

SUPPORTING HIGH LEARNING POTENTIAL IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Summary

This advice sheet is aimed at parents and carers. It covers how to recognise high learning potential in Modern Foreign Languages, as well as how to support a child with high learning potential and/or a strong interest in this. There are also links to further resources in this subject area.

Spotting a Child with High Learning Potential in Modern Foreign Languages

A child with High Learning Potential in Modern Foreign Languages may demonstrate their ability in a number of ways. Some key examples of this may be as follows.

- **Interest in English language** This refers to a fascination with words. The child might engage in word play, invent words, or have a large vocabulary in English. A child with a High Learning Potential in Modern Foreign Languages may ask for origins of words or recognise unusual spellings or pronunciations in the English language (e.g. "vase"). They might recognise components of similar words ("television, telescope, teleportation").
- **Awareness of other cultures** When watching TV or reading books, the child may show interest in customs, foods, festivals of other cultures. This might continue with the language of other countries - they might want to learn to count in a language of a country they are interested in, want to say "hello" in as many languages they can think of, or remember individual words they have heard in a different context at school, on TV, etc.
- **Musical ability** A considerable number of languages are tonal, where pitch and tone are part of the language construction. At the same time, music requires a precise ear for pronunciation, and a recognition of patterns which are not dissimilar to sentence structures. A child who is interested in music, particularly singing, may also have High Learning Potential in Modern Foreign Languages.
- **Interest in communication/empathy** Language is a way to communicate. A child with High Learning Potential in Modern Foreign Languages may be interested in other people - their experiences, their feelings, their lives. They might ask deep, even philosophical questions, and seek to understand other people's point of view.

Supporting High Learning Potential in Modern Foreign Languages

A high learning potential in Modern Foreign Languages, when it is nurtured, can pave the way to a large variety of careers. Many university degrees, for example, are now offered with a language option. The thing to remember is that it does not, in fact, particularly matter *which* language you focus on. Learning another language at an early age has advantages both linguistically and culturally. Once we get used to forming sounds uncommon to our own language from an early, this ability usually stays with us later on. Similarly, the social integration aspect of learning about other cultures remains. Therefore, being led by interest and/or availability will probably work well. Below are a number of ways to support your child.

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Exposure to other cultures

Many children who are interested in Modern Foreign Languages are interested in communication, and *understanding* other people. Look for opportunities for your child to experience other cultures - National Days or festivals being celebrated by the community, food tasting/cooking/baking sessions at home. Explore the foreign foods section in the supermarket, have "cultural adventures". Check the local "What's On" guide online or in your local newspaper.

DVDs

Depending on age, DVDs can be used at a variety of levels. For very young children (5 and under), the BBC "Muzzy" series covers a lot of languages and is very repetitive, making it easy to pick up the words. For older children, it might be worth looking at DVDs they really like (and know well!), and to get these. Most DVDs, when they are dubbed into other languages, retain the English original, so children can watch the foreign language version as well as the English one, or the other language with subtitles, etc. Beware of DVD regional restrictions.

Books and magazines

The problem with books and magazines is that the lower level of knowledge in the foreign language will mean that authentic books in the foreign language can be quite difficult. Magazines, because of the many pictures and shorter sections of writing, can be easier. Another option would be to look at dual language books - search for these online, or ask in your local library. These books will have the text in both languages, making them easy to explore and understand. Eurobooks is one publisher focusing on foreign language books for children:
<https://www.eurobooks.co.uk/>.

Websites and Apps

Thanks to smart phones, there are a vast number of apps and games out there - many will mainly practise numbers and/or vocabulary. Sadly, the way the market works, you cannot access other countries' app stores, and so will be restricted to what is available here. Still, they can form a great, playful introduction to another language.

Encourage language play

Encourage playful engagement with the target language - through a set of word fridge magnets, a game of Boggle or Scrabble, hangman, labelling furniture, writing out the shopping list, "I spy". Create a game of pairs where words in English and the target language. Get your child to write a story in the target language, and draw a picture for each word they don't know, to make a film (an introduction to the family, guide to your town, a documentary) - the more opportunities there are to *produce* (speaking, writing) language as well as *consume* (listening, reading) it, the better.

Association for Language Learning: <http://www.all-languages.org.uk>

The Association for Language Learning is the UK's main organisation for the subject of languages. They cover all sectors of school and university, and offer a variety of membership options. The website has links to some resources at Primary level, and contact details for committee members across various languages, who may be able to help in identifying local clubs.

Community college classes

Most community colleges offer some language classes. Although not all are aimed at children, it will be worth contacting them and explaining the situation - you may have to attend with your child.

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Tandem language learning

Tandem language learning involves two people learning together, from and with each other. Each will be "teaching" their native language to the other - this might happen as part of a travel exchange, or through regular meetings, either face-to-face or online. There are a number of tandem exchange programmes - look around to find one that works for you. See for example <http://www.tandemcity.com> , <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/getinvolved/eusaglobal/languages/tandem> - or search for "tandem language learning" online.

Further Information

Websites	
http://www.memrise.com/about	Covers 20 different languages
http://livemocha.com	Covers 38 languages. The basic package is free, cost for tutor optional.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages	Also covers 38 languages.
http://www.languagesonline.org.uk	Covers French, Spanish, German, Italian, Latin. Partners of the Encore book series but can be used alone.
http://www.conversationexchange.com	Conversation Exchange allows conversation with a native speaker by Skype or email.
http://zut.languageskills.co.uk/index.html	Topic-based activities in French, Spanish, German and Welsh. Free after 4pm and at weekends.

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To give feedback on this advice sheet, please go to:
www.surveymonkey.com/s/advicesheetfeedback