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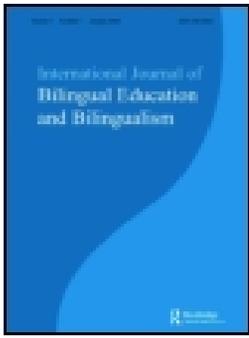
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# Challenges of implementing authenticity of tandem learning in formal language education

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## ABSTRACT

In tandem learning, a model for two-way language learning originally developed for non-formal education, language is learned through interaction between two native speakers with different first languages learning each other's languages in cooperation. A high level of authentic learning characterises this model. The original tandem learning model has been developed and transferred to a formal educational context. However, the effects of this transition on the authentic character of tandem learning has not been investigated, and research in this field is needed. This paper aims to increase knowledge and understanding of the challenges of implementing authenticity of tandem learning in formal language education by analysing the learning tasks in a handbook developed for classroom tandem, a model for language learning and teaching, within second national language education in Finland. The results indicate a large variation in authenticity levels among classroom tandem tasks, indicating that the implementation of tandem learning in a formal educational context has compromised authenticity. The results identify aspects of learning tasks that are problematic and could be further developed. The results point to areas for further development of the classroom tandem model.

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Classroom tandem; second language learning; authentic learning; tandem learning; task analysis

## Introduction

Tandem learning is a model for language learning originally developed in a German-French youth-exchange programme in the 1960s, i.e. in a non-formal learning context (see Bechtel [2003] for a historical overview). The tandem model entails two native speakers with different first languages forming a tandem dyad to learn each other's languages. Tandem partners switch languages and roles between learners in their respective second languages and resources in their first languages. Tandem learning embraces a social-interactional perspective, emphasising that learning and instruction are social processes situated in social contexts, in which participants are engaged in mutual social actions (Doehler 2010; Enfield and Levinson 2006; Kääntä 2010; Seedhouse and Walsh 2010). The learning content of tandem learning is not restricted to the language itself, in that the culture associated with the language is viewed as equally important (Karjalainen 2011).

In all tandem forms, the main principles of tandem learning are *reciprocity* and *learner autonomy* (Brammerts and Calvert 2003, 19–20; Holstein and Oomen-Welke 2006, 53–61; Karjalainen 2011, 28). Reciprocity denotes that learning occurs in cooperation with both participants in an equally beneficial position, whereas learner autonomy implies that the learners take responsibility for their own learning process. Both principles have received substantial attention in previous research within this field. In addition to these, *authenticity* is a third characteristic of tandem learning,

mentioned in research when authentic interaction and learning situations are discussed (Brammerts 2003, 14; Karjalainen 2011, 32; Karjalainen et al. 2013; Lightbown and Spada 2006, 32; Pörn and Hansell 2017).

Authentic learning is a multidimensional concept, discussed in detail further on in the paper. In a tandem context, authentic learning situations have been understood as second language learners having the opportunity to use and learn the second language in interaction and reciprocal cooperation with a native speaker in a real-life, non-formal learning context, instead of practicing the second language in a traditional formal education context (Karjalainen 2011; Laurén 2006; Pörn and Hansell 2017; Rost-Roth 1995). Since this authenticity has been taken for granted, it has not received as much attention among researchers as the two main principles.

Although originally developed in non-formal contexts, tandem learning has evolved and is implemented in formal educational contexts at different levels. One example is classroom tandem, developed as a model of language learning and teaching within the second national language instruction in upper secondary school in Finland. Finland is a bilingual country with two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, and education is organised separately for both language groups in parallel monolingual schools. Both language groups study their respective L2 national languages as an obligatory school subject: Finnish as a Second National Language in Swedish-medium schools and Swedish as a Second National Language in Finnish-medium schools (Boyd and Palviainen 2015, 63–64; Nuolijärvi 2013, 37–40).

The principles of tandem learning originally were defined in a non-formal context and have been assumed to apply to formalised tandem learning as well, this assumption can however be questioned. Challenges associated with transferring tandem learning from a non-formal to a formal classroom tandem context have been pointed out previously, e.g. regarding learner autonomy (Pörn and Hansell 2017; Schmelter 2004). As with learner autonomy, it can be assumed that the authenticity of the learning activities could suffer from the transition from a self-directed non-formal context to substantially more teacher-led and task-based formal language instruction, steered by the national core curriculum.

Previous research on tandem language learning mainly has examined peer interaction between tandem partners in different contexts (Apfelbaum 1993; Bower and Kawaguchi 2011; Hansell and Pörn 2016; Karjalainen 2011; Karjalainen et al. 2013; Karjalainen et al. 2015; Rost-Roth 1995). Because of the limited research on problematising the authenticity of tandem learning in formal educational contexts, more research from a didactical perspective on tandem learning and teaching is needed (Pörn and Hansell 2017). This paper aims to increase knowledge and understanding of the implementation of authenticity in classroom tandem contexts by analysing the authenticity of language learning tasks in a handbook developed for classroom tandem in formal language education in Finland (Löf et al. 2016). In the analysis of the tasks, we use a meta-analytical framework based on Rule's (2006) framework for authentic learning.

## **Tandem learning in a formal educational context**

Classroom tandem, developed as a model of language learning and teaching within second national language instruction in upper secondary schools in Finland, is organised in mixed language groups, i.e. half the class has Swedish as their L1 and the other half has Finnish as their L1. Classroom tandem builds on reciprocal, two-way learning in dyads of two students with different first languages. Students switch roles back and forth between second language learner (L2) and resource (L1), depending on the target language of the lesson. Even though contrasting the two languages is encouraged in tandem, the focus always is on the target language for the lesson in question, i.e. Finnish during Finnish lessons and Swedish during Swedish lessons (cf. Hansell and Pörn 2016, 110–111; Löf et al. 2016, 25). Classroom tandem is highly student-centred and whole-class instruction, typically provided through teacher-led direct instruction, normally does not occur. Classroom tandem mainly builds on pair work (or group work), in which students interact with the same tandem partner throughout the

whole course. Students work with different tasks planned and steered by the teacher, and they have access to a native speaker of their own age as their main language resource during the tandem lessons. Thus, classroom tandem differs from most other communicative language instruction contexts in which students mainly interact with other L2 students or with the language teacher (Karjalainen et al. 2013, 168–170).

Classroom tandem is a two-way learning model in which the tandem partners are each other's language resources and are expected to actively cooperate with, help and support each other (Brammerts and Calvert 2003; Holstein and Oomen-Welke 2006; Karjalainen et al. 2013). However, this cannot necessarily be fully expected from students in a formal educational context, in which they are mainly accustomed to more teacher-led language instruction. The tandem partners need support and guidance from the teacher coaching L2 and L1 students in their roles as language learners and resources. The tandem teacher is a facilitator who is responsible for the overall planning of classroom tasks and activities, achieving goals set for learning and instruction, and assessing students' learning results (Pörn and Hansell 2017).

As mentioned in the introduction, all tandem forms build on the principles of reciprocity and autonomy. In classroom tandem, reciprocal learning means that both students and both languages have equal status. In practice, students take turns participating in Finnish lessons given by the Finnish-language teacher in a Swedish-medium school and in Swedish lessons given by the Swedish-language teacher in a Finnish-medium school (Löf et al. 2016, 18). As tandem partners switch languages and roles, both benefit from the cooperation, sharing time evenly between both languages (Kleppin and Raabe 2000, 355). However, the formal learning context has implications for how the tandem principle of autonomy is implemented and for how authentic learning emerges. For example, school curricula, i.e. the teaching materials and tasks given and steered by the teacher, often limit students' free choice concerning what to do and which topics to discuss. In a classroom context, students could be motivated only by completing and fulfilling the demands of a task, instead of focusing on content or sharing thoughts and meanings in authentic learning situations (Pörn and Hansell 2017). As Schmelter (2004, 52) states, it is questionable whether this kind of learning can be viewed as autonomous. As these kinds of challenges have been identified through implementation of core tandem principles in formal education, it is relevant to extend the critical study of classroom tandem by including the authenticity of formal tandem learning.

## **Authentic learning**

Gilje and Erstad (2017) view authentic learning as one of the contemporary educational buzzwords. For example, authentic learning is discussed in connection with enterprise and entrepreneurship education (Gilje and Erstad 2017; Macht and Ball 2016), online and computer-assisted learning (Herrington, Oliver, and Reeves 2003; Herrington and Parker 2013), arts education (Russell-Bowie 2012), language education (Nikitina 2011), history education (Hillis 2008), social studies (Saye and Social Studies Inquiry Research Collaborative 2013) and technology education (Nicaise, Gibney, and Crane 2000; Snape and Fox-Turnbull 2013). Two decades ago, Schaffer and Resnick (1999) pointed out that the concept of authenticity is used with varying meanings – in varying contexts – rather loosely and inconsistently. It appears as if little has changed, as authenticity frequently emerges in different variations and contexts in contemporary educational research, e.g. as authentic learning, authentic tasks, authentic pedagogy, authentic learning environments, authentic activities, authentic assessment, etc.

Authentic learning normally is used to describe learning activities that connect to real world situations and problems beyond the classroom context (Macht and Ball 2016; Rule 2006). This emphasis on real-world contexts can be interpreted as a reaction to the decontextualised activities that characterise traditional classroom education (Splitter 2009), and is considered to have positive effects on students' motivation and learning (Edelson and Reiser 2006). However, the idea of defining authentic

learning as being more real world than other forms of learning is problematic, and as Engeström (2009) shows, the underlying assumptions of what separates the authentic from the inauthentic can be rather superficial. Although it is the mainstream interpretation, connecting authentic learning to an outside 'real world' is not the only possible perspective. Vu and Dall'Alba (2014) have chosen to view authentic learning in light of Heidegger's concept of authenticity; being one's true self. From this perspective, authentic learning is understood as learning to be(come) our true selves, for instance by summoning students to take a stand and carry responsibility for their being; to be authentic. Therefore, the outside real world ceases to be the primary point of reference for assessing authenticity. Adopting this perspective shifts the focus from discussing authenticity as an attribute of e.g. individual tasks, and directs it towards the ontological question of who students are becoming through their education. We mention this perspective to demonstrate that the nature of authentic learning is contested, and different interpretations result in quite different frameworks, focuses, approaches and subsequent findings.

Several scholars have presented frameworks to define the characteristics of authentic learning. As the topic is contested, the frameworks differ and offer different perspectives on authenticity. Frameworks have been presented for example by Herrington, Oliver, and Reeves (2003), Newmann and Wehlage (1993), Schaffer and Resnick (1999) and Rule (2006). As authentic learning has many competing interpretations (Schaffer and Resnick 1999; Macht and Ball 2016) choosing a framework entails taking a position. It simultaneously entails recognising that the chosen framework is not the only legitimate one; another framework would have provided a different perspective, resulting in different findings. We have chosen the framework of authentic learning by Rule (2006) as our frame of reference. Rule's conceptualisation is of a general character, and focuses on the authenticity of learning in formal education, presupposing that learning occurs in situations that involve given learning tasks in a school context.

Through a meta-analysis of 45 articles on authentic learning, Rule (2006, 2) summarised the core of authentic learning into four characteristics. Though Rule's (2006) framework is not primarily rooted in any particular theoretical vantage point, it portrays authentic learning as situated in a social-constructivist perspective on learning, in comparison with e.g. the more cognitive-oriented perspective suggested by Herrington, Oliver, and Reeves (2003). Thus, Rule's (2006) framework is in line with the social-oriented perspective on learning that tandem pedagogy is based on.

The first characteristic of Rule's (2006) framework denotes that authentic learning 'involves real-world problems that mimic the work of professionals in the discipline with a presentation of findings to audiences beyond the classroom' (Rule 2006, 2–3). This characteristic can be divided into three aspects. The first highlights that the learning activities should revolve around real-world problems. The second highlights that the methods used should correspond with those used by professionals within the respective professional field. The third aspect highlights that the results should be presented to outside audiences, implying that the problems that the learning activity focuses on should be relevant for that audience.

The second characteristic occurs when 'open-ended inquiry, thinking skills and metacognition are addressed' (Rule 2006, 3–4). This characteristic can be divided into three aspects. The first denotes that the learning tasks and processes should be open-ended. The second denotes that the tasks and activities should require and involve thinking skills. The third aspect focuses on metacognition. This characteristic can be interpreted as a call to abandon excessively structured tasks in favour of more open-ended, ambiguous real life tasks where the learner asks questions, thinks strategically, makes decisions or draws conclusions, i.e. utilises thinking skills. Students also are engaged in metacognition, i.e. thinking about one's own thinking, assessing one's knowledge and skills, assessing one's learning and learning needs, etc.

Third, authentic learning occurs when 'students engage in discourse and social learning in a community of learners' (Rule 2006, 4–6). This characteristic also consists of three aspects. First, it states that authentic learning involves authentic discourse, second, it highlights that authentic learning has a strong social dimension, and thirdly that it occurs in a community of learners. Within the

community, learners make sense of their tasks, negotiate meanings and can become involved in some form of dialogue with professionals in the field. As discourse is portrayed as something students should engage in, it can be interpreted as the use of professional or scientific language and vocabulary, or as the adoption of the professional discourse within the corresponding professional field.

Finally, the fourth characteristic says 'students are empowered through choice to direct their own learning in relevant project work' (Rule 2006, 6). This denotes that a sense of empowerment is achieved through two aspects: students having choice to direct their learning, and the learning activities having the character of project work. It assumes that students feel empowered by substantial learner autonomy, allowing the learner to influence and direct a learning process that provides real life relevance.

Although Rule's (2006) framework is intended to be context neutral, it is not necessarily applicable to all learning contexts or content without modification. In a language learning context, the first characteristic, i.e. 'the activity involves real-world problems that mimic the work of professionals in the discipline with a presentation of findings to audiences beyond the classroom' (Rule 2006, 2–3), can appear problematic. Mimicking the work of professionals might seem purposeful, e.g. in natural sciences (doing science vs. learning about science; Hodson [2014]). Language, however, is used in everyday communication, and it might be difficult to identify a 'group of professionals' that would qualify as a point of reference. If the core idea is that learning content should be processed in ways that resemble how similar content is processed in real life, perhaps the way native speakers use language would be a better point of reference. Thus, the real-world problems used in the learning process would be problems involving everyday communication. The characteristic then could be re-interpreted as: 'The activity involves language use in real-world situations or revolves around real-world issues; results are presented to audiences beyond the classroom'. This characteristic thus consists of three aspects: language use in real world situations, language use revolving around real-world issues and learning results presented to audiences beyond the classroom.

The second characteristic, 'open-ended inquiry, thinking skills and metacognition are addressed' (Rule 2006, 3–4), can be applied more easily to a language learning context, as it mainly appears as an appeal to abandon ready-made tasks with ready-made answers in favour of more open-ended tasks that allow and demand thinking skills and metacognition. The characteristic consists of three aspects: learning activities being open-ended, learning activities requiring thinking skills and learning activities requiring metacognition.

The third characteristic, 'students engage in discourse and social learning in a community of learners' (Rule 2006, 4–6), is unproblematic, as it entails language learning through social interactions. However, defining exactly what discourse means in a language-education context might be more problematic as the concept is complex and can be interpreted in many ways. In Rule's (2006) framework, 'engaging in discourse' is portrayed as using professional or subject-specific language in a specific context and references are made to e.g. substantive discourse. As the learning content in classroom tandem (everyday language) is not profession-specific or tied to a particular vocabulary or style of speaking, the discourse that would function as a point of reference cannot be found within the language subject. Engaging in discourse therefore means using subject-specific or professional language in *some other subject field* than L1 or L2.

The fourth characteristic, 'students are empowered through choice to direct their own learning in relevant project work' (Rule 2006, 6), also can be applied to a language learning context without modifications. It consists of two dimensions: students have choice to direct their learning, and learning tasks have the character of relevant projects.

## Materials and method

The empirical study in this paper focuses on analysing the tasks in a handbook (Löf et al. 2016), developed for classroom tandem in formal language education, to determine to what extent the tasks

create prerequisites for authentic learning. This will provide insight into whether the assumed authentic nature of non-formal tandem learning has survived the transformation into the formal context of classroom tandem. Analysis of teaching materials and tasks can be carried out at several levels. We have developed a structured schedule for analysis that builds on the schedules presented by Littlejohn (2011, 191, 196). The schedule is based on the 11 aspects of Rule's (2006) framework for authentic learning and is presented in the results section.

When analysing teaching materials and tasks, Littlejohn (2011, 185) identifies three levels of analysis: First, what is the content? Second, what is required of users? Third, what is implied? The first level focuses on describing the material, including its physical aspects, as well as structuring it into sections and subsections, i.e. a rather objective description of the general features of the material. The second level focuses on the learning tasks and concerns what users are expected to do, with whom and with what content. The third level focuses on the implicit aspects of the tasks, e.g. deducing the tasks' overall aims or what kinds of competencies the tasks demand from students. Third-level analysis also can reveal the overall teacher and learner roles that the material proposes, as well as the underlying principles, theories or beliefs on which the material is based. This framework can be used to evaluate teaching materials against predefined criteria to assess their suitability for use in a particular context (Littlejohn 2011). Our analysis focused on assessing to what extent the tasks in the material create prerequisites for authentic learning, and is therefore mainly focused on the second and third levels of analysis suggested by Littlejohn (2011). The first level of analysis is addressed at the end of this chapter through a general description of the classroom tandem handbook.

Analysing tasks is not a straightforward matter and can be carried out from several perspectives. Individual tasks can be analysed as tasks-as-workplans, tasks-in-process or tasks-as-outcomes (Breen 1989; Dooly 2011; Littlejohn 2011; Seedhouse 2005; Seedhouse and Almutairi 2009). Focusing on tasks-as-workplans involves viewing a task as proposing certain courses of action, while making others less likely. Analysis at this level can explore the kinds of activities that the task proposes, or makes possible for student engagement. It also can focus on the underlying implicit preconditions and assumptions on which the task is based. As our ambition is to analyse to what extent the tasks create prerequisites for authentic learning activities, tasks-as-workplans is the relevant level of analysis in our study. Analysing a task-in-process involves exploring what actually happens when a task-as-workplan is transformed into action through the input of the teacher, students and surrounding context. Analysing tasks-as-outcomes focuses on exploring the actual outcomes of tasks-in-process (Breen 1989; Seedhouse and Almutairi 2009).

By focusing our analysis on tasks-as-workplans, we are not making claims on what actually happens in the classroom when the tasks-as-workplans are transformed into tasks-in-process, nor are we making claims on the actual learning outcomes of the activities. A task-as-workplan is a proposal for action that both teachers and students interpret and modify in accordance with their subjective intentions and interests with contextual factors contributing to the task. Thus, a task-as-process can be, more or less, in line with the intentions of the task-as-workplan (Dooly 2011; Seedhouse 2005; Seedhouse and Almutairi 2009). Our focus on tasks-as-workplans is motivated by our view of the classroom tandem handbook as the materialisation of the transformation of non-formal tandem learning into a formal classroom tandem concept. As this handbook is the primary guide for teachers implementing the classroom tandem model, the tasks in the book are the normative blueprints for how classroom tandem is intended to be implemented.

If we were to focus on the tasks-in-process, this would add elements of interpretation by both the teacher and students, as well as the influence of contextual factors, thereby making the object of analysis something else. It has to be highlighted that as our analysis is focused on to what extent the tasks create prerequisites for authentic learning, we are not making claims on to what extent authentic learning actually takes place in practice, as this would place the analysis at the level of tasks-as-process or tasks-as-outcome. By evaluating to what extent the 11 aspects of Rule's framework are present in the individual tasks, we are in a way quantifying characteristics that are qualitative by nature. It is however not our intention to imply that all 11 aspects would be of equal quantitative

importance for authenticity; the characteristics remain qualitative and this has to be taken in to account when viewing the findings.

The classroom tandem handbook is the result of a three-year research and development project that aimed to further develop classroom tandem as a model of language learning and teaching of the second national language. Based on tandem pedagogy, traditional language tasks were developed in a collaboration between teachers and researchers in an action-research manner (Forsman et al. 2014, 114; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2012; Hardy 2012).

The handbook has three chapters: The first is a short theoretical description and overview of classroom tandem as a model of language learning and instruction. The second describes how classroom tandem can be implemented by giving concrete suggestions on how teachers can begin bilingual school cooperation, e.g. how to plan, introduce, accomplish and assess a tandem course in practice. The third chapter consists of tasks and activities for classroom tandem. The tasks and activities are divided into four categories: 1. Oral tasks, 2. Words and structure, 3. Written tasks and 4. Other tasks (referring to tasks outside the classroom).

Our choice of tasks for analysis is based on the recommendations by Littlejohn (2011, 186), suggesting a sample of roughly 10–15% of the tasks, preferably from the middle sections of the material or chapters. As the tasks in the classroom tandem handbook are divided into four main categories, with the first two categories consisting of several subsections, our selection contains tasks from all four main categories, as well as all subsections. Following Littlejohn's (2011, 186) recommendation, we chose tasks from the midpoint of the categories. To include tasks from all subsections and achieve a balance between the main categories, our sample consists of 10 tasks in total: three 'oral tasks', three 'words and structure tasks', two 'written tasks' and two 'other tasks'. This results in 25% of the total of 40 tasks being analysed, instead of the 10–15% recommended by Littlejohn (2011, 186). The sample of tasks is described in the results section below.

## Results

In this section, we present and discuss the results from the analysis of the sample tasks from two perspectives. The first perspective's point of departure is the four main categories of tasks and it focuses on exploring to what extent each individual task creates prerequisites for authentic learning. As the four characteristics by Rule (2006) are divided in to 11 aspects of authentic learning, the maximum total of 'points' possible for each task is 11. The second perspective's point of departure lies in the characteristics of authentic learning. This perspective explores how well the characteristics were represented in the tasks altogether. Discussing the results from these two perspectives reveals both the level of prerequisites for authentic learning that the individual tasks create, as well as how the individual characteristics for authentic learning were represented in the complete sample of tasks. An overview of the results is presented in Table 1. In the vertical columns, the individual tasks are listed, with tasks 1–3 being 'oral tasks', 4–6 being 'words and structure tasks', 7–8 being 'written tasks' and 9–10 being 'other tasks'. The characteristics for authentic learning are placed in the horizontal rows.

Below, we present and discuss the results from the perspective of the individual tasks.

### ***First level of analysis: significant differences in the prerequisites for authentic learning in the analysed tasks***

#### ***Oral tasks***

As shown in Table 1, the results for the 'oral tasks' varied. This category contains the two highest-scoring tasks, 1 and 2, both with 7 points out of the 11 possible on the authenticity table. The purpose of Task 1 is to get acquainted with the tandem partner by playing a board game. In the game, students are instructed to take turns throwing a die and answering or taking a stand on different questions or claims as the game proceeds. The questions or claims concern students'

**Table 1.** Prerequisites for authentic learning in classroom tandem tasks.

Task number:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. The activity involves language use in real-world situations or revolves around real-world issues, producing language for audiences beyond the classroom.</b>										
Language use in real-world situations	x	x							x	x
Language use concerning real-world issues	x	x			x		x		x	x
Results presented to audiences outside the classroom										
<b>2. Open-ended inquiry; thinking skills and metacognition are addressed</b>										
Tasks are open-ended	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x
Tasks demand thinking skills			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tasks require metacognition.	x	x						x		
<b>3. Students engage in discourse and social learning in a community of learners</b>										
Students engage in discourse within a specific field										
Students learn in social interactions	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Students learn in a community of learners	x									
<b>4. Students are empowered through choice to direct their own learning in relevant project work</b>										
Students have choices for how to direct their learning	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x
Learning tasks have the character of 'relevant projects'										
<b>Total number of 'hits'</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

personal lives, opinions, experiences, etc., and require that students reflect on themselves and defend their answers and points of view. This task can also be accomplished in larger groups. This activity was considered one that could occur in real life and as the game's questions and claims concern students' personal lives and opinions, they simultaneously revolve around real-world issues, are open-ended and require metacognition. In Task 2, students are instructed to participate in a test on how environmentally aware they are by analysing their own behaviour concerning everyday decisions, then discussing the results with their partners. As with Task 1, Task 2 can be accomplished in real life, requiring both metacognition and thinking skills.

The category 'oral tasks' also contains one of the lowest-scoring tasks, Task 3, with only 2 points. In this task, students are given 10 pre-defined and de-contextualised sentences. The L2 learner is directed to read the sentences aloud to practice pronunciation, with support from the L1 partner. This task is de-contextualised, controlled in detail by the teacher and bears no resemblance to real-life activities, nor does it revolve around any real-life issues. The task is an example of a very traditional school task implemented in a classroom tandem context. As the analysis shows, the oral tasks in the classroom tandem handbook are not a homogeneous group when it comes to the prerequisites for authentic learning they create. Tasks 1 and 2 have a common denominator in being open-ended, conversational tasks revolving around real-world issues that also require some level of metacognition by learners. However, in Task 3, the task is structured in detail and has no resemblance to the world outside the classroom.

### *Words and structure*

In the main category of 'words and structure', we find one of the lowest-scoring tasks, Task 4, with 2 points, along with Tasks 5 and 6, with 4 and 5 points, respectively. Task 4 is a crossword puzzle in which students are given separate ready-made crossword puzzles. The L1 crossword contains half the words, and the L2 crossword contains the other half. The tandem partners are instructed to explain the missing words to each other without saying them out aloud. In the analysis, this task was viewed as lacking a real-world connection, reducing students' roles to accomplishing the detailed task to achieve the pre-defined result. However, Tasks 5 and 6 are open-ended and demand thinking skills. In Task 5, the L2 learner must describe the furnishings in his or her room in such a detailed manner that the L1 partner can draw an accurate picture of it. While the task does not resemble a real-life situation, it does concern a real-life issue; the furnishing of the room. In Task 6, students are given a tic-tac-toe game in which each checkbox contains an interrogative.

Students are instructed to translate the interrogative and make up a question beginning with the word in the box to see whether he or she knows its meaning. The partner is expected to answer the question. None of the tasks in this category involves real-world situations, and Tasks 4 and 6 lack any and all real-world connections, giving this task group the weakest connection to the real-world.

### ***Written tasks***

Compared with the previous two categories, the written tasks appear as a more homogenous group, with Tasks 7 and 8 earning a total of 6 and 4 points, respectively. The analysed tasks can be characterised as open-ended, in which students can direct their own learning. In Task 7, students are given a fictional opinion piece. After reading it, students must negotiate a shared position in response to the piece and write an answer piece. Thus, the task is open-ended and requires both thinking skills and metacognition. It also revolves around a real-world issue, but as the opinion piece is fictional, and students' responses are not submitted to a newspaper, the task cannot be interpreted as a real world situation. For Task 8, students are told to imagine being on a trip to Europe and to write a fictional letter home covering five pre-defined topics. The task does not have the character of a real-world situation, nor does it revolve around a real-world issue, as the letter and trip are fictional. If the students had been instructed to write about a trip they actually had taken, it would have had a real-world connection. Both tasks demand some level of thinking skills, as well as metacognition in Task 7. As tasks involving writing would have the potential to produce results that could be presented to an outside audience, this aspect could be developed and increase the tasks' real-world character.

### ***Other tasks***

The final main category, 'other tasks', is less structured than the previous three and is the only one open to the possibility of doing tandem learning outside the classroom. As this category bears the closest resemblance to original non-formal tandem learning, one would have expected it to score the highest on the authenticity table. However, Tasks 9 and 10 received medium scores of 6 and 5, respectively. In Task 9, students are told to plan and execute a 20-minute guided tour, presented in the L2 language, for their tandem partners in some part of their hometown. The task is open-ended, involves a real-world situation and revolves around real-world issues. It also requires thinking skills, but as it is very open-ended, it does not necessarily include metacognition. Task 10 is a homework task in which students must plan an activity in their first language for their tandem partner. Students meet during their leisure time to carry out the activities. Like Task 9, this task is also open-ended, revolving around real-life activities and issues. However, the task's open-ended character does not guarantee that it involves either thinking skills or metacognition, though both could be included. Thus, these tasks are the most real-world oriented and student-driven of the analysed tasks, but because of their open-ended nature, they do not necessarily create the prerequisites for including thinking skills, metacognition or presentation of results to an outside audience. However, they potentially can include these, as well as language learning in a community of learners and the possibility of engaging in discourse in a specific field.

Although the 11 aspects of Rule's framework are qualitative by nature, the results presentation might lead the reader to view them as quantitative. We therefore point out that one should not assume that two different combinations of the same amount of 'hits' means that the tasks create the same level of prerequisites for authenticity in a quantitative sense.

### ***Second level of analysis: imbalance between aspects of authentic learning in analysed tasks***

In the previous section, the point of departure for the discussion was in the individual tasks. In this section, we change the perspective, with the characteristics and aspects for authentic learning as the

starting point, examining to what extent the individual aspects emerged in the overall sample of tasks. This analysis shows that while some aspects emerged in every task, others emerged in none, revealing substantial imbalances between them.

The first characteristic is that 'the activity involves language used in real-world situations or revolves around real-world issues, producing language to audiences beyond the classroom'. Concerning the real-life connection, [Table 1](#) shows that merely 4 out of the 10 tasks created prerequisites for learning in real-world situations, whereas 7 of 10 revolved around real-world issues. Both these numbers presumably could be improved by paying attention to this aspect when designing tandem tasks. This indicates that many tasks still have the character of traditional school tasks, with little resemblance to situations or activities outside of school. These challenges were especially apparent regarding the 'words and structure' tasks, as well as the 'written tasks'. Another observation is that none of the tasks involved presenting the results to audiences outside the classroom. In this respect, the tasks followed the traditional pattern of school tasks being of relevance mainly within school itself. However, the tasks could be developed further to involve exposure to outside audiences. Developing this aspect by writing blogs, opinion pieces, items for a school newspaper or publicising the results of the tasks to outside audiences in other ways presumably also would increase the real-world character of the learning activities.

The results for the second characteristic, 'open-ended inquiry, thinking skills and metacognition are addressed', also were heterogeneous. The first two aspects, that tasks are open-ended and require thinking skills, both received eight 'hits' out of 10, meaning that these aspects were fairly well covered in most of the tasks. Regarding metacognition, however, the situation was different. Out of the 10 analysed tasks, only three created prerequisites for metacognition. This is an interesting observation from the perspective of the perceived subjective relevance of the tasks and learning activities as tasks that involve reflecting one's own opinions, perspective or habits of thought, i.e. metacognition, presumably would increase the perceived subjective relevance and authenticity of learning.

The third characteristic, 'students engage in discourse and social learning in a community of learners', received widely varying results. As tandem learning is mainly based on pair work, all tasks were qualified for students to learn in social interactions. However, only one task involved instructions for learning in a community of learners. Based on this, it would thereby appear that group work is rare in classroom tandem, an aspect that possibly could be considered, even though it would decrease the amount of 'speech time' for each individual student. As expected, the aspect of 'students engaging in discourse in a specific field' did not elicit any 'hits'. As discussed earlier, if discourse in this context is interpreted as using a subject-specific vocabulary or a way of talking within a professional field (e.g. medical discourse, legal discourse), it is hardly surprising that none of the tasks matched this characteristic, as language is the content for learning, as well as the medium for learning in a language learning context. This significantly differs from, e.g. chemistry learning, in which chemistry is the content, and students consequently could engage in discourse on the content, i.e. use scientific language. In a language-learning context, the equivalent could mean that students engage in discussions on language resembling discourse by linguists. However, this hardly would make the learning experience more authentic, as the goal for learning is everyday language use, not linguistic discourse.

The fourth characteristic, 'students are empowered through choice to direct their own learning in relevant project work', received varying results, as students had the chance to direct their own learning in eight out of 10 tasks, which is in line with the tandem principle of autonomy. None of the tasks, however, created prerequisites for the learning activities to have the character of being 'relevant project work'. As classroom tandem tasks generally are short and meant to be executed within a normal lesson, this criterion does not seem to fit with the classroom tandem model. However, it might be covered if the classroom tandem model were incorporated into larger cross-curricular projects combining, e.g. natural sciences and language education. These kinds of projects also might include students engaging in some kind of discourse. However, combining language learning with other subjects would require language learners to be fluent enough in their L2 that language itself

would not be an obstacle to learning subject content. This kind of cross-curricular cooperation presumably would prove difficult and counterproductive with language learners on a beginner's level, as the low level of language skills would become an obstacle to learning the subject matter.

## Discussion

As the results above show, much variation exists in the level of prerequisites for authentic learning that classroom tandem tasks create. This indicates that the transition of tandem learning from a non-formal to a formal context has compromised the level of authentic learning. Assuming that the authentic character of non-formal tandem is transferred to classroom tandem thus appears problematic. This is presumably the most visible when 'traditional' language learning tasks (such as Tasks 3 and 4) have been transferred to a tandem setting without careful consideration of their suitability for the classroom tandem context. Thus, our results provide more knowledge about the challenges associated with transferring tandem learning from a non-formal to a formal classroom tandem context. The principles of tandem learning cannot be realised in any context simply by matching two native speakers with different first languages, the language learning tasks must also be in line with the tandem pedagogy (Löf et al. 2016; Pörn and Hansell 2017). As we pointed out in the introduction, the authenticity of tandem learning mainly has been assumed or taken for granted, but not necessarily critically scrutinised through research. Claiming that the level of authenticity has decreased in the transition to a formal context rests on the premise that the authenticity of non-formal tandem indeed is high, as assumed in the literature (Karjalainen 2011; Rost-Roth 1995).

Our results also raise questions about the concept of authentic learning itself. As mentioned earlier, authentic learning has been criticised for being a vague and poorly defined concept, and several competing frameworks for defining authentic learning exist. Our analysis rests on the meta-analytical framework by Rule (2006) and as our critical discussion shows, these characteristics could not be transferred to a language-learning context without modifications. As it also appears as if combining classroom tandem with e.g. a scientific project could have improved the authenticity of the tasks, it raises questions of how contextually neutral Rule's framework ultimately is.

As both Engeström (2009) and Splitter (2009) have argued, studying the authenticity of learning or of tasks is a problematic endeavour. Analysing authenticity implies that an outside evaluator, such as the teacher, could judge the authenticity of a learning experience or a task. If authenticity is viewed as subjective and context-specific, the learner might very well experience a task considered to create prerequisites for authentic learning by the teacher as inauthentic. Similarly, a task resulting in authentic learning in one context with a certain group of learners might appear inauthentic in another context with different learners, even though the task and intended learning content are identical. Different frameworks also highlight different perspectives, while being blind for others. The frameworks for authentic learning in general can be criticised for being rather blind to the learners' perspective, as well as the above-mentioned contextual perspectives, exemplified by Gulikers et al. (2008) argument that ultimately 'authenticity is in the eye of the beholder'.

The strong emphasis on the 'real world' connection that runs through the literature on authentic learning is also problematic as it implies that school would not be a part of this 'real world' – that some aspects of reality can be judged as more real than others. As Splitter (2009) argues, from the students' point of view, their existence in school is, indeed, very 'real', and linking learning activities to some issue or reality outside the school context that is considered more real by, e.g. the teacher, does not necessarily make learning more meaningful or authentic for the student. Splitter (2009) therefore points to the importance of learning having subjective relevance and meaning to the learner for it to be labelled authentic. Adopting the view of Vu and Dall'Alba (2014) in seeing authentic learning as learning to be(come) our true selves would presumably address the question of subjective relevance. Given the multitude of perspectives, studying authentic learning requires accepting that competing perspectives produce different frameworks, and being aware that any chosen perspective is merely one of many on a multidimensional concept.

This study naturally has limitations, one of which lies in the previously discussed challenges with the concept of authentic learning itself, and the results must be viewed in relation to this. Simultaneously, acknowledging that the framework by Rule (2006) provides one legitimate perspective, and accepting that other perspectives would have resulted in different conclusions, the results show clear differences in the prerequisites for authentic learning created by the tasks in the classroom tandem handbook, and point toward different ways of developing the tasks.

The study also points toward several possible tracks for future research. One is to emphasise the learner perspective on authenticity. This could be done, for instance, by conducting a study with the same sample of tasks, but instead focusing on learners' experiences on the authenticity of tasks-as-processes. This change of perspective could provide new insights on perceived authenticity of the classroom tandem model. Another possibility could be to choose a different framework for authentic learning as the starting point and re-analyse the tasks from this perspective. For instance choosing the definition of authentic learning as learning to be(come) our true selves (Vu and Dall'Alba 2014) could provide a very different perspective on authenticity. We believe that our study, which spotlights challenges associated with the implementation of authenticity in tandem learning in formal language education, adds an important new perspective to the ongoing discussion on tandem pedagogy in a classroom context, simultaneously pointing toward a relevant area for further research.

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