



Introducing Tandem Language Learning and the Tandem Canada Platform

Parlons français! < > Let's speak English!

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? What is Tandem Language Learning?

In tandem language learning (TLL), French second language (FSL) students pair up with native speakers of French who are learning English to exchange and help each other learn each other's language. Thus, for example, a class of FSL learners could partner up with English second language (ESL) learners in Quebec.

Although TLL is not very well known within Canada, it has in fact been around as an approach to language learning since the 1990s. Initially, TLL started out in Europe as face-to-face tandems. However, with the advent of the Internet, it is now increasingly done as virtual exchanges in both asynchronous – email, forum wiki – or synchronous – chat, videoconferencing – formats.

? How exactly does TLL work?

Once classes have partnered up, students usually work in dyads (or in small groups if class numbers do not balance out). TLL partners give each other equal time. In a forum activity, for example, students in the French class post their messages in French and the Francophone students answer in French. Then it is the turn of the ESL students to post a message in English and get responses in English. Partners thus practice communicating in their respective second language. But they also pick up vocabulary and expressions when their partners answer them.

In addition, partners give each other feedback. This does not mean grammar explanations as a teacher might do. Rather partners draw on their implicit understanding of their first (or school) language to help clarify or reformulate. In a chat exchange, for example, a FSL student wrote *"Quel âge est-il?"* and the Francophone partner responded with *"Quel âge a-t-il?"*. As a second example, *"Mon ordinateur est junk"* was rephrased by the Francophone partner as *"Ah ton ordinateur n'est pas bon!"* TLL is a Win-Win approach.

? Is it important for TLL to be integrated into a class?

Yes. The teacher's role is indispensable. In TLL students in different classes do not need to be at the same proficiency level. FSL students with elementary French might be partnered up with students with intermediate ESL students. However, teachers of each class need to choose topics appropriate for their specific students. Partner teachers must decide on a schedule and the number of exchanges. They also help students understand how to give feedback to their partners and how to maximize the interaction for the purpose of language learning. To further promote learning, information from partners can be recycled for in-class activities.

? Why did we create the Tandem Canada Platform?

Numerous research studies and our own experiences attest to the fact that hooking up with native-speaking peers is motivating and promotes language learning. However, we are also aware of the challenges, especially with respect to finding a congenial platform and partner classes. The ESL-FSL Tandem Canada platform is designed to facilitate these exchanges.

Features of the platform – www.tandem.ulaval.ca – include the following:

- synchronous tools: videoconferencing and chat (including recording of all exchanges)
- asynchronous tools: forum, wiki and the videoconferencing tool for posting presentations
- free
- secure – no need to give students' names or emails; platform hosted at Université Laval
- teacher friendly – teachers post their own assignments and have access to all students' work



? Is there pedagogical and technical support?

Suggestions for activities and materials are provided on the Tandem Canada platform. For more information about tandem language learning and how to set up activities, see our YouTube channel with videos in English and French:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5ZsXLsonjrBqgxpGNSF0DQ>

? How can teachers register and find partner classes?

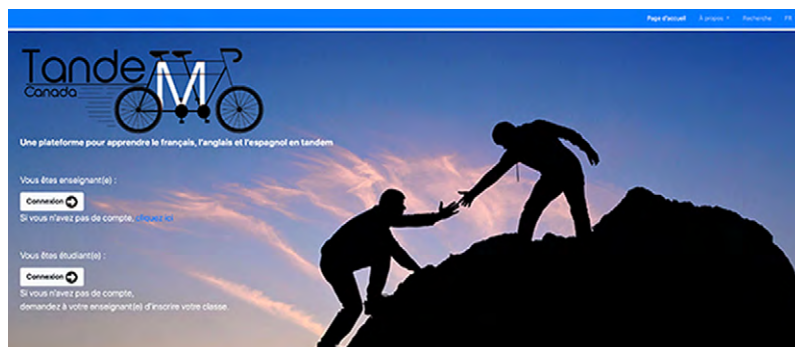
Registration takes place on the Tandem Canada platform. Once registered, teachers will be able to post their class profile(s) and look for partner classes. Teachers who are already involved in school exchanges can use the Tandem Canada platform to enhance these partnerships both before and after school visits.

? What can I do as a parent?

As a parent, you can help spread the word about TLL and the Tandem Canada platform by contacting FSL teachers and school administrators. Help promote Canada's two official language by doing what we couldn't do before – use technology to hook up classes and make authentic communication between FSL and ESL students a part of the school curriculum.



¹ Initial funding for the creation of the Tandem Canada Platform was provided by the Quebec Ministry of Education and Higher Education in accordance with *the Canada-Québec Agreement* for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction 2016-2017. Research on TLL in school contexts is currently supported by a grant from the **Fonds de Recherche du Québec - Société et Culture (2020-2023)**.



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