

## THE LANGUAGE FUTURES APPROACH

The core purpose of Language Futures (LF) is to generate deep engagement with learning, such that learners are motivated not solely by outcomes but also by the learning process, such that they take responsibility for their learning both within and beyond the classroom, voluntarily extending it outside school.

## FIGURE 1: LEARNING FUTURES CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Language Futures extends the four original concepts of Learning Futures (shown in Figure 1) to five core principles:

- 1. Student choice and agency**  
Students choose the language to learn, but also exercise autonomy within topic, methods of learning, resources, classroom activities, and follow-up work outside the classroom.
- 2. Teacher as designer and facilitator** of language learning.
- 3. School as basecamp**  
The degree to which students choose to take their learning beyond the classroom is a significant indicator of intrinsic motivation.
- 4. Project-based learning** for students of all abilities that crosses disciplinary boundaries.
- 5. Language learning builds a learning community** for which teachers, students and the local community share responsibility, and from which they all benefit.



## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

The learning theory that resonates most with the Language Futures approach is social constructivism:

TABLE 1: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

Core principle	Social constructivist theories of learning emphasise knowledge sharing, and collaborative meaning making through experience and exchange
Nature of knowledge	'What' and 'how' in meaningful context
Student choice / agency	High student control over many aspects of learning
Role of the teacher	To design flexible, open-ended learning projects, driven by challenging questions, and create an environment in which responsibility for learning is shared
Most typical interaction pattern	Student - student
Role of memory	Memory is synonymous with use. The emphasis is not on recall but on contextualised use
Assessment	Formative and summative, integrated with learning
Motivation	Motivation is synonymous with engagement / participation

## MOTIVATION

A salient thread running through the five core features of LF is engagement, or motivation. The pivotal role motivation plays in language learning is clear: 'In a long term learning process such as the mastery of a second language, the learner's ultimate success always depends on the level of motivation' (Dörnyei, 2014).



## METHODOLOGY

To investigate language learning in Language Futures a qualitative case study approach was adopted. The specific design of case study was informed by its overall purpose, which was both 'instrumental', that is, to illuminate something beyond the peculiarities of the case itself (Stake, 1995), and 'descriptive', seeking a detailed description of Language Futures in context. The main study comprises eight linked case studies of different models of Language Futures, four in-curriculum, and four extra-curricular programmes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Language Futures was originally developed by Linton Village College as part of a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Initiative, Learning Futures. In September 2015 the Language Futures initiative was transferred to the Association for Language Learning, with legacy grant funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for the next two academic years.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What progress do pupils make following the Language Futures approach?
2. How does their progress compare to conventional classroom-based progress in language learning?
3. What are some of the key factors that impact on this approach?

## PILOT STUDY

A small-scale interpretative pilot case study in one secondary school explored the motivational aspects of choice of language and learner agency, the roles of teacher and mentors, the progress made by students, as well as their attitudes to LF and to conventional classroom-based language learning. In addition, the study confirmed the suitability of the overall research strategy and methods.

## PILOT SCHOOL AND LANGUAGE FUTURES MODEL

The school in this pilot study is a mixed gender secondary academy, part of a multi-academy trust in the East of England. Rated 'good' in its last Ofsted inspection, the school has a higher than average proportion of pupil premium students. The model of LF in the pilot school was an in-curriculum model for a group of 14 Year 8 (age 12-13) students. One of the aims of the model was to provide a more motivational context for language learning for certain students whose progress and behaviour within mainstream language lessons was of some concern. Within the model's design, students continued to learn French as well as their LF language.

## METHODS

In keeping with the main methods for qualitative research, the study included interviews, observation and document analysis.

## PILOT STUDY FINDINGS

1. Linguistic progress: Students showed evidence of progress in speaking and writing in their LF language, although they struggled with pronunciation and vocabulary retrieval. In writing they produced longer, more complete sentences than in speaking, although the choice of words was noticeably influenced by online tools.
2. In comparison with mainstream classroom language learning, most students had a clear preference for LF. In some cases, it was clear that this higher level of motivation resulted in better learning outcomes.
3. An emerging key factor that impacts on the success of the LF approach is choice (including language, task, way of learning, format of project, etc.). Other factors, such as autonomy, project-based learning, school as basecamp, mentors (learning community), did not evidence as strongly within this study as in previous (Hawkes, 2011 a, b), probably as a consequence of the nature of this particular LF cohort.

## MAIN STUDY September 2016 – March 2018

The first of two visits to the research schools have taken place, and included observations and interviews with teachers, mentors and students. In addition, all LF students in the eight schools completed an online survey.

Second visits will take place at the end of the summer term 2017. Data reduction and analysis follow, with findings published in a final project report in March 2018.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dörnyei, Z. (2014). Motivation in second language learning. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed., pp. 518-531). Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning/Cengage Learning.
- Hawkes, R. (2011a) *Language Futures Pilot Project Report – September 2011*. Unpublished research report.
- Hawkes, R. (2011b). *Language Futures Report Update Phase 2 – November 2011*. Unpublished research report.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

## FURTHER READING

1. *Language Futures Pilot Study Research Report September 2016* (Hawkes, R.)
2. *Language Futures Pilot Study Research Report September 2016: Executive Summary* (Hawkes, R.)

