

# TeachBetter

Professional Development Insights  
for Teachers in China

Message from the Editor	2
TeachBetter in Review	3
The Biggest Challenge in Early Years Education	4
Sessions in a Nutshell	5
Playing to Win	11
Teacher Toolkit 3	12
Motessori vs RIE	13
Hidden Head	14
Great Teachers Aren't Enough	15
Starting Early	17
Pedagogy Column	18
Save the Date	19
The Last Word	20
TeachBetter: Confident Communication	21



# Message from the Editor

**Kate Rowe**  
**Venture Education**

Hello everybody and welcome to Volume three of our TeachBetter community newsletter! Our CPD community continues to grow and we were delighted to welcome over 300 sign-ups to the WeChat group and around 150 teachers receiving certification.

One of the more unusual people quoted in our third series, Scottish policeman and violence reduction expert John Canoghan, has this to say on early years development: "The four most important years in a child's development happen before a child is three."

It would have been impossible to walk away from this TeachBetter series, without reflecting on the absolutely crucial nature of these first years of human life, and just how amazing children's brains are. The sessions, focussing on a wide spectrum of early years teaching and learning - from the ways that young children reason, learn and process the world around them, to the foundations of Montessori philosophy and a wealth of tips and ideas about how to shape children's learning environments and opportunities even when your resources are exceptionally constrained - were all fascinating, and we are very grateful to our amazing speakers from Anglia Ruskin University, and the Universities of Aberdeen, Sunderland and the West of England Bristol.

We are also incredibly grateful for the contributions from everyone in the TeachBetter community both in the insightful questions and comments throughout each session, and in the lively chats and debates on WeChat. We are delighted in this newsletter to be presenting more community articles than ever before - and would like to sincerely thank all the contributors: Sophia Androu-Erriah, Kumiko Akiyama, Lauren Leonie Glennie, Martin Kemp, Xolisile Sithole, and of course this issue's very wonderful Hidden Head - your shared experience, enthusiasm and insight made this newsletter a genuine pleasure to edit - thank you.

Our next series, on confident communication, kicks off in May - we very much hope to see you there!





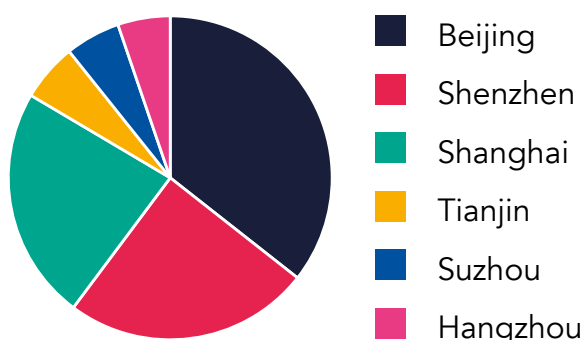
# TeachBetter in Review

**In March, Venture hosted the third TeachBetter series: free online workshops for teachers in China**

With over seven hundred registrations, the response from the community was fantastic, and we received great feedback for the webinars which, this series, were led by:

- University of the West of England Bristol
- University of Sunderland
- Anglia Ruskin University
- University of Aberdeen

Following the trend of the last two series, Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai keep top position of cities where our registrants are located. However, this series also saw registrants from further afield, like Singapore, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand and Russia.



## **We asked about the biggest challenges in early years education and these were some responses (quantative data on next page!):**

*"Achieving learning by playing is the biggest challenge in early years education."*

*"From an ESL perspective, defining a curriculum that's effective for learning English and retaining what's learned."*

*"Having enough time to really spend with the children and giving them the space to authentically take their time to inquire."*

*"Allocating different tasks to students with different learning abilities or at different learning paces."*

*"Managing a room full of young children can be delightful, but it can also be hard and can drain a lot of your energy. The day-to-day challenges you will face can range from dealing with difficult behaviors to crying and cranky children. Throughout the day, you must balance all of their unique needs to keep your classroom functioning smoothly."*

*"Helping parents understand the importance of play, creativity, routines and exploration."*

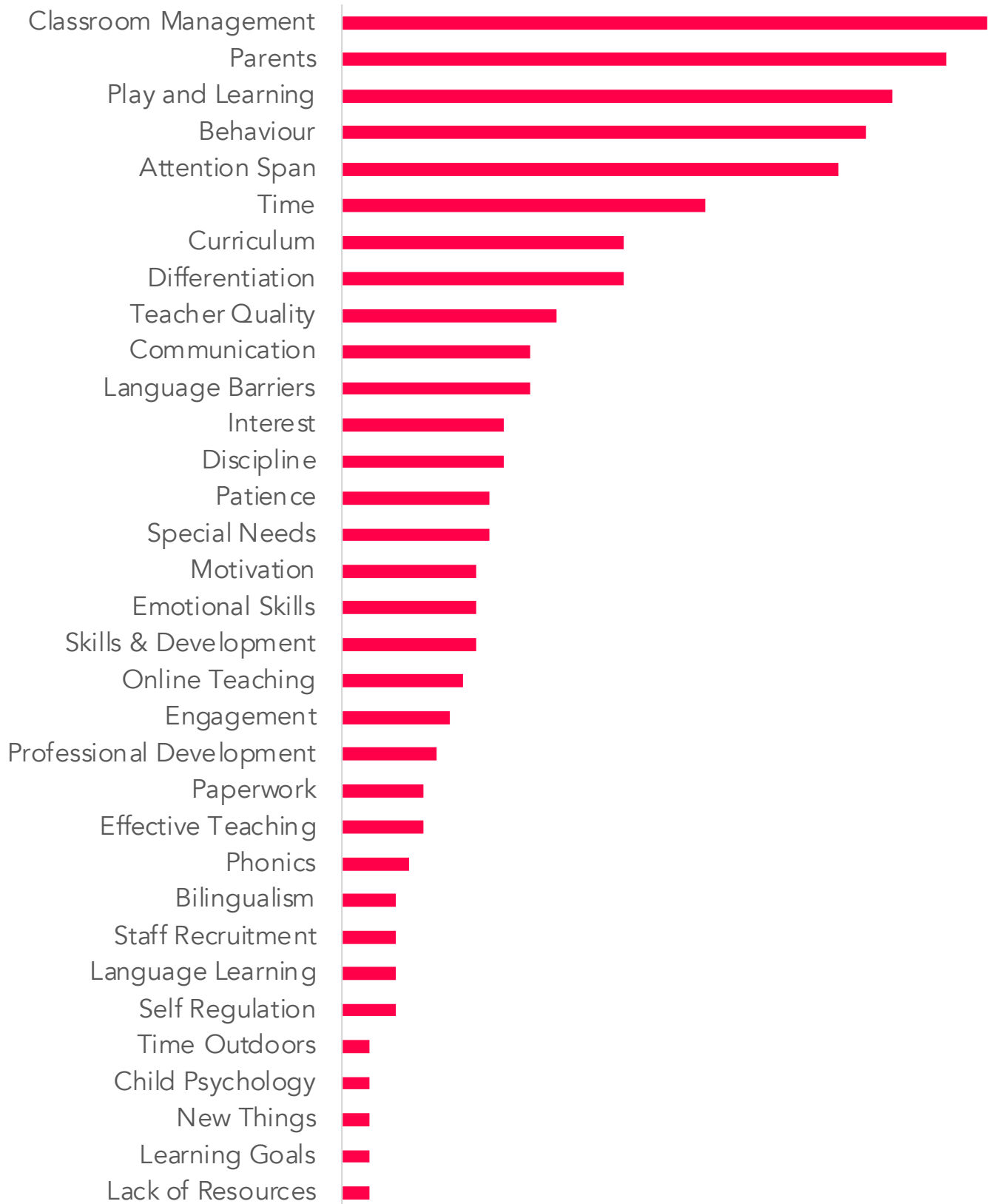
*"Realizing and accepting child-centred play is best practice, in a society and tradition that thinks adult-led education is the only way."*

*"Engaging students with purposeful games and activities, while achieving the learning goals."*

*"Handling class management with over excited students or those with strong personality ones."*

# What's the biggest early years **challenge**?

780 educators gave their thoughts and here were the most frequent mentions (there is significant overlap in some of the topics but unless they are exactly the same in meaning we have kept them seperate)







# Session 1 (and 5!) in a Nutshell:

**Topic:** Executive Functioning  
**Speaker:** Becky Kingsley-Jones  
**University:** UWE Bristol

## 4 Big Ideas

1. What children are learning and how they are learning are as important as each other.
2. People draw different conclusions about the world and have different truths. Our ability to reason across these truths is at the core of our executive functioning.
3. Our reasoning is closely related to our feelings, so creating strong relationships is essential to its development.
4. Children's learning works at its own pace and in relation to its own sense of discovered truth.

## 4 Quotations Worth Remembering

1. "The facility with which we both create and negotiate our social worlds is owed in part to having a theory of mind." Perner
2. "Children are beings not becoming. They are not adults in waiting."
3. "Reasoning is the middleman."
4. "We must give children space to 'play' with ideas, concepts, language and their emotions, but be ready to scaffold these where required."

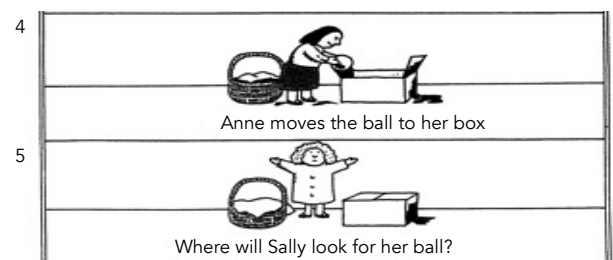


## 4 Facts/Statistics

1. One of the earliest examples of 'hidden' reasoning is our capacity to order and catalogue the world conceptually.
2. Reasoning is the process by which we make judgements and draw conclusions, make sense of phenomena, situations, encounters, and concepts which help us reach answers, make decisions and inform our behaviour and responses.
3. There is a distinction between innate and learned moral behaviour – as adults it's easy to forget this.
4. Theory of mind is the understanding that people's observable actions are motivated by internal mental states (e.g., beliefs, desires) that are related to, but ultimately distinct from, reality.

## 4 Recommendations

1. [False belief tasks video](#)
2. [Children learning to lie – the secret life of 4,5,6 year-olds](#)
3. Goswami, U. (2008). Cognitive development: the learning brain. Hove: Psychology Press. Pp.245-247.
4. [#WholeClassHappyPack](#)



*To correctly complete this task, children have to be able to simultaneously hold two different truths in their mind.*



## Session 2 in a Nutshell:

**Topic:**

**Pioneers of Play**

**Speakers:**

**Vikki Wynn and Alison McMaster**

**University:**

**University of Sunderland**

### 4 Big Ideas

1. In all cultures, children play – and it is a learning process.
2. Your environment changes how you play - e.g. covid and vaccine taking over cops and robbers.
3. Adults really listening to children both develops children's increasing understanding of their own autonomy and agency and teaches adults the patience and responsibility they need to be effective.
4. Building opportunities for play can also help to develop a host of other key skills – but leaning into this too far within a neoliberalised system can also mean a more adult-led, goal-oriented approach. Therefore, it is also important to honour the primary purpose of play as being for enjoyment and recreation.

### 4 Quotations Worth Remembering

1. "If you don't know better, you can't do better."
2. "No job is more important than working with children in the early years" (DfE, 2021, pg.3)
3. "Play is the work of the child." Maria Montessori
4. "The pedagogisation of play has led to that becoming more focused, adult led and related to meeting goals."

When asking the participants "What is 'play'?", these were their responses:

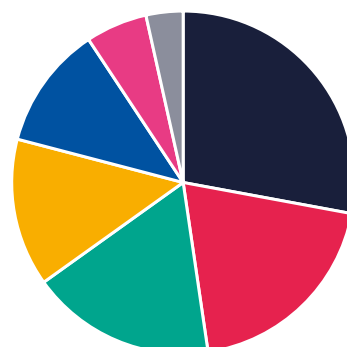
- Fun
- Interactive
- Happiness
- Freedom

### 4 Facts/Statistics

1. Play covers an enormous number of different activities and supports a wide range of skills including storying, developing a narrative, mark making, developing fine and gross motor skills, and multimodal skills. Our understanding and study of it often marks out misconceptions.
2. Listening to children is at the heart of the Reggio approach.
3. Children have a right to education, as stated in the UNCRC, Article 29. The responsibility for ensuring this right is vested in others in the community.
4. Some voices argue that increasing neoliberalisation in schools is also leading to more constrained forms of play in play-based curriculums.

### 4 Recommendations

1. Inspiring Foundations (IF) on Instagram: @inspiring\_foundations
2. [Ken Robinson's TED talk on creativity](#)
3. [Ball, S \(2010\) The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. Journal of Education Policy, 18, \(2\), 215-228. \[online\]](#)
4. Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Friere – available in Penguin edition – ISBN 978-0241301111





## Session 3 in a Nutshell:

**Topic:** Foundations for Future Learning  
**Speaker:** Dr Michelle Wisbey  
**University:** Anglia Ruskin University

### 4 Big Ideas

1. Montessori is about providing skills for the future.
2. Learning environments don't have to be fancy or high-tech – the best echo the real experiences children see happening in the adult world.
3. There is a clear link between the 'realness' of the environment, and the engagement students show with their learning.
4. Gently guiding play is as effective a way to support learning as traditional instruction – and creates more agency and a more positive disposition towards learning.

### 4 Quotations Worth Remembering

1. "Follow the child." Maria Montessori
2. "I am neither very clever, nor especially gifted, only very very curious." Einstein
3. "We do need to learn the hard way because then we remember."
4. "Children do not like being incompetent any more than they like being ignorant. They want to learn to do, and do well, the things they see being done by bigger people around them." John Holt



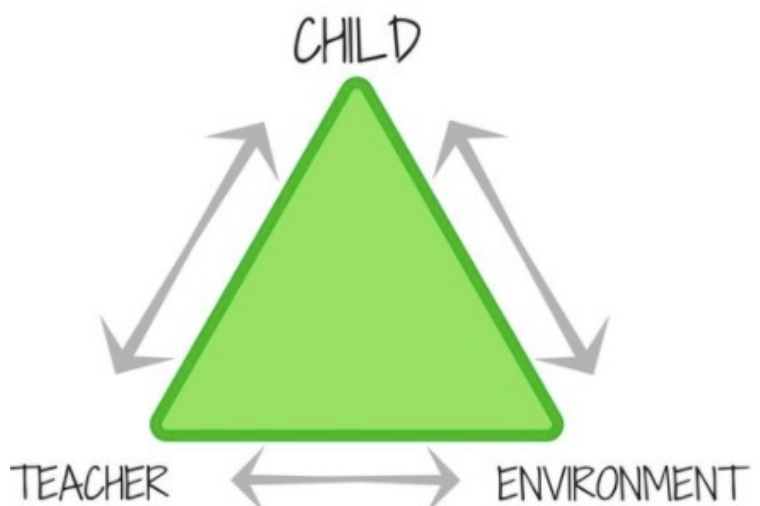
*Collaboration of the Montessori Triangle gives children voice and empowers their identity*

### 4 Facts/Statistics

1. The child's mind absorbs messages continually through their senses, they are explorers, creative thinkers and curious.
2. The ability to speak multiple languages is linked to strong critical thinking.
3. Now, in countries around the world, English is often a second or third language. This poses a whole new set of challenges to English Language Learners.
4. Culturally responsive pedagogy, developed in 1995 by Ladson-Billings works to challenge the ideology of the teacher being the 'knower imparting wisdom'.

### 4 Recommendations

1. [Leuven scales for involvement and well-being](#)
2. [Escape from Childhood, John Holt](#)
3. [Cambridge research on guided play](#)
4. [The Absorbent Mind, Maria Montessori](#)





# Session 4 in a Nutshell:

**Topic:** Creative Approaches  
**Speaker:** Sheila Nutkins  
**University:** University of Aberdeen

## 4 Big Ideas

1. Young children learn and develop through being active and social, engaging with the world around them: exploring, investigating, observing and experiencing their world through all their senses.
2. Development shapes learning and vice versa. Development happens spontaneously but is situation dependent and learning is provoked by the experiences a child has.
3. Our own childhood experiences might not be that close to the children in our care – childhood has changed!
4. By providing them with an environment which promotes agency, activity, resilience and confident exploration, we can help young learners gain the skills they need to become happy and successful adults.

## 4 Quotations Worth Remembering

1. "A child born in a warzone becomes a warrior." John Canoghan
2. "What you actually give children to play with can have a huge impact on their confidence to make choices and explore their own ideas." Beeley 2016
3. "No matter the question, the answer is relationship." John Canoghan
4. "It can look very random."

## 4 Facts/Statistics

1. The infant brain doubles in size in the first year of life.
2. Learning starts with the beginning of life and is very fast from birth to three.
3. The brain does not readily follow sequences prescribed by those who already know.
4. The brain excels at absorbing information in a variety of formats from a seemingly random range of sources.

## 4 Recommendations

1. [Loose Parts Play](#)
2. [Experiential learning – Ferre Laevers](#)
3. [All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten – Robert Fulgham](#)
4. [Places of Woe: Places of Possibility](#)

*When Sheila asked participants "What is your earliest memory of play?", these were their responses:*



- Playing outside
- Imagination games eg. hide and seek
- Sports eg. skipping
- Relaxation eg. reading



**UWE Bristol: [rebecca2.kingsley-jones@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:rebecca2.kingsley-jones@uwe.ac.uk)**

*Our International PGCE Early Years at UWE embeds themes of developing the child voice, playful learning and planning for the development of the unique child, supporting your competence in the classroom and confidence in making positive change for the children you work with, your colleagues and the children's families.*

**Click the banner for more information!**



**UWE  
Bristol** | University  
of the  
West of  
England

# International PGCE Early Years

**University of Sunderland: [alison.mcmaster@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:alison.mcmaster@sunderland.ac.uk)**

*We are strong advocates of the play-based approach and it was fantastic to have the opportunity to share this with so many Early Years enthusiasts. The passion and enthusiasm was evident and we were blown away by the shared appreciation of the positive impact the play-based approach can have.*

**Click the banner for more information!**




# PGCE EARLY YEARS TEACHING



**Anglia Ruskin University: [distancelearning@aru.ac.uk](mailto:distancelearning@aru.ac.uk)**


*A career in education, whether it be Early Years or primary, is a vocation – one which empowers inquisitive minds and gives you the power to build your own future. The role of education is not only to inform but to inspire, and with our online Education MA, you'll experience opportunities for growth and inspiration in your own role whilst developing the skills to nurture learners in any environment.*

**Click the banner for more information!**



# AMPLIFY

YOUR IMPACT



**Embrace your passion** and shape the future with our specialist online Education Master's degrees.

**Find your course today**

**University of Aberdeen: [c.mcdonald@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:c.mcdonald@abdn.ac.uk)**

*This programme aims to provide a response to the continuing professional development needs of fully qualified educationalists wishing to advance their skills and knowledge, enhance their professional practice, and extend their capacity to lead and shape change in a range of educational settings through part-time study by e-learning.*

**Click the banner for more information!**



1495 UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

# Masters in Early Years Education (M.Ed.)

Distance (e-learning) PG Taught PGCE, PGDE and full Masters.





# From the Chalkface

## Playing to win

Recently I wrote my own definition of play as, "Play is imagining and re-imagining the very existence of our experiences. Play is the sparks of curiosity flying seamlessly through the air as we realise that every idea that exists in our minds can be realised. Play is removing the boundaries of the real world and allowing children's imagination to manifest in our settings. Play is growth. Play is communication. Play is exploration. Play is learning in its most authentic form. So let them play. Let us play with ideas about play. Let us retain childhood and remove the adult world from our children's early years experiences."

As early years teachers, we often find ourselves battling with remarks such as, "all they do is play," from those in the primary and secondary domains, who don't always truly understand what it is that we do. However, the importance of play cannot be ignored. Birth to age 6, is the most critical stage in our development, and play holds a significant role in that development. This is not an idle assertion: it's backed by a rich tradition of scientific enquiry. In the early 60's, Diamond et al. (1964) found that rats who had experienced an enriched environment had developed thicker cerebral cortices than those who had experienced impoverished environments. Furthermore, after being given free time to explore, the brain has been seen to release higher levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) which is essential in the growth and maintenance of brain cells (Huber et al. 2007).

So how does this translate to what we do in the classroom? As a hippy at heart, the need to be outside often transcends into my own practice. The surge of mud kitchens in outdoor areas around the world warms my heart, and initiatives such as these only offer a wealth of opportunity to the little ones that we teach. Imaginative play and role-play (often initiated in mud kitchens) has crucial linguistic outcomes - Lewis et al. (2000) found that children who engage in this kind of symbolic play had a greater capacity for receptive language (what a child understands) and the language that they express (the words that they speak).

This is just a microscopic sample of the cognitive, linguistic, social and affective benefits of play that form the foundations of early years practice. So in an ever-changing world, where science and technology increasingly guides our paths, problem-solvers will be crucial to our future. So please don't write off play. Play might be the only thing that will save us!

Look around your setting...does the environment enable free-play/exploration? Is it an environment that gets those imaginative juices flowing? Do you let the children think or do you let the children think in the way you want them to think? Think about it.

**Sophia Androu-Erriah**

PD Coordinator

Yew Wah International Education School of Beijing





# Teacher Toolkit 3

## Experience Sticker Charts

*"Children are living a more sedentary life for a number of reasons including the growth of children's television, video games and parental concerns about the risk of "stranger danger," or physical harm while playing what used to be normal childhood games."*

Sue Palmer, Toxic Childhood -

How the Modern World is Damaging our Children and What We Can Do About It

This term's teacher toolkit is a response to some of the excellent discussions over the past two weeks about children's agency, freedom to roam and freedom to play.

This is the first set of resources we are sharing rather than making ourselves, since 1: we think they are great lists as they are and 2: we wanted to give teachers the opportunity to select activities that best fit their own opportunities and contexts.

### Where do we do this?

This is something you can tackle with a whole class or targeted individuals, share with parents to be completed out of school, or (our favourite idea) complete in collaboration between home and school by selecting some things each.

Click the pictures below to download the sheets and enjoy!

### What ages is it suitable for?

The first pdf goes up to 12, the second breaks down activities by year group from Reception to Year 6 (ages 4 to 10).

### How does it work?

Select some or all of the activities and make a sticker chart or poster for your class or students at the beginning of the term. As children complete the activities, add stickers and celebrate weekly as the activities fill up!

### Prize for winning?

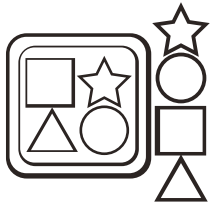
Rather than a prize for this one, beyond the very motivating sticker chart, we recommend asking students to share their experiences in short review discussions and reflect on how much they enjoyed each activity by being allowed to choose their own sticker.

### 100 things to do before you're 12



### My Activity Passport





# Montessori vs RIE

**OK, we admit it, this heading is a little misleading...**

We're not really putting the two systems head to head, but our discussions over the past couple of weeks in sessions and chats on the many merits of both prompted two of our community members to write the personal reflections below about the way that both systems can absolutely unlock development and confidence in younger learners.

## The Magic of Montessori

When I got the opportunity to work in a Montessori kindergarten in Shanghai with 18-month-to-3 year olds, I wasn't sure what to expect. I wondered about how this style of teaching would work and how it would benefit children. When I observed the Montessori work cycle, I could not believe my eyes. Two-year-olds making their own orange juice. Following a recipe, using all the ingredients to bake cookies, using a real oven, and cleaning up after themselves. Cleaning shoes. Spreading jam on bread. Flower arranging. Using scissors. The list goes on and on. After witnessing all these incredible tasks that these children do every day, I then asked myself 'Could I have done this when I was their age? Definitely not.' Montessori enables young children to make their own choices and to express themselves. It encourages children to be independent and resourceful and to think for themselves. Montessori is not just a teaching method, it's a way of life.

## Lauren Leonie Glennie

English Teacher



**Kumiko Akiyama**  
RIE® intern



## Transforming Daily Caregiving Tasks into Quality Time with RIE

The founder of RIE®, Magda Gerber, teaches us to see all caregiving activity as quality time and an opportunity to build an intimate relationship with infants and toddlers. I want to share my diaper change experience with a 14-month-old girl who just joined under my care at the nursery. It was her first diaper change after the transition period. Based on RIE's respectful approach, I slowed down. I let her know what I was going to do at each step. And I gave tarry time for her to process, respond or participate. It went smoothly until the moment when I showed her a new diaper and paused. She took the diaper from me and started crying, calling her mom and grandma. I stopped instead of rushing. And I remembered that it is about relationship and getting to know her.

I acknowledged and sat with her emotions as I wiped her tears. She was holding her diaper tightly and did not want to let it go. I could tell how much she missed her family. I was wondering how to complete this diapering in a respectful way. Then I got an idea to bring another diaper. She accepted it and we could finally complete diaper change after about 25mins. This was my slowest diaper change and I will never forget the powerful lesson I learned. A simple action of slowing down helped me to demonstrate "I respect your body. I respect your feeling. I see you. I am here. I trust your competence and you can trust me." Tarry time allowed the child to speak up her voice and authentic feelings. And I could connect with her. Magda's Educaring® Approach is a beautiful tool especially for busy parents and caregivers who seek deeper connection with young children. By transforming daily caregiving into quality time, we can empower and raise an authentic child who feels secure, competent and connected.

Would you like to learn more?

Kumiko recommends the following two articles:

<https://rie.org/about/educaring/>

<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/oVfNnjHvXs3oDP9X9wGHaQ>





# The Hidden Head

## Ever wondered what your school leaders are really thinking?

In this regular feature, we ask a different anonymous head of a school in China what they think.

### How are you managing wellbeing at your school?

*Were you fooled? I was. I thought the restraints of the pandemic would be over by now and that after a prolonged period of quarantine and online learning, we could return to the "way things were" and carry on in life as if it was a mere blip in history. Yet, I am writing this article mid-way through two weeks of mandatory quarantine.*

*Heads may tell you that the first year of the pandemic was the easy part in comparison. Forming online learning platforms, managing staff across countries on various timelines and working to get them back into the country was a challenge but one with hope and optimism. We still had the energy, vigour and a confident goal of returning to school and getting on with it. During the pandemic, most teachers caught in different situations where, for the most part, understanding, cooperative or made decisions best for their circumstances, and we as Heads were able to find clear-cut solutions, support and understanding from others that helped us through the difficult period, or so we thought.*

*As borders remain closed (or at least challenging to enter and leave), we are left with a massive fallout that may be the real crisis of the pandemic for international schools. As the rest of the world seems to have moved on, here we are instead presented with daily anxiety and surprises. Heads have to make future decisions based on scraps of information and assumptions about what it might look like in the summer... the end of the year... and what about next year?... while teachers often expect clear-cut answers based on 100% certainty (sometimes as if we were holding all the information and keeping it a secret). The continuous threat that the school may close due to cases nearby, worries about teachers' and staff mental health, and recruitment problems are all adding to a potent cocktail of instability and frustration for the international education sector as we continue to endure the realities of the pandemic. Schools traditionally plan at least twelve to twenty-four months ahead, and issue school calendars that form the basis of strategic plans, admissions, school events, and exams. Most importantly, they also let*

*staff know when they have holidays and can return to see family. The biggest challenge in planning for the future is our staff's well-being post-pandemic and their continuing realisation that they might not be able to return home to see family at present. The fallout on staff mental health and the accompanying psychological burden of extra rules, regulations, and uncertainty have profoundly impacted the school environment and how we lead our teams.*

*If well-being was not a priority before, it is certainly top of the list for Heads now. We are all keenly aware that we must implement initiatives to reduce distress and anxiety before it has a significant negative impact on school culture, retention rates and engagement. And all this at a time when, let's face it, we are all mentally exhausted from unreasonable demands, inconsistencies and the inability to return home ourselves. Our schools are now facing post-covid blues, a genuine concern for our teachers that puts them at an elevated risk of mental health issues. Initiatives and protocols for employee physical and psychological wellbeing need to be taken seriously, implemented or updated. But, as if the situation with our teachers' mental health were not enough to contend with, we are also facing challenges getting the required budgets and funds from head office or the board to help support the current situation and convincing them that well-being is worth investing in and will have a long-term tangible impact on the school.*

*As we face these daily struggles, we cannot forget our own mental health and well-being. Heads do not get carefree vacations, and our breaks are not entirely free of work burdens. When do we find time to switch off? Make that a top priority before burnout? We may well be exhausted after leading over two years of crisis management, and 'YES', we need to "just get on with it", but let's all be kind to each other while practising transparency, empathy and patience to ourselves and others in this period of continued uncertainty.*

Got a question for a Hidden Head?  
Contact Mary at [mary@ventureeducation.org](mailto:mary@ventureeducation.org)





# From the Chalkface

## Great Schools and Great Teachers Just Aren't Enough

My 3-year-old son hangs on my every word. He studies me, copies me and sometimes repeats things I wish he wouldn't! Our young learners have this same link with their caregivers - their parents, grandparents, guardians and siblings. The positive impact of active parent - or 'caregiver'-involvement in early education is agreed upon by all. However, do we as teachers do enough to explicitly advise our students' caregivers?

**Research shows that successful schools have effective partnerships with parents (Davies, 1996).**

It makes sense, therefore, that effective partnerships should be high on a school's priority list when looking to improve learning. The onus primarily falls upon us: it is the role of the educator to encourage and nurture participation. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) state that

'invitations to involvement from important others are often key motivators of parents' decisions to become involved'. We, the important others, therefore need to show that parental involvement is not just welcomed and valued, but also expected.

As I write this, from a current lockdown in Shenzhen with kindergartens yet to start the term, our responsibility to encourage participation seems more vital than ever. We must encourage involvement in multiple areas of parenting: learning at home, communication, volunteering, decision-making, and community collaboration (Epstein, 2018). Effective parental involvement programmes need to be developed when the child is at a young age and perhaps parents and caregivers need to understand how important their role is. Perhaps, most importantly, caregivers need to feel valued and that their contributions will make a difference. Let's show them how appreciative we are.

**Martin Kemp**  
Victoria Kindergarten  
Shenzhen



In their session 'Pioneers of Play', Alison McMaster and Vikki Wynne from the University of Sunderland also referenced these two texts on caregivers:

- Baumrind, D (1966) 'Effects of authoritative parental control on child behaviour'. *Child development*, 37, (4), 887-907
- De Graeve, K (2016) 'Theorising Identities in Early Childhood', In Farrell, A, Kagan, S, Tisdall, K, M. (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Research*. London: SAGE





University of  
Nottingham  
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA



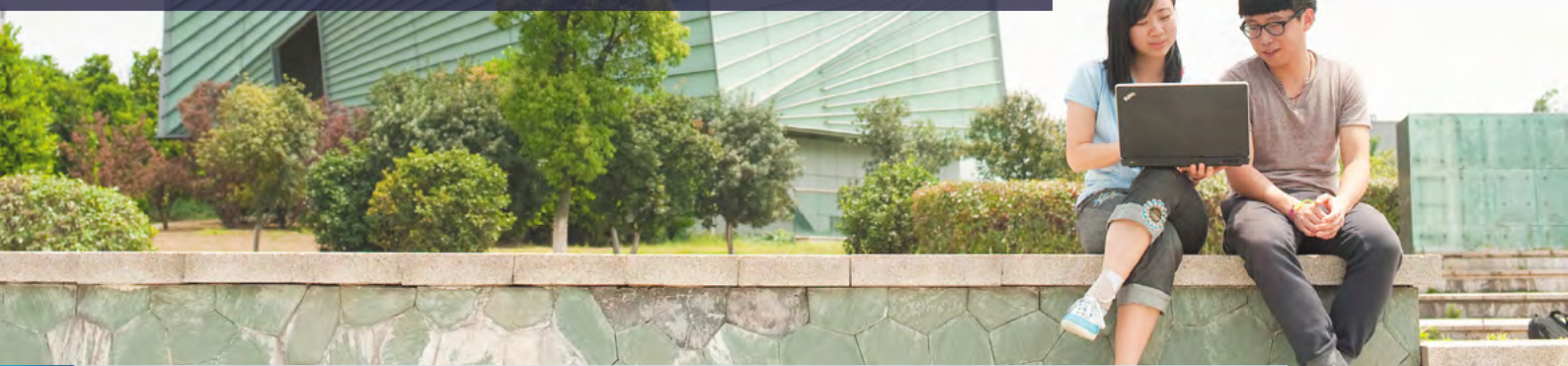
问创  
VENTURE

## UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAMME

How ready are your students to live and study independently?

Our tailored two-day campus programmes at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China can help your high school students transition positively to overseas universities.

Contact [jingwen@ventureeducation.org](mailto:jingwen@ventureeducation.org) for more information.



University of  
Nottingham  
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA



问创  
VENTURE

## PUBLIC SPEAKING SUMMER 2022

Join our confidence-building summer programme in the University of Nottingham Ningbo China.

Ages 11-14  
16th - 30th July

Including engaging public speaking workshops in the mornings and a range of university-related activities every afternoon including sports, activities and performance!



Friendship



Confidence



Fun



Our video



Our brochure



Our WeChat



Book your space!





# From the Chalkface

## Starting Early

Understanding mental health, across all age groups, is crucial; how do we attend to such an undertaking? We may be different in our various ways but as COVID has shown us, we all go through challenges with our mental and emotional health. How we cope, and the strategies we use, can play a big role in how we deal with stressful moments. The question is: where and when do we apply these strategies?

UNICEF's Executive Director, Henrietta H Fore wrote:

**"We can wait no longer. We cannot fail another generation. The time to act is now."**

With this in mind I developed a programme to introduce mental health to my EYFS students. By the time we are adults, we have developed muscle memory for a huge variety of skills from how to ride a bicycle, to how to write and count... skills so automatic and embedded that we can't remember a time when we couldn't do it. It rarely occurs to us to wonder how we actually learned those skills.

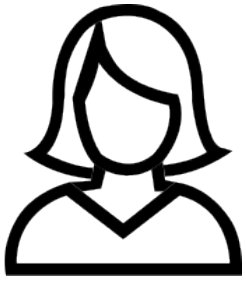
Building mental health into our foundational phase alongside literacy and numeracy skills can give us leverage over potential future stress. Concepts like empathy, understanding the nuances in feelings, and being able to describe the full complexity of our emotions can all be explored in early years.

For a young person, emotions which they don't have control over, can become overwhelming. Negative emotions can end up being expressed as anger or through behaviour labelled by adults as "acting out". Depending on how this is handled, these behaviours can earn inappropriate or excessive reactions from adults leading to repression which we experience later as "triggers". Better communication and thoughtful practical strategies practised in advance can help young people to experience and express how they really (truly) feel with more confidence that each 'down' is a potentially useful lesson instead of the end of the world. Recognising this during such the critical period of childhood may play a role in reducing some of the staggering statistics of depression that are currently gripping the adult world.

Our programme lasts over two months and through games, role playing, English and Chinese videos, we engage in topics that introduce the foundations for mental health in the hopes that, like reading, writing, speaking, it too can be seen as a crucial developing skill.

**Xolisile Sithole**  
EYFS Homeroom Teacher  
Malvern College Chengdu





## Pedagogy Column

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

---

### **My Year 1 class is lovely but it contains pupils with totally different language and concentration levels. How can I provide them all with what they need?**

Working out how to maintain an inclusive classroom is one of the most important skills you will learn as a teacher, and also one of the toughest. I'm not going to lie, children don't tend to come to you in a factory default setting and all classes with more than one student in them need at least some differentiation. There are days in every teacher's life when they feel like their head might explode from the effort of understanding and focussing on so many of their students' different needs, which also, to make things even more fun, will also change radically from day to day as well as across the cohort.

The bad news is that there are very few magic bullets to make you automatically great at maintaining an inclusive classroom. The good news, though, is that, just as in your classes, everyone gets better at it if they have the confidence to keep trying, so will you!

Here are some simple steps to help you make sure your class won't become more divided than it already is by:

- Pairing up or grouping students in a way in which they can complement and help each other rather than dividing them into 'stronger' or 'weaker' groups – it's also a good idea to mix them differently throughout your time with them.
- Remembering to praise the process not the results. Try to always provide positive feedback to all students based on their own achievements and everyday victories rather than comparing them to one another – or even worse, their siblings.
- Always having a diversified set of exercises in mind for individual practice – having basic and extended tasks and questions can often be enough to make sure the pupils make full use of the time designated for an activity and work on improving their skills.
- Making sure that learning activities are diversified and adapted to different styles of learning and the different interests and abilities of the children in front of you.
- Varying the ways you deliver and shape instructions and success criteria. Everyone should be able to 'win' or get there first at least sometimes.
- Continuing to mix things up. Routines are of course very important in a well-run classroom, but you will learn more about your students' different talents and abilities if you set them a wide range of different challenges as you go along.
- Keeping the classes dynamic, the students active, and providing them with "brain breaks".
- Learning as much as you can about them as people. This makes all differentiation much more natural and easy: to be honest, if you do this one thing, you will probably learn what you need from the rest by yourself. You will find yourself much more able to come at the challenges of differentiation from the point of view of making the most of the unique superpowers that each of your students brings into the room every day, than addressing the deficits that you think are there because of what they can't yet do.



## Save the Date

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

22  
APR Virtual Spring  
2022 Conference



25  
APR IOE120: The importance of  
early years education



27  
APR Sensory Processing Disorder:  
Helping Strategies for Parents  
and Teachers



28  
APR Sustainable Education Impact  
Space - Launch



10-19  
MAY TeachBetter:  
Confident Communication

**TeachBetter**  
*Confident Communication*

26-27  
MAY Kaleidoscope 2022:  
The Power of Storytelling



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

31  
May Positive Early Childhood  
Education - Coach Accreditation



**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  
[mary@ventureeducation.org](mailto:mary@ventureeducation.org)





# The Last Word

Kids are great.

If we had to boil down all the great learning from this series into one principle, it might be spend more time listening to children and less time telling them what to do. So, with that principle in mind, we'll devote the last word to them.

## What is love?

By Emma K Age 6

"Love is when you're missing some of your teeth but you're not afraid to smile because you know your friends will still love you even though some of you is missing."

## Ninja Skills

I didn't think I'd actually lose in a game of hide and seek against my nephew...



## Back off, Snow White



## Rewards



Ashley Austrew  
@ashleyaustrew

4: What did I earn for being good today?

Me: My love and affection.

4: [cries] I don't want that!

12:57 AM - 2 May 2016

70 166

## Open minded

My sister got an answer ~~wrong~~ right

The question was "Which one of these is not like the other?"

The answer was multiple choice.

A. Dog B. Cat C. Table D. Human.

She answered D. Human.

The "correct" answer was C. Table.

Obviously the teacher marked it wrong. And sent it home to mother. As we were slightly confused as to why she thought a table had anything to do with the other answers, we asked her about it. She was sad and confused. Her response was quite simple. "All of them have 4 legs, except the human."

## Winning



Syren Pan  
@SyrenPan

Follow

My daughter - 5 years old:

"I'm not cheating. I'm only helping myself win." #kids

#parenting #kidssaythedardestthings

2:08 PM - 19 Aug 2016

1 6

## Late



dadmissions  
@Dadmissions

Follow

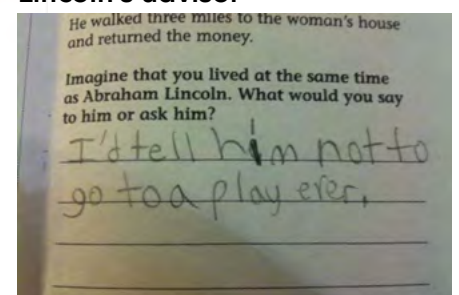
dad: "come on, you guys are LATE!!!!"

11yo: "you should have started YELLING at us earlier!"

6:37 PM - 30 Jun 2016

133 258

## Lincoln's advisor



## Bad guys



James Breakwell  
@XplodingUnicorn

6-year-old: Why do bad guys always try to take over?

Me: They want to be in charge and make all the rules.

6: Why don't they become moms?

11:59 PM - 29 Aug 2016

843 2,686



问创  
VENTURE



# TeachBetter

*Confident Communication*

10 May

12 May

17 May

19 May

**Register for free!**  
5-6pm China Time  
[mary@ventureeducation.org](mailto:mary@ventureeducation.org)



**Would you like to contribute to the next issue of the  
TeachBetter Newsletter in May?**

If you have an event to share, a question for our Hidden Head,  
Agony Column, or anything else you think we might like to  
include, please contact: [mary@ventureeducation.org](mailto:mary@ventureeducation.org)



Venture Education empowers education in  
China through research, events, professional  
development and student activities.



[Follow us on LinkedIn](#)