

## Business Learners' Beliefs

### What are they and how can we use them?

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## How well do you know your learners?

- What percentage of your learners would agree with the following statements?

It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.

The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.

I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.

I believe that I will learn to speak English very well

I feel timid speaking English with other people

## Why beliefs are important

Very strong filters of reality  
(Arnold 1999)

Play an important role in  
dictating learning strategies &  
learner motivation  
(Horwitz 1987; Dörnyei 2001)

Resilient, therefore difficult to work  
against, but powerful when we work  
with them  
(Bassano 1986)

If we know our learners' beliefs, we  
can tailor our teaching to be more  
effective and learner-centred.

## How to research beliefs

### **Method one – survey, e.g. BALLI**

(Horwitz, 1987)

### **Method two – interviews**

(Wenden, 1987)

### **Method three – contextual observation/analysis**

(Barcelos, 2000)

## Results from Düsseldorf – some highlights

### Aptitude

I have a special ability for learning foreign languages

14.5%  
agreement

People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages

17%  
agreement

## Results from Düsseldorf – some highlights

**If I learnt for one hour a day, how long would it take me to speak English very well?**

3-5 years

38%  
agreement

Less than one year

12%  
agreement

You can't learn a language in one hour a day.

6%  
agreement

## Results from Düsseldorf – some highlights

### Nature of language learning

It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to learn English.

32%  
agreement

The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.

34%  
disagreement

The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary.

74%  
agreement

## Results from Düsseldorf – some highlights

### Learning and communication strategies

It is important to repeat and practise a lot.

99%  
agreement

It is important to practise with DVDs, videos and other listening material

74%  
agreement

I feel timid speaking English with other people

20%  
agreement



## Results from Düsseldorf – some highlights

### Motivation

I want to learn to speak English well.

99%  
agreement

I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.

75%  
agreement

I would like to have more foreign friends / business contacts.

75%  
agreement

## Using beliefs to streamline learning

Make learner beliefs a topic of classroom discussion. Explore them with learners.

Include beliefs in your needs analysis process

Be prepared to alter your program / approach to fit student beliefs.

Use the results of surveys and discussions to shape course content / methods

To introduce new or controversial ideas, begin where students are and move slowly

Where beliefs within a group conflict, allow for as much free choice as possible

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**Reflect on your own beliefs as a learner and teacher, and be aware of potential clashes or gaps between your beliefs and those of your students.**

## Communicating beliefs – a two way process

“Teaching is the daily search for  
the learners’ point of view“

*On Listening to What the Children Say, V.G.Paley, 1986*

**but**

“Student learning is enhanced when students  
accurately perceive teachers expectations and  
intentions“

*Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms, K.E.Johnson, 1995*

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