CHAPTER 2

THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF TANDEM LEARNING

The defining features of as well as the problems occurring in tandem learning have been reported on by past research. Furthermore, suggestions for improving online and also in particular tandem learning have been offered. These suggestions were important in making decisions for the design of the current study.

Defining autonomy in tandem learning

One of the main issues addressed in chapter 2 of "A guide to language learning in tandem via the Internet" (Little & Brammerts, 1996) is that of autonomy. They outline a rough sketch of what is required of learners should they wish to study a language via the internet. They define tandem learning as:

1. A capacity for self-direction

2. The way through which learners integrate their academic background knowledge and skills with their personal being

3. An instrument to liberate oneself from and manipulate a given (learning) environment

4. An innate human capacity

This outline suggests that students can be systematically guided in becoming better at self-direction. The notion that autonomy is considered to be somehow 'innate' in learners and develops over the course of human maturation could be an indicator of a natural need for possessing such skills. On the other hand, people also have an innate capacity for language learning; yet without any teaching their development would halt at some point. The distinction made between first order (cognition and beliefs) and second order intentional systems (reflection upon the former) requires some examination. They are presented by Little & Brammerts (1996) as defining features of individuality. This is a good example of how important meta-cognition is in the process of becoming not only a responsible person but also a more effective learner. Autonomy is a property of which we can be made aware, and "exploit consciously". Little & Brammerts (1996), furthermore, include in the skills they deem necessary for tandem language learning "the ability of both partners to continue to learn autonomously." Their statement indicates that self-reflection over time will improve the learner's ability to consciously exploit their skill in learning autonomously.

They also acknowledge the need for explicit training in this matter. Most learners come from a background of traditional instruction which does not emphasize learner autonomy, but teacher centered instruction instead. This has fostered varying degrees of autonomy in learners. Just as differences in the grasp of the subject matter between learners causes difficulties to collaborate effectively, a gap in autonomy development can also lead to such problems. Learners who are engaged in a tandem, rely on their skill in learner autonomy according to Little & Brammerts (1996). They might experience hindrance from such a gap if they would not be trained in autonomy. Thus

both learners might need training in this matter to balance this 'mis-match'. It is in everyone's interest that all participants are equally informed, in order to arrive at potential learning situations for all of them. It might then be suggested that in order to raise levels of autonomy we would also need to know how exactly we would go about doing so. The basic formula of Little & Brammerts (1996) is that learners must be taught to

> Plan, monitor and evaluate their learning, and they must know how to best exploit the native speaker competence of their partner (and the particular conditions of their tandem partnership), and have an insight into the language learning process that enables them to respond appropriately to their partner's learning initiatives.

Two potential difficulties mentioned by Little & Brammerts are the situational differences and issues in circumstances of learners and the nature of the medium (online writing). They suggest that students "need advice on how to organize their learning, manage their attitude to learning, and develop appropriate learning techniques and strategies." (Little & Brammerts, 1996). Despite these early reports on areas of possible trouble and learner needs, the sections on how to instruct and tutor online tandem learning do not address how to help learners develop autonomy or become more autonomous. Unfortunately, Little & Brammerts (1996) had not designed an intervention scheme for when those possible problems actually occur. An estimation of the kind of problems that can and do occur in a tandem might give us an opportunity to suggest better ways of further refining and sharpening the toolset that tandem learners need to be equipped with. The fact that both learners are thought by Little to need "to continue to learn autonomously" is an indication that a progressive scheme or format to establish simultaneous cultivation of skills within both learners

would be valuable. This roughly corresponds to the suggested "plan, monitor and evaluate" outline given by Little.

Theory and purpose of tandem learning: reciprocity and autonomy

First of all, the concept of tandem learning is based on the principles of reciprocity and autonomy. Ideally this would mean that "all partners benefit equally from collaborating with native speakers of their target language, and that they spend rather equal amounts of time using each of the two languages." Markus Kötter (2003). It is important that

> Each partner is prepared to act as an expert for the linguistic and cultural community of his or her native language. To ensure that these goals are achieved, the learners must negotiate when and how to help their peers, that is, how often and in how much detail they should comment on each other's potentially flawed output. (Kötter, 2003)

1. Not surprisingly, in actual application this does not occur as symmetrically as outlined in these guidelines, since these learners are neither language experts nor language teachers. Also, most language learners do not start out equipped with these attributes; in fact, the frustrations a language tandem can cause (especially via distance) may influence some to give up before they ever reach any minimum level of autonomy or reciprocity that would be required to benefit from tandem learning. So a way to overcome this seemingly vicious circle would be to view the process in a different light. People who are thrown

in at the deep end do not necessarily learn how to swim: likewise, tandem language learners might need to learn how to 'swim on dry land' before taking the plunge.

Current issues in distance tandem language learning

In the afore mentioned Kötter (2003) study, the students' lack of interaction is attributed to differing backgrounds. His suggestion is to research learners with more closely matched backgrounds, to avoid such issues in future studies. Instead of treating the issues involved in tandem learning as obstacles that need to be eliminated from the research, one option would be to accept them. In a real tandem setting, learners will most likely come from greatly differing backgrounds due to the nature of a language exchange.

Problems between tandem learners arise from:

1. Differing backgrounds
2. Conflict of interests

Differing backgrounds

Only if learners are involved in the same program at the same institution will they have the same goals, deadlines, evaluation criteria, and motivation to participate. Even then there will likely be individual differences, albeit on a much smaller scale, which would probably result in a less significant cause for conflict of interest between the learners. However, an important reason why learners would opt for a distant language exchange program or telecollaborative partnership in the first place is

because they are studying a language of a group of people not frequently found in their immediate surroundings. Hence their need for a way that would facilitate contact with a member of this group. In most cases, major differences between many telecollaborative partners are likely to be found in language proficiency, socio-economic, historical and cultural background. Despite these differences, all participating members must share equally in what is called a community of inquiry in order to benefit fully from the educational potential of a tandem.

A community of inquiry according to Garrison, Anderson and Archer:

> (As shown in Figure 1), a worthwhile educational experience is embedded within a Community of Inquiry that is composed of teachers and students - the key participants in the educational process. The model of this Community of Inquiry assumes that learning occurs within the Community through the interaction of three core elements. Figure 2 shows the three essential elements: cognitive presence social presence, and teaching presence. (Garrison et al., 2000)

In the context of this study, community of inquiry is an ideal outcome in developing autonomous and collaborative tandem learners. See the illustration below.

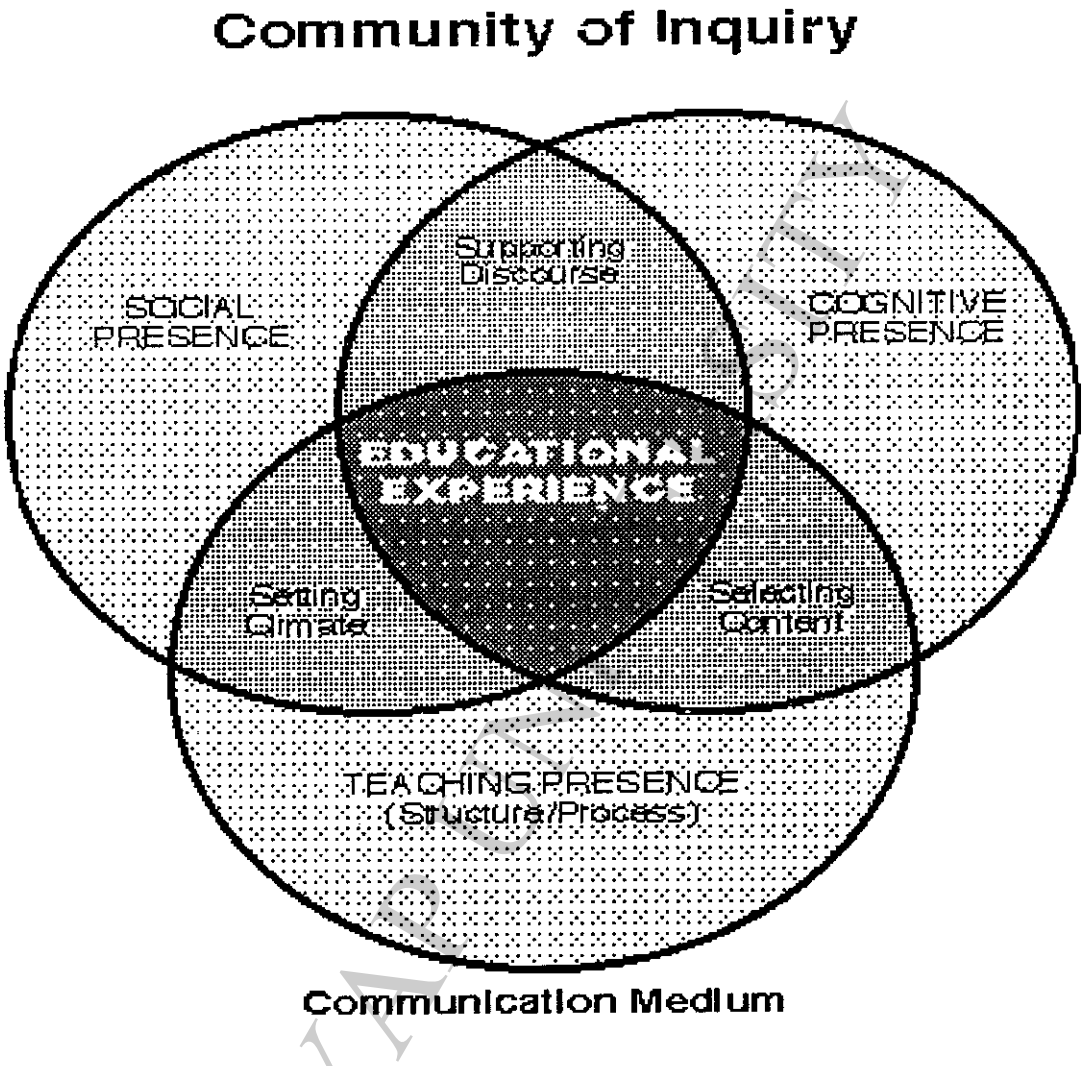

Figure 2: Community of inquiry, model of Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000)

One of the problems observed in a study by Markus Kötter (2003) was that participants did not share equally in such a "community of inquiry" (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001). In studying real-time interaction between tandem learners, Kötter acknowledged that there were marked differences in conversational repair between face-to-face tandems and on-line tandems. Kötter also acknowledged that there were significant gaps in the background of the two groups of participants (German and American undergraduate students). Their purposes for participating in the language tandem varied considerably, influenced by factors such as a difference in language proficiency and urgency to fulfill course requirements. His suggestions for further research are to recruit from groups of learners who are more closely matched in terms of target language proficiency and socio-cultural factors. However, since the factors listed above are unlikely to change, we must instead devote our time to understanding how we can enhance the elements of an online educational experience as detailed by Garrison & Archer. These suggestions still disregard the course structure and cognitive and teaching presence. The agreements or guidelines need to be expanded to become teachable skills, incorporated into an on-line distance education course as suggested by Pawan et al. (2003) and Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000). One important note here is that Kötter suggested an explicit agreement or some guidelines for turn-taking and codeswitching to be formed beforehand in future studies. This resembles one of the suggestions made by Pawan et al., for students and teacher to structure classroom discussions and outline requirements for participation more explicitly.This will be discussed later in this chapter, in the paragraph titled **"Suggestions for improving collaboration in distance education"**.

Conflict of interests

One of the key problems for those participating in tandem learning lies here: there is a conflict of interests. Since the objective of a teacher is to teach a student a skill and the objective of the student is to learn a skill to the best of his or her ability, how can someone hold both objectives at the same time? A tandem partner might have the best intentions to teach but not act accordingly because of interference from his or her own personal agenda, which is to learn the language from the other. Such a conflict of interests results in an attempt at collaborative learning which often fails at achieving its goals. In most cases, reciprocity, or one learner benefiting from another learner's progress (perhaps a form of altruism) is difficult to establish in a developing relationship between telecollaborative partners.

A similar problem as in Kötter's study occurred in a study conducted by Belz (2002) in that students were drawn off task, did not participate equally, lost motivation and failed to meet course requirements. The main causes for these problems were probably that students had differing agendas. The German group had other requirements to fulfill course objectives as set out by their educational institution as compared to the American group. The latter group in fact depended on a joint effort between the two groups to complete a number of tasks on which they would be graded, whereas the German group only needed to complete two exams. This example illustrates the importance of having clear teaching presence in the student preparation phase and outlining of objectives, stating requirements and modeling collaborative interaction.

Pedagogical intervention to resolve conflicts

Belz (2002) asserts this need for teaching presence in her conclusion, stating that "a shift from the locus of learning to the task" might minimize difficulties associated with institutional difficulties (here, Belz is drawing on the work of Leont'ev). Also, "educational development may be effected by calculated pedagogical intervention" implying the need for a more structured teacher involvement in future projects. In contrast to Kötter (2003), Belz (2002) believes that "cultural faultlines in telecollaborative learning communities…should not be smoothed over or avoided based on the sometimes negative results of a study such as this one; indeed, they should be encouraged."

Differences will most likely always remain a difficulty in cross-cultural communication, so to recruit closely matched individuals from different social groups would not be a reflection of reality. Furthermore, the challenges posed by these difficulties might just be the spark that fires the engine of inquiry: curiosity. Thus, Belz would have future German-American telecollaboration guided in "cultural sensitization on social patterns of communication and institutional conditions which may influence (but not determine) the execution of task-oriented electronic collaboration". Such guidance could come in the form of suggested readings that represent certain aspects of educational differences, or reading about other students' immersion experiences. Perhaps a more culturally sensitized pair of individuals would be more aware of potential cultural obstacles and able to deal with them more appropriately when these matters arise in a conversation. The likelihood of setting more realistic expectations, ground rules or partnership agreements beforehand could

be increased through knowledge of cultural differences. In short, this is one kind of autonomy that can be fostered with the help of teacher guidance.

In a way, this reflects on Garrison et al.'s (2000) call for social presence along with teaching and cognitive presence, adding another dimension to it. He defines social presence as "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as "real" people." One of the complaints of the students in Belz' (2002) study was that they were not able to really get to know the other person, due to either task pressure or lack of participation. Also, Garrison et al. (2000) argue that "cognitive presence...is more easily sustained when a significant degree of social presence has been established." Apart from the ways Garrison et al. suggest ways of expressing non-verbal linguistic data, he also states that social presence is community shaping, in that without it, there is only a transfer of information.

Benefits of tandem learning

Some of the benefits for individuals, teachers, communities of learners and society in general have been discussed in chapter 1. As mentioned by Gläsmann & Calvert (2001), the benefits of tandem learning for learners include real communication, motivation, autonomy, reflection, equality, intercultural learning, social skills, technical skills, flexibility and lifelong learning. The reported benefits for teachers include pupil learning, a changing role for the teacher and increased interest and motivation. The benefits for the schools include prestige, cross-curricular work and flexibility. Three of the benefits listed above will be discussed here.

1. *Real communication*: Certain studies analyze the distribution of types of collaboration interactions, using Garrison and Archer's practical inquiry framework (2001). In a study conducted by Pawan et al. (2003), the search was for patterns and types of collaborative interactions occurring in a task performed on an online bulletin board. Further analysis would determine to which level of the cycle of cognitive presence these interactions belonged. The main concern in that study was that the level of collaborative interactions achieved by the participants, who were inservice teachers in various fields at the language teacher education department of a large midwestern American university, was relatively low. According to Pawan et al. (2003): "Without instructors' explicit guidance and "teaching presence," students were found to engage primarily in "serial monologues."" Based on their findings, they suggest "three intervention strategies that may help instructors increase collaborative interactions in online discussions." They are: structuring classroom discussions, demonstrating overt instructor facilitation, and requiring students to self code responses. These suggestions will be discussed later, in the section "**Suggestions for improving collaboration in distance education**". In the current study, the importance of real communication was communicated to students while also informing them of the purpose of language learning. In the study of Pawan et al., the focus was on gauging the amount of new knowledge generated amongst peers, not to improve their language abilities. Yet a cycle of cognitive inquiry applied to language learning might aid in the explicit making of certain language forms, and give more reason for discourse. Thus, a balance must be kept between language and task. From another perspective, real communication is necessary to complete tasks, but an explicit

focus on either language form or task completion might hinder 'real communication'. For example, if a task has a set outcome, it is questionable whether participants have a genuine interest in chatting with their interlocutor, because the information they are trying to gather from him or her has less bearing on their intrinsic motivation as compared to an open-ended task. If students would be told to only focus on their partner's usage of past tense forms, perhaps the content what is communicated degenerates in to an exchange of formal corrections. It could become harder to sustain motivation to engage in such exchanges. On the other hand, if no outline of expectations or guidelines is given, students might be at a loss of how to help each other improve. Again, a balance of both worlds is part of this pursuit. In effect, regarding real communication as a benefit of tandem learning is indirectly relevant to the objectives of this study.

2. *Autonomy*: The procedure of the current study definitely involves decentralization of power, however, the teacher's potential value as a guide is emphasized . There is still a need for the teacher, who needs to show the students how to become less dependent on that same teacher. They still depend on that teacher for showing them how to get to that level, however. Otherwise, some students might not be able to arrive at a higher level of independence, and ultimately cannot reap the full potential benefits of tandem learning. If students are able to self-correct, analyze their own needs and keep track of their progress, then progress might follow without a continuous need for teaching presence. A level of autonomy at which students are able to keep track of their progress independently, or judge their production by their own internal (student) values, might spark motivation.

But students still need to be made aware that these tools are at their disposal. To be able to grasp how to use those tools, many students might want to see a demonstration and an explanation of how to become an autonomous learner. Some practice under supervision and some unsupervised practice might be necessary. It is a separate skill that needs to be developed, aside from the language skill development. At the same time the process of becoming autonomous serves as an (future) aid to language learning. The intention must be there to add to the convenience of and satisfaction in language learning.. However, this current study approaches the learning/teaching situation from a perspective of progressive improvement in teaching and in individuals' performance and ability to work autonomously. Little & Brammert's (1996) concept of autonomy, being a 'capacity for self-direction' in this study is viewed as an opportunity to learn how to self-direct.

3. *Reflection*: These include benefits such as improving selective information acquisition, becoming aware of learning style and language differences, and learning about the culture (Gläsmann and Calvert, 2001). Teaching learners to be able to reflect on one's own work is an instrumental skill in stimulating intrinsic motivation. This could be an essential component of continuous development: thus it is likely that this is a relevant benefit for this study as well, as the relationship between CA and autonomy will be described in the next section. The aforementioned practicality and convenience of making an audio recording of learners' speech makes reflection less of a chore as compared to doing reflection with a whole class of learners. This current study benefits from this, in that it

provides clearer insights in what subconscious processes will have affected students' performance and decisions after our session.

Developing autonomy and reciprocity in tandem learners

Tandem learners have responsibility for:

1. Own learning (autonomy)
2. Peer learning (reciprocity)

As Schwienhorst (1997 p. 2) points out:

> Vygotsky's approach, then, emphasises that social interaction and collaboration are essential to the learning process. This involves the extensive use of alternative learning environments where students can collaborate and interact in pairs or larger groups, new environments that have not been shaped by teacher-centred, non-collaborative classrooms…External social interaction and internal cognitive interaction are, of course, inseparable and influence each other. The idea that learners need to become aware of and accept responsibility for their learning process is thus extended to include the learning process of their peers. (Schwienhorst, 1997)

Continuous assessment as a means to foster autonomy in learners

Autonomy is one of the two main tenets in tandem learning, thus is a quality that telecollaborative learners must learn to develop. Autonomy can be developed in learners by using continuous assesment. As reported by Puhl (1997 p. 3):

> The concept of CA itself holds rich potential for teachers because it affirms high-order creative and critical thinking and because it embraces not only cognitive outcomes but affective and behavioral outcomes as well…CA in practice can embody the global changes that affect the very nature of the classroom process, bringing it away from education as information and toward the full development of learner potential. It offers a way to provide differential input depending on the needs of learners, and can help to improve the quality of instruction even with large classes. (Puhl, 1997).

Puhl indirectly refers to autonomy, in that a learner is "put in control of his/her own learning". Whether this autonomy is meant to be an outcome or a goal, aspect, or a method in CA has not been defined by set boundaries. For instance, is it a goal to have learners become autonomous over the course of time, or are they expected to be able to control their own learning from the very start of a program? One could argue that the concept of learner autonomy takes these roles interchangeably, holding a symbiotic relationship with CA. If students gain insight into their learning process when assessed by CA methods, this increased awareness can help them improve their autonomy. Self-assessment for example, can serve as a checklist for students to keep in mind while in class. Over time, paying attention to matters which are self-assessed, such as helping their peers or noticing vocabulary, can become habits or positive traits.

Awareness is one step towards treatment; we need to find suitable ways to create more appropriate learning opportunities and alternative learning environments (as noted by Schwienhorst, 1997) for the teaching/learning parties involved. By doing so, a continuous development is set in motion. This process we want to set in motion probably needs to start with an examination of the individuals partaking in the endeavour. This in effect means that learning a language in tandem, just like learning a language in any other way, requires working on guided self-development that has implications beyond developing skills of the individual. If responsibility for self-development can be fostered in a group of students, then the distance between that and learners' responsibilities inside a community of learners becomes a gap which can be narrowed.

Regarding autonomy as a skill

There is a considerable amount of overlap between CA as described by Puhl and the trait of autonomy, which is considered necessary for tandem learning. As David Little's states:

> Autonomy is a *capacity* - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts." (Little, 1991:4).

These "wider context" may relate to further academic achievements, but also to the functioning as a more conscious member of society.

Continuous assessment in tandem learning can be divided into:

- Gathering and integrating information about learners
- Continuous development: goal setting and agreements (such as on the degree of language negotiation and applying practical inquiry)

Puhl goes on to report on the definition of assessment as being the "process of gathering and integrating information about learners from various sources to help us understand these students and describe them." Examples of the teacher's role in gathering and integrating knowledge: maintaining portfolio's, offering suggestions (on objectives or agreements amongst peers), monitoring and reflection. All of these tools aid in raising awareness in learners, which over time develops autonomy. She is explaining this from a teacher's point of view, but for the purpose of developing autonomous learners, perhaps it could apply to a self-reflective learner in a similar manner. However, these various sources would need to be identified: how to find this information and how to interpret it is a task in which the teacher would play a central role. This will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Reciprocity: collaboration and cognitive presence

The level of success which learners can achieve through collaboration is in part determined by each group member's individual level of autonomy. In a study by Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin and Ching- (2003), students did not achieve much

collaboration, and did not receive any training in autonomy, but were expected to collaborate with peers and self-direct their learning in several online projects. Just as learners differ in learning style, their capabilities of learning autonomously differ as well. In any group learning, this affects overall performance because learners depend on each other. The dependence is greatest when there are fewer peers to collaborate with, even more so if in fact their peer also fulfills the role of a teacher. They rely on the cognitive presence of each other (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). However, it has not been investigated how the varying degrees of autonomy of individual learners engaged in telecollaborative learning influence their attempt to generate new knowledge together. The tenet of *reciprocity* is interwoven with autonomy and collaboration to such a degree that they cannot be separated; their interplay needs to be examined to determine what most influences learners in this kind of learning.

Reciprocity may be enhanced by:

- Establishing cognitive presence
- Conscious application of cognitive inquiry as a tool for inductive learning

However, cognitive presence, when applied consciously, can raise awareness in learners, improving reciprocity and in turn collaboration. To integrate schemata with given tasks and internalize new knowledge learners must exercise autonomy, or apply their capacity for self-direction. This means learners need to exercise *cognitive presence* (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000); when participants of an online session are not fully self-directing (either according to their assigned role, or the objectives of the task) the possibility of absorbing and constructing new information diminishes. Likewise, learners cannot benefit from each other's knowledge if either is

not cognitively present. Thus, the efficiency of task-completion is affected by the quality of the participation of individual members. From the literature a perspective emerges which assumes that participation might be linked to a learner's ability to self-direct and to his or her sense of responsibility to fulfill the duties he or she has been assigned to (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer; Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin and Ching-, 2003).

Suggestions for improving collaboration in distance education

Some of the techniques that Little & Brammerts (1996) mentioned in the guide to online tandem learning (see also the paragraph titled " **Narrowing the autonomy gap between learners")** have been clearly outlined in Pawan et al. (2003), stating suggestions for further research in her study. In their study, the focus was more on collaboration than autonomy, but their suggestions are valuable to both the development of and the insight into the interplay between these two factors. Meaning, if we can better our insight in how either collaboration or autonomy interrelate, and how they can be fostered in students more effectively, we might improve development of both in future tandem learners. The study she conducted concerned teachers involved in an online teacher education course. In this study, she tried to uncover what patterns and types of collaborative interactions occurred during three online classes, and her intent was to use these findings as a guide in the design of instructional interventions. She applied Garrison, Anderson & Archer's practical inquiry model (2001) as a framework for her study. This model has four categories to determine the collaborative 'phase' of a discussion, as being either

- Phase 1: Triggering event – The posing of issues, dilemmas, or problems

- Phase 2: Exploration – Engagement in brainstorming, questioning, and exchange of information

- Phase 3: Integration – Construction of meaning from the ideas generated in the exploratory phase

- Phase 4: Resolution – Finding, testing, and implementing a solution to problems presented in the triggering phase

The focus of most discussions remained in phase 1 (Triggering) and phase 2 (Exploration), with little events in phase 3 (Integration) and almost no events in phase 4 (Resolution). In practice, this means that discussions continuously lead into various different directions, bringing also many 'off-task' topics to the discussion. Many possible solutions to triggering events were offered by other members, but did not lead to much application or new constructed meaning, let alone testing new constructed meaning. She proposes the following intervention strategies to prevent "serial monologues" and improve collaboration in online discussions:

- Structure classroom discussions: a more explicit outline of participation requirements such as deadlines and modeling to students how to contribute to discussions (both in quality and quantity) could be included in a syllabus or addressed by an instructor teaching a collaboration course.

- Demonstrate overt instructor facilitation and leadership role: modeling critical thinking and questioning, and clear framing of questions within phase 3 and phase 4 of the practical inquiry model.

- Require students to self-code responses: a meta-cognitive strategy to have students consciously exercise their roles allows students to gain awareness of their individual responsibilities and reminds them of the greater task at hand, keeping them on track.

Again, the differences in method (asynchronous versus synchronous) setting (academic versus language learning) and purpose (improving collaboration only versus improving language and learning skills) need to be taken in to account when applying these suggestions to tandem learning.

The synchronous/asynchronous distinction in distance learning

As Little & Brammerts (1996) state that "learners must be able to create communication situations which provide good learning potential for themselves and their partner," Garrison, Anderson & Archer's (2001) critical or practical inquiry model might be applied to language learning in a similar way. The negotiation of either language forms or meaning which emerges once students consciously apply the practical inquiry model can serve as a such a "communication situation" with good learning potential.

It needs to be acknowledged that as Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2001) mentioned that asynchronous interaction provides more opportunities for reflection; there is simply more time to reflect while waiting for a reply than in synchronous learning. Intuitively one might expect that the potential of achieving higher levels of critical thinking increase when there is more opportunity to look back, process information again, and then reply to one's peers with a more thought-out answer. However, as pointed out in the study done by Pawan et al. (2003), this can hardly be regarded as a rule of thumb. Those who focus on improving collaboration amongst peers are often proponents of asynchronous distance learning (Garrison and Archer, 2004), even some who have investigated CMC language learning or distance tandem language learning (Belz, 2002; Little & Brammerts, 1996; Kötter, 2003). Yet, when we consider the less than satisfactory levels of collaboration found in the outcomes of these studies, there is a lot more work to be done to make this method viable. Both Kötter (2003) and Belz (2002) reported less than expected negotiation of meaning and collaboration. In both cases, differences and issues in the learners' circumstances (as also mentioned by Little, noted in paragraph 2.2) were given as explanations for these shortcomings. But they could also have been affected by the other factor Little stated, namely the nature of the medium.

Overlap and contrast of synchronous/asynchronous methods

Reasons for giving a preference to asynchronous method include the convenience of review and reflection on interaction, the extra amount of time resulting in better formulated responses (thus perhaps a plus for language practice), the diminished sense of anxiety in shy students to participate and less pressure to participate for students in

general. These benefits may also apply to synchronous methods; perhaps some methods do not fit this neat binary categorization of either synchronous or asynchronous, such as text chat messaging. According to Freiermuth (2002): "Internet chatting may be better at fostering interaction than online discussion in a time-delayed (asynchronous) mode because Internet chat mimics actual conversation more closely. A chat response is, relatively speaking, immediate and tends to be topically driven." Yet, different aspects of language come to one's attention than when actually communicating orally. Likewise, decisions and responses need to be delivered at a different pace, as does negotiation of meaning. The concepts are there, but the form changes. What degree of severity might the nature of the medium have on affecting collaboration and negotiation of meaning? This current study might give some insight of whether it has greater or lesser impact than learner circumstances, for example. Other factors might play an equally important part, such as learning style to name just one example.

Collaboration based on critical or practical inquiry model

So expectations of what constitutes a respective event in each of the phases of 'cognitive presence' need to be adapted, with which Garrison and Archer (2004) mean "the extent to which the participants are able to construct meaning through sustained communication." Perhaps the level of inquiry is not on a comparable level with discourse for academic purposes, but the cycle of the four phases of cognitive presence might be effectively applied none the less as well as the strategies of teaching presence. In this same line, Little states that there needs to be agreement between learners or groups of learners on how errors are dealt with. The critical or

practical inquiry cycle of triggering, exploration, integration and resolution could be applied here, but in an adapted fashion.

For example, if students would decide on trying to discuss a mistake by making use of this cycle, it might provide valuable insight, in terms of language mechanics and language use, for both parties. This means that students would be taking a sideline from the general task, leading them away from the task at hand. However, it provides learners with another opportunity to also practice the target language and learn more about it at the same time, which could be considered as valuable goals when participating in a tandem. The discussion is a means to an end, to practice and learn about a language. The objectives of the task should be secondary to the primary task of attempting to improve language proficiency.

Because goals in tandem language learning differ from goals in academic discourse, it changes the setup of both cognitive and teaching presence. Cognitive presence is necessary for learners to fulfill their responsibilities more than fulfilling task requirements. Perhaps a distinction between task-related and language-related events should be made as well. Staying 'on-task' in a language-related event would mean acting out the responsibilities of the temporary role they take on at the respective moment of event occurrence. When a triggering event occurs such as a language mistake in an L2, the respective L1 speaker needs to be aware that he or she needs to apply him- or herself in the exploration phase, which might spark more discussion belonging to this phase. This discussion could lead to learners connecting ideas about error correction (phase 3, integration), and testing these connections (phase 4, resolution) might occur by producing new language utterances using the same

structure that was originally corrected. Learners might generate their own corpus in this example, to discover collocation in the target language.

Finding appropriate teaching methods

A more traditional classroom-correction such as reformulation might only give students the how, but not the why, nor possible alternatives or the opportunity for independent language production. For example, suppose a learner would be corrected on an utterance by means of reformulation. Provided that the student possesses average retention and language skills, this might not be enough for him or her to learn from. Other possible ways to rephrase the utterance should be given (either by a peer or a teacher), then collected and summarized and an attempt should be made to apply these in a new situation; a process often too time consuming to be a viable option in most classrooms. Then again, highly developed autonomy and collaborative strategies are only as effective as the quality of the design of the task and teacher facilitation allow them to be (see also Freiermuth, 2002). So students will probably stay on-task more and work according to their assigned role and responsibilities if their task is clearly outlined.

So if students can be taught to adhere to a hypothetical outline that would have them stay on task, can they realistically conduct a conversation that still resembles so-called 'real communication' as mentioned in paragraph 2.1? In actuality, for discourse to flow naturally, the level of cognitive presence will fluctuate. Students need to either have a very clear outline of objectives, and determination to fulfill the requirements to achieve these objectives (such as role-determined responsibilities), or be guided in

how their participation could contribute to a successful outcome of their task. Facilitating gestures on the teacher's behalf could include asking critical questions, raising new issues, or elicit from students how to tie concepts together.

The job of the teacher is not to fill in the gaps but point out those gaps instead. The teacher also needs to keep learners on task. Freiermuth (2002) lists these as the CMC teacher's aids in running an online collaborative language class. As noted by Pawan et al. (2003), a lot of the threads wound up being discussions of topics unrelated to the task. The only teacher interaction was on this same unrelated topic. Likewise, Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2001) mention that there is evidence that most computer mediated education fails when there is a lack of teaching presence, leadership and direction. However, when properly exercised, teaching presence can lead to more sustained student participation, higher-order learning outcomes, and cognitive and social presence.