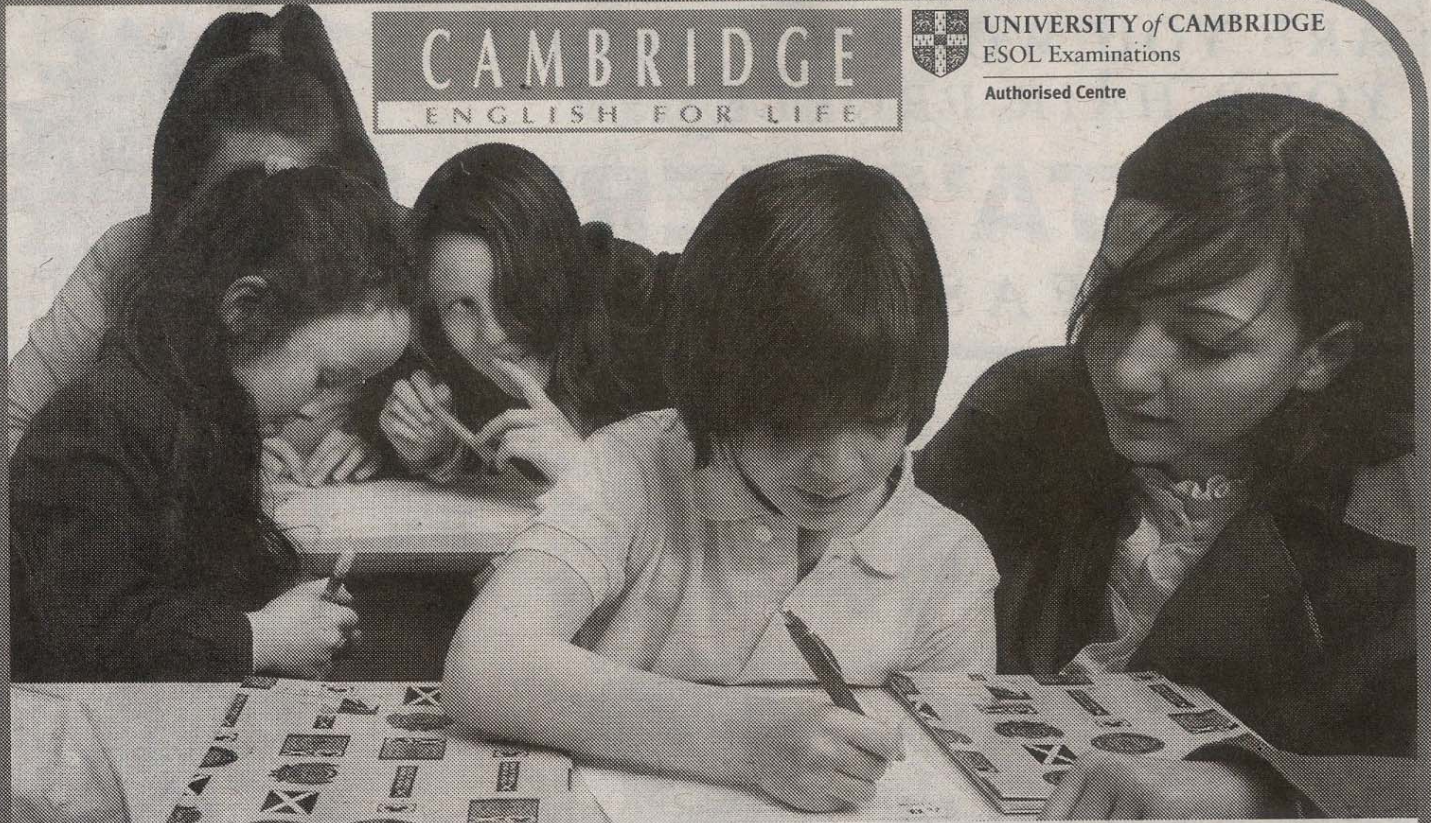


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Teachers who have a natural desire to make life better for children can fill a child's life with so much.

Taking the 'road less travelled'

LEMUEL Gulliver, the protagonist in the latest movie adaptation of Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels", thought himself a "nobody" helping out in the mail room. He had always wanted to be a journalist but did nothing about it, until one day when he was asked to write an article about the Bermuda Triangle – where aircrafts and boats allegedly disappeared mysteriously. He managed to confront his own fear and accepted the challenge. When he returned, he was a changed person, one who was more confident and reliable.

"Taking the road less travelled is not something many of us would do because it is risky and staying in our comfort zone feels safe and cosy.

But that was what I did. I decided to teach," says Dr Elsie Chin.

"After 26 years of working with learners of all ages, especially children, I'm still intrigued by them: their innocence, trust and simplicity. They are concerned only with the moment. It's all about what is in front of them: the blocks, the balls, the picture they are drawing, the made-up game they are playing that helps them develop their inner creativity and social skills.

"In the course of my work, I plan and write the curriculum for Cambridge Children House Ltd in London, an associate company of Cambridge English For Life. I find that I am always guided by six key approaches which are helpful in teaching children to learn and cope with the challenges of growing up and at the same time meeting parental expecta-

tions," says Dr Chin.

Briefly, the six approaches to teaching young children are:

- Using children-centric words

Using adult-centric words can be counter-productive. Using words which are familiar to the child's still-developing vocabulary to convey the essence of a concept is a better option.

- Reinforce the benefits

Explaining to the child why he or she should pick up his toys after playing or making an effort to write his name correctly is the right thing to do. And making it enjoyable is important. This way, the child doesn't feel that cleaning up after himself is a chore. Attitude determines aptitude and if a child cultivates excellence as a habit, then excellence becomes his way of life and not an elusive standard he must meet.

- Find time to appreciate art and music

This provides an opportunity for children to reflect on their day's activity, watch a movie, sing songs, role-play and mimic characters in a play. It is also the place for teachers to teach children speech and drama techniques where children and teacher can close their eyes and focus on breathing in and out. You may only hold the children's attention for a few minutes but in those few moments, you are planting character building seeds in them.

- Enjoying the presence of the young

Teachers who have a natural desire to make life better for children can fill a child's

life with so much. When you make a child's life a little happier you are also making yourself a little happier because you are able to inculcate good things in a child. There is an emotional connection when you see that look on a child's face that tells you he or she finally grasps what you are teaching them.

- Teach by example

When you are teaching children, you must always complete the cycle. Begin a task, see it through to the end. Even when you are upset about something, you must maintain a level head and cool demeanour and never take it out on the children.

- Have patience

Children will not master anything overnight (and neither will teachers). It is a combination of time, patience and commitment. Interestingly, you may reach the point where the children may be able to turn the tables and play the role of teacher. Situations may present themselves where in their own special way the children will show you what they have learned or can do.

Dr Chin is also a master trainer of the Cambridge International Diploma for Teachers and Trainers (DTT). Seminars leading to the DTT are conducted at Cambridge English For Life. The diploma is awarded by the University of Cambridge International Examinations.

• For details, visit www.cambridge-forlife.org or call Audry Reyes at 03-7883 0912.