

Language Learning For Children

By Frank Middleton Historically, languages are not well taught. We can see this is true because most adults who have had to study a language or languages when younger have no real competence in them as an adult. Maybe as a result of these early experiences, many people never learn another word in a foreign language no matter how frequently and widely they travel . It would be unfair to place the blame on the educational system, but an interest in language learning and the non English speaking cultures that go with them is often lacking later in life.

Encouraging an interest in language and so other cultures is a great gift to give, as if you have an interest in something as a child, there is a good chance that it will provide a basis for further learning as an adult. The level of language attained is in some ways less important than gaining a greater understanding and perspective on the world. After all language and culture are inextricably linked.

Most formal language learning, is not taught in an immersive environment, and can't be due to lack of resources and time. It is often dominated by exams to be taken and a rigid syllabus to be followed and it is inevitable that this can detract from the spontaneity and fun that are part of language. As a parent, you can't force your child to be interested in learning other languages but you can try and stimulate an interest and add activities which are perceived as more fun.

Variety is the spice of life and this is equally true when learning, and will help your child put the language into context. One of the difficulties for children who are being taught a language is that it is hard for them to see the point of what they are doing. I remember feeling like that as a child. I lived in a completely monolingual culture and being young I really couldn't understand the need to learn French.

You can provide variety and stimulate interest by using resources outside of the normal syllabus. It is worth bearing in mind, that when learning a language you need to hear it used in different situations, and when learning vocabulary (as children so often have to do) it helps to see and learn the words in different ways.

Two possible ways of adding interest are through television and computer software. These are not substitutes for activities which encourage participation (such as say a French club) but are easy to fit in at odd moments. Children like watching television . Foreign language television or foreign language versions of films can be extremely helpful. Equally children enjoy using computers and don't always associate them with learning. There is a wide range of language learning software available, and this is important as everyone has different styles of learning.

As I have already said variety is the spice of life, and while no computer software or DVD of foreign language cartoons will keep your child interested forever or make them bilingual, it will improve their language skills. For example, watching cartoons in French will inevitably improve their accent, and they will subconsciously pick out words that they already know helping to reinforce and internalise them. The same can be said for language learning software, which is that it is a useful complement but not a substitute to formal learning.

About the Author

Frank Middleton is a freelance author and writes occasional articles for <http://www.linguata.com> a site dedicated to the achievable goal of learning simple foreign words and phrases.

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