Language Learning in Tandem

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Tandem learning

- Language learning in tandems: two learners with different native languages form a pair in order to learn each other’s language as well as to learn more about their partner’s cultural background.
Why do Tandem Learning?

- Learn a language;
- Refresh language skills;
- Practically apply skills while or after following a course;
- Keeping up and expanding the language while or after following a language course;
- Learn about each other ('s culture);
- Prepare for a (work) stay abroad!
What can you learn from your partner?

- Can serve as a model;
- Provide help when you donot understand;
- Help if you want to “say” something and you do not know how;
- Correct your mistakes;
- Give information about life and culture in his / her country!
What can you learn from your partner?

**Acting as a model:**

- Using vocabulary that’s important for you;
- Giving you samples/models, e.g. CV;
- Expressing oneself differently (more-less slang, more professional language)
What can you learn from your partner?

If you donot understand something:

- Translate it into your native language;
- Express the same thing with different words;
- Give additional examples, explanations or background information.
International Tandem Network:

- eTandem first set up from the Ruhr Universität Bochum (Germany), 1992
  www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de

- Now appr. 70 bilingual sub-networks

- Website Sittard (in English): eTandem Project Fontys Teacher Training College
International Tandem Network

- face-to-face tandem
- eTandem:
  - via e-mail
  - video conferencing
  - chat
  - telephone
  - sms
E-mail Tandem

- Bilingual network
- Writing skills
- Cultural exchange

Bochum services:
- Tandem Agency (matching partners)
- Discussion forum (incl. archive)
- Databank (suggestions, experiences, tasks, manuals for teachers and students)
Tandem learning: principles

- **mutual benefit:**
  - each partner should benefit equally from partnership

- **learner autonomy:**
  - students formulate their personal learning targets
  - students choose topics to write about, not teacher
  - peer teaching: learn from other learners; help and correct each other → partner = expert
  - time, place & teacher independent
eTandem: aims

- improve writing skills → variety of text types: informal letters & colloquial language; formal tasks
- cultural exchange
- authentic communication with native speaker
- improve ICT skills
- planning & organising tasks
- problem solving
The teacher

- Participating in / starting up bilingual network
- Finding partners
- Role in curriculum (complement to traditional course)
- Course description, tasks, requirements
- Instruction & counselling
- Intervision partner school teachers & network coordinators
- Contribute to eTandem materials
- Project evaluation
Sittard (NL) eTandem experiences

- German Dept.:
  - 94/95: face-to-face tandem
  - 95/96: pilot e-mail tandem
  - from 96/97: tandem learning compulsory

- English Dept.:
  - 96/97: pilot e-mail tandem
  - from 97/98: e-mail tandem compulsory
  - from 04/05: e-mail tandem partially compulsory (due to structural lack of sufficient partners); arranging alternatives
  - Future: expand network!!
    (so if you know any English-speaking schools that are interested in email contact, let me know! - h.vandentillaar@fontys.nl )
Evaluation Sittard /1

Pitfalls:

- Dutch = small language → difficult to find sufficient partners (for appr. 30 first-year students)
- (In)reliability of partner because of differences in requirements → with regards to frequency of correspondence, correction, credits, compulsory vs. voluntary, different timetables (exam weeks & holidays), etc.
- Initiative in forum
Evaluation Sittard /2

Advantages, students say:
- motivating: e-mail & tandem learning is fun
- authentic contacts (sometimes develop into lasting friendships)
- expansion of vocabulary & idioms, esp. everyday informal language
- variation of course work & task organisation
- autonomy & responsibility: free to choose personal learning targets & topics
Good starting points

- www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
- www.epals.com
- www.teaching.com ➔ IECC
- The Virtual School Project: www.otan.us/webfarm/emailproject/school.htm
- etc.
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