Christian PUREN
www.christianpuren.com
June 16, 2018 version

This text is the English translation of ""Comment intégrer la démarche de projet dans le travail en classe sur les unités didactiques des manuels de langue?" (www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/069, juin 2018)

HOW TO INTEGRATE THE PROJECT APPROACH IN THE CLASSROOM ON THE DIDACTIC UNITS OF LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

The aim of this text is to see how the didactic units of language textbooks can be used by teachers and learners in order to implement a project approach.[1]The authors of textbooks come up against an incompatibility in principle between the constraints of the didactic unit and the principles of the pedagogical project:

–One of the primary functions of the teaching units in textbooks is indeed pre-programming:

- of language and cultural content, and the progression of this content from one didactic unit to the next;

- of all the documents that introduce these contents: we will call it here the **documentation**;

- the **use that is** made of it, most often in the form of a collective oral commentary in class[2];

- and **practice** (*i.e.* all the language exercises[3]), through which the students work in a targeted and intensive way on the part of the language content, introduced by the documents, that they will be able to reuse in their **final productions**.

The **design of the** final **action** to be carried out by means of these terminal productions must therefore itself be pre-programmed, or "pre-designed", by the authors of the textbooks.

The elements indicated in bold above are highlighted in red in the diagram below: this part of the diagram corresponds to the "constrained" model of the didactic unit of textbooks in the action-oriented perspective.

---
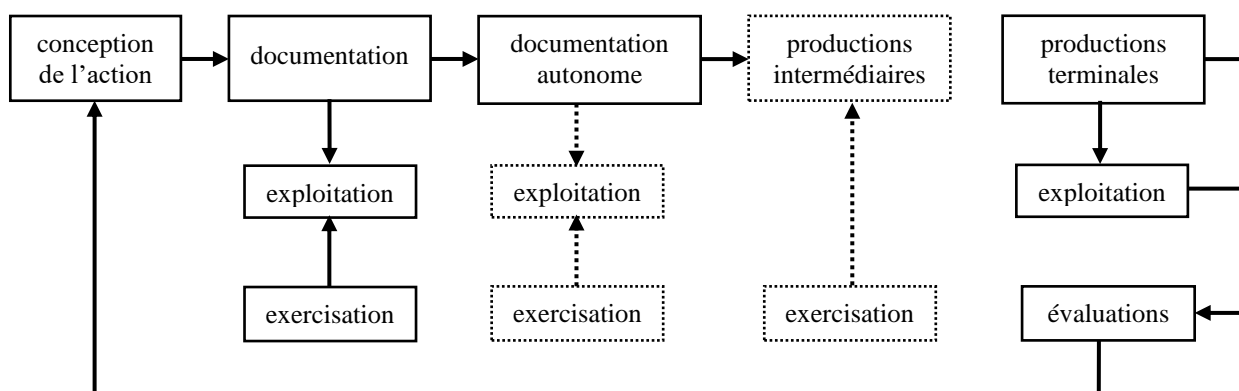
[1] The present text extends the reflection started in the article "Pedagogical project and engineering of the didactic unit" (www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2011b/).
[2] See "Traitement didactique du document authentique en classe de langue-culture. Modèle d'analyse par tâches", www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/041/.
[3] See "Fundamental Procedure of Didactic Design" (www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/034/) and "Standard Procedure of School Grammar Instruction" (www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/009/).

–A pedagogical project, on the other hand, has as its primary aims the empowerment and responsibility of the learners, which is essential if they are to be mobilized on a project that is their own: it is they, therefore, who must design at the outset the action to be carried out at the end of the didactic unit, and they who must search for, select and exploit the necessary documentation, so that it is impossible to foresee their language and cultural needs in advance, and therefore to pre-program the exercise.

We can therefore understand the constraints to which the final action proposed in current textbooks that claim to be based on the actional perspective is subjected: this final action ranges from predefined one-off tasks to highly supervised[4] mini-projects. In a conference in 2011, I presented what appeared to me to be the two possible strategies, already attested to in certain textbooks:

> *1) The first one consists in reducing the pedagogical project to the dimension of the classical didactic unit by making it a "final task" which simply replaces the communicativist simulation in its primary function of situation of reuse of the linguistic forms introduced in this unit. This is the strategy favored so far by publishers (at least those I know best, those of French as a foreign language).* […]
>
> *2) The second consists, conversely, in expanding the didactic unit to the dimension of a mini-project: this is what is made possible, for example, by "Cyber surveys" (Webquests) and "scenarios" such as the one implemented for certification in the Diplôme de Compétence en langue (DCL, http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid55748/le-diplome-de-competence-en-langue-dcl.html/).* (2011b, pp. 9-10)

The following year, the fourth level of the FFL textbook *Version originale* (B2, Éditions Maison des Langues) was published, in which I applied the second strategy, with terminal mini-projects that were sufficiently complex to require that they no longer be presented by simple instructions, but in the form of scenarios[5]. To increase the level of autonomy, two different mini-projects are proposed at the end of each didactic unit, one "realistic", corresponding to a real social issue, the other "fictitious" "in the sense that it calls upon artistic expression, poetry, affectivity, emotion, playfulness, or even creativity or fantasy"[6]. What keeps the pre-programmed documentation and exercise relevant is that the two mini-projects are two variants of the same social action, called "generic", chosen among those that a democratic society must not only allow, but facilitate, for its citizens: maintaining solidarity between different generations (Unit 4, "Making connections"), living together with their differences ("Unit 5, "Living together"), expressing their disagreement (Unit 7, "Being able to say it"), traveling freely (Unit 10, "Getting around"), etc. It is expected that different variants can be chosen by groups of learners, especially in the public, educational or professional fields, fields that are already taken into account in the didactic units for the choice of documents ("In search of information" and "Cultural tools" sections).

The parts in dotted lines in the diagram above correspond to what seems to me to be easily added to the classic model of the didactic unit, and which is sufficient to introduce a true project approach:

1. Learners are invited to add their own documents to the documentation provided in the manual, particularly those found on the internet. Proposals to add or replace a document from the textbook with a proposed document (by a learner or, better still, by a group of learners) are discussed in class, with the proposal being argued and the class making the decision after collective discussion.

---

[4] See the "Grid for Analyzing Different Current Types of Implementation of Acting in Language Textbook", www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/050/.

[5] See the final "Taking Action" pages of two units in this manual available online (Unit 5, "Living Together", www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/050/, pp. 64-65, and Unit 7, "Being able to say it", www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2012j/, pp. 86-87.

[6] Foreword to *Original Version 4*, Item 1 "From Unity of Communication to Unity of Action", Foreword, www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/031/.

2. Some of these new documents are used by the teacher or, better still, by the group of learners who proposed them. In a perspective of pedagogical differentiation, these documents are used in one or the other, or in several, of the three possible logics at that time: document, support and documentation[7] logics. Language exercises on grammar and lexicon, possibly accompanied by research by the learners of exercises proposed elsewhere in the textbook, in other teaching materials or on the Internet, are then added according to the contents of these new documents.

3. From a certain level of complexity such as the one aimed at in this "project-based" learning unit model, the final productions cannot be carried out by the learners from the outset, but must be prepared by intermediate productions, such as note-taking on documents or summaries of documents, or drafts of the final productions. These intermediate productions can require, during the writing process, to complete the autonomous documentation (or, on the contrary, to choose only certain documents from this documentation, or from the documentation in the textbook), and they can in turn give rise to exploitation and exercise: this is logically the case if they are drafts of the final production, in which case the exploitation and exercise aim to improve them.

4. The final productions are also used: this is logically the case, for example, for oral presentations made by groups, which are then commented on collectively in the class. The teacher may decide not to use them as a pretext for a new exercise, if he/she judges that this would risk depriving the final productions of their character of authentic social action or, if simulated, of at least realistic social action.

5. Based on the documents they have selected in groups, the learners can be led, in a recursive manner, to examine whether the action initially conceived can be maintained as it is, or modified, with each group deciding to carry out a different variant. The same is true afterwards, with recursive feedback from the intermediate productions on the documentation used, which the learners can then see that some documents are useless, or on the contrary that others are missing. [8]

6. On the other hand, these final productions must be evaluated, even if the modes of evaluation must themselves be complex in terms of their authors (each learner, the groups, the teacher), their types (process evaluation and product evaluation) as well as their criteria[9].

7. Finally, in a project approach, evaluation does not only focus on the final products: it loops back to the initial design and the whole project management, with the learners collectively looking for answers to questions such as: "What did we succeed or fail at, and why?" "What could we have done that we did not do, or what could we have done differently? " And most importantly, "How can we better design, conduct, and execute the next project? »

Some language textbooks are now offered in an "open" digital version, meaning that learners can add their own documents, comments, intermediate productions and exercises. The use of this technology is interesting because it makes it easier to integrate the project approach into the teaching units. Of course, there are still constraints linked to the pre-programming of language and cultural content, but the price that this entails in terms of limiting the autonomy of the students is worth paying, compared to what is gained in terms of maintaining a minimum of internal coherence of the units and progression from one unit to the next throughout the language course, which are necessary conditions for maintaining a maximum of efficiency in the collective teaching of the language.

---

[7] See "The five documentary logics currently available (model)",
www.christianpuren.com/bibliothèque-de-travail/066/.
[8] See the importance of recursivity, ensured by feedback, in the schema of the project approach as presented and commented in the article "Cognitive operations (proaction, metacognition, regulation) and fundamental activities (feedback, evaluation) of the project approach", www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2017a/, p. 2 and chapter 4.2 p. 6.
[9] See, in the working paper "Project-based pedagogy in the implementation of the action-oriented perspective", www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2014b/, chapter 19 entitled "The problem of project evaluation" (pp. 21-25).