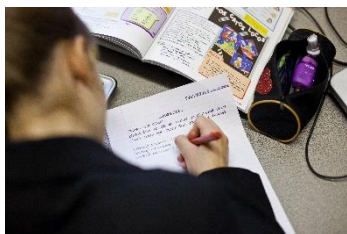


How mentoring supports language learning at Linton Village College

Language Futures is an exciting approach for primary and secondary schools interested in developing languages beyond the classroom. Its core purpose is to generate deep engagement with learning, such that learners are motivated not solely by outcomes but also by the learning process, and that they take responsibility for their learning both within and beyond the classroom.

Increasing motivation and engagement are integral to the approach with learners not only choosing the language they wish to learn, but also exercising choice in elements of what and how to learn. The class teacher acts as a facilitator of language learning rather than a teacher of a specific language by creating the conditions for students to manage their own learning processes and supporting them to learn collaboratively with their peers.



A core feature of the Language Futures approach is the personalised support offered to students by mentors. Language Futures mentors are volunteers with an in-depth knowledge and fluency in a particular language, recruited to

provide good models of the language and to advise students on language and learning tasks in the classroom.

Linton Village College (LVC)

LVC is a co-educational comprehensive secondary academy in Cambridgeshire serving a largely rural community. It has 830 students on roll between the ages of 11-16. As a Village College, the school is at the heart of its local community, providing life-long learning, sports and leisure amenities for its locality. The school has a strong sense of community in which relationships, pastoral care and enrichment opportunities are of paramount importance.

Why Language Futures?

Language Futures was first developed by LVC in 2009. The inspiration behind the approach came from the schools' Deputy Principal at the time, Vivien Corrie. Although not a language teacher, Vivien had always been fascinated by a challenge experienced in languages education: why is it that many of our students appear to find language learning difficult and can often be disengaged? She reached the conclusion that it had to do with two issues which are fundamentally important to how language is acquired: the need for relevance, and immersion. She felt that the constraints of the curriculum, both the structure of the timetable and the availability of specialist



language teachers, rendered it difficult to teach a language in a way that is natural which has led to a best fit model of language teaching.

However, the question was: can we transform the structure and pedagogy of language learning in order to engage learners, and develop their language learning skills so they become confident and independent learners? Language Futures was designed as a response to this question.

Actions taken

What was introduced at LVC is a personalisation of the curriculum where pupils are given a choice of which language they would like to learn – a language which is relevant to them. Pupils become enquiry-led learners and learn to

immerse themselves in the whole language and its culture both at home and at school, thus resolving the potential constraints of a traditional curriculum.

Blurring the in/out of school boundaries is key and is done by recruiting volunteers from the community to become mentors. At LVC, mentors are native speakers or specialists of the languages pupils have chosen. They are trained and offered ongoing support through emails, phone calls and regular workshops. They attend Language Futures classes two or three lessons a fortnight, run lunchtime clubs for the pupils and work alongside them, helping with their pronunciation, grammar, etc. This year, the initiative's seventh, the approach is being offered to 43 pupils supported by 15 mentors.

Outcomes

Feedback from two studies of the approach completed in 2011 highlighted that, when delivered in line with its five core features, Language Futures achieves real breakthroughs in learner engagement and that language expert mentors from the community are essential to the success of the approach. Students speak positively about working with mentors face-to-face in the classroom, citing the opportunity for conversation and immediate feedback and there is an overwhelming conviction on the part of the students that having the mentors in the classroom with them is the best way of working.

At LVC approximately 125 students have accessed the project so far with approximately 90% going on to study languages at GCSE. Many mentees have chosen to study languages that their grandparents or parents speak at home which has greatly benefitted and enriched their home life and cultural awareness.

There are also clear advantages for those who join as mentors. At Linton, approximately 95% of all mentors found the experience of mentoring/befriending beneficial in terms of their own skills and experience with approximately 85% saying that being a mentor/befriender had been considered positive on their CVs by potential employers. Nearly all mentors commented on the positive benefits of being a mentor: increased involvement in their local communities, sense of being valued and useful in their local colleges and schools and enjoying an enriched relationship with their students on a weekly basis.

Lessons Learnt

It is advisable to consider the essentials needed to establish mentoring early on i.e. establishing the benefits of the approach to the Languages Department and the Senior Leadership Team. This will help secure whole school and long term support for the initiative. Appoint a LF Coordinator and/or someone who can manage the mentoring process and, ideally, have appropriate allocated time and expertise.

Acknowledge the potential barriers to establishing mentoring and explore solutions with school colleagues. Establishing mentoring requires resilience and creativity! Communication is key between teachers, mentors and LF coordinator: not only training, but supporting and showing appreciation on the part of the school and student goes a long way.

"Mentoring is an integral part of the Language Futures process for us at Linton Village College. We understand that it would not be the success it is without the vital and valuable role that our community mentors play in teaching language, sharing their culture and enriching the experience for all our students. When a mentor is really engaged with the students it can take language learning to another level. It can also be a very enriching and confidence boosting experience for those mentors who are deciding whether to go back to work or not and are trying volunteering and also for those who are retired but still want to contribute and share their love of languages/their culture."

Siobhan Judge, Language Futures Co-ordinator, Linton Village College.

For further information on Language Futures, please [email](#) or visit the [Language Futures website](#)