FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING *IN-TANDEM: TELETANDEM* AS AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL IN CALLT[1]
Aprendizagem de Línguas *In-Tandem*: *Teletandem* como uma Proposta Alternativa em CALLT

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Abstract

In a previous paper on this journal (Vassallo & Telles, 2006), we presented the theoretical bases and practical procedures of two modes of foreign language learning in-tandem *approach –* face-to-face tandem *and* e-tandem. *Now, in this article, we introduce our proposal of a third mode of* Tandem *– the* Teletandem, *as an alternative in CALLT.* Teletandem *is a virtual* Tandem *that uses the online writing, reading, audio and video resources of the* Windows Live Messenger. *Next, we wish to outline and to argue for the applicability of the theoretical and practical principles of this third mode of* Tandem *within the context of a research project –* Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all. *One of the central aims of this project is to promote, by means of the virtual space of the* Teletandem, *the contact of Brazilian university students with the peoples of the international community and the exchange of their respective languages and cultures.*

Key-words: *foreign language learning;* Tandem*;* in-tandem*;* Teletandem*; CALL; CALLT.*

Resumo

Em publicação anterior nesta mesma revista (Vassallo & Telles, 2006), apresentamos a fundamentação teórica e os procedimentos práticos de duas modalidades da abordagem à aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras in-tandem *- o* tandem face-a-face *e o* e-tandem. *Neste artigo, apresentamos nossa proposta de uma terceira modalidade – o* Teletandem*, como uma nova opção em CALLT. Trata-se de um* Tandem

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[1] CALLT – Computer Assisted Language Learning and Teaching.

virtual que utiliza as ferramentas on-line de escrita, leitura, áudio e vídeo do aplicativo Windows Live Messenger. *Em seguida, descrevemos e argumentamos pela viabilização dos princípios teóricos e práticos desta terceira modalidade de* Tandem *no contexto de um projeto de pesquisa – o* Teletandem Brasil: Línguas estrangeiras para todos*. Um dos objetivos centrais deste projeto é proporcionar, por meio do espaço virtual do* Teletandem*, o contato dos alunos universitários brasileiros com outros povos da comunidade internacional e, por meio deste contato, o intercâmbio de suas respectivas línguas e culturas.*

Palavras-chave: *aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras;* Tandem*;* in-tandem*;* Teletandem*; CALL; CALLT.*

1.   Introduction

UNESP (São Paulo State University) at Assis is in the Southwest inner part of São Paulo State, quite close to the borders with the states of Paraná and Mato Grosso do Sul. It is located far from tourist and international commercial routes. Its students have no regular or, to put it bluntly, no contact with either foreign universities or foreign students. Achieving communicative and cultural competence in foreign language under such constraining geographical and local conditions is quite difficult. This is true particularly for undergraduates who wish to major as teachers in one of the six foreign languages taught in our university Language Arts course: English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Japanese.

Such restrictive conditions make it difficult to implement *in-tandem* learning; that is, to put pairs of either native or competent speakers to learn each other's language by means of bilingual conversation. In fact, as a collaborative and reciprocal way of foreign language learning that has its focus on oral interaction, *Tandem* needs regular sessions of practice[2]. During these sessions, each partner becomes both learner of the foreign language and tutor of his/her mother tongue (or of a language in which he/she is proficient enough to teach). In sum,

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[2] In a previous issue of this journal, we have described this practice as the core of the Tandem method. Please, see Vassallo & Telles (2006) for further details on the Tandem method.

conducting extensive foreign language *face-to-face tandem* practices that would be useful to our undergraduates and future foreign language teachers seemed nothing but a dream within these contextual teaching/ learning constraints.

As a university-based FL lecturer in Italian language (Luisa) and a FL teacher educator (João), we started studying *Tandem* moved by our common interest in its original formula and after personally experiencing the originality of the *face-to-face* mode of *in-tandem* learning in Italian-Portuguese. Then, mixed feelings of disillusion and challenge emerged. Despite the fact that the *Tandem* potentialities were quite evident to us (Telles & Vassallo, 2005a), it seemed impossible to offer them to our students, due to the geographic isolation of this region and to its consequent lack of face-to-face contact with people and cultures from other countries.

Later on, due to changes in our life (Luisa had to return to Italy after four years in Brazil as a university lecturer in Italian language), we started to look for possibilities that would allow us to keep the profitable contact we had during our *face-to-face tandem* period. These contextual changes led us to search for software that could provide us with distance synchronous and audio-visual interaction. As we experimented with different software, the first ideas about the *Teletandem Brasil Project* emerged. We were aware of the possibility of continuing our *Tandem* via e-mail, which is called *e-tandem* (McPartland, 2003). However, we were looking for ways to keep the oral interaction provided by a *face-to-face tandem*, and not a *Tandem* focused only on reading and writing practices.

Our search led us to the *instant messaging software* as a tool for distant communication*,* particularly the *MSN Messenger* that is, now, in its most updated version called *Windows Live Messenger*[3]. As we

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[3] The MSN Messenger is now in its newest version called *Windows Live Messenger* and it brings new tools that can help and organize language learning. For example, Teletandem partners can, now, share folders that store their written production and save edited versions of it, allowing the other to access feedback to written work at the time they wish. Teletandem can also be practiced through other instant messaging software (NET Messenger Service, AOL Instant Messenger, Excite/ Pal, Gadu-Gadu, Google Talk, iChat, ICQ, Jabber, Qnext, QQ, Skype and Yahoo! Messenger), not only the Windows Live Messenger.

ventured ourselves into the experimentation of the communication resources of the *MSN Messenger*, this time, as distant learning and teaching tools, we realized that when a *Tandem* is done by means of instant messaging tools, it becomes a quite different form of *Tandem*. We decided to name it *Teletandem*[4].

2.   From *Tandem* to *Teletandem*

We believed that *Teletandem* resembled the face-to-face interaction similar to the one we had previously developed together. Besides, it might make up for the economical and geographical limitations imposed by the situation of two people living either away from each other or in different countries and who wanted to get in touch with foreign languages and cultures. The cost of online synchronous and audio-visual interaction through the *Windows Live Messenger* also seemed quite low and we believed it could also account for income restrictions of university students.

After our first contact with the *Windows Live Messenger*, we experimented with *Teletandem* ourselves, with friends we had abroad who were interested in developing their oral/written skills in Italian and Portuguese. The results were exciting, successful, practical, and, above all, at very low cost. These experiments made us realize that the *Messenger* tools could work towards the benefit of our foreign language students' online practice of reading, writing[5], speaking and listening abilities, with the privilege of having visual, face-to-face contact with

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[4] Our notion of *Teletandem* presented in this article has a few theoretical but no practical links with the "Programme Tele-Tandem" – a program of binational distance Tandem for elementary and high schools that has been carried out between France and Germany since 2003 under the sponsorship of the DFJW (Deutsch-französisches Jugendwerk) (Macaire, 2004). Only recently have we found out about the existence of a homonymous term (but quite different notion) for a Tandem program.

[5] We must acknowledge the fact that interaction by means of instant messaging may bear many characteristics of the oral mode, even the interaction by means of ordinary written chat. However, they are still quite different, since the former is carried out by voice and the latter is carried out by writing. For example, a Teletandem partner cannot edit his partner's spelling while he/she is talking. This is one of the reasons why we keep such a distinction here.

their partners. These *Messenger* tools are: (a) synchronous communication by means of chats (reading and writing), (b) voice communication resources (listening and speaking), (c) image resources (its video-conferencing device) through which we could see the facial expressions and body behavior of our partners on the other side, and (d) the *white board tool* – a kind of electronic note pad on which one can write and draw sketches. The interface of these *Messenger* tools is illustrated on Figures II and III, below.

Later on, we reflected on our personal experiments with the *Windows Live Messenger* and wrote practical suggestions for possible future *Teletandem* users (Telles & Vassallo, 2005b), in the hope they could profit from it as much as we had.

Finally, the results of our actions and search coalesced into a research project in order to investigate the ramifications of what we were doing and the possible educational results of this new mode of *in-tandem* learning - the project *Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all*, which we will describe further below.

2.1.   What *Teletandem* is: our search of a definition

In the project *Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all,* we introduced a third alternative mode of the *In-Tandem Learning Approach*[6]. We were, then, able to articulate the six principles that characterize *Teletandem*: (See distinctions between *face-to-face tandem*, *e-tandem* and *Teletandem* on Table I, below):

1. *Teletandem* is a new distance and computer assisted mode of learning foreign languages *in-tandem* that makes extemporaneous use of oral and written production, reading and listening comprehension and webcam images of the participants.

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[6] According to Anthony (1972) and Richards & Rodgers (1986), an *approach* is a set of assumptions, preferably based on empirical research, as to the nature of language, the nature of learning and the nature of teaching.

2. *Teletandem* procedures are carried out on bases of commonly agreed and shared principles of reciprocity and autonomy between two participants.

3. *Teletandem* participants are two people interested in studying each other's language at a distance in a relatively autonomous way. We say "relatively autonomous" because they can resort to a teacher's professional mediation, if they wish or if they need so.

4. *Teletandem* participants are (reasonably) competent speakers of the respective languages. They may or may not be native speakers of the target languages. They are not professional teachers.

5. *Teletandem* teaching/learning processes are accomplished through the development of regular and didactically aimed sessions of free audio/video distant conversations.

6. These free conversations are followed by shared reflection during which reading and writing abilities are practiced. These reflections may focus on content, culture, form, lexicon and the process of *Teletandem* interaction itself. The reading and writing practices can also take the form of regular *e-tandem* practices, such as exchange of written homework assignments by e-mail, when language feedback and meaningful vocabulary and grammar inputs are given by the *Teletandem* partner.

This sixth principle, above, is crucial to understanding *Teletandem* as being different from mere and ordinary *chatting* mingled by corrections of grammar and lexicon. Why? First, because *Teletandem* sessions must finish with a regular debriefing activity (shared reflection) that focuses on form, on lexicon and on the interaction process that evolved. Certainly, these actions are not common in ordinary chats. The excerpt from an account of a Brazilian university student who practices *Teletandem* with a German partner illustrates this difference between *Teletandem* conversation and ordinary chat:

> *(…) Principalmente, quando a gente não sabe como fala aquilo... na língua. Aí o outro pára e explica... daí começa a explicar em*

cima daquilo. E quando você está num chat, simplesmente você arranja um sinônimo pra coisa, manda e acabou, né. Não tem interesse de aprender isso. [AE1: 593-5][7]

Although the focus of a *Teletandem* session is on oral production and reception, the writing and reading abilities through *Teletandem* can also be practiced during the session itself, as both partners take notes to keep track of language input during the session (opportunities of spelling correction is an example, here). In this sense, the reading and writing practices serve as support for the oral interaction, as a way to register new vocabulary and grammar inputs. Another reason for *Teletandem* to be different from mere and ordinary chatting is that partners can choose to write accounts on the themes that were discussed during the sessions between one meeting and the next. Certainly, nobody does that in ordinary interaction. In this case, this more thought and pre-planned writing practice between one *Teletandem* session and another is distanced from the peculiar oral mode that characterizes writing practices through instant messaging.

In the following sessions, we describe how we have made these six principles of *Teletandem* to coalesce into an internationally and socially oriented project of foreign language education - *Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all*, a project that aims at providing Brazilian university undergraduate students and university students from around the world with free and democratic access to online cooperative processes of learning and teaching foreign languages.

3.   How *Teletandem* works

Basically, most of the characteristics and the theoretical and practical points of *Tandem* learning that we pointed out in the previous

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[7] (…) *Particularly when you don't know how to say that… in the language. Then, the other one stops and explains… then he starts to explain from that point. And when you are in the chat, you simply find a synonym for that, send it and that's finished. There's no interest in learning that.* [AE1: 593-5] This excerpt is part of a corpus that is composed of a series of interviews with teletandem practitioners.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN *FACE-TO-FACE TANDEM*, *E-TANDEM* AND *TELETANDEM*

Type of *Tandem*	Physical Context	LANGUAGE				
		Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Images
FACE -TO - FACE TANDEM	Participants share the same physical context.	Shares its role with listening. Though it closely approaches natural everyday conversation, it does not, because practitioners can talk about the language.	Shares its role with speaking. Just as well, it depends on the role that participants wish it to play in conversation. Generally, speaking and listening are not equitably shared – one participant either speaks or listens more than the other.	In this type of tandem, it plays the least active role. It can be practiced alone and outside the Tandem session. Nevertheless, participants can agree on how much reading they can perform, in order to either discuss during the tandem encounter or read each other's reading production based on the conversation they had. They can suggest specific readings to each other on the Internet sites, for example.	As in reading, it plays the least active role. It can be practiced alone and outside the tandem session. Pairs have the autonomy to agree upon how much writing is to be done during the tandem process. It is commonly done by note-taking as conversation unfolds, but writing assignments can be done between one tandem session and the following one. Usually, partners agree that they will comment on each other's pieces of writing. They can suggest specific subjects to each other.	Along the interaction, participants are free to choose the images they wish to read of each other and of the context. What they choose amongst the images that are at their disposal during *face-to-face* interaction will depend only on their choice and/or attention.
E-TANDEM	Each participant is restricted to his/her own physical context. Participants have to exchange descriptions about the context where they are, which may stimulate writing and reading. Their perceptions are mediated by the partner. .	Non-existent	Non-existent	In this type of Tandem, it plays the more active role. It can be practiced in pairs by using chat software or regular e-mail. In the first case, it is synchronous whereas in the second it is asynchronous.	In asynchronous *e-tandem*, writing process can be well-thought, since it is practiced outside the tandem sessions; the arguments and used register vary. In synchronous *e-tandem*, writing about everyday subjects is done more quickly, in a low or medium register.	Non-existent
TELE-TANDEM	Participants are physically apart, but they are able to share what can be offered to them by the images of the webcam. They are together within a third context - the virtual context.	Like *face-to-face tandem*, it closely approaches natural everyday conversation, but it depends on the good functioning of the equipment. Equipment doesn't allow voice overlapping.	Like *face-to-face tandem*, it closely approaches natural everyday conversation, but it depends on the good functioning of the equipment.	Like *face-to-face tandem*, it can be practiced as partners develop conversation. By means of note-taking, they can read the new vocabulary that emerges and is written on the chat window of the *Windows Live Messenger*, as oral conversation unfolds.	Like in *face-to-face tandem*, it can be practiced as partners develop conversation. By means of note-taking and as conversation unfolds, they can write and read the new vocabulary that emerges on the chat window of the *Windows Live Messenger*.	Participants share and can read the images of each other shown on the video windows of the *Windows Live Messenger*. These images are restricted by the scope that the webcam can catch, as well as by what participants choose to give to his/her partner's view. Participants see at the same time the partner and themselves, in the video window.

Figure 1: Distinctions between *face-to-face tandem*, *e-tandem* and *Teletande*

publication of Part I of this article (Vassallo & Telles, 2006) are valid for the context of *Teletandem* lessons. The difference is that the *face-to-face* mode of *Tandem* is restricted to people who share the same geographical context; the *e-tandem* mode is confined to reading and writing abilities and practices, leaving the speaking/listening and image reading abilities aside. The *Teletandem* mode, however, can appropriately provide its participants with the appropriate tools and context for those who, though being geographically apart, need to practice speaking/listening in addition to reading/writing abilities. By thinking this way, we could say that *Teletandem* approaches the completeness of presence *face-to-face* communication by means of virtual teaching/learning.

In Figure I we present a synthesis of the distinctions we can initially perceive between *face-to-face tandem*, *e-tandem* and *Teletandem*. These distinctions will be confirmed and new ones will be added, as we develop the *Teletandem Brasil Project* in the next years.

3.1.   The software used in *Teletandem*

Once both *Teletandem* partners have committed themselves to meeting at a certain time of the day, according to time differences between countries, and once they have their ADSL modem and webcam, they are ready to start *Teletandem* lessons. They can, then, turn their computers on, connect them to the web, open the previously loaded *Windows Live Messenger*[8], and click on their partner's contact icon (which was previously put on by inviting their partner to be part of their list of contacts).

A chat window will, then, open. On the top menu, one partner invites the other for a video conversation, by clicking on the "video"

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[8] For sometime we used the version 7. and 7.5 of the MSN Messenger – the one that can carry webcam functions. We are now using the newest version called *Windows Live Messenger*. Partners must have the same versions if they wish to share the same features of the *Windows Live Messenger*. These versions can only work on computers that have Windows XP platform.

button (see Figure II, below). If the other partner accepts the video conference invitation on the other side, each partner's image will be shown on the right side of the screen in a few seconds, while, on the upper left side of the screen, the chat dialogue window will remain smaller.

On the lower left corner window, partners can write messages or take notes on the language content of the conversation.

Figure II, below, shows how the *Windows Live Messenger* screen will look: main menu on the upper part and four windows showing: (1) first partner's video screen, on the higher right side of the screen, (2) second partner's video screen, on the lower right side, (3) the chat dialogue window on the left, and (4) the message composing window, on the left bottom corner of the screen.
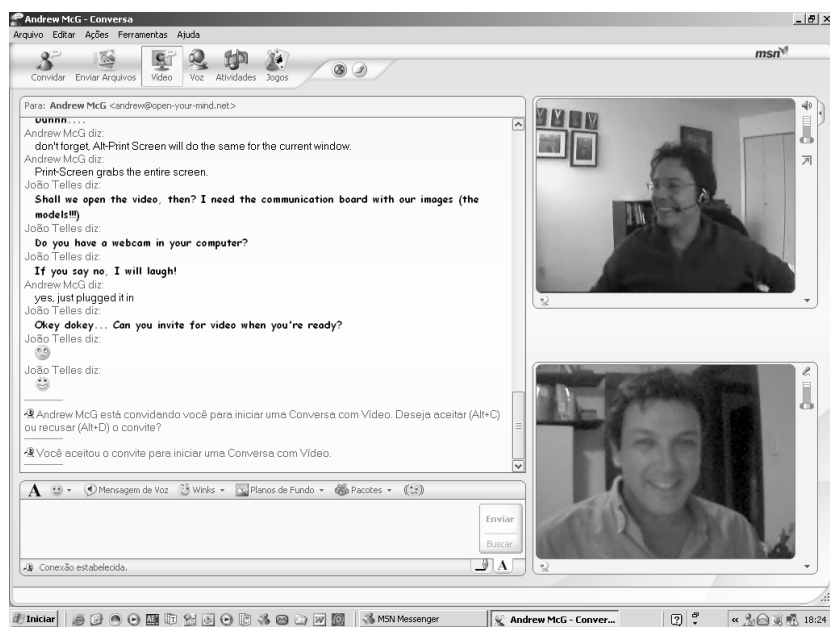

Figure II: *Windows Live Messenger* **screen with video, chat, and composing windows open**

Once the session is finished, partners can save their notes in a file for later reference, for studying and for homework preparation, if they wish. If they want to avoid using the *chat window* to take notes, because they have to scroll up or down the screen to refer to anything that has been previously written, they can use the *White Board* for that purpose (see Figure III).
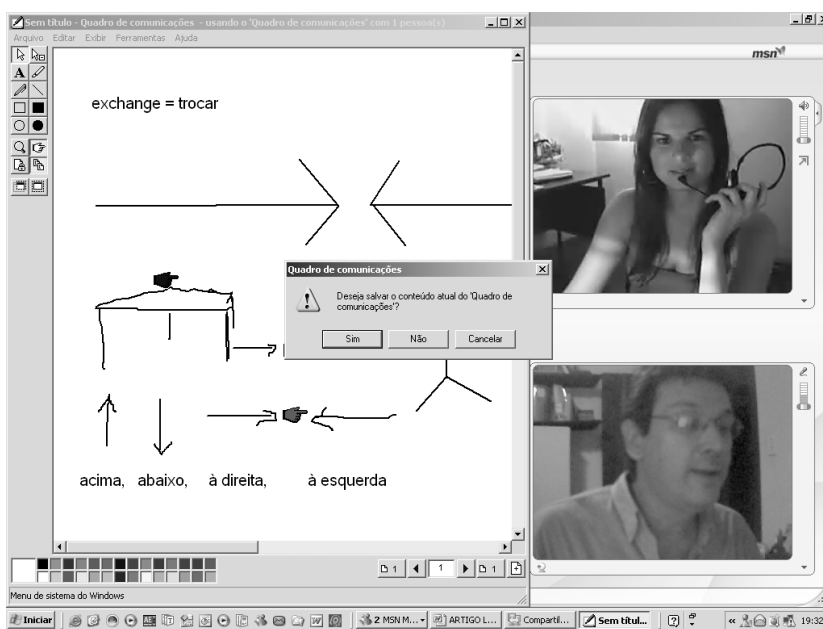

Figure III: Screen with White Board and video windows open

The difference is that when using the *White Board* of the *Windows Live Messenger*[9], partners can (a) take notes, (b) choose font colors, (c) highlight words and expressions, (d) draw pictures, (e) use the "little hand" as a pointer while they comment on the notes (see this tool on the left side menu and on the drawing space of Figure III, above), etc. But the interesting point about the *White Board i*s that it is literally "shared",

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[9] Which actually functions like "the old blackboard" in traditional classroom.

in the sense that both partners can use all of its functions simultaneously; that is, whatever one partner writes or draws on the board, the other can interactively interfere, change, erase or write on it at the same time, somehow causing an impression of "being together", as in *face-to-face tandem* interaction. In addition to all this, partners can save the content of the *White Board* for print outs and later references. They can, therefore, keep records of the *Teletandem* session and process.

3.2.   Understanding the parts of a *Teletandem* session

Grounded not only on our own experiences as *Teletandem* practitioners (Telles & Vassallo, 2005a; Vassallo, 2006), but also guided by theoretical perspectives drawn from the *Lexical Approach* (Lewis, 1993, 2002) and from the studies on *Focus-on-form* (Doughty & Williams, 2004), we believe that a regular *Teletandem* session can last (a minimum of) two hours: one hour for each of the languages. Each hour is composed of three basic phases:

- *conversation about one or many topics (approximately 30 minutes):* partners talk about whatever they wish and whatever there is of their interest. Participant 1 (proficient speaker) should pay attention to WHAT and HOW participant 2 (student) says things in the target language. Participant 1 should be a good listener and respond to what participant 2 says in order to keep the conversation going. At the same time (and this will take practice!) the proficient speaker should keep taking SOME (not all) notes of the vocabulary that his/her student needs, his/her grammar mistakes and pronunciation problems (ONLY those that affect comprehension). These notes will function as guidelines for the next step.

- *language feedback (approximately 20 minutes)* is necessarily done in the last 20 minutes. This is the period of the lesson in which participant 1 (the proficient speaker) will use the notes he/she has taken while his/her partner was talking with him/her. The partner who is playing the role of the teacher

(the language expert) should not give long grammar explanations, but be objective and focus his/her comments on the grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation problem, preferably.

- *shared reflection on session (approximately 10 minutes):* First, the proficient speaker can ask his/her partner how he/she felt while speaking the target language. The proficient speaker should listen attentively to his/her partner's feelings, fears and problems. Only after he/she has expressed his/her point of view about his/her performance, the proficient speaker should start making brief comments about it. The proficient speaker should be encouraging, look for positive points, and praise his /her partner's risk taking and accomplishments. He/she should be attentive to possible competition and comparison between his/her partner's performance and his/her own, and remember that the *Teletandem* is a cooperative, reciprocal and mutual endeavor, not a destructive competition for one partner to show off that he/she is better than the other. Shared reflection on the session is important for reviewing common agreements and building team identity, in the sense that partners can talk about how they wish their learning story of *Tandem* to unfold.

Between one session and another, both partners should take a few minutes to leave the room, to stretch, to relax and/or to have something to drink. In the next day that partners meet, they should swap the order of the language to be learned. This is because one tends to get more profit from a lesson if he/she starts afresh. Between one week and another of *Teletandem* sessions, partners can write texts in the target language and e-mail them to their partners, so that they can be commented on and edited. The level of texts to be reached will depend on partners' agreement and personal aims they wish to achieve in written production. These are not compulsory, but recommended, as they may increase the effectiveness of *Teletandem* sessions.

4.   The *Teletandem Brasil Project*

Teletandem Brasil is an educational research project in the areas of computer assisted foreign language learning, teaching and teacher education at São Paulo State University. The project aims at providing an adequate virtual teaching/learning setting – the *Teletandem* – a setting within which undergraduate foreign university students can interact with undergraduate Brazilian university students, and learn each other's languages and cultures, with adequate pedagogical assistance and by means of the reading, writing, audio and video resources offered by the *Windows Live Messenger*. This is done on completely free of charge bases, so that students will have access to foreign cultures and languages and will establish links with them by means of partnerships, friendship and exchange of linguistic and culture information between both parts.

Initially, the project started with the following languages: Portuguese, Spanish, English, Italian, and French. At the moment it has no financial aid and is being undertaken by the university's own resources through the integration of research and teaching.

4.1.   Origins of the project

As we studied the published literature on *Tandem*, we ourselves experienced its most complex and richest form - our *face-to-face tandem* in Italian and Portuguese (respectively, our proficiency and, *by chance*, our mother languages) - for a period of eight months. During this process, we collected data and reflected on our very personal version of *Tandem*, focusing on our needs and objectives. Our data was in the form of edited essays, e-mail messages, diaries, notes and even reminders of vocabulary and grammar structures that we kept stuck on our office walls. We were interested in a learner-centered approach that could bring us the balance between *focus on forms* and *focus on meaning* (Long, 1988, 1991; Doughty & Williams, 2004)*,* grounded on the socio-constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1962, Bruner, 1966) and on the concept of language as social action (Bakhtin, 2000)*.*

The *Tandem* form we practiced was focused on free conversation. As the latter evolved, the proficient speaker took notes of the most relevant mistakes (morphological, lexical, syntactic or pronunciation) of the partner without interrupting his/her speech – we were focused *on the content* and *on using* Italian and Portuguese. In every encounter we had, our notes were always jointly analyzed and reviewed in the form of a linguistic debriefing during the last fifteen minutes of each turn (one in Italian, one in Portuguese). Discussion and reflection on form could happen whenever we needed them, but the last fifteen minutes were particularly devoted to them – we were, then, focused on *talking about* language.

We found out that this system has many advantages: first, it is flexible; second, it does not interrupt the flow of participants' conversation and ideas and, third, it prevents the lesson from being focused only on meaning without further systematic and explicit focus on the forms of the target language. In fact, our interest was to develop a *Tandem* form in which *noticing* (Schmidt, 1993*)* the forms of language had an important role in it.

After the analyses of our *Tandem* (Telles & Vassallo, 2005a; Vassallo, 2006), we started to jointly reflect on the peculiarities of the *Tandem* as a learning/teaching context for others, particularly for our students. Despite the fact that these peculiarities referred to our very own *Tandem* process, we believed that they could be further extended to the *Tandem* form in general and to the *Teletandem*, as well. It was on the bases of this presupposition and grounded on the principles and peculiarities presented in the first part of this article that we outlined our own notion of *Teletandem* and that we conceived the *Teletandem Brasil Project*.

4.2.   The three dimensions of the research project: the pedagogical tool, learning and mediation in *Teletandem*

As we progressed in our joint reflection, we realized that a *Teletandem* between two applied linguists would be quite different from one between two pre-service FL teachers and even more different from

a *Teletandem* between two lay students coming from other areas of knowledge. The need of support and/or mediation of a FL teacher for the latter group of students was, then, quite clear to us. Therefore, we thought that a coherent and comprehensive research project should account for at least three dimensions, as far as learning and teaching in *Teletandem* are concerned: (a) the dimension of the role that the new pedagogical tool plays in its learning/teaching process (the role of the *Windows Live Messenger* as a pedagogical tool); (b) the dimension of learning in *Teletandem* and (c) the dimension of teaching, counseling and/or mediation in the *Teletandem* process.

In fact, the originality and the peculiarities of the *Teletandem* settings, as they were shown above, make it difficult to conceive support to *Teletandem* learning in the same way as to traditional classroom learning processes. The project will be investigating several alternative forms of pedagogical support to *Teletandem* practitioners, as the departments of Portuguese of foreign universities and the coordination of the research team at São Paulo State University take the responsibility to introduce them.

In order to participate in the *Teletandem Brasil project*, university students should: (a) be regularly registered in a Portuguese language course (foreign students) or foreign language course (Brazilian students); (b) have easy access to a computer connected to the internet, with a webcam (at home or at the university) and the *Windows Live Messenger*[10]; and (c) have at least two hours per week in order to practice regular classes of *Teletandem* with his partner within a previously agreed period. *Tandem* pairs are supervised by foreign universities professors and graduate students (teachers of Portuguese and teachers of FLs) who act as foreign language *teacher-mediators* in the research team.

In the *Teletandem Brasil project*, teaching is conceived as a mediation and activity support. As the project evolves, their principles and practices still have to be defined in line with their theoretical foundations. We expect that research on mediation within the *Teletandem* context will increase our knowledge about autonomy in learning and will deepen our understanding of this concept.

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[10] Or any other Instant Messaging software, as mentioned above (n.4).

4.3. Research within the context of *Teletandem Brasil*

In line with the three dimensions outlined above, the *Teletandem Brasil project* has three objectives: *(a) to verify the compatibility of the* Windows Live Messenger *as a pedagogical instrument for distance foreign language teaching/learning* tandem*; (b) to verify the characteristics of linguistic, cultural and pedagogical interaction between the* Teletandem *pairs; and (c) to verify the role of the teacher-*

FOCI	THEMES
Teletandem: processes, context, participants and tools.	• The use of the *Windows Live Messenger* as a *Teletandem* pedagogical tool. • The use of the *Windows Live Messenger* by the teacher-mediator and by the interacting partners • The use of the *Windows Live Messenger* video images by the interacting partners and by the teacher mediator. • The use of the White Board by the interacting partners and by the teacher-mediator. • The role of the *Windows Live Messenger* in the construction of student autonomy, reciprocity, reflection and self-management of learning in the *Teletandem* process. • Analysis of the registers induced by the specificity of CMC[1] (written register on the White Board of the Messenger and register of the oral interactions via webcam in the *Teletandem*). • The role of the virtual space in power dynamics between *Teletandem* partners.
Foreign language teaching and learning *in Teletandem*: investigating the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical characteristics of partners' interaction in different languages.	• Interactive and learning processes between pairs of learners in the *Teletandem*. • Linguistic, cultural and pedagogical characteristics of the interaction between pairs of learners in *Teletandem*. • Language transfer within the intercultural learning context of *Teletandem*. • Oral evaluation in *Teletandem*. • Use of learning strategies in *Teletandem*. • Autonomy within the intercultural context of *Teletandem*. • Turn-taking system in the interactions between native x non-native speakers, forms of politeness as signs of beginning and end of turn-taking.
The teacher-mediator: actions, beliefs and their roles in teachers' practices of *Teletandem*.	• Teacher development within the virtual context of *Teletandem*. • The role of the teacher-mediator between *Teletandem* partners. • Mediation in the teaching/learning process of *Teletandem*. • Beliefs of teacher-mediators and *Teletandem* partners. • Management processes and pedagogical strategies. • Roles of teacher-mediators' beliefs and actions within the practices of *Teletandem* partners.

**Figure IV: The three research foci of *Teletandem Brasil*
and their respective themes**

[11] CMC - Computer mediated Communication.

mediator within the context of foreign language teaching/learning distance tandem. After our *face-to-face tandem* experience, these objectives became the foci of our research interests on *Teletandem*. Respectively, these three objectives focus on (a) the communication tools, (b) the interactive processes, and (c) teacher development within the context of *Teletandem*. These objectives gave raise to three foci that the *Teletandem Brasil Project* is investigating in the areas of Applied Linguistics and foreign language teacher education.

In line with the three objectives of the project, Figure IV presents the three research foci (left column) and their respective themes (right column).

The researchers are university professors - local coordinators of the project, Ph.D. graduate students, Master's degree students of the graduate programs where the project is being developed, and undergraduate research scholarship holders[12] of São Paulo State University. Data collection and analyses will be conducted on bases of several qualitative research methodologies. For purposes of data delimitation and researchers' choice of participant profiles, only a few *Teletandem* pairs will be selected for participating in the research data collection. This will be done by means of an invitation letter and signature of an informed consent.[13] Finally, the participant foreign universities must have (a) a department or language center where Portuguese as a foreign language is taught; (b) a foreign language professor, in charge of the local organization and coordination team, who presents a personal research project within the context of *Teletandem Brasil*, using his/her own or Brazilian students as research participants; (c) university facilities that can offer computers, webcams and internet connections to participant students (they can also have them at their own homes).

5.   Final comments: perspectives and challenges

In a previous publication on this journal (Vassallo & Telles, 2006), we presented some theoretical aspects of *in-tandem learning*

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[12] Bolsistas de Iniciação Científica.
[13] In addition to its investigation purposes, the project is also aimed at increasing effectiveness of FL learning on campus. That is one more reason for not considering all the students as research participants.

and described the peculiarities of its two most traditional modes – *face-to-face tandem* and *e-tandem*. In this article, we introduced our proposal of a third mode that we named *Teletandem* and outlined similarities, differences and shortcomings of the three modes of *in-tandem learning*. We, then, concluded the article with a practical application of this third mode, within the context of a research project – *Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all*. Also, as we discussed the pedagogical differences among the three modes of *in-tandem* foreign language learning, we have focused on both the characteristics and the importance of the *Teletandem* curriculum as a flow of events that are socially co-constructed by the partners while they develop their *Teletandem* process in the foreign language.

In addition to presenting the three modes of *in-tandem* learning, this article also aimed at outlining the research possibilities within the realm of Applied Linguistics that will be explored by the research team of the *Teletandem Brasil Project* within the next years.

We believe that the research possibilities we have outlined above are attuned with the advancement of CALL[14] and CMC software. Our inquiry into this area is both necessary and relevant because the development of virtual learning environments has increasingly facilitated the ways to learning foreign languages *in-tandem* and to communication among peoples and cultures of countries that are geographically distant. Such technological advancements have made possible to make the contact with people and cultures of other countries more democratic and accessible to socially and economically disadvantaged societies. Although we share the idea that one can master a foreign language very well without having a native speaker as a teacher and without having to live in the country where the language is spoken, we believe it is important that foreign language teacher education offers these opportunities to both pre-service and in-service teachers. This is to deepen not only the quality of their professional education, but to develop critical competence and knowledge of the cultures of the peoples whose language they will be teaching.

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[14] CALL – Computer Assisted Language Learning.

Therefore, we believe that CMC and CALLT advancements that come associated with socio-pedagogical projects, such as the *Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all* can shorten geographical, economical and cultural inequalities. The creative and social aspects of our research project become, then, evident: it is possible for inhabitants of countries with continental dimensions, such as Brazil (in which international traveling becomes a luxury restricted to a few) to get in touch with and to learn from peoples from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Once these international contacts are approached from the perspectives of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1974; MacLaren, 1997; Giroux & MacLaren, 1989), they may facilitate the inclusion of students from underprivileged social classes of Brazil within the international debate and cooperation.

Although our views and arguments, so far, may seem excessively positive and optimistic with regard to *Teletandem* and to the possibility of implementing it, we are aware that the *Teletandem Brasil Project* presents obvious economic and pedagogical shortcomings and challenges. However, we have been trying to be both conscious and ready to deal with them. The first economic shortcoming (and, at the same time, a challenge) has to do with the fact that computers, webcams and ADSL connections - the basic necessary equipment to make the *Teletandem* feasible, are still very expensive to many. In order for the project to have its expected social outreach and transformative scope, it needs financial support from state, educational and research funding agencies, as well as from private sponsors who could certainly profit from its educational results. Language laboratories equipped with booths, computers, webcams and ADSL connections are needed in order for the project to come to its existence.

As teachers and applied linguistics researchers consider the pedagogical materials and actions from the point of view of the *Tandem* theory, and as we devise counseling procedures and the instructional materials to be offered online to *Teletandem* practitioners, the three principles of *Tandem – autonomy, reciprocity and non-mixture of both languages*[15] – must be taken into account. An ultimate challenge the

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[15] Refer to our previous article, Vassallo & Telles, 2006 for more details on these principles.

project must face once it is concluded within the next three years is to find the most appropriate ways to integrate *Teletandem* in the Brazilian public school and university contexts.

Finally, as our research efforts evolve within the context of the *Teletandem Brasil Project*, we have succeeded in establishing partnerships with the Departments of Portuguese of several foreign universities, so that Brazilian university students can have their partners to share *Teletandem* sessions. From its beginning in March 2006 and even before receiving appropriate funding, the project has succeeded in assembling more than 200 university (foreign and Brazilian) students to practice *Teletandem* through its site www.teletandembrasil.org. We have also succeeded in publishing two issues of the project electronic journal *Teletandem News* (also available on the site), with the third one coming next January. Within the coming years, we expect to have the first research results from studies that are still being conducted both at master's and doctorate levels from mainly three perspectives: (a) the use that *Teletandem* practitioners make of the *Windows Live Messenger* tools to learn/teach language; (b) the characteristics of *Teletandem* interaction; and (c) the alternative roles of teachers in their mediation of *Teletandem* processes.

We close this article with a brief excerpt from an evaluation interview with a *Teletandem* participant that illustrates her positive relationship with *Teletandem* activities:

Eu, para mim, em relação ao alemão, eu acredito que eu tenha aprendido bastante coisa, inclusive coisas que eu não tive muita oportunidade de aprender nesses dois meses que eu fiquei na Alemanha, porque eu estava dentro de uma sala de aula durante a maior parte do tempo e com estrangeiros, dentro da escola. Então, não deu muito para pegar essas coisas da língua mesmo, falada, do cotidiano... não dentro da sala de aula, que a gente aprende aquela coisa mais formal. E... deixa ver o que mais eu posso falar sobre o Tandem... *E que tem sido um momento muito interessante, também, de conversar, de contato, de aquisição... de conhecimento de uma cultura nova. Para mim tem sido ótimo, tem sido momentos muito legais e têm me ajudado tanto na minha parte profissional, porque eu preciso dar aulas de alemão, quanto na*

minha possibilidade de falar, mesmo. Porque aqui é difícil você praticar alemão com uma pessoa, né? Não tem com quem. [RI] Então, tem sido ótimo.[16]

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[16] Well, for me, as far as the German language is concerned, I believe I learned many things, including those I did not have the opportunity to learn during the two months I stayed in Germany. Most of the time, I was in a classroom, with foreigners, in a school. So, I couldn't actually catch these tricks about daily language… not in the classroom, where we learn those formal aspects. And… let me see what else I can say about tandem… we have also had quite a bit of fun, of talking, of sharing, of learning… of knowledge of a new culture. For me, it's been great, fun moments and it has helped me so much from the professional side, because I need to teach German, about my chances of actually speaking the language. Because, it is difficult to speak German here, speak with someone, you know? There's nobody to talk with. (LAUGH). So, it's been great.

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