

Community Language School

Founded in 2022



**Community
Language School**
AT YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY



**Communities
Centre**
AT YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY



Welcome to the Community Language School

The inception of the Community Language School (CLS), as well as its policies and practices, have one underlying aim: to remain true to inclusivity by acknowledging and celebrating cultural diversity in all that we do. We are proud to be Yorkshire's first-ever multilingual community language school – founded and led by academics who specialise in linguistics, languages, teacher training and translation studies.

One of the school's founding goals is to instil a love for language learning amongst children from migrant families, where English is often not the main language spoken at home. In doing so, we aim to address a challenge shared by many such families, both in the UK and around the world, where children drift away from their heritage languages in favour of dominant languages like English. This shift can have deep and lasting effects, weakening connections with extended family members who may not speak English, and affecting one's sense of identity and belonging (Meddegama, 2018). Owing to demand, the school's provision has expanded to include children who simply wish to learn an additional language. Today, we teach learners aged 5–15 from all backgrounds and levels of proficiency, creating an inclusive community where every child can thrive as a confident multilingual speaker.

School Committee



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Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics
and TESOL
CLS Co-Founder and Director



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CLS Co-Founder and Director of
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CLS Curriculum Development Lead



Lucy Sors

Senior Lecturer in Initial Teacher
Education
CLS Professional Development Lead



Nikki Jephson

YSJ Communities Centre Manager
CLS Compliance Lead

Language Volunteers

Our teaching team consists of language volunteers, including both university students and members of the public who bring a rich mix of professional and academic experience. What unites them is a shared passion for languages and for championing language learning.

We recruit volunteers based on two essential criteria: language proficiency and a genuine commitment to language advocacy. Their linguistic backgrounds, whether they grew up speaking the language at home or learned it as an additional language, are not criteria we use to assess suitability. This means that not all our volunteers are “native speakers” of the languages they teach.

This inclusive approach helps us challenge the persistent myth that the so-called “native speakers” are, by birth, best placed to teach languages (Holliday, 2006). In reality, effective language teaching requires professional training and pedagogical knowledge, the same as teaching any other subject does.



Our Approach to Teaching

At our Community Language School, we offer free classes in languages such as Spanish, Italian, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, taught by language volunteers. A key aim of our classes is to enhance children's oral fluency in the languages they are learning, with an emphasis on them growing confident in using languages other than English. What's more, children are encouraged to become familiar with different dialects of the languages they are learning; this is made possible by our diverse volunteering team.

Translanguaging in the Classroom

When it comes to teaching, our aspiration is to design and deliver accessible language classes in an environment that celebrates all languages, dialects and language abilities. To achieve this, we adopt translanguaging, where students and teachers purposefully use multiple languages and meaning-making resources to communicate (García & Kley, 2016). During classes, our teachers use English, as well as dialects of the language being taught and other forms of communication like facial expressions, gestures and even emojis! This practice helps develop children's confidence (Galante, 2019), reduce learner anxiety (Tai, 2025), and foster inclusive learning environments where teachers scaffold understanding across languages and modes, children support one another's participation, and knowledge is co-constructed between teachers and learners (Zingaretti & Meddegama, forthcoming).

Activity Based Teaching

With dedicated training from our annual professional development workshops and ongoing guidance from the academic committee, our volunteers create learning materials that are both age-appropriate and rich in cultural insight.

To make the languages they are learning relevant to everyday life, our classes are designed to be highly interactive, incorporating arts and crafts, games and storytelling. No class is ever the same, and the emphasis is always on fun, creative approaches to language learning. This forms memorable learning experiences for children, helping them to build strong connections to the languages they are learning.



Impactful Research

As part of our founding vision, we carry out research that explores how the school shapes the perspectives and experiences of teacher volunteers, parents and children, particularly in relation to language learning and teaching. Another major strand of our work examines the professional development offered to teacher volunteers, the ways this training influences their classroom practices, and how those practices, in turn, shape children's language learning experiences.

To date, our academic team have shared research findings at both national and international venues, including presenting at the British Association of Applied Linguistics conferences at the University of Essex in 2024 and the University of Glasgow in 2025. This year, our research on translanguaging, which investigates what works, why it works, and the difference it makes for children, families and communities, will be presented at the Bilingualism Matters symposium in Milan, Italy.

Overall, our research aims to inform policy and deliver meaningful benefits to the communities we serve.



References

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Webb-Davies, P. (2017) *Welsh schools: an approach to bilingualism that can help overcome division*.

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To access the reading, please visit our website here:
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