

Volume 7

Jun. 2023

TeachBetter

Professional Development Insights for Teachers in China

Message from the Editor	2
TeachBetter in Review	3
We need to talk...	4
Sessions in a Nutshell	6
Experiential Learning with EiM	12
Teacher Toolkit	14
The Hidden Head	16
Dialogic Feedback in Experiential Learning	18
Advice Ayi	20
Save the Date	22
TeachBetter: Diversity and Inclusion	24

Message from the Editor

Mary May-Miller
Venture Education

The summer has officially landed in China and this week in Beijing we are seeing temperatures going all the way up to 40 degrees. My frail, pale, British body can't handle it! Our Teachers in China community continues to grow and we'd like to thank each of you who has shared what we do to colleagues of yours – we love seeing a thriving community of educators!

Now that schools are back to 'normal' and are starting to engage with outdoor programmes, we know that a theme on Experiential Learning would be fitting; making sure that no matter if you have a week-long school trip booked in, field trips to nearby areas, or are just staying in school, every teacher is well equipped to deliver engaging lessons around nature and your surroundings.

We were truly inspired listening to the expert speakers from this series. So many amazing ideas and resources were shared and we hope you are able to make use of these in your contexts. From forming an 'eco-committee' with students, to learning how to facilitate truly impactful experiential lessons, to how we can learn from the cycle of nature and use those rules to influence our own habits as humans.

When people think of experiential learning, they often say 'well I can't do that because in my school we aren't allowed to leave the classroom'. But so much about experiential learning is so much more than that. This newsletter is full of examples, resources and inspiration which we hope you can use to bring nature into the classroom, or just encourage students how to engage with the learning matter in a different way.

We are immensely grateful to all of our expert speakers, Dr Laura Smith, Charlie Williams, Josh Kernan, Dr Heidi Smith, Hannah Eckert and Julia Eckert. Their incredible wealth of experience, research and insight all sparked thought-provoking discussion among the community. We'd also like to thank Sean Healy, a member of the Teachers in China community, for submitting a fantastic Chalkface article, and to this edition's fantastic Hidden Head (you know who you are). I thoroughly enjoyed reading each and every word.

The next TeachBetter series will be in October and will focus on all things diversity and inclusion, including SEN provision. If you aren't already part of our Teachers in China community, make sure you scan the QR code on the final page and share with your colleagues. I wish you all a wonderful summer break and hope you all enjoy the next series.





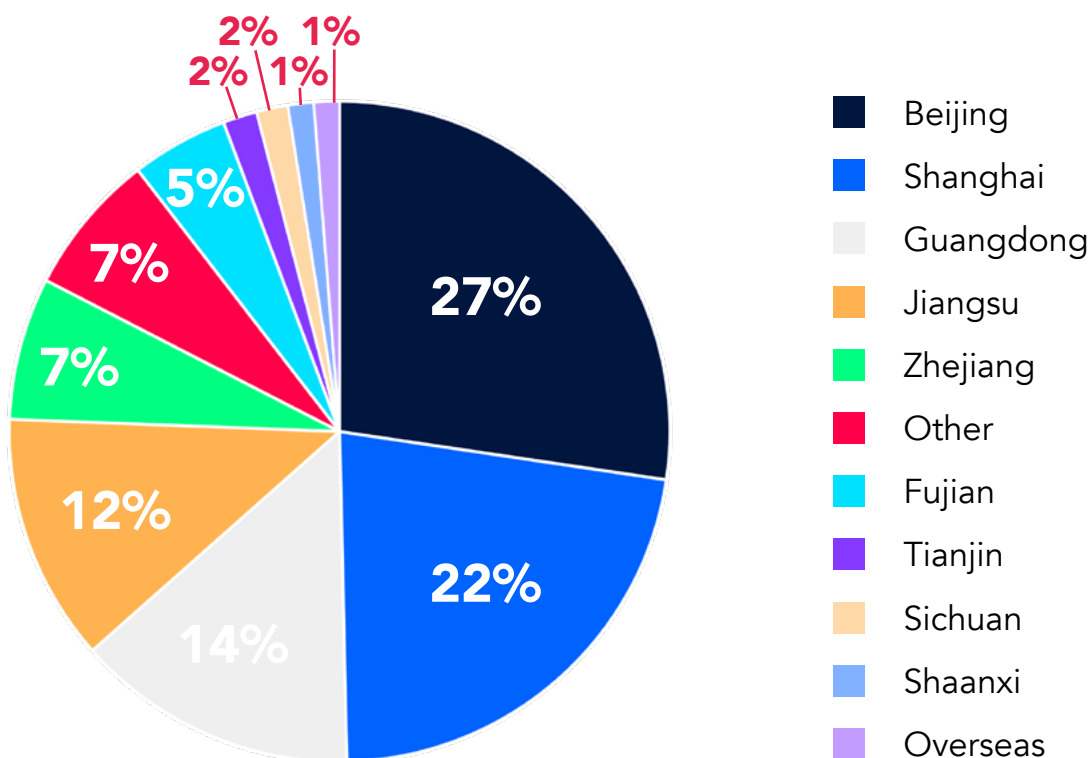
TeachBetter in Review

In May 2023, Venture hosted the seventh TeachBetter series: free online workshops for teachers in China

Since the first series in October 2021, TeachBetter has featured topics such as Embedding Employability, Early Years, Confident Communication and more. With a total community of over 2,000 educators in China, we know that the demand for good quality professional development is in high demand. This series, we received great feedback for all four webinars, led by:

- Dr Laura Smith: *Lecturer in Sustainability and Business, University of Leeds*
- Charlie Williams and Josh Kernan: *Programme Director of Beijing Field Studies and Managing Director of The Hutong*
- Dr Heidi Smith: *Programme Director Outdoor and Environmental Education, the University of Edinburgh*
- Hannah Eckert and Julia Eckert: *Trainers and educators for regenerative development, Forum ViA*

Where in the world... are our Teachers in China?



'Other' includes Anhui, Chongqing, Gansu, Guangxi, Guizhou, Hainan, Hebei, Henan, Liaoning and Shandong. 'Overseas' includes Australia, India, Malaysia, Philippines and Russia!

What a diverse group we are!



We need to talk...

Not to sound too much like a needy teenager but...

TeachBetter is a programme we at Venture Education genuinely love running. It does what we do best; connects the education sector so that everyone can thrive. And it's free! Even better!

Each series from our first in October 2021 was getting bigger and better, with sessions seeing sometimes over 200 attendees at a time, 100 at a minimum.

Then suddenly... You guessed it... COVID.

It turns out that TeachBetter actually thrived during COVID. Schools were online which meant that teachers were working from home, didn't have additional after-school commitments, didn't have to commute to and from work, and were really focussed on self-development.

We, like everyone else in the education community, were obviously extremely happy to see the back of China's 'zero COVID', the lessening of restrictions, no more scanning health kits, no more queueing for your daily COVID tests, no more isolation. We could see each other again, hug each other again, and share stories, food and wine.

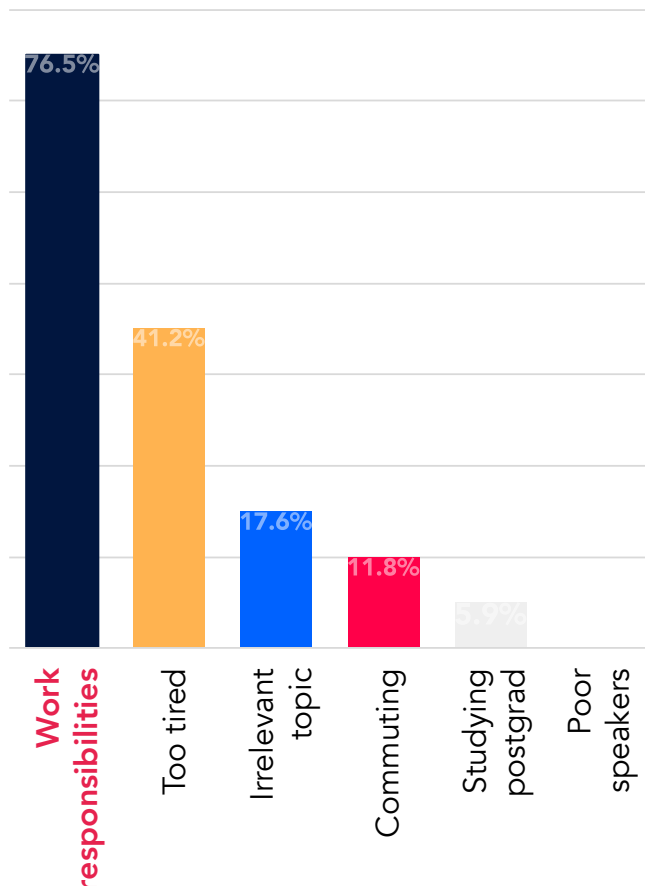
But COVID restrictions ending meant that teachers were extremely busy again... With other things are on your plate, things like TeachBetter have had to take a back seat. TeachBetter, which was once going from strength to strength, is now only seeing around 50 attendees per session.

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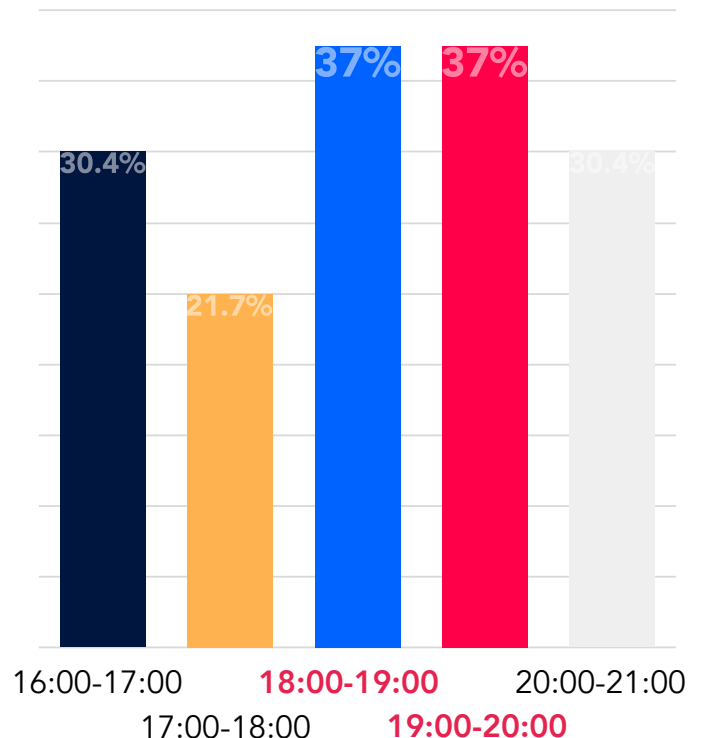
We held a survey at the end of our most recent series and asked you a couple of questions to help us better understand how to go forward and below are the results so far.

We will go through your suggestions and feedback and try to offer a TeachBetter which works best for you! To contribute, [click here](#).

If you were unable to attend this series, why?



When would be the best session time for you?



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Session 1 in a Nutshell:

Speaker: Dr Laura Smith

Role: Lecturer in Sustainability and Business, **University of Leeds**

Session: Action for Sustainable Futures

Ideas, information and quotes worth remembering

Teaching about sustainability is not something we can simply add on. We must **embed learning about sustainability into the curriculum**.

In science, teach about the melting ice caps and climate change, in design and technology have students design an eco building, in maths have students calculate the carbon footprint of their school or household, illustrate results and consider what they can do to reduce it.

Ensure students really understand what they are doing and why, by having them consider or undertake the following:

Sustainability awareness - how do they understand sustainability, their impact on the world, and implications for the future?

Sustainability survey - audit the class, teachers, parents, or even family members. What are the important issues? What are we doing well? What can we improve?

Evaluation and voting – teachers facilitate class/group discussion for students to review the issues raised from the survey. Ensure students are taking small steps, being realistic, and prioritise issues.

Educators are encouraged to start a 'green team' or 'eco-committee'. This not only develops leadership skills in young people, but also instils in them a sense of **responsibility** to educate the larger community.



Sustainability action plan - what are the tasks that need to be done? Consider responsibilities, resources and time frame. Make sure goals are measurable and achievable.

Monitor progress - measure progress and display results for the school/community to see; everyone needs to be aware of activities and process being made!

After research and time spent on assessing and improving the issues in the school, have students develop a school-wide manifesto or eco-code from their investigation and assessment. Students practise **leadership** by ensuring everyone is sticking to the code.

Click the cover to access the resource

"This pack contains activities to introduce children and young people to the concept of a one planet future – a future in which people and nature thrive. It also introduces them to the challenges of safeguarding the natural world, tackling climate change and changing the way we live."





Session 2 in a Nutshell:

Speaker: Charlie Williams and Josh Kernan
Role: Programme Director of **Beijing Field Studies**, and
Managing Director of **The Hutong**
Session: Experiential education in China

Ideas, information and quotes worth remembering

1 The government is putting a **bigger focus on sports, exercise and nature**. From rules implemented to ensure students are balancing video games with sleep management, to the Double Reduction Policy giving students more time to play outside, instead of extensive additional tuition indoors.

2 Schools should **practice due diligence when choosing trip providers**. With lower barrier to market entry, this means that anyone can buy a kayak and sell trips to a school. Schools should create a clear checklist for prospective providers to make sure that providers are providing safe trips and mitigate risks. Look at prior experience, safety records, emergency plans and incident reporting systems to ensure providers are well accredited and safe.



Click below to check out Beijing Field Studies!

3 To minimise trip culture shock for students, it is advised to **avoid jumping straight back into full trips as normal**. For students who might have never been on a trip before, this can be a lot. Start with day trips, and build up over the months and years to where they would have been had COVID not derailed the last few years of education!

4 **Time and money are two of the most valuable things**, and this is the same for trip providers. Schools need to bear in mind the following when booking outdoor programmes:

a It takes time to plan a top-quality trip, usually several months, and definitely not the few weeks that most schools are requesting at the moment.

b Providers always aim to overstaff programmes to accommodate potential threats and building extra capacity for potential problems. This comes with a cost, and needs to be a dialogue between educators and organisations.





Session 3 in a Nutshell:

Speaker: Dr Heidi Smith

Role: Programme Director Outdoor and Environmental Education,
the University of Edinburgh

Session: Innovating Experiential Learning

Ideas, information and quotes worth remembering

When going outside to learn, **everything can be used as a learning opportunity**. If students pick up a leaf, ask questions to facilitate their curiosity, critical thinking and learning. What does it look/smell/taste like? Is it new or old? Why did it fall off? Have any insects eaten it? What happens to it when it decomposes? The questions really are endless.

Allow students to be authentic. If they identify ways to improve an area of the school, have real discussions with them on how they could achieve this. Can they apply for grants? How can they fundraise the funds? How should they decide where the money should go?

Support students by allowing them to fail in a safe environment. **Failing is a part of learning.** Follow up every stage of the process with opportunities for reflection; what went well and what did not? This attitude needs to be ongoing. If something stops working or they get stuck, stop, reflect, and look at what to do next.

Behaviour management – when you are going outside with a class for the first time, don't plan to try and achieve too much. Everyone is trying to work out how to act and what to do, students and teachers alike! Make sure there is something students can learn and connect to by giving them a focussed task (like the mapping activity below).

When outside, give students really clear, simple instructions and make sure you follow up on them. **Time limits are your friends.** Tell students they will receive the next instruction after they have completed the first task, almost like finding clues in a scavenger hunt.

Heidi fondly reflected on her experiences of enjoying nature at home, from climbing trees with her mother, to going fishing with her grandfather. **Children's early years completely shape their lives.** Teachers should encourage their students' parents to continue the love of nature at home. Get parents to jump in puddles with their children, lay on the grass, and look up at the clouds together.



Click the image to access the University of Edinburgh's Teaching Matters blog:

*"Dear Oak":
Showcasing the
value of place-based
education through
local landscapes – a
video blog post*

School ground mapping activity

Students draw a map of their school grounds and include everything in it. Make the map to scale, work out how big the buildings and play spaces are, add a compass and directions. Have students question why the buildings placed where they are, why the play area is bigger or smaller than the learning buildings, who's allowed to go where and why? Unpack and learn experientially about the place they are inhabiting every day. What do the spaces mean to them? What does the playground think of them? What has an old tree in the playground experienced? Who has sat under it? What stories could it tell?



Session 4 in a Nutshell:

Speaker: Hannah Eckert and Julia Eckert

Role: Trainers and educators for regenerative development,
Forum ViA

Session: Regenerative Leadership with Permaculture

Ideas, information and quotes worth remembering

1 *Just sustaining the status quo is not enough.* The earth is already in decline, so we need to do more than just sustain.

Inherently, **nature is circular and productive.** We can apply this natural law into our own lives in many ways; composting food waste, transforming old clothes into dish cloths, even transforming negative thoughts into opportunities of mental growth, learning and adaption.

Educators are encouraged to print out the Permaculture principles (click below) and reflect with students. **Take part, be open, and be curious.** We are all learning together; we are all on the same journey.

4 If you absolutely cannot go outside during classroom hours, find ways to **bring nature into the classroom!** Cress grows very quickly and easily indoors, and you can plan lessons around it. In science, look at the growth cycle from a seed to a plant. In maths, calculate the germination rate by counting how many seeds were planted and compared to how many sprouted. In art, make posters illustrating the classroom's 'garden'. And at the end of it all, enjoy some delicious egg and cress sandwiches!

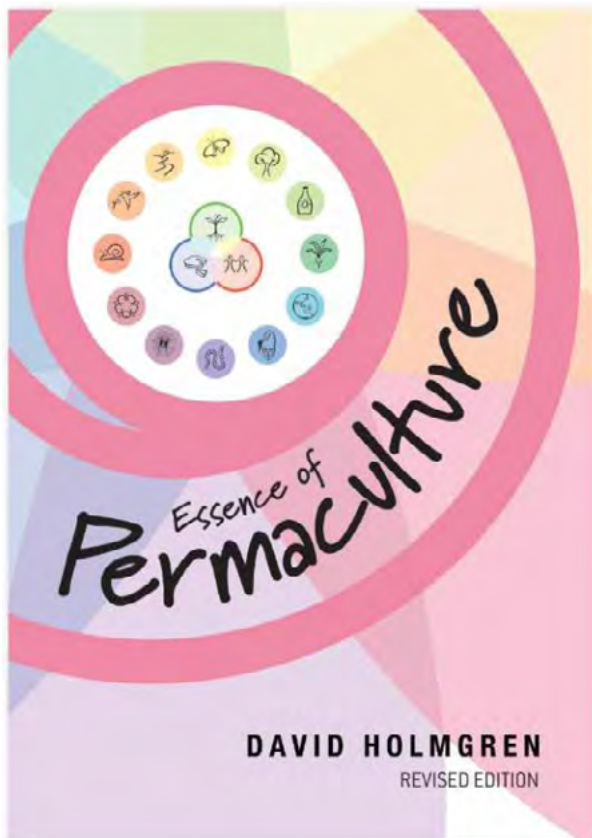
5 Education is not about checking boxes, **it's about lighting a spark.**

A regenerative journey: a walk in the wild forest (an imagination exercise you can run with your students).

In the next few minutes, you don't need to do anything. You can just lean back, relax and if it feels right, you can close your eyes, too. I invite you to step into the forest and explore it from within. This forest is wild and untouched, and offers us a playground for learning from nature, being curious and synching into the forest's regulating peace, balance, and deep calmness. Your nervous system feels the forest straight away and relaxes with every breath you take.

If you want, you can take off your shoes and walk on your bare feet. As you're walking around, you can hear the leaves and fallen branches underneath your steps, and the soft moss following your way. Enjoy the smell, the clear fresh air blowing through your hair, touching your skin.

For the full transcript, contact [Hannah](#).



University of Leeds: C.Chen7@leeds.ac.uk

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Experiential Learning with **EiM**

Education in Motion speak about their key focusses when planning experiential learning, and how this creates success at Dehong Beijing.

Experiential education can mean lots of different things in lots of different contexts, but the universal element is that it is a major enhancement to learning. We may not remember many of our day-to-day classes of when we were children but we do remember the days where we made a coin snake for World Polio Day, or blew into a straw to puff up a sheep's lungs (or maybe that was just in Australia!).

Essentially experiential learning is exactly that; learning through experience. There are a number of ways this can manifest itself, for example:

1 The culminating point of a unit or topic that has a lived component and interaction - this could mean dressing up as bees on that bee unit or learning to fix a bike tube from a topic around materials, or counting car colours going past to go back and create graphs and asking why there are so many black cars in summer!

2 Having a designated outdoor learning space. This doesn't have to be a garden, any space outside is conducive to any learning as it heightens the senses, adds a different dynamic to the content and creates a space of exploration, discovery and learning without walls.

3 There are also special designated learning experiences such as trips, excursions, extra curricula activities and opportunities to take learning somewhere else than in a classroom.

4 Another experience to add into the mix are those with people. Community partnerships, learning with others in or out of school, taking part in events, joining opportunities, awareness raising, meeting with decision-makers and much more.





At the family of schools across Education in Motion (EiM) we have a multitude of examples of best practices around experiential learning, but the very best examples and where we all need and should do more, is in the everyday opportunities to incorporate, integrate and increase experiential learning into our schools and learning of our students.

Our sister school, Dehong Beijing, was recently recognised at the British Chambers China Schools Award in Chengdu for its leadership in sustainability and global citizenship, and not because of how many trees it planted on Earth Day, but because they bring sustainability into the lives of the students and their formal studies through a variety of memorable, contextual and meaningful experiences. These include growing and eating food from seeds taken up into space, having an outdoor learning space, setting up night vision cameras for small animals and often adding exciting, fun things to do into the learning environment for students.

Dehong Beijing has these wonderful examples and more for students to experience learning, but we can all do more to bring tactile, tangible, practical and personal learning to all our students more often. To get started, simply take-a-look at your plans for next week and see where you can add some experiences into the learning for your students.



The outdoor education and experiential learning space in China, much like the rest of the education sector, has recently enjoyed a fast-paced and enthusiastic return to delivering quality educational experiences to our students post-COVID.

Spending time in the great outdoors is **back** in a big way and the Beijing Field Studies team could not be more excited to be a part of this!

Over the spring season Beijing Field Studies team have supported students in seed bomb making, hide building, eco-farm cultivating, bird species classifying, bug hunting, coaster creating, goat feeding, pet rock making, and much, much more.

There are always 3 things we try to strive for as a team when guiding students for a day in nature, that we think are key to keep in mind when guiding your own students.



Student-led exploration

Structured lesson plans are important, but knowing that something as small as a caterpillar could take 5-10 minutes out of that plan is worth considering, perfectly fine and actually should be encouraged.

Nature never rests

Engaging with the outdoor all year round is crucial for their understanding and appreciation of nature. Are we sending the wrong message by only immersing in nature when it is lovely outside?

Risk taking is necessary, safety underpins everything

Safety is undoubtedly the number one consideration when providing outdoor/experiential experiences for our students but building in risk consideration and taking can cultivate more critical thinking opportunities.

For any enquiries, please contact:
bfs@ventureeducation.org



Beijing Field Studies share activity ideas for educators to build into their own curriculums to boost student experiential learning.

Lower School: Seed Bombs

Key words: flowers, bees, pollination, bio-diversity

Materials: soil, water, wild flower seeds, buckets, bowls

Summary:

This activity is great for getting the students' hands dirty whilst considering how their mud ball, with seeds in the middle, may contribute to the bio-diversity of the area. This then can also be tracked by them biweekly to check whether the plants have germinated.



Middle and High School: Campus Green Space

Key words: Campus Greening, micro-rewilding

Learning objective: to be able to plan and build a campus green space that promotes environmental engagement for students

Brief: Plan, build or cultivate a green space with your class/grade/other grades in your school on an existing area on campus. This area must contribute to school life and have a positive impact on the school's sustainability or environmental goals as well as student wellbeing.

Summary:

An opportunity to make a difference by promoting sustainability initiatives and chances for students to work on projects big and small, making their campus or local community a greener and more environmentally sustainable place.

The employability value of such projects is also worth noting, allowing students to take ownership and develop key skills desirable in the workplace like proposal writing, project and time management, perseverance, resilience and a solution positive mindset.





The Hidden Head

What are Heads really thinking when they walk around the school? In this recurring feature, we ask an anonymous School Lead their perspective on the most pressing questions in the sector.

Why is it hard for schools to do outdoor education?

We'd love to take children outdoors more - I grew up climbing trees and blocking streams with rocks - but there are six big challenges that we face.

1 Perceptions: It can feel that school trips, classes outdoors (especially in older years) or time spent in nature is a break from study or something "extracurricular". "Embedding outdoor education into the curriculum" sounds nice but is much harder in practice.

2 Health and Safety: This has become harder throughout my career and while it is necessary it can be overbearing. There also seems to be an increase in litigation against schools and it's not always easier to ensure maximum safety with a really high staff ratio.

3 Capacity: Making sure teachers are first aid trained and comfortable educating outdoors is one restriction but also class time. Many students have done a lot of online teaching over the past two years and they want to catch up. Schools are overstretched.

4 Price: Using outdoor providers is good, we've worked with a number of well-established experiential providers over the years, but that costs money and, outside of a "week without walls", is harder to justify to boards and account departments.

5 Parent Concern: Parents pay money to go to school and they are generally laser-focused on exam results and university destinations (especially in older years). When students complain that they don't like the mud or wind, parents often share those complaints straight to us.

6 Preciousness: Truthfully, many of our students are uncomfortable around bugs, some teachers flinch at the rain, and they often prefer a sanitised version of nature that they get in zoos or parks. Nature is, and should be, wild.





daniel.rosenberg@otus.com
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From the Chalkface

Sean Healy, long-term member of the Teachers in China community, explores how educators can use Dialogic Feedback in Experiential Learning.

With the undeniable potential of Experiential Learning (E.L) for students comes a challenge for teachers who may be wandering - where do I fit in? Indeed, in many E.L frameworks there is no rigidly planned sequence of tasks, no textbooks, sometimes not even a classroom. However, it is my suggestion that this presents an opportunity for educators to use 'Dialogic Feedback' to co-construct with their learners a role for the teacher based on the type, timing, and purpose of feedback.

Imagine a student who will visit a zoo to learn about animals. In a normal lesson, the teacher will define the objectives and already have a strategy in mind as to how to give feedback to the learners. Decisions such as the type, register and timing of error correction is arbitrarily decided beforehand. Many studies have indicated that teachers and students tend to have different attitudes about feedback which can result in a breakdown of respect and trust (Hill & West, 2020; Yu & Gu, 2017). In the case of Experiential Learning, feedback can be perceived by the student as 'poorly-timed', 'unclear' or 'intrusive' which can break the immersion of the situation and undermine the autonomy of the student (Zhou et al, 2021; Zhen 2019).

To avoid this, the teacher begins by eliciting from students their attitudes regarding past experiences of receiving feedback in class. From this discussion, the teacher can present a list of alternative feedback strategies such as delayed versus instantaneous, written versus oral comments and direct versus indirect. Focusing on

the specific situation of a trip to the zoo, imagine that each student will take on the role of Scientific Explorer who will journey around each of the habitats creating a journal of their 'discoveries'. A poorly executed feedback strategy can undermine the authenticity of the task and to avoid this, the teacher will present students with a list of reasonable options for how they will receive error corrections or suggestions. Questions such as "would you prefer instantaneous or delayed feedback?" and "would you like me to be more direct or offer some suggestions?" can facilitate the co-construction of a relationship that is based on mutual respect.

Essentially, throughout the task the teacher does not deviate from what was agreed, even in situations where an intervention might be appropriate. However, after the task the teacher will guide the student through a critical reflection on the feedback strategy. More capable learners can even be trained on how to self-assess their work through a dialogue with their teacher, learning to request specific kinds of feedback such as a focus on vocabulary versus punctuation.

Experiential Learning opens the world to the student and in this world, they will need to co-construct relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Dialogic Feedback is a means for these first tentative steps to be taken under careful and professional guidance revealing a new role for our Experiential Teachers.

Sean Healy

English & Humanities Teacher
Chongqing BI Academy



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Advice Ayi

In this section, we attempt to answer some of the PD-related questions of the TeachBetter community

How do we teach reading in an experiential way?

Experiential learning is when students acquire knowledge through experiencing things. Sitting and reading in a classroom can only give students so much... In order for them to get to the next level of comprehension, tie in some other activities linked to the reading.

1 **Role playing** is a great example of how to take reading comprehension to the next level.

Role-playing involves not just thinking about a scenario, but actually acting it out to get a feel for the experience. This could range from primary aged students roaming through the playground while reading 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt', to acting out a Shakespeare play.

The teacher must facilitate questions to help students empathise with the characters, to understand what they are thinking and feeling.

On the bear hunt, could students walk through long grass and feel the tickle of each blade of grass? Could they take off their shoes and feel the squelch of mud between their toes? Could they describe what the wind and rain on their face feels like?

2 This could then progress to **hot seating**, where students take it in turns to interview and be interviewed by peers while taking on the role of one of the characters. How did baby bear feel when Goldilocks ate his porridge?

This could then progress into a whole-class **debate**, where one side argues the case of Goldilocks, and one the case of the three bears.

There are several things educators can do to facilitate deeper comprehension beyond reading. Imagination is key; simply allow yourself and your students to really feel and understand the stories behind the reading.





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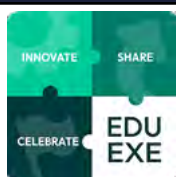


Save the **Date**

Here are 7 events or courses for teachers taking place in the coming months. Click an event to find out more!

15
JUN

Inclusive education in online communities (online)



22
JUN

ChatGPT & Education: 8 Ways AI Improves Student Outcomes

EducationWeek®

23
JUN

Social Justice and Early Childhood Education Workshop



24
JUN

Why Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences (PACEs) Matter



5
JUL

Risk Management for Outdoor Programs



1
SEP

Promoting Literacy Outdoors



10, 12
17, 19
OCT

TeachBetter:
Diversity and Inclusion

TeachBetter
Diversity and Inclusion

Do you run any courses, webinars or other events for teachers in China?

If you would like your event to be featured in next term's newsletter, contact careenza@ventureeducation.org

Your Whole-school Sustainability Transformation

supported by WildBound

WildBound is your trusted guide and resource for whole-school sustainability. We offer support in embedding sustainability, climate and biodiversity actions into your school's strategy and culture, teaching and learning, making your campus more sustainable and helping you engage local and global communities on impactful initiatives.

Imagine your school where

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- **Students initiate campus-wide climate and biodiversity actions**
- **Your campus is a living laboratory for sustainability and sanctuary for nature**
- **The wider community feel empowered and connected**

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Sustainability Accelerator



Sustainability Lead Training



TeachBetter

Diversity and Inclusion

10 Oct

12 Oct

17 Oct

19 Oct

Exclusive to Venture Education's
Teachers in China group

**Register to join
the group free!**

NB: if you are already part of the
WeChat group 'Teachers in China (TIC)'
you do not need to register again

