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No hassle mastering English

If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone." - Confucius

And what was true two thousand years ago remains true today.

The importance and indeed the benefits of learning to use a language correctly cannot be overstated.

But learning a language is not like learning any other subject. With maths or history you can get to grips with the subject by learning a mass of facts.

With a language you cannot.

Learning a language requires a different approach.

Languages are learnt by developing language skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking. And when these skills are in constant use, as in a country where the language is the native tongue, acquisition of the language will be achieved more rapidly.

There is a lot of talk about the importance of learning English, but perhaps one aspect is not focused on enough – the fact that acquiring proficiency in English at an early stage opens up much wider horizons for children and

offers them options at school and college, at work and at play which they would lack without good command of the language.

So what is the effective way to learn a language? What remedial action can be taken? Or, how can parents best help their children acquire English language proficiency so that they reach a standard which will benefit them when the time comes for them to move on to tertiary education or enter the workplace?

First of all, we must get away from the idea that there is a "quick fix." Generally, intensive English courses, or crash courses, will achieve little. Language must be absorbed.

Secondly, start young when children are most receptive and provide a foundation and allow the development of language skills to take place progressively over a period of years. Expose them to the language from the earliest age. Those of us old enough to have gone through the English medium school system have the ability now to communicate in English, virtually at the native speaker level.

We can also communicate with our fellow Malaysians in

"Manglish" and switch from one English to the other instinctively. Today, most Malaysians speak Manglish "fluently," but, children especially, do not know there is "another English" which is the language in which the world communicates.

Thirdly, realise that setting a goal, in education especially, is not a mandate or a command. We cannot set fixed limits on time, putting educators in a straitjacket and limiting the extent to which teachers can do what is best for each student. The focus should be on the needs of the student, not some arbitrary time frame. Goals should have built-in flexibility.

Language schools which offer flexibility and accountability in their programmes are going to be the ones which provide the best chance of success. Children must be assessed and tested periodically for English proficiency and steps taken to assist the child who is not achieving the level of progress necessary to meet certain goals.

Cambridge English For Life (CEFL), a leading provider of English language courses, believes firmly in the communi-



Teachers can do what is best for each individual student.

cative approach to language learning.

And with 36 centres around Malaysia, CEFL is well placed to provide effective language learning for children of all ages. CEFL's courses also prepare students for the Cambridge ESOL examinations so that learners will have a tangible and useful outcome at the end of their course.

To achieve success in language learning, learners must know that the objective is to

enable them to communicate in the language. By taking a step by step approach, validated at each stage by a widely recognised qualification, and developing confidence in a non-threatening environment, learners can derive maximum benefit from their studies.

■ For further information about CEFL courses call 03 7883 0912 or visit the CEFL website at www.cambridgefor-life.org