

Language Futures

“Language Futures is one of the most innovative ways of teaching modern foreign languages that I have seen” (Estelle Morris)

It is a highly personalised, learner-led approach to language learning. It challenges the traditional role of the teacher as the expert in a language classroom and demands a huge shift in the teacher’s role. It is based on 5 core features:

- Student choice and agency; teacher as designer and facilitator; school as basecamp; project-based learning; building a learning community

It was in response to long-term concerns about the low take up of language learning in schools and low levels of learner motivation. The low levels of competence in languages of UK students when compared with their European counterparts have recently been highlighted by the All Party Parliamentary Group in their Manifesto for Languages. (see <http://blog.britishcouncil.org/appg-modernlanguages/>) Surveys of the views of school students have revealed that languages are the students’ least favourite subject and the one perceived as most difficult (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority report 2007; The Invisible Child 1998, CILT).

The influential Languages Review in 2007 concluded that for language learning “a one-size-fits-all approach” is failing to motivate learners. The report recommended more varied options of languages, greater and better use of technology and online learning and more immersive learning opportunities (Languages Review DfES 2007). We consider that Language Futures responds directly to these challenges.

This approach to language learning was originally developed in 2010 by Linton Village College in Cambridgeshire. Since then five secondary schools have been trialling Language Futures during curriculum time, with a further six schools (including one primary school) introducing the approach as an after-school enrichment activity. We have been collecting achievement data since then with, in some cases, control groups to compare the levels of progress. This has demonstrated that students are attaining levels at least in line with their peers. (see our website www.languagefutures.org.uk)

Students and teachers are very enthusiastic about this approach. This is evidenced in the survey recently carried out. Results showed that on 36 out of the 39 measures, LF students reported more positive perceptions of their language learning than their non-LF peers. (see results on website www.languagefutures.org.uk) Two evaluation reports were produced by Rachel Hawkes in the 2011 and 2012 based on Linton which highlighted the growing independence and confidence of the learners.

We feel that any languages teacher who dreads going into a year 9 low ability class on a Friday afternoon or who feels that we are spoon-feeding our gifted linguists too much, needs to explore what Language Futures could do for your students.