

LIFE&TIMES FAMILY

**Y**OUR friend boasts that her child is at the top of his class. For the school holidays, he will study Grade 1 piano, Korean and taekwondo. Come January, he will submit a written essay of what he did during the holidays to an online publication. Then she says: "What is your son doing for the holidays? Didn't he get below average marks for English this year?" You mumble: "Nothing. It's the holidays."

"Asking a child to write an essay about their holiday is a terrible thing to do," says Dr Elsie Chin, CEO of Cambridge English for Life. Instead, she advocates a "past, present and future" approach. "Say you're going on a holiday to Penang. Before the holiday, ask your child to do some research about the place and plan an itinerary. Give him a budget. During the holiday, go to that shop and order the chicken rice. Ask him how he likes it. Then, when you come back, he can talk or write about this experience with his friends."

In this manner, a child has experienced the exciting journey of learning. He has acquired useful communication skills in English such as reading, writing and speaking. "Children learn the joys of the creative process of writing. They experiment with the features of story-making and how to transfer their ideas in an entertaining written form," explains Chin.

In addition, the child has a sense of accomplishment about what he's produced, which ought to be visible. Our job, as adults, is to ensure that the entire process is part of the fun of learning.

What happens, though, when you ask a child a question and he answers in monosyllables? For instance, when you ask: "How did you find the new James Bond movie?" and his answer is, "OK." Most parents give up at this point.

Chin suggests that you persevere and advocate the use of the "enquiry method" — keep asking the question until you get the answer. For instance, "Which part do you like?" Once the child gives an answer, then ask: "If you could watch it again, why

# Positive approach to learning

Learning should be enjoyable and give the child a sense of personal satisfaction, writes Aneeta Sundararaj



Chin suggests parents to take a child to the bookshop and let him choose the books he wants to read.

would you?" Continue asking such questions and finally, sum it all up by saying something along the lines of, "So, your 'OK,' means that you like the James Bond movie because you like these parts of the movie and not others. This means that when you say 'OK,' you actually have very high standards."

Such an approach engages the child in a conversation and means that you've given him confidence.

As for the art and skill of reading, Chin says: "There is no right or wrong. Reading should never be used as a negative alternative. You should never say: 'Go to your room and read a book. You've spent too long on Facebook.'"

"Instead, take a child to the bookshop. Sit with him and let him choose the books he wants to read."

What happens when a child chooses a book that has words such as "hate" or "damn" or when it doesn't

say nice things about parents? "My suggestion is that parents read the book first. Then take the merit of the story and teach the child that he must not speak in such a hurtful way. For instance, if you don't like Grandma, ask the child, 'If I gave you a magic wand, would you want Grandma to go away?'"

The pivotal person in a child's education, Chin believes, is the teacher, and she shares two maxims: First, there are no bad or good teachers; only trained or untrained ones. Second, it's always about what students are going to learn, not what the teachers are going to teach.

"One of my students gave me the impression that she was not interested in class. She would snigger and cover her face. She never looked at you when she spoke. Her English was excellent, though. I asked her parents to come in. They told me that she contracted a disease that affected the muscles on her face and she couldn't control the movements on her face. Now that she didn't have to look at a person when she was speaking, she was fine."

Chin says that had she not spoken to the parents, she wouldn't have known how to help the child. "Teachers should not be considered glorified babysitters. In fact, they should not lose their moral compass, but concentrate on the child. The child should not be made to feel that it's his fault if he cannot do something."

Say your child is 15 years old, but has the English language skills of a 10-year-old. Chin does not promise that in six weeks your child will be speaking like a 15-year-old. "What we do is we go back to basics. We build a foundation for them and help them unlearn what's wrong and re-learn what's right."

Central to this approach is how a teacher marks a child's work. "We don't focus on what's wrong. Look at these two examples. In example 8.4.2 (see illustration), the teacher has corrected the child's word and written words such as "You will be

**8.4.1 EXAMPLE FEEDBACK RECOMMENDED**

**Task:** Describe a book/film which you have read/watched recently.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Use a range of words and phrases to describe.
- Identify and correct their mistakes.
- Write coherently.

"Chicken Little" was a funny film. The film is a kind of stories say that the chicken little saw an alien in the spaceship. The sound effect was very nice and some parts are so wide and some parts are so wide and some parts are so wide and some parts are so wide.

The graphic of the show is like 3D but it is quick a little blind. The person who make this movie are so silly. The characters in the film all are scary and some sad.

The best I choose, I will make a better show that this film. The music of the "Chicken Little" are nice.

good sentences

very interesting & wide

the music in the movie is called the theme song. The theme song of "Chicken Little" is nice.

**8.4.2 EXAMPLE FEEDBACK NOT RECOMMENDED**

**Task:** Describe a book/film which you have read/watched recently.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Use a range of words and phrases to describe.
- Identify and correct their mistakes.
- Write coherently.

"Chicken Little" was a funny film. (The film is a kind of stories say that the chicken little saw an alien in the spaceship) The sound effect was very nice and some parts are so wide and some parts are so wide and some parts are so wide and some parts are so wide.

The graphic of the show is like 3D but it is quick a little blind. The person who make this movie are so silly. (The character in the film all are scary and some sad) Some of the characters in the film are scary and some sad.

(The best I choose, I will make a better show that this film) The music of the "Chicken Little" are nice.

The film tells the story of Chicken Little, making an alien in the spaceship. If I had the opportunity, I would make a better film than this.

By the end you can see the sound effect is not good. You have very wide. Second, you will be punished the wrong if you use not wide different words.

English is not difficult to master provided that the learning process is made fun.



A child who has experienced the exciting journey of learning will acquire useful communication skills in English such as reading, writing and speaking.

penalised in the exam if you do not write sufficient words. And the objectives did not ask the child to identify singular and plural." Such demoralising comments are a no-no with Chin.

Instead, she would mark the child's work in the manner set out in example 8.4.1. "Look at the objectives set out. Check that these objectives have been achieved. Then, point out good words. For example, the child has used a word such as characters.

Show him what good sentences are. Yes, the child has made mistakes, but the positive manner in which the teacher marks the work will encourage the child to end. The child continues to want to learn."

Ultimately, what Chin wants to achieve is this: A child should not look back on his time in school and attribute his success to the time he spent cramming for the big exams. He should look on his success as a result of the time he spent learning.

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