

The 'Tao' of mastering English



THERE is a lot of talk about the importance of learning. Acquiring proficiency in English at an early stage opens up wider horizons for children and offers them options at school and college, at work and at play which they would lack without a good standard of English.

There are many barriers to overcome before this mastery level outcome can be achieved. Not least the belief that communication skills can be learnt in isolation, separate from language study. For example, before you can put together a piece of creative writing, you must have a set of tools which includes vocabulary, grammar and structure.

In other words, communications skills and English language proficiency must be tackled together if effective communication in English is the objective. This is the 'tao' of language learning.

For example, if a learner finds it challenging to watch documentaries and films in English, without the subtitles, it would be rather ambitious to imagine that by enrolling in an English language course and especially a "crash course", the learner's proficiency will improve by leaps and bounds at the end of the course. There are levels of progression to achieve such as, "Waystage" (Elementary), "Threshold" (Pre-intermediate), "Independent User" (Intermediate), "Advanced" (Upper Intermediate) before one reaches the "Mastery" or near native speaker proficiency grade. This is the "tao" of language learning or learning anything for that matter. You must first lay a solid foundation before you can build anything on it.

To achieve proficiency in English language communication, it is necessary to address each of these areas for development to become an effective communicator. So what parents should be looking for is an English language programme that offers real practice in using the language while at the same time providing interesting and illuminating topics to broaden the minds of the students.

Growing into its 12th year, Cambridge English For Life, or CEFL, has been delivering a wide range of English language courses which raise the level of English language proficiency of course participants and also prepare them for the Cambridge ESOL examinations, from Young Learners English tests to Cambridge's most advanced examination,

the Certificate of Proficiency in English. But CEFL courses offer much more than just English language development.

Cambridge English For Life's, English language courses are designed to achieve two major objectives.

First, it is to raise course participants' level of proficiency in the language and provide the skills to communicate effectively. The second objective is to prepare the learners for the Cambridge ESOL examinations, offering them the opportunity to obtain an internationally recognised English language qualification.

CEFL offers this mix of ingredients in its English language programmes using the communicative approach to learning.

Classes are small and interactive so that learning is an enjoyable experience and teachers also have the opportunity to address the needs of individual students.

Students look forward to their classes at CEFL partly because they are fun, but also because they are introduced to a wide range of both literary and cultural topics which they seldom encounter at school.

Generally, students who thrive at CEFL will also achieve better marks in their school examinations. The CEFL method of teaching is based on the communicative approach to language acquisition which means that the focus of all training, whether at beginner or very advanced level, in academic or business English, is on developing fluency, improving reading and listening comprehension, expanding the participant's vocabulary range and on refining pronunciation and intonation.

It is essential, if skills and confidence are to be imparted, that course participants should be encouraged, and persuaded, to participate actively in class activities. Prerequisites for this kind of participation are relevance and interest.

To achieve measurable results, CEFL's learning programmes are highly practical and incorporate role-play, structured reading and listening activities, debate, open discussions on stimulating topics, oral and written analysis of case studies, timed and recorded presentations and business simulations.

■ For information on CEFL's English language courses call 03 7883 0912 or visit the CEFL website at www.cambridgeforlife.org.

CEFL courses provide students the skills to communicate effectively.