Language Futures and the future of language learning: lessons for the mainstream languages classroom and beyond

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What is Language Futures?

An approach to language learning, which:

- has its origins in Learning Futures (Paul Hamlyn Foundation)

- was initially developed in 2009 by Linton Village College, Cambridgeshire

- aims to generate deep engagement with learning

Core features

- Student choice and agency
- Teacher as designer and facilitator
- Project-based learning
- School as basecamp
- Learning community

The research study

- Four different models of Language Futures
- Eight schools
- 102 students

The four Language Futures models

- In-curriculum 2nd foreign language
- In-curriculum community language accreditation
- KS3 in-curriculum alternative language provision
- Extra-curricular language learning programme

The report

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Implications for the mainstream languages classroom

- Motivation for language learning depends largely on classroom learning experiences
- Aspects of autonomy and project-based learning are closely associated with positive motivation
- Mentor support is invaluable yet complex
- High levels of anxiety need mitigation
- Individual difference is key

1 The motivational power of choice

"When learners make choices they tend to take more responsibility for their learning."

- choice of words to learn
- 'Surprise me!' homework tasks
- strategy training for memory and choice of method
- 80-20 rule for writing / personal repertoire
- open-ended classroom tasks

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Association *for* Language Learning
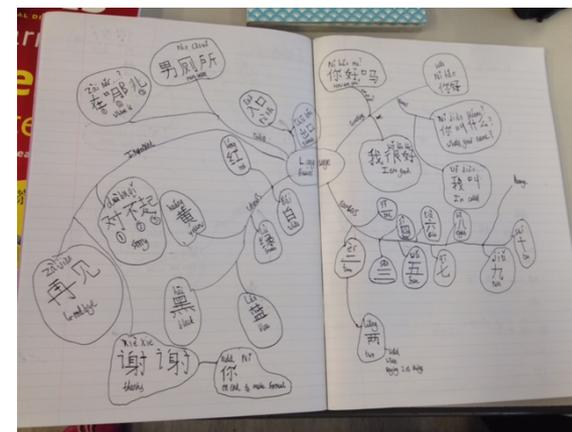
Core objective of the lesson:

1. learn some nouns for places you could see in a town

2. learn to use the indefinite articles 'a', 'some' and 'many'

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¡A los diccionarios!

WordReference English-Spanish Dictionary © 2017:

Principal Translations

Inglés		Español
river *n*	(channel of water)	río *nm*
	A river flows through town.	
	Un río fluye a través del pueblo.	
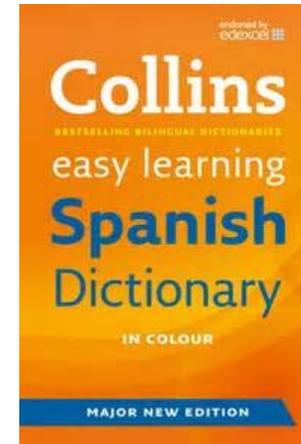
every week. Juego a las quinielas todas las semanas.

jueves,19 de abril

¿Qué hay en Bilbao?
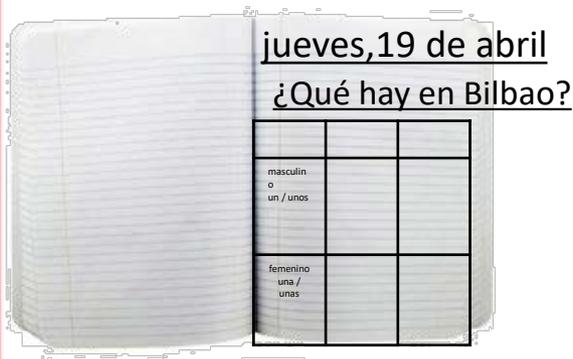
	singular (a)	plural (some)
masculino **un / unos**	**un río**	
femenino **una / unas**		

2 Language mentors

"The support of additional adults or older learners in the classroom, as role models, conduits of culture, one-to-one explainers of structures or vocabulary, is invaluable."

- Sixth form enrichment, in which students use an afternoon to support in KS3 classes
- Sixth form afterschool lesson programme, in which students take responsibility for planning and delivering additional support lessons to Y7 students
- Adult community volunteers, who come into lessons once a week to classes of Y7 and Y8 students
- Adult learners in lessons, a project in which adults join a GCSE class and learn alongside students, indirectly modelling mature learning behaviours and linguistic thinking

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3 Autonomy

"they (the students) traced a connection between the opportunities to direct their own learning and increased interest in learning. For some students, the feeling of autonomy was the overriding positive difference between LF learning and mainstream classroom." experiences."

Interviewer: Do you think language futures has changed you in general as a learner in any way?

Student 1: I think it's made me more independent and wanting to find out things on my own, and being more interested in finding out about things in more depth.

Interviewer: And how does it change your behaviour in other classes?

Student 1: I think it makes me ask more questions like yeah, want to find out more, I suppose.

Interviewer: You're more likely to think of questions now?

Student 1: Yeah, I think I'm more likely to think of questions. I think I would have asked questions before this, just maybe not so keenly.

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3 Autonomy

"Most students in the programme articulated their enthusiasm for Language Futures because it allows them to work at their own pace."

- "ideal scenario"
- teacher-led → independent work
- independent research → teacher-led

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4 Mastery

"Lower attaining students overwhelmingly appreciated LF because they had more time to master content, vocabulary and grammar."

- reduction in overall content

- focus on key verb structures and core vocabulary

- opportunities for extensive practice and use (through project-type tasks)

- frequent and systematic revisiting

5 Project-based learning

"Students in all the different LF models where projects were a key feature reported high levels of enjoyment, irrespective of ability or gender."

- work with the same language for longer
- practical outcome and purpose
- audience
- pair / group work

"Students who might not be intrinsically motivated by language can be motivated by culture. In addition, students who are interested in the language can also be further motivated by engagement with the culture. So, for all students, a culture-rich curriculum is likely to be more motivating."

Purpose of study

Learning a foreign language is a **liberation from insularity** and provides an **opening to other cultures**. A high-quality languages education should **foster pupils' curiosity** and **deepen their understanding of the world**. The teaching should enable pupils to **express their ideas and thoughts** in another language and to understand and respond to its speakers, both in speech and in writing. It should also provide opportunities for them to **communicate for practical purposes**, learn **new ways of thinking** and **read great literature** in the original language. Language teaching should provide the **foundation for learning further languages**, equipping pupils to study and work in other countries.

7 Developing classroom ecology

"In the LF classroom, students tend to ask quite a lot of questions, often not of the LF teacher, but rather of their mentor or their peers."

- Asking questions in small groups is much more face-saving than in front of a class of 30 learners.

- They have more questions to ask because far less is explained to them. The onus is on them to find things out for themselves and they know this.

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- Remind ourselves as teachers to bounce questions from students on to other students.

- Actively promote and solicit question-asking from students by rewarding them explicitly for it

- Teach and revisit often target language question-forming in our curricula

- Use pair and group configurations to generate more questions, getting them to try out their spoken questions on each other first in a face-saving situation before expecting them to use them in whole-class discourse.

8 Example of LF sequence for whole-class teaching

"Recurring themes throughout the study associated with higher levels of engagement are:

- choice

- controlling the pace and scope of one's learning

- open-ended tasks and projects

- collaborative working in pairs or small groups."

Lesson objective: To make a phone /
in-person reservation for a hotel stay in a TL country

1. Introduction of the project task (in the target language)
2. Whole class brainstorm of language needed
3. Scaffolded whole-class 'harvesting' of known TL structures
4. Group work to generate all the language needed for the dialogue
5. Language rehearsal in pairs / groups
6. Recording (or live performance)
7. Peer and/or teacher evaluation, as appropriate.

Heritage languages [Case study 2]

- 1/5 young people has a first language other than English

- 1/3 of those takes a qualification

- limitations in accreditation system

- some schools support accreditation but not tuition

Support for community languages in schools

- Progress and attainment
- Identity, culture and self-esteem
- Language mentors

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"Nuggets of gold"

"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).

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For further information…

- Visit the Language Futures Stand during Language World 2018

- Visit the website (https://www.all-languages.org.uk/research-practice/language-futures/)

- Contact the Language Futures Project Manager Clodagh Cooney by emailing ccooney@all-languages.org.uk

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