2015 BLOG FOR
SCHOLARSHIP PROJECT:

Teletandem: Learning language and culture at a distance

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CENTRE FOR EDUCATION FUTURES SCHOLARSHIP
Bonjour et bienvenue!
March 4, 2016

Welcome to our new blog: Teletandem! An interactive language and culture learning between UWA and Lille 3 University in France.

From Perth to Lille and back
March 7, 2016

UWA students have been paired up with their Lille partner! They now need to make contact and organise a time for their first ever Teletandem skype session this week. What a strange but exciting feeling to speak to someone you never met before on the other side of the world!
The following is a brief summary of activities undertaken by UWA students as part of the Teletandem, their level of participation in the project, as measured by blog posts and some observations on their experiences thus far.

Overall, UWA students have responded enthusiastically to the project. From the blog posts it would appear that most students have embraced the spirit of the Teletandem and use it not only as a tool for language acquisition and improvement, but also as a forum for cultural exchange and an opportunity to form friendships.

Although many expressed a little apprehension at the idea of speaking French with a native speaker, which is perfectly understandable, most of their fears were quickly allayed once they made contact with their partner and realised that they had just as many reservations about their English. Students have taken advantage of the flexible nature of the programme, showing initiative and tailoring the activities and their questions to suit their individual circumstances, eliminating those that are irrelevant or of no great interest to them and adding others which are. Their discussions appear not to be limited to the activity or topic for the week, with students using the occasion to discuss other areas of interest with their partner. This is consistent with the idea that the Teletandem is not just understood as educational exercise by the students but also a social occasion in which they can use their target language in a less structured more authentic way. The teletandem process encourages students to take control of and to direct discussion, allowing for a more natural conversation to take place.

Activities undertaken so far

Out of the 33 students enrolled:

- 22 have completed exercise 1, “Getting to know each other.”

- 15 have completed exercise 2, “Describe your normal day. Describe your ideal day.”

- 12 have completed exercise 3, “One culture or many?”

- 5 have completed exercise 4, “Values.”

(Figures correct as of the 11th of April 2016)

All posts by UWA students have been in French. The blog enables students not only to share their experiences, but also gives them the opportunity to practice their writing skills in French.
At the end of week five students submitted the first half of their journal, covering activities 1, 2 and 3. Students will submit the second half in week 9, which will encompass remaining activities 4, 5 and 6. To date students should have (and may have, though have yet to post on the blog) completed activity 4. Currently the students are not undertaking activities as their teletandem partners in Lille are on university break until the 17th of April. Teletandem will resume with activity 5, “Cultural behaviours and stereotypes”, during the UWA study break.

Rowena Putland (Teletandem assistant).

Our Teletandem coming to a close
June 6, 2016

Three weeks ago, students had their last skype session with their partner in Lille. Last week, we held a focus group session, officialising the end of the Teletandem programme. Most students expressed their ‘regret’ about ending the 10 week conversational exchange with their French partner but many of them will continue to keep in touch through Social Media. Some of them even intend to visit each other (in person) in the near future.

Students had two weeks to reflect on their journey and last week, they posted on LMS a reflective report on their intercultural and linguistic learning experience as part of their 3d assessment regarding this programme, the first and second ones being diary entries summarising their Skype activities.

Rowena and I devised a feedback questionnaire and posted it on LMS for students to complete. We will analyse it towards the end of June and see what needs to be improved for implementation as part of a Unit next year. So far, the response rate is rather low, with only 28% of students responding, but we hope to get more responses within the next few weeks, after the busy exams period.

I will post more news as soon as Rowena and I have analysed the responses.