

Fulfilling a need

LYDIA Teh, author of many books about Malaysia and Malaysians including *Honk! If You're Malaysian* which won The Star-Popular Readers' Choice Awards in 2008, shares her experience running an English language centre.

"When my children were one and two years old, I took a sabbatical to stay home with them. I had two more kids and enjoyed 17 years as a housewife and later as a writer working from home," said Teh.

"In 2009, I started teaching part-time at a friend's Cambridge English for Life (CEFL) centre in Bandar Ambang Botanic. Several months later, I joined forces with the friend and started a new centre at Setia Alam, a booming township located near Meru, Klang."

They began with two classes in December 2009 and today there are 30 classes in session. Students range from four-year-olds to middle-aged working adults. The majority of my students live in Setia Alam but there are also those who come from Meru, Kapar and even Puncak Alam. They hail from all types of schools: Chinese, Kebangsaan, private and international.

CEFL fulfils the needs of a community hungry to improve its command of English. The standard of English in Malaysia has been on the decline ever since English was de-emphasised in our education system.

Teh has come across numerous job applications written in atrocious English by university graduates. The English was so appalling it was laughable.

However, bad English is no laughing matter. Parents realise that though English is not a 'must-pass' subject in SPM, their children need a good grasp of the language in order for them to excel in tertiary education and to hold their own when they join the workforce later.

Even parents of very young kids know that they must build a good English foundation for their children. That is where CEFL comes in.

CEFL takes students systematically from one level to the next, starting from Junior English for pre-schoolers, progressing to Young Learners English for primary students and on to the Cambridge Main Suite for secondary students. For adults, there are beginner classes for those barely able to converse in English as well as business English courses for working people. The syllabus and teaching materials are well formulated by the CEFL academic department and most courses are geared towards preparing students for the University of Cambridge ESOL examinations.

"Even before I became involved in CEFL, I had already seen the results of its programmes. A few years ago, my sister asked for my recommendation for an

English course for her eldest daughter who attends a Chinese independent school. My sister's family speaks Mandarin at home and they aren't very conversant in English.

"After studying at CEFL, my niece's English grade in school improved and she became more confident in speaking English. In fact, she could even imitate the English accent that she hears on her course CD when she reads out the passages in her book!"

Having run the Setia Alam centre for 18 months and listening to parents' feedback, which for the most part has been positive, Teh says it has been a gratifying experience to see students make progress and pass the ESOL exam.

"I have seen young students who can barely read in English make great strides in the span of a few months and adults who only dared speak to me in Malay or Chinese initially but at the end of their course, could carry out a decent conversation in English. I am glad that CEFL has helped them to improve their standard of English."

There is another positive side-effect in taking CEFL courses. It is a fact that the students tend to fare poorly when it comes to general knowledge. At CEFL, they expand their borders, learning about people, places and events around the world.

"I have experienced this for myself when I was teaching at CEFL earlier. One of the topics dwelt on Capoeira, a Brazilian art form that combines martial arts, sports and music. It was the first time ever that I had heard of Capoeira and the knowledge stood me in good stead when I was later assigned to write a magazine article on unusual children's classes.

"Having seen how CEFL fulfils the needs of the communities in Setia Alam and Klang (my partners also run three other CEFL centres in Klang), we are planning to open another centre in Shah Alam," concluded Teh.

If you live in Shah Alam, you are most welcome to CEFL's Open Day on Sunday, April 3 at Laman Seri Business Park in Section 13 (near Kelab Golf Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah, next to the PTPL College).

Bring your family and find out how CEFL can help you. There will be free placement tests, games and refreshments.

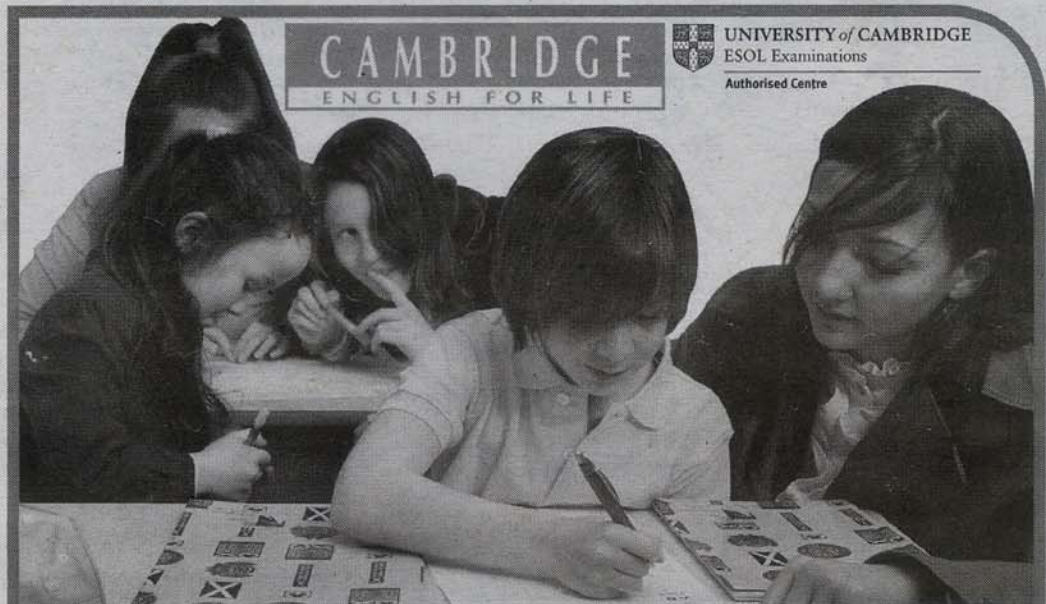
☐ For enquiries call CEFL Setia Alam at 03-3344 4603. For further information about CEFL Centres and courses contact 03-7883 0912, e-mail info@cambridgeforlife.org or log on to www.cambridgeforlife.org.

Teh (right) helps students improve their general knowledge.



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Young Learners English (YLE)	The Cambridge Main Suite	Business English Certificates (BEC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starters Movers Flyers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key English Test (KET) Preliminary English Test (PET) First Certificate in English (FCE) Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BEC Preliminary BEC Vantage BEC Higher

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