

Learning by Doing



Creating global citizens through experiential education. *By Sonia Cahill*

Aristotle once said, "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." As a young child, learning by experience is second nature to us. For instance, riding a bike or learning to brush your own teeth are skills that are acquired through experience and experimentation, thought and reflection.

In recent years, experiential learning programs have been growing in popularity in schools around the world. WISS's secondary school principal Jaia Tucker explains that students need to actually do things for themselves to learn. "As educators, we're essentially guiding children to be good human beings. They need life experience to develop self confidence."

Terence Dayes, secondary school coordinator at YCIS Shanghai, says, "Applying learning to real life situations reinforces understanding in ways that extend beyond what is learnt within the classroom. Experiential learning takes all forms in modern curricula. From school excursions to developing countries, enterprise courses that foster small business skills, and robotics and environmental clubs, all of these programs, combined with classroom learning, broaden horizons and prepare students for an increasingly globalized world.

Invaluable experience

There is an amazing array of experiential learning opportunities available in China. From cultural immersion programs to out-

door adventures, students from Shanghai's international schools are traveling to remote corners of China and beyond, to learn about themselves and the world around them. But what is the difference between a family vacation and an experiential learning trip?

Tania Mansfield, deputy primary school principal at WISS, explains that school trips without Mom or Dad teach children independence, organizational skills, social skills and responsibility, both for themselves and each other. "Excursions are entirely planned with the children in mind. Next month, our fifth graders will fly to Xi'an for four days where they will take part in a diverse range of activities designed to bring

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the history of the city to life, including an interactive tour around the ancient city wall and an investigative tour of the Terracotta Warriors. It's a fantastic opportunity to learn more about themselves and our host country. They will also visit a local school to develop community connections and learn about the lives of students at the school, while also imparting some of their own culture on the local students."

Frances, a YCIS Year 10 student, describes a sense of empowerment after joining her school's trip to Tanzania as part of their World Classroom program, an initiative designed to expose students to the culture and history of regions and countries beyond Asia. "I am thankful for this opportunity to push my limits and to broaden my perspectives. I believe that becoming more culturally aware is a crucial part of becoming a global citizen, and having experiences like the World Classroom program that encourage cultural acceptance and appreciation are important steps towards promoting global harmony."

Inspire, empower, engage

Experiential education provider the JUMP! Foundation offers programs that address leadership and global citizenship for youth. "We inspire young people through experiential education, empowering them to be passionate community leaders, and engaging them in personal, community, and global development projects," says Joanie Wang, partnership development manager for the non-profit social enterprise.

Over the past eight years, JUMP! has worked with more than 15,000 young people across four continents, including students from Concordia International School, Shanghai American School, and Shanghai Community International School.

Jeff Rosen, middle school principal at SAS Pudong, says JUMP! has helped to define and develop their experiential learning programs and also kickstart their school year on a high note. "For the past three

years, JUMP! has run a community day at our school that has ensured the beginning of the school year is marked with positive relationships and a sense of belonging for all our students. It's important to make a big school 'feel small!'"

Concordia students have also undertaken programs, including an NGO experience working with a migrant school in Beijing, as well as participating in adventure programs, trekking along unrestored sections of the Great Wall, and experiencing a different pace of life at a homestay in Cuandixia, a small village two hours west of Beijing.

Grooming the next generation

Part of experiential learning is developing leadership skills in students who demonstrate an interest in this area. In February, JUMP! worked with 16 students from SAS Pudong, Concordia and SCIS, training them as JUMP! junior facilitators. In March, these students facilitated workshops for educators at the 2014 Association of China and Mongolia International Schools (ACAMIS) Spring Conference, held at SCIS Pudong. Kia Hutchins, 11th Grade student from Concordia, found the training inspired her to become more involved in community leadership. For Kia, the public speaking and communication skills were the most useful part of training. "We learned the value of clear and explicit communication. I believe these skills will help me to be a better leader throughout my career."

SCIS 10th Grade student Robin Moreau learned the value of team building and teamwork while training to be a facilitator for the event. "The program taught me to be a leader by inspiring action."

Global citizenship

There's no disputing the intrinsic value of life experience. In Shanghai, our children have a myriad of opportunities at their fingertips. Programs like these develop awareness, life skills and a sense of empowerment, which will enable children to become competent global citizens throughout their adult life. 