Vive Les Villages!

"Paris" is the name given to the main building in Les Villages Français.

PBL in a Language Immersion Program

Even the games are French.

The five C's—Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities—are essential components of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' standards. These are ambitious goals, given the usual learning environment provided to accomplish them: the 50-minute class, five days a week.

What would it look like if we tried to really meet these standards? It would be project-based learning, and technology would play an important role in making it happen!

We describe here a language immersion environment, a summer camp for learning languages, and the technology-rich projects that these learners were involved in. We look at the technology projects and what we think was accomplished through them. Then we extrapolate how we might be able to accomplish many of the same things in a more typical school environment. We focus on French in this article, but the activities could be adapted for any language.

The standards statement of philosophy indicates that every individual should be proficient in at least one language other than their native tongue. Both the context in which we use language and the culture of the native speakers of that language should be part of what it means to learn a language. If we could place

our language students in an ideal environment, they would be living in the land of the target language, interacting with people who are native speakers of that language, participating in that culture, and receiving instruction in the fundamentals of the language. The Concordia Language Village (CLV) program approaches that ideal.

By Bernard Mambo and Diane McGrath

Subject: Foreign language immersion

Grades: 2–12 (Ages 7–18)

Technology: Web

Standards: *NETS•S* 3; *NETS•T* II (http://www.iste.org/nets/). *FL* 1.1–1.3, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 5.1 (http://www.actfl.org).

Language Villages

This fully accredited summer camp for youngsters ages 7–18 near Bemidji, Minnesota, has programs in 14 languages, ranging from beginning to advanced. Each language group is located in a different group of "villages" with architecture, food, and daily schedules and activities designed to reflect a culture associated with the language. Most counselors are native speakers of the target language, and they come from all over the world, so they are from the native cultures associated with the languages. We focus here on Les Villages Français, the French Villages.

Immersion

When you first arrive, according to the CLV Web site, "you will get your first taste of traveling abroad when you pass through customs with your Concordia Language Villages passport. Officials will stamp your passport and check your luggage" for contraband, such as English language books, tapes, food, or other American items. Next, you "choose your new French name. You'll exchange your dollars for Euros (€) and your moniteur or monitrice (counselor) will help you settle into your cabin named after a French city, province … or another French-speaking country. You'll meet other villagers as you unpack and your moniteur or monitrice shows you around your new land."

Two villagers doing a radio show.

(*Editor's note:* See Resources on p. 39 for this and other Web sites.)

Those who live in the French Villages spend their day living in the French language and culture, ranging from the games they play and entertainment they devise, to the food they eat, to the need to discuss projects they carry out.

Technology Projects

In the CLV high school program, students can receive credit for a year of language study. During the summer of 2003, co-author Bernard spent his time at CLV as a counselor, African drum instructor, credit curriculum facilitator, and researcher. In an attempt to enrich the language learning with technology projects, he worked with high school villagers to carry out two types of PBL: a radio project and several video projects.

Radio Project. A recording studio was set up in the media center. The control room had computers, digital tape machines, mixers, and digital effect processors. The soundproof "live room" had microphones, playback speakers, computers with CD/DVD burners, and a super burner for multiple production of the final copy. There was also an FM radio station that was able to broadcast for about a mile.

The villagers who produced the live and prerecorded radio shows were responsible for all aspects of the show, from planning and scripting to performing and directing. These villagers were able to settle disagreements about content and style by themselves—in French, of course! Those who collaborated on this project brought a diversity of skills and learning styles and developed the ability to evaluate the quality of their own work. They took proud ownership of their shows and were motivated by their real audience—the other villagers who

eagerly listened to the programs. The teachers/counselors rather naturally fell into a coaching role in this project.

Video Projects. Villagers also produced three types of video projects: advertisements (publicités), a TV show (téléjournal), and Cinema Odysseys (where they produced versions of *Harry Potter* and *The Ring*). They used digital camcorders, DVD and VHS players, and computers. Each type of project required planning a script, deciding how the script would read in French, and storyboarding the final production. Villagers figured out how to record these shows without having to edit them, because editing was so tremendously time-consuming. They used their storyboards as a guide to what to shoot, and then paused to view the scenes they had previously shot so they could see what scene to shoot next. Typically you shoot lots of video and decide *later* what to keep and what to edit out. Again, these villagers collaborated in French, worked out their differences, and gave input on all projects. Teachers coached, answered questions, and guided student production work.

Meeting Standards

The language standard most heavily addressed in the CLV digital projects was the all-important standard of Communication, which asks students to:

- engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions
- understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics
- present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics

The technology projects at CLV clearly address each of these parts of the standard on Communication. In the course of the projects, the interac-

tions, negotiations, and discussions the students engaged in were authentic, rather than pedagogic. The contexts of these projects required of the students spontaneous use of French that was more typical of everyday language in a francophone country than what usually takes place in a conventional classroom. As a result, students developed a facility for speaking freely and spontaneously, although not always perfectly.

Doing This in School

We know you are thinking by now: How could I possibly do this in my school? We don't have DVD burners, a sound studio, or an FM radio station, and our students are not with us 24 hours a day.

We would like to suggest several ways to approach this intensive, immersive environment in the regular classroom. Both technology and PBL involve a short-term immersion experience in carrying out a task or solving a problem. If we were to do this in the language we are trying to learn, we could, even with short-term immersion experiences, have some of the same cultural and communicative payoff. Below are some ideas to think about and adapt or add to in your language of choice.

QuickTime Radio Show. Produce a radio or TV show in French, done from a French point of view using for background research French search engines (e.g., Yahoo! France) and portals, French online newspapers or radio, or correspondence with French students (in the United States or abroad). Record the show using QuickTime rather than the expensive radio equipment. Don't forget the importance of a real audience: "broadcast" the show on the Web. Here are some sample topics that incorporate cultural connections as well as communication skills:

- Research French popular music around the time of World War

II and play audio excerpts from Charles Trenet, who was later named a national treasure of France. Translate some of his sillier songs or discuss in French the controversies surrounding his wartime career.
- Write and perform a Théâtre Guignol show, locating pictures from the Internet of the authentic French puppets, and base the content and style of the show on the original.
- Debate the French point of view on the current war in Iraq.
- In a QuickTime video, teach people how to play pétanque (bocce ball).

Collaborate with Speakers of a Native Language. In Diane's September 2003 PBL article, she mentioned some ongoing cultural connections projects that might provide a starting point for such collaborations. The Creative Connections Project hosts projects in which classrooms can interact with other classrooms from China, Latin America, or Africa. Here, the projects are already designed for you, and you simply join in. Your students will find many opportunities for communication in another language and learning about the cultures.

We feel certain that some of you out there have successfully combined the important features of PBL (a driving question, extended collaborative research, production of an artifact and presentation to an audience, a community of inquiry, and technology for cognition and communication) with the five C's of language learning. Please write and tell us what you are doing, and send us additional resource links that we can add to this segment of the PBL Web site listed first under Resources.

Resources

Diane McGrath's PBL Web site (http://coe. ksu.edu/PBL/) will take you directly to the Web resources discussed in this column, as well as resources mentioned in other columns.

Villagers did Internet searches using French search engines and researched popular French Web sites such as TF1, Météo France, and Investir en Zone Franc.

2005: The Year of Languages: http://www. yearoflanguages.org/i4a/pages/index. cfm?pageid=3408
Concordia Language Villages: http://clvweb. cord.edu/prweb/
Creative Connections Project: http://www. ccph.com
Fairfax County Public Schools French Resource Sites: http://www.fcps.k12.va.us/ DIS/OHSICS/forlang/french/
Foreign Language and Culture: http://www. speakeasy.org/~dbrick/Hot/foreign.html
Foreign Language Resources: http://www. webgerman.com/languages/
Internet4Classrooms: http://www.internet4 classrooms.com/flang.htm
Investir en Zone Franc: http://www.izf.net/izf/
Météo France: http://www.meteofrance. com/FR/
TF1: http://www.tf1.fr/
Yahoo! France: http://fr.yahoo.com

Bernard Mambo recently received his PhD from Kansas State University. He has taught for several years in the Kansas State Modern Languages program and is currently a French teacher and head of the French Department at St John's Literary Institution at Prospect Hall in Frederick, Maryland. His home is in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Africa.

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