

LAUNCHING A CAREER AFTER TEACHING IN CHINA

A COLLECTION OF EXPERIENCES AND ADVICE
PREPARED BY TEACH ENGLISH IN CHINA ALUMNI.

FOREWORD



Since 2005, we have built an extensive alumni network of individuals from across the UK and beyond who have different interests which have led them on to different career paths. One thing they all have in common however, is their experience teaching English in China.

Spending time in China as a teacher is an experience like no other, and I look forward to sharing and discussing the experience with all of you for years to come. My mission for Teach English In China has always been to make it a collection of stories and experiences and that taken together, form a valuable resource that future participants can benefit from.

This booklet embodies this by highlighting how teaching in China can lead to so many different potential careers paths. The inspiring stories by our contributors highlight that with initiative and resilience, this experience can turn into a significant steppingstone to your future career. We hope that the stories that follow will help inspire you to make the most of your time teaching in China and provide an insight into how you can turn these different experiences into something more long-term.

Having worked closely with some alumni of our programme in recent years, I'd like to share two observations about the skills you hone as a teacher in China. As a new teacher, you often find yourself needing to take actions without lots of specific guidance. This ability to take ownership of a situation and find creative solutions is something employers in all industries value greatly.

Secondly, living and working in China means you become naturally equipped to understand someone else's point of view and culture. Working through this and arriving at a greater understanding is a great asset in an increasingly globalised world.

This guide brings together advice from some of our most active alumni members, who speak honestly about their experiences in and since China, and how it's led to where they are today. I want to thank all who contributed to this booklet and have made it possible, and I hope that it serves as a valuable source to future participants.



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CONTRIBUTOR 1

IMARA LENDERS

MEDIA, BBC SCOTLAND

I first thought about going to China after Teach English In China came to my university to give a presentation about what they do. I was about to finish studying and knew that I wanted to put pursuing a career on hold for a while and go travelling. Teaching abroad seemed to be the best way to do this, and the testimonials from those who joined Teach English In China were glowing. After I joined, they found me a placement in gorgeous Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province, and there began my adventure.



While teaching may not be the permanent path you want your career to take, it provides the perfect opportunity to develop yourself and your skills, as well as the time to think about how you'd like to progress in work life.



TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

In my first year in China, I didn't know what direction I wanted my career to take just yet. But without being fully aware of it, I was still developing all of the transferable skills that I required for my current job role. Getting yourself prepared to go to China is an organisation masterclass in itself. Dealing with important documents, liaising with your school, and getting all of this done in the fastest and most efficient way can actually be quite the challenge. You may deal with strict visa guidelines, or unexpected requests from the school, such as notarisation of documents. All of these hurdles are good learning experiences for any administrative work you may take on in the future. At the very least you will learn how to present yourself and what type of language to use when talking with companies and prospective employers.

Upon your arrival, you will face creating lesson plans for your classes. When doing so you must consider the time in which you have to get through the curriculum, the ages of your students, the level at which your students are competent with English (and whether there may be differing levels of competence within the same class), how many students are in each class, etc. You may also have to account for extra time needed for more difficult lessons, or perhaps even the students getting through the work faster than expected. All of this is contributing to your development in organisation, time management, adhering to deadlines and flexibility.

RESPONSIBILITY

When you accept a role as a teacher, you are accepting responsibility for each student in your classes while they are on your time. You are responsible for ensuring that they understand your teaching, that they contribute during your class time, that they feel safe under your management and even that they have fun, as many schools will request that you play games to ensure student engagement. It might feel intimidating when you first undertake the role, but rest assured it will feel great to be successful in being responsible for more than just yourself, which was certainly my situation. To show that you can keep a room of people- children, teenagers or adults- engaged and under control is an impressive thing, especially if your desired career involves being in a position of management.

SELF DEVELOPMENT

I remember the very first lesson I had in Zhangjiajie. Fifty faces staring up at me expectantly, wondering what the next hour and twenty minutes would hold. To be honest I wasn't 100% sure either, as I had arrived at 10pm the night before, only to be told that this would be my first class (which was at 8am the following morning.) I was given no textbook (only for that particular class) and told that unfortunately I couldn't use my pre-prepared PowerPoint as the classroom only had a blackboard. The class went as well as it could go on a heavy dose of jetlag. As much as I thought I had blown it as the bell rang to signal the end, the kids smiled at me and waved as they left. They weren't laughing and wondering who this imposter was! My point is that you are given a wonderful array of keen and interested learners, and you can make so much of the time that you have with them. Not only do you find out how to effectively teach a language, but you hone your presentational skills, self-confidence and ability to ask and answer questions in the most concise manner. Excellent communication is a skill that can apply to any job role you might seek.

Another thing to be considered is that you will have to make new friends, unlike high school, college or university where people often have at least one or two people they already know. I was very lucky in Zhangjiajie, in that the three other foreign teachers were all girls around my age. It was actually trickier in my second year in China where there were more foreign teachers, but I was definitely the youngest. I made the most of this and sought to learn as much from their experiences as possible, in order to better my own. From both of my years in China, I have made friends for life.

TIME MANAGEMENT

This is an important one. Depending on which level of education you teach, you'll have varying amounts of free time. More so if you're teaching at a college, which I did. It's important to use that to explore your surroundings and make the most of your time away, but I would recommend also regularly taking time to put research into what exact career path you'd like to take, and if you're not sure, then honing various relevant skills is always a plus. There are countless online courses, many of them free, that you can put time into and that would reward you when you begin the jobseeking process.



It took me a long time to realise that Editing and Post-Production was the field that I was most interested in within the media industry. When I got back home I started putting together acting showreels for. But once I did, I started doing things as simple as watching YouTube videos on editing techniques and downloading free software to practise cutting on. When I got back home I started putting together acting showreels for people as further practise, but I realised that even that was something I could've been doing that back in China. There are so many things that you can do that don't require being in the country you'd like to end up working in. The Internet is a great thing! You can even take advantage of the fact that equipment is often cheaper on websites like Taobao (essentially Chinese Amazon) and stock up on what might be much more costly back home, like gimbals and tripods.



AFTER CHINA

After I returned from China and finished up with travelling, it took me about four months of sending out CVs, visiting production companies, getting advice, work experience and odd jobs before I landed a proper media role, which was Production Runner for the Scottish BBC soap opera, River City. I had been in contact with several people from my university course while I was finishing up in China so that I could work out the best way to get into the job market when I returned home. Still some time is needed after you get back just to settle in and work through the reverse culture shock (it can be a thing!) I used the time to catch up with family and old friends as well as getting my name out into the media world and making contacts. I can't stress how important it is to make contacts in this industry, so do your research, put your CV online, get LinkedIn- all that good stuff. I was lucky to know someone who works part-time at River City, so they recommended me to the Production Manager who asked me to do three days cover that November. I was asked to replace the role the next February.

Leading up to that, I was very conscious of what employers might think of two years away doing something unrelated to media work. While it was perfect for me, would it put me at a disadvantage? Ultimately, no. In university, if I didn't meet a deadline, it was only myself that was affected by it. However as a teacher, if I missed a deadline for creating a lesson plan, the class would have no lesson and the students would fall behind in their learning, which would put them behind in their exam preparation, which would reflect badly on me and thus the school. This is an example of something I saw reflected in my BBC role: the potential domino effect of being underprepared. Thus the time away might feel irrelevant to what you want to do in future, but you will find more links that you expect. I'm entirely confident that I wouldn't be able to do half as good a job in the runner role if I had taken it without having taught in China beforehand.

FINAL THOUGHTS

While teaching English abroad is certainly growing in popularity, it still stands out on a CV. To be able to jet off to the other side of the world without friends and in most cases, without too much grasp of the local language, is no mean feat. It gives the impression of an interesting, adaptable person who doesn't mind a challenge. And it's a great talking point in an interview! To use a personal example, I was once asked in an interview how I would deal with a manager who had a very different working style to myself. Of course I drew on my experiences in China, where the management style is almost the opposite of here. Things can be very last minute, you are expected to be flexible and independent (I'll hark back to my first day: no textbook, no projector, no classroom assistant...) You may be told on a Friday that you're working that weekend due to public holidays, and you just have to roll with it. And if you're sharing classes with another teacher, they may have a very different teaching style to you, but you will still have to communicate in order to make sure that the students are getting the right amount of coverage in each area of the curriculum. It's not your place to say that you disagree with their teaching style, whether you think their classes are too boring, or too lax- it doesn't matter. You must cooperate. And this is a great thing to learn for any of your future endeavours.



I mentioned this already, but in media, television and film, contacts are everything. I was lucky in that I didn't have to go through an interview process for my role as Production Runner, nor for my progression to Edit Assistant, so I didn't have to worry too much about making sure that my employer knew just how great my time away was for my work ethic/style here. But I try to make sure as often as possible that I reiterate what I've learned in my time away- I meet my deadlines because I've learned how to manage my time well, I get on well with my colleagues because I learned the value of teamwork, and I work hard because I now know that's the only way to get the most out of what you do.

if you have any questions for Imara about her teaching experience or chosen career path, she will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with her at: imaralenders22@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTOR 2

FABIENNE KING

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER, UK

In China, I worked as a Kindergarten and Grade One teacher in the Wujiang District of Suzhou. I decided to apply for Teach English in China after University because I was interested in living and working in a foreign culture and I was keen to see more of the world. Although I was interested in teaching, gaining real world experience in a classroom appealed to me more than going straight onto further study and teacher training. Teach English in China provided the perfect opportunity to gain valuable teaching experience whilst exploring a beautiful and vibrant new culture, language and country.



Suzhou is a small city by Chinese standards (although it's about the size of London) and it's famed for its picturesque canals, gardens and well-known education system. I was drawn to Suzhou's combination of traditional Chinese architecture and dazzling skyscrapers, it's historic interest in the arts and its reputation for beauty. I liked the idea of living in an expat friendly city, with good links to Shanghai and western comforts, but which still felt more traditional. It was a fantastic city to live in and I enjoyed my time in Suzhou immensely.



TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Teaching in China gave me useful skills and experience for pursuing a career in Education. As part of my job, I planned and taught lessons, interacted with students, parents and other teaching staff, prepared resources, choreographed dance routines, led assemblies and became involved with school events such as Children's Day. I also travelled outside of work, studied Chinese and experienced many new situations. All of these opportunities in China can help you develop skills for a career back in the UK.

Communication is more challenging in China than in the UK due to cultural differences and language barriers. Therefore, the knowledge and confidence you gain communicating is a widely transferable skill. Employers value individuals who can express their ideas, needs and knowledge clearly and politely. In China, I became better at simplifying my language, when I wasn't understood in English, and using hand gestures or alternative phrases to aid communication. These are all things I also do as a classroom teacher in the UK and I quickly learnt not to over complicate my instructions to students. When speaking to my team, I also learnt to be more aware of different ways of communicating in a work environment. For example, Chinese culture is less direct than in UK. Important information was relayed in what felt like casual-conversation and rules were expressed more through suggestion. For example, my supervisor would say I should 'perhaps' or 'maybe' do something. This nearly always meant that I absolutely should but was typical of a softer, less confrontational way of speaking.

I work in London now and accepting that people express their needs differently is crucial to understanding different social contexts, working with parents from different communities and providing pastoral support to students.

A teacher friend of mine also uses the Chinese she learnt while with Teach English In China to run a Chinese club. So whether it's putting your language awareness to the test or literally learning a new language, the benefits and possibilities for future work are clear.

One of the most useful experiences was quite simply, spending so much time in front of a class. Before China, I was quite shy, and I remember trembling in front of seminar rooms when I had to give presentations. However, teaching abroad made me more confident. I was under more scrutiny in my day to day life and because I looked different, I became quickly used to increased attention. I stopped being fazed by stares and I got used to speaking in front of lots of people. At the same time, I realised that teaching feels like a different kind of performance to being on stage. While you are naturally a central figure in the classroom, teaching isn't actually about you. It's about the students you are teaching. You need to be good, in order for them to succeed, but at the end of the day you are there to facilitate their growth and learning. Teaching abroad will help develop your confidence and public speaking skills.

Teaching and planning lessons also gave me valuable knowledge about activities and behavioural management techniques that do and don't work in an EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom. My role in China, as a foreign teacher, was primarily to get children talking. The Chinese English teachers tended to focus on written language and grammar tests and thus, I could concentrate on a more play based, interactive teaching style. I used to play a lot of vocabulary games involving recall, flash cards and actions. As a Grade 1/Kindergarten teacher I also sang a lot of songs with the students and I learnt the value of simple, fun and easy to follow activities. In the EFL classroom, less can be more and it is useful as a teacher in the UK to know that not all effective lessons need to be resource heavy. Planning and teaching lessons in China gives you time to experiment with your teaching style and learn what works for you and for different students. In terms of pedagogy, it is also interesting to see how schools in different countries work and how teaching styles vary.

Finally, teaching in China will allow you to hone your sense of assessments because you need to know if the children in your class have learnt what you are teaching them. To do this, I was expected to design a formal written and verbal examination for my Grade 1 students at the end of the year. The purpose of this was to let the school, students and parents know whether the student had passed my class or not. However, as a teacher you also assess your classes more informally throughout the year and even during lessons for a variety of reasons. Sometimes you will be aiming to see how much children already know to help you plan lessons which are the right level of difficulty for them. Sometimes you will be seeing who in the class has mastered that week's target vocabulary and whether the class are ready to move on to the next topic. This can be done through asking children questions or even playing games and seeing which children are confident using the target English in a fun, non-pressured environment.



AFTER CHINA

To become a qualified teacher in the UK there are various routes you can take such as University or School based PGCEs (post graduate diploma in education) or routes such as Teach First. All have pros and cons and you can find out more about them through the Department of Education, open days or websites such as Get into Teaching. However, most courses require an undergraduate degree, a minimum of 10 days teaching in a UK school and for you to pass professional skills tests in Maths and English. Teaching in China gives you fantastic experience, but you can get the UK requirement for teaching in a UK school through volunteering or working as a teaching assistant.

It is also important during your final weeks in China to get a police check verifying your good conduct whilst abroad. This is to show you don't have a criminal record. You can do this easily in China by going to a local notary office. They can also translate a copy of your police check into English for you and formally authenticate it. While it is possible to get this paperwork once you are back in the UK, it is significantly harder and will take a lot of effort and time. It is crucial to prove you don't have a criminal record for a job working with young or vulnerable people, so it is worth remembering to do this when your time in China comes to an end.

if you have any questions for Fabienne about her teaching experience or chosen career path, she will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with her at: fabienneking13@gmail.com

In my interview for a Primary PGCE position, I talked about my experiences teaching abroad and found it provided abundant examples for ways I could show my knowledge and passion for teaching as well as the challenges I had overcome. For my course in particular (different training providers vary slightly on the full interview process), I had to take an additional maths exam, private and group interviews and I also had to give a presentation to a small group of candidates. For my presentation, which was about 'powerful learning experiences', I taught the room how to count to 10 in Chinese. The hand gestures for this are different than counting in English so it let me talk about the importance of movement in aiding memory. I could also tell anecdotes about how memory is aided by necessity and genuine interest because I learnt Chinese whilst living in a non-English speaking country. Certainly, counting to ten was crucial to help me find bus, buy vegetables and order food. My time in China helped me with material and it helped me stand out from other candidates.

Once I was on my PGCE, I think teaching abroad made me feel more confident in a classroom than students who had only spent the required ten days. Having time out, after my undergraduate degree was also in itself beneficial. There is no reason why you can't become a teacher straight away but a PGCE is very challenging. Many people say that the first two years of teaching are the hardest and the working hours during a PGCE are notoriously long. I think, had I not built some resilience abroad and had some time to learn more about myself, this year would have been more difficult. Likewise, the shorter working hours in China showed me that I did really like being a teacher- an important thing to remember when your knee deep in paperwork, stressed out and sleep deprived as a student teacher.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Teaching is a fantastic job and it is a pleasure to work with young people whether in China or the UK. However, I found being a TEFL teacher was significantly less all-consuming than teaching in the UK. As such, it acted as a fantastic introduction to the profession. Teaching in China gives you a great space and freedom to learn about teaching and to develop your teaching skills.

CONTRIBUTOR 3

KEIRAN JONES

CIVIL SERVANT, UK

Wuhan is a rapidly developing city of growing interest around the globe. As one of the less obvious major city choices, it was perfect for what I wanted to take away from China; namely a more immersive China experience without the degree of Western influence apparent in more famous locations.

The Teach English In China programme was therefore the perfect opportunity for me to go to Wuhan to get the above, but to do so with connections allowing a quicker settling-in period, a comforting level of security and a new network for exploring opportunities.



At the time I enrolled on the programme I had no ideas for my future, other than the experience I had signed up for. There was no 5-year plan for me, a question I always disliked. I thought learning Chinese and discovering a different culture would be important for my future. But beyond that? This was therefore a chance to explore my interests and try as many new things as possible.



TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

There's something quite special about entering an entirely different society. The naivety, unfamiliarity and excitement are a driving force, and the entrepreneurial buzz in China is infectious.

It makes being active and seeking out experiences much easier than when living in the predictable setting of home. Do not underestimate the life skills learned in situations unlocked by saying yes, both to others and yourself.

The combination of a professional teaching position and the multitude of extra work and experiences on offer allows for self-discovery, but to turn this into a career direction requires reflection. To then develop this into wider employability requires analysis of lessons learned and the melding into a personal narrative of growth. This doesn't just happen, but takes time in thought. All tasks at work, both major and minor, should be analysed and recorded. For government jobs, you'll be happy you did (more on this later).

For example, I took on extra work tutoring several Chinese civil servants at the Hubei foreign office, and their children. I gained an insight into provincial politics and Hubei's interests in Brazil, but also the aspirations these people had for their families. I learned some of these people cared nothing for a country's culture or their language; only its resources. And I also learned how to develop relationships with such people and about the reciprocity that's so important in China.

As previously mentioned, the programme allowed me to establish myself in China. It provided a network which blossomed but there are other important points to take note of. Mixing with Chinese people, learning their culture and conversing in the language made it possible for others to trust me and offer new opportunities.

Speaking Chinese will not help find work in itself. However, it highlights to others the ability to learn. A previous employer said learning the language was a factor in taking me on. Combined with other skills, and this point must be stressed, it will improve long-term prospects. Languages must be supported with professional experience to be of use. Finding time to learn whilst on the programme can provide both of these.

This isn't a quick process though. In a year it is possible to reach a high standard of Chinese, but it requires full immersion, a degree of confidence and taking every opportunity to test yourself. Learning to read and write in this time means practising at least an hour every day. You can see how quickly waking hours are spent!

Finally, speaking and reading Mandarin opened up life experiences I would have missed otherwise. It enabled me to travel to far flung towns in China, to make my way to mountain villages without a vehicle in sight, to try all kinds of different dishes and more. These are some of my fondest memories.



AFTER CHINA

This experience highlighted to me my interest in politics and foreign affairs. It also allowed a way to present this experience as part of my development. Here I was managing time effectively, carrying out my full and part-time work. I was also managing relationships with people of widely different backgrounds – schoolchildren and government officials.

Now expand this out to all the work I was involved in China through accepting or seeking my own opportunities. In my 4-5 years in the country, my work experiences were from the ludicrous to the fruitful. I've been a travel agent, a coffee salesman, wedded couples as a priest, a survival instructor, a bodyguard, a sports coach, a personal assistant, business founder, an extra, a presenter at events and of course, an English teacher.

Some of these were as ridiculous as they sound. But, the life experiences learned, the situational awareness gained and the working with limited information and structure have all benefited me. In a recent appraisal, I was awarded a bonus for my contribution to the project team. Reasons cited were my maturity in coping in high pressure situations, providing high-quality outputs with limited information, strong team-player and willingness to adapt quickly to new tasks. These are all related to my development in China.

It was somewhat natural that I ended up seeking opportunities as a civil servant. An interest which particularly matured during my time in China was for politics and how state and provincial-level decisions can influence policy, economic growth, foreign relations and culture. I found myself analysing everything and comparing it to home. It unravelled some deeply held biases which I took for granted, but also helped me identify and strengthen my belief in ideas such as the UK democratic way of life.

So how to focus an interest, channel professional experience and turn it into employability? No matter how insignificant an experience may seem, it is useful to record it and the lessons learned. Evaluators for government roles in the UK demand detailed examples which match their core competencies or success profiles (which can be found online), particularly if applying for higher grade positions or graduate schemes.

They encourage the use of SMART or STAR models for presenting examples. In the process driven world of the civil service, presenting information this way allows the evaluator to judge your answers more easily with the scoresheet. Regardless of what career direction you take, these models are great for structuring answers and experience in a coherent and organised fashion.

SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. For applications it is best used to discuss how objectives were achieved, but it is also used in government to set objectives.

For example, I wanted to attain the specific goal of HSK 5 (Chinese language proficiency test). Learning 1685 characters and practicing listening, speaking and reading for a set number of hours helped me achieve this. I was at HSK 4 and already knew 1064 characters. It was realistic to expect I could achieve this goal in 5 months if I studied reading for an hour a day, listened to a half hour podcast and spoke to whoever would listen to me. It turned out I did a bit extra and achieved my goal in 4 and a half months.

STAR stands for Situation, Task, Actions and Results. This will be more familiar when writing answers in applications. For graduate schemes or management roles there will be questions relating to the core competencies in which you'd answer using STAR. To name a few of these competencies: Seeing the Big Picture, Leading and Communicating, Managing a Quality Service.

More information can be found on the government website. Success Profiles will also become more widely used overtime, although as of May 2019 both these and core competencies are in circulation. If you intend to work for government, it is a good idea to start using this information and record your actions as they happen. Don't let them slip out of memory.

Evaluators are not officially allowed to compare you with other candidates and must not make a decision based on a personal, subjective opinion. When marking interviews, evaluators will be using a scoresheet and either the core competencies or success profiles as guidance. Interviews are therefore not personal. There was very little about my life and all questions related to a professional setting. It is beneficial to look at the core competencies and practice answers before an interview.

In more detail, you might be asked how you affected change in a team or at the workplace. With a year on the programme it's likely you'd have experience of such behaviour. Think encouraging the office to save paper and therefore costs and environment, or teaching methodology you shared with colleagues. These may seem natural and nothing to gloat about, but put them into the STAR format of answer and it shows the employer another skill.

It shows the ability to understand the significance of minor actions and making a positive impact at work. It shows a structured way of thinking to presenting information. These are exactly the kind of examples the civil service look for, and the only way they can evaluate an individual. Just remember to record as you go so not to be scratching around for examples!

FINAL THOUGHTS

I am at the beginning of my government career and the opportunities open to me are vast. Not only are roles in all the different ministries available, but also different functions such as project management or commercial (essentially procurement and supply). There are plenty of jobs going in the latter, and excellent graduate training schemes.

I am being trained as a procurement specialist and will gain industry-wide, internationally accepted qualifications. With my Chinese language ability, I will be transferable to departments like the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, where I have wanted to work but previously failed due to a lack of government experience.

In summary, if you're about to embark on a teaching placement in China, I highly recommend that you explore, explore, explore, take opportunities for extra learning, record everything you do, even the seemingly insignificant, push yourself at work beyond the minimum – you'll learn more about yourself, and last but not least; enjoy yourself and stay positive!

if you have any questions for Keiran about his teaching experience or chosen career path, he will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with him at: keiranjones2000@hotmail.com

CONTRIBUTOR 4

NICOLLE CHENJERA

SALES CONSULTANT, SHANGHAI

2015 was the year I decided to move to China with Teach English In China. I was initially based in a small city called Tongling in Anhui Province. At the time the city was still a developing copper-mine town with barely any foreigners living there. The local people were unable to speak English nonetheless the city grew on me and I loved it.

Of course, there were times I longed to see foreign faces, so I often spent my free time travelling to different cities. One city I visited a lot was Shanghai. I fell in love with Shanghai hence the decision to move and I have been living here since 2016. I

specifically chose the Teach English In China programme because, the

application process was swift, Arnold personally contacted me promptly answering all my questions and the package deal was nicely organised and well planned out. Undeniably I did not have problems and for that I am grateful.





TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Use China as a chance to have a fresh start, discover more about yourself. You will have a lot of time as a teacher to ponder on what you want to do after you are done teaching. Seeing my young students grow and develop definitely reminded me of how far I'd come and the more I was around my students the more inspired I became, to keep growing and developing. I often enjoyed travelling and meeting new people learning about how far they have come or where they came from. This inspired me a lot.

After 3 years of teaching I realised as much as I loved teaching, I needed to go back to what my first love was which was Psychology. I longed to find a field in psychology which suit me best. So, I started to search and find what my niche was, and I realised living in a financial city, business development and the occupational psychology of building a business in China really intrigued me. However, at that moment I realised I did not have the relevant skills and experience to work in business development. It was when I was rejected in all my interviews, I realised I needed to change something. Hence, I decided to study Mandarin while looking for an internship or part time job. That is exactly what I did.

I cannot stress the importance of networking to career development. One of China's fundamental believes is that of Guanxi - building relationships with people for business or personal benefits. I started to meet people outside of my friendship circle and teaching environment. I attended different young professional events, meeting many people and different organisations. The more people I met the more knowledge I gained, especially about how they reached the stage they are at. Networking not only helped me professionally but in my personal life too; for example, the people who had been in Shanghai longer than me were able to give me helpful advice and information e.g. best hospitals, housing agents, job application sites etc.

My goal was to eventually go back home knowing what it is I wanted to do for my career. I didn't move to China aimlessly, I moved to find myself. As a new graduate I had lost myself and forgot the path I was on and the reasons behind it. I was lost and I knew I needed to find myself. I didn't know what I found passion for. So, I set myself a goal that after one year I should know what it is I wanted to do then return home. Three years later my goals led to more goals and my career options changed numerous of times until I fell into where I belonged. I had spent my time in China travelling and meeting people with different experiences and soaking the information as I went by. If I truly hadn't been open minded and outgoing, I wouldn't have been where I am today.

When I started searching for a more cooperate job, a lot of employers did not give me a chance, because all I had was teaching experience and I did not have a proficient skill in Mandarin. I didn't do any extracurricular activities to boost my skill set language being the biggest. I applied for so many jobs and I was rejected not because I was a teacher but because I didn't have anything more to offer. Thus, I decided to take a year out of work to learn Mandarin while searching for me job prospects. Until one day an old friend contacted me asking if I would have been interested in shooting an ad for her company for free which I agreed. I went to participate for the whole day for unpaid work. It turned out her boss was there on that day and some of the colleagues. In the end they really appreciated me helping with the add.

After numerous telephone interviews all rejecting me, I nearly gave up. Instead I texted the old friend that had invited me for the video shoot to ask for advice. At that moment she told me her company were looking for an English sales rep and she asked if I wanted to apply. Which I did, but I had no hope because of my lack of experience. However, to my surprise they immediately offered me the job based off my personality and energy at the shoot. It has me thinking that; If I had not met the group of people while travelling, I would have never been introduced to the girl whom 3 years later contacted me to join her company campaign video shoot. Furthermore, if I had not gone to the shoot because it was unpaid, I wouldn't have made an impression on the team and the boss. Months later they offered me a full-time position in their company, and I am excited to be part of the team.

I am now working for a dental health start-up company. I am really happy about how far I've come and the 3+ years I spent in teaching learning core essential skills which now help me daily at work. I cannot emphasise enough how effective skills acquired in teaching are.



AFTER TEACHING

What helped me and what I found effective in China was practicing ‘Guanxi’ which is the mutual beneficial relationships you build with others and the rest followed.

When I moved to China my goal was to find myself and what it was, I wanted to pursue as a career option. I finally realised after spending so much time in Shanghai the business world made an impression on me and I wanted to understand how it worked! I decided to stop teaching in 2018 to pursue my dream to find a cooperate job in Shanghai. Living in the city really inspired me to want to wake up and go sit in an office with a nice view and have a different goal to and challenge each day. I wanted to not only live in the city but to experience the hustling and bustling lifestyle. I had thoroughly enjoyed my time as teacher and learnt what I needed. However, being young my dreams and goals were changing fast and rapidly. I needed to explore these options while I could.

As mentioned previously I didn’t have the best of luck when I started applying for non-teaching jobs. I understood I was underqualified for the kind of jobs I was applying for, but I was determined. Indeed, I was rejected in all my interviews, most of the interviewers always ended the conversation by offering me another teaching job. It was rather upsetting as I felt boxed, but I could only blame myself as I never took the initiative to volunteer to gain experience for other opportunities. So, then I decided it wasn’t too late, I applied to study mandarin for that September. I knew mandarin would help me be more of a valuable candidate in a company. I already knew how to speak but I couldn’t read and write.

I did so and I was accepted into the university. While at university I continued to search for jobs but with no luck. However, during this period something extra ordinary happened, when I realised the little steps I took while out in China would have helped me land the job position, I am in now. From English teacher to Sales consultant.

How did I do it? I simply put myself out there, I remained open minded to travel and meet people along the way, shared contact details. Whenever and wherever there were events, I attended and built a network. Years later a girl I had befriended through a group of people I met while hiking mount Huashan as mentioned above contacted me asking for a favour for her company as they needed a model for a campaign video they were shooting. Months later they offered me a full-time position. The biggest lesson I have learnt while out in Shanghai was the importance of networking. I built relationships with strangers who became good friends and in turn helped me find the path to where I needed to be. I was open to working for free to gain experience and I let my hard work show. A different way of doing things from the west but again I was open minded to try new things if it meant I would grow as an individual.

My teaching experience however never was not in vain. I learnt about the importance of time, patience, organisation, communication and dedication. All these key skills have helped my transition to the business world smoother. Having worked with Chinese teachers helped me better understand how healthy working relationships are manifested here in China.

Looking over my resume, it may have seemed odd to for one to want to pursue a career in sales having had more experience in teaching. However, with my experience I have learnt there are many parallels between the two occupations that are of advantage.



FINAL THOUGHTS

There are many reasons why I believe being an educator equipped me with skills that can help execute the sales process. For example, having spent time helping students understand things with which they were unfamiliar, gave me a greater chance of turning them into customers. Furthermore, I quickly understood that treating all students the same was a sure path to failure (same for customers). Thus, I regularly adapted my lesson plans to meet the needs of my classroom. Therefore, to be an effective teacher, it was important for me to remain current in all these areas such as my students learning styles/traits, school curriculum etc.

The same is true in sales. During my time working for the company, I understood that effective sales reps needed to stay one step ahead of prospects, and this required staying current on trends and keeping skills sharp. These are just mere examples of why I believe my teaching experience is relevant in wide variety of job vacancies.

CONTRIBUTOR 5

PETROS DJAKOURIS

CO-FOUNDER & CEO OF BEHIVE, BEIJING

During the programme I worked in Beijing, one of China's most buzzing, lively and... populated metropolises! After graduating from Nottingham University, I planned to take a gap year and maybe grasp an additional language, therefore teaching in China appeared like a great choice! Little did I know that through this experience I would discover my passion for education and that until this very day I would still be based in Beijing, almost four years after setting my foot here.





TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Regardless of your career plans after completing the programme, a suggestion would be to study Chinese as much as you can in the limited time you have. Try to at least become conversational before leaving the country. You can achieve this in less than 9 months with 4-6 hours of weekly classes and self-practice. Having an extra language under your belt can help you differentiate yourself from other applicants and open up doors in other industries or roles.

Another tip to develop some key career skills is to immerse yourself in the local culture. This will not only reinforce your language learning but also help you to hone your cross-cultural competences and empathy, qualities which are deemed important in today's workplace. No matter how simple it might sound - believe me, it's not - try to have as many Chinese friends as you can and taste all of the local food or drinks they might offer you. Developed cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, etc. already have large expat populations so there will be a lot of things to do even without speaking the local language. Networking and entrepreneurship gatherings, language mixers, dance classes, professional and personal development events, you will be surprised with how many choices you will have. Do choose wisely though and nonetheless try to hang out with locals to experience and understand China from their own perspective.

Having said that, during the programme, I have been blessed to meet incredible people from all around the world who have inspired but also helped me with building my career path. If you have a specific future career trajectory in mind, then you have plenty of time and resources to be strategic with the type of skills or connections you can build while teaching in China. Utilise this time to read, take online courses, and attend or organize events that will support your personal and professional development. Do you want to become fluent in Mandarin or dream of becoming a programmer, graphic designer, blogger or even an online celebrity? China could be the place where you can achieve some of your goals. There are no limits as long as you have a robust VPN. Also, whether you enjoy posting on social media or not, a piece of advice would be to be active on both WeChat (the most popular messaging app in China) and western SNS. Remind your friends back home that you are based in China and that you are doing something unique and unconventional. You never know where the next business, employment or personal growth opportunity could come from. Building your personal brand on WeChat could also help you create new friendships, practice Chinese, bring you more professional opportunities and make the most of your time in China.

AFTER TEACHING

After teaching for 10 months in China, I had the dilemma of either going back to the UK for a master's program or stay here and improve my Chinese. I decided that it would be a better investment of my time and money, at that time, to stay in Beijing and undertake an intensive Chinese course for a year. After half a year in during the Chinese program, I was determined to stay in China for work afterwards. Therefore, I attended all of the job fairs that I could, took the initiative to organize career events, and translated my CV in Chinese.

This effort resulted in securing two internships, one in the financial arm of a Chinese conglomerate, and another in the marketing department of a technology startup. What I highlighted from my experience in the Teach English In China program was the resourcefulness that I had to demonstrate while teaching excited young students and the organizational skills that I developed by preparing weekly and monthly lesson plans. My conversational Chinese also helped me build rapport with the recruiters during the interview process. Thus, I urge you to take full advantage of the free Chinese classes that your school could have on offer and even invest in having a private tutor.



FINAL THOUGHTS

After working for almost two years at the tech startup, I recently resigned to focus on building BeHive; an education platform that connects college students with professional development opportunities. In two short years, we have organized so far multiple job fairs in Beijing and helped more than 4000 international students to develop career skills and become more employable. I am grateful and lucky to have participated in the Teach English In China program. It has played a significant role for me to develop this passion for education and I am very privileged to be working with the programme to facilitate the professional development for some of their teachers in China.

Finally, the way I would emphasize my Teach English In China experience in future interviews would depend on the job or industry I am applying for. Teaching or experiencing China might not be explicitly related to your aspiring future career. Nonetheless, identify all of the links possible and explain how this unique experience helped you develop the skills and character to bring value and fresh ideas to your chosen field or company.

if you have any questions for Petros about his teaching experience or chosen career path, he will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with him at: pdjakouris1@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTOR 6

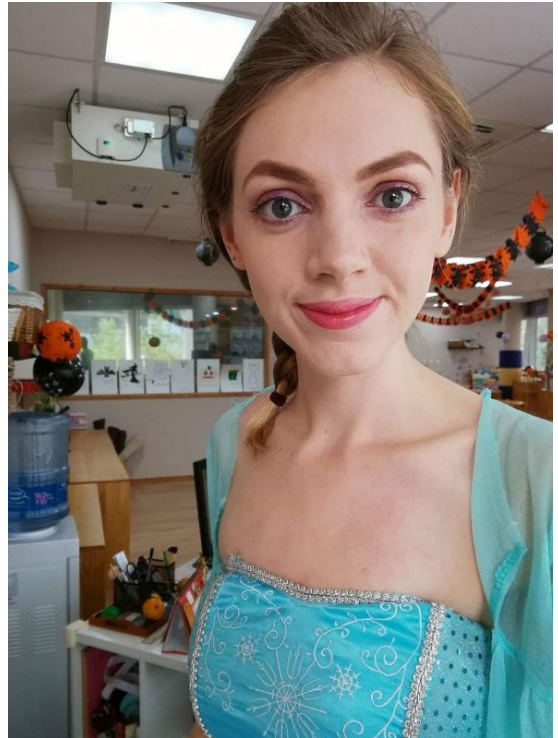
NICOLA BURTON

PGCERT EDUCATION, SHANGHAI

I applied to Teach English In China in 2016 to teach primary school in Shanghai after speaking to them at my uni's career fair. After I completed my undergrad I wanted to get some experience teaching and wanted to do some traveling so thought this would be the perfect opportunity.

I think it has been fantastic that the programme itself offered me lots of ways to expand my experiences. I also felt that in my spare time I additionally had lots of opportunities to develop further. As well as working at schools Monday to Friday teaching various classes I also got extra opportunities to do open classes in front of teachers, parents and local education authorities.

I believe this gave me chances to have my work critiqued to receive useful feedback and to gain personal development about public speaking; teaching a class of children with adults at the back watching you/making notes is a quite nerve wracking experience I must say! I gained a lot of confidence through these experiences even though I am sure I wouldn't have said I felt positive about them the night before. I also got the opportunity to be involved in interesting side projects, for example I was recorded for an APP teaching English. I also taught in a high school for one year where I got to teach a class in Business English. I think all these different experiences really added something unique and different to my CV that gave it something to stand out.





TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

I took on the extra part time options from Teach English in China and blogged during my time on the programme. Not only did this serve as a great communication tool with my friends and family but also developed skills in an ever growing social media world. It offered a chance to express my experience with something tangible for my CV that future employees could read.

After working for two years with the school in Shanghai I changed jobs and began working for a Montessori kindergarten in their EC class. This was another invaluable experience and after teaching an age group that spans from 3 years old to 18 years old in the past three years I found my passion was with the younger age groups. It was also fantastic to be learning a lot about a different educational theory as well and one that particularly interested me with my background in Psychology. I am staying with this school for a second year and moving to the toddler class where I will also plan to apply with The North American Montessori Center (NAMC) to earn my Infant/Toddler (0-3 years) diploma. This qualification provides me information on child development at these ages, Montessori theory and setting up the classroom environment. I am excited to start the course and start working in the new classroom.

In my spare time I found there were lots of opportunities also to gain experience towards a certain career direction. Personally, I have been an avid volunteer for a while now and so it made sense to me to search for voluntary opportunities to pursue in my spare time.

I ended up volunteering for a children's charity and I gradually built up the roles I had within the organisation. I ended up with a role training new volunteers and then a management role. It's awesome to give back to the community and also to gain skills in training others and a management position. I found there were quite a few voluntary opportunities within different areas depending on your interests. I saw organisations working with children, animals, elderly, and homelessness to name a few. This is an awesome chance to gain experience towards your chosen career path too.

As well as different voluntary roles I found there were lots of sports teams to get involved with. Of course this is a fantastic way to make friends with others who share a common interest. In addition often these sports teams will compete nationally and sometimes internationally and therefore often have a committee with different organisational roles. This also provides a great way to gain experience and hone lots of skills such as team working, organisational, time keeping etc to add to your CV. It also gives you a great opportunity to keep fit and make new friends in your new city.

Living in China also offers the opportunity to study Mandarin. Being able to speak Chinese can provide many benefits and could open up new career paths in the future. Living in China and therefore constantly hearing Chinese and having plentiful chances to practice gives you an ideal scenario to work on your language skills. I also found there to be lots of language schools and tutors so you have many options for studying the language.



Shanghai is a busy city with lots of events and places to network. The city is home to many event organisers and party planners and because of this you often see events advertised for chances to network with others in your field/ a potential new career path. You can sign up for these events and make new contacts who can provide opportunities to work on skills you want to develop. This is of course is also a fantastic way to gain confidence in mixing with others in a professional capacity.

AFTER THE PROGRAMME

After living and working in Shanghai for almost three years now I decided to apply for my PGCert Education (International) with Nottingham University in the Shanghai cohort. It is classed as a level 7 qualification in the UK National Qualifications Framework. There's a few UK universities that offer this so you can choose a course that best suits you. Most of the course is online apart from just four days in which I have to go to a school in Shanghai. The course specialises in teaching about education from a global perspective and I believe to be especially useful in teaching in international setting.

I decided to do this to further my knowledge and improve my teaching practice. I also believe this is a fantastic way to gain confidence and push me further in my chosen career path. After this course I have more options to apply to international schools with the PGCEi. It also opens doors in other countries for me too in case I ever moved elsewhere; however the qualification does not provide QTS to work in the UK. I highly recommend the course by someone who already completed it; she believed it gave her confidence and a lot of useful knowledge.

To be accepted onto the course the application process involved an online form with various personal statement questions and a professional/academic reference. The questions were about my motivation to apply for the course, my future aspirations and what makes me a good candidate for the programme. My time on the TEIC programme and teaching in Shanghai gave me relevant and direct experiences to draw upon in the application form. I felt confident to write about my experiences in the classroom and truly felt that I am an ideal candidate for the course with relevant experience.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In total doing the PGCEi is costing me 4110 GBP however there are other options with other universities at different costs. I found people to be very helpful when discussing my options and researching online. Also for the Montessori qualification the over all cost (including shipping) is the equivalent of 1668.22 GBP* (as I write this at the current exchange rate) If this is something you would be interested in then rest assured there are options available. Three years ago, before I started this adventure, if someone told me that I'd still be living in Shanghai three years later and about to start studying for a PGCEi and a Montessori toddler qualification I wouldn't have believed them. But I am so glad this is where my journey took me!

if you have any questions for Nicola about her teaching experience or chosen career path, she will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with her at: nicolahburton@outlook.com

CONTRIBUTOR 7

LAUREN PETTIT

MARKETING, SHANGHAI

I first went to China in 2013 on the Study China Programme with the aim to explore somewhere entirely different to anywhere I'd been before. I was placed in Jinan, where I spent 3 weeks studying and exploring alongside around 20 other British students. This experience well and truly gave me the China bug, and soon after I returned home I began to explore options to get back for a longer period of time.

I found Teach English In China whilst searching through my options, and applied as soon as I could for a teaching position starting a few months after graduation. Whether it was down to fate, coincidence or luck, Jinan appeared on the list of possible placement cities, and I knew I had to choose it as my teaching location. With learning Mandarin as one of my primary aims and not wanting to be surrounded by too many opportunities to speak English, Jinan was the ideal choice for me. Home to a relatively small expat population, the city offered me very little exposure to the foreign community and instead spent much of my time with Chinese friends.

During my time in Jinan, I worked in a new primary school, which had opened only 3 years earlier. This meant I was one of two foreign teachers, who worked across 4 different grades. I was assigned Grades 1 and 2, which brought with it challenging and rewarding moments.





TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

I went into teaching in China with one main focus; to learn Chinese. Before I embarked on my teaching adventure, I was pretty certain that teaching wasn't for me. Though I thoroughly enjoyed the experience, any doubts I may have had about this were pushed aside. That's not to say I didn't benefit from it however; teaching 15 classes of 50+ primary school students teaches you a lot of new skills that can be applied in many ways both professionally and personally.

Besides the obvious time management, responsibility and communication skills I gained, I found that one of the most important lessons for me was learning to adapt to a new way of doing things. As someone who's always valued setting and keeping to a schedule, I found the last-minute changes quite hard to get used to. Just like everyone I know, I gave changing this my best shot, but I soon learnt to let things be and to go with the flow. This has helped me become much more relaxed when it comes to change, something I later realized happens even at home in the world of work.

This was just one of many things I learnt along the way. Rather than list all of these, I'll simply leave a word of advice; view every day as a new opportunity to learn and don't get bogged down by the bad days. Living and working in China isn't easy; each day brings its own challenges, but by being able to look at these as an opportunity for personal development rather than faults in the community you're in will help you hugely.

I found it useful to make a note of particularly challenging moments I faced, be it with my classes, my colleagues or my life out of school. I then took some time to think how I could use these examples in answers to competency-based interview questions to make myself stand out. Not only did this help me prepare along the way for later job applications, but it also proved vital in helping me look at what once seemed like significant problems as advantages.

Another important piece of advice would be to get as involved as possible in the local community. Looking back, I wouldn't say that I made the most of the opportunities out there for professional development whilst in Jinan. Though these were notably fewer and further between than in a city like Shanghai, the opportunity was still there, and if I could go back I would make sure to take advantage of it.

Start by finding something you love; from sports clubs, to art, to volunteering. Whatever it is you're interested in, ask around for ways you can get involved. And if it doesn't exist? Create it! You're in a country where almost anything is possible, where foreigners before you have set up their own start-ups, volunteer led organizations, networking groups and so much more. Being part of such a motivated, adventurous and encouraging community ignites a desire to get involved and carve out a path for yourself. Don't be afraid to dive right in!

By immersing yourself in the activities going on around your city, you'll not only enrich your experience tenfold, but you'll also develop skills and experience along the way that will make you effortlessly stand out in later interviews.

Lastly, if you know you want to stay in China after your year of teaching, but you want to move into a different industry, it's extremely important you get involved with the professional community. This is much easier than it may sound; start by attend networking events, which take place regularly around the larger cities. You'll soon discover a wealth of non-teaching related opportunities for foreigners. By building a professional network, you will open yourself up to a wider community and learn much more about the industry you are interested in. The saying goes just as much in China as it does elsewhere; it's who you know, not what you know. And these contacts will be just as useful in China as they will be elsewhere. So, whatever you've got in mind for later, embrace the now and build as robust a profile as you can.



AFTER THE PROGRAMME

Despite being tempted to remain in China and teach for another year, I eventually decided to return to the UK to start my career. At this time, I had no idea what field I wanted to work in, so after a few weeks of aimlessly firing off CV's to various positions in various sectors from customer service to government, I grew tired with the prospect of settling down in a 9-5 position that my heart wasn't in.

Throughout all of this, I had stayed involved with Teach English In China, attending the odd event and doing some writing. Several months after beginning my unsuccessful search for the right career path, I was offered a full-time position with Teach English In China. Right away, this seemed like the ideal opportunity and looking back I can say with certainty that it was.

Working with Arnold gave me exposure to many different aspects of running a small business. From candidate management, to visa processes and blog articles, I got the chance to try my hand at many different things, which considering I had no idea what industry I wanted to work in, couldn't have been a better opportunity for me. After just a few months of working for Teach English In China, I discovered an interest in Marketing and got the chance to work on more in-depth projects, from social media and content creation to SEO and analytics.



After a year and a half of working full-time for Teach English In China, I was offered a Marketing internship opportunity in Shanghai with a Chinese language school. It wasn't until then that I realized maybe I wasn't 'done' with China. So I accepted, and within a couple of months was headed back to on an adventure that almost felt bigger than going to Jinan for the first time.

Throughout my internship, I gained a greater knowledge of various aspects of marketing and soon decided that this was the path I wanted to take. Following my 5-month internship, I was offered a full-time position with the company as Marketing Manager – something I think my mum was very relieved about.

Since then, I've been working full-time for Hutong School Shanghai, where I've learnt unprecedented amounts. In the space of a year, I've gone from interning to creating ad campaigns, maintaining two websites, managing a team of interns...and more.

None of this would have been possible without having found Teach English In China and later working for the company. I'm really happy that I've been given the chance to continue contributing to Teach English In China since coming back to Shanghai and remaining a part of this community.

FINAL THOUGHTS

If, like I was around the time I signed up to teach English in China, you are unsure what comes after, don't worry. The experience of living and working in China is truly life-changing, and the person you are when you leave home is almost certainly a shadow of the person you'll become. For me, the most important thing is to embrace every opportunity that comes your way, try as many new things as you can, and throw yourself in to life in your city. In doing so, you'll stumble across opportunities, places and cultural quirks you would never have known existed had you not. And, most importantly you never know where these may lead you.

By taking note of different things you experience, learn or overcome, you will make your future job applications stand out from the crowd and turn what some may think is a common gap year choice into a head-turning achievement.

It can be hard when applying for your first 'real job' out of university to highlight more than one experience. For me, that's where my teaching experience in China really came in useful. Besides the actual teaching work, I was able to draw on specific situations I encountered during my time living abroad that were about the same time period, but not about the exact same thing.

Think outside the box and how you can apply the skills you gained during your time in China to the specific job descriptions you are applying for. This in itself can be a test of your creativity!

Looking back, I can say with absolute certainty that this was the case, and the skills I have gained from the experience were crucial in helping me get to where I am now. My experience of teaching in China enabled me to work closely alongside Arnold and learn about the inner workings of the business, which proved crucial in me securing my current role. I may have found a role I am happy in, but that doesn't mean the adventure is over. Even now, I live by this motto and take every day as it comes.

if you have any questions for Lauren about her teaching experience or chosen career path, she will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with her at: laurenpettit@hotmail.com

CONTRIBUTOR 7

COSTAS GEORGIU

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL COUNSEL, BEIJING

I often get asked why I left the paradise that is Cyprus to go to an unknown place so far away from home. Cyprus is a truly incredible place to live. It has 300 days of sunshine per year, people are friendly and hospitable and the food is absolutely amazing! Growing up in Cyprus though, I didn't really get the chance to interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds.



The first time that happened was when I started studying at the vibrant and international University of Manchester. The city gave me the chance to engage with people from all over the world and, as such, see things from an alternative point of view. By doing so, I realised that I wasn't just learning more about the world but I was learning more about myself too. I was developing and growing in ways that I couldn't grow back home because my environment was so much more diverse. I decided, therefore, that I wanted to go to a place I hadn't been before, to study a new language and learn about a new culture. Teach English in China provided the perfect platform for that.



TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

I have been based in Beijing for the past 3,5 years and I have to say that my personal development here has been exponential. Beijing is a city of 24 000 000 million people, coming from all over China and the rest of the world. It is no exaggeration to state that this city has something for everyone, as long as one is willing to do the digging. Regardless of whether you enjoy art, music, food, martial arts, culture, hikes, adventures, nature or people and life at large this city has it all. One only needs to be open-minded, leave preconceived notions behind and enjoy this experience for what it is, a journey of self-discovery and personal growth!

Furthermore, the Beijing expat community is extremely welcoming. People do not judge you based on your ethnicity, background or gender but instead, accept you for who you are. There are networking events that are either completely free or very cheap. You can find them pretty easily by following WeChat official accounts and being part of WeChat groups which promote them. The way you can find them is to simply ask around or get in touch with Petros or I. Attending these workshops can help you hone your communication skills, practise public speaking, harness your passion and volunteer for great causes. By doing so, you get the opportunity to work with people from different countries and further the increasingly important ability of being able to excel in a multicultural environment. Every time you get out of your door will be an opportunity to learn, expand the boundaries of your comfort zone and adapt to new environments. You will learn things you never knew existed and because of that, you will emerge a better-rounded individual, with enhanced critical thinking and a more understanding nature. Without even realising, your confidence will increase and those around you will be positively influenced.

I would further suggest to consider engaging in conversations with every opportunity, to ask questions, to learn where people come from and what their stories are. Try to listen without bias, learn what motivates others and what they want to achieve. This kind of inquisitiveness will inspire you and propel you to higher heights. It will enable you to become an explorer of possibility and reimagine your reality. You will view life in a completely different light and you will believe that what once seemed impossible is actually well within your grasp. As a consequence, you will be more able to thrive in your chosen field regardless of the path you eventually decide to take.

Simply by deciding to spend a few months in China, you show a willingness to explore, a desire to grow, a degree of adaptability and the courage to go down a less travelled path. All these are qualities that ambitious organisations want their employees to possess. You can make so much more out of this experience, though. As the teaching schedules are usually not extremely demanding you can learn Mandarin and within a year you could reach a proficiency level of HSK 3.

Every interaction you have will be an opportunity to connect and create relationships. Those relationships could evolve into friendships and opportunities. As long as you are willing to give and add value first you will eventually take. I have found both my last job, as a Management Trainee of a big Chinese conglomerate, and my current one, International Legal Counsel of an IP Law firm, through networking and relationship building. I didn't apply for them but had met the people behind the companies and through genuine conversations, we explored possibilities of collaboration which eventually came into fruition.



FINAL THOUGHTS

At the end of the day this experience, just like any other, is up to you to shape and mould. Through it you can emerge a better version of yourself, equipped with tools and abilities that will bring you closer to achieving your goal. Teach English in China was the platform through which I came to Beijing and because of the program I was able to meet incredible people and discover a different world. If you are uncertain of what you want to do later in life or simply want some time to explore I would highly recommend considering this program. If there is any way I can prove of assistance please do not hesitate to get in touch.

I hope that we will get the chance to meet somewhere in China.

if you have any questions for Costas about his teaching experience or chosen career path, he will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with him at: costasgeorgiou35@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTOR 7

NATASHA LOCK

YENQING ACADEMY SCHOLAR, BEIJING

My name is Natasha Lock, I am 23 years old and a recent graduate of History, International Relations and Mandarin Chinese from the University of Exeter. For as long as I can remember, the East has fascinated me. I have been studying Mandarin Chinese for eight years and during this period I have been interested in the etymology of Mandarin, the history of China and contemporary political status of the country.

I've been extremely lucky to have spent the past five years back and forth from China - traveling, working and studying. I started with a family trip to China in 2013 and was fascinated by the country I had set foot in.



There seemed to be an energy here that was totally different from any other country I had been to, and a real connection between the past and the present. I followed this with a government study scholarship for short programmes (one / two months) spent in Shanghai and Nanjing during my university holidays. Then in 2016, I moved to Beijing for a year to study at Peking University. Since graduating in the summer of 2018 I have stayed in Asia, first to travel, then working for a manufacturing company based down in Southern China, and now I teach at a High School in the beautiful city of Suzhou.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Teaching has been an incredible experience. It has allowed me first hand access to see how the next generation of Chinese doctors, lawyers, academics and workers have spent their teenage education. China's higher education system is truly outstanding and illustrates the countries drive for academic excellence and a well educated workforce; one reason why the nation has achieved such vast economic growth in such a short span of time. However, it has also been extremely eye opening to observe the education environment for Chinese high school students and compare this to my own experiences as a student schooled in England. For the Chinese students, their whole lives, and their whole parents lives, have been solely devoted to their academic performances with the projected goal of achieving high grades in their 'gaokao' (A level equivalent) in order to get into a top university.

学习压力, a frequently used phrase translating as study pressures, are both real and worrying. As a result, during my role as a teacher I've really tried to focus on addressing some of these issues. I try to pursue discussion based learning, study topics that require the students to 'think outside the box' and do not set my students homework.

I am also using my teaching experience in China to develop my Mandarin and fulfill my travel desires. As a teacher, you actually get a lot of free time. There are breaks between lessons and I never work later than 5pm. This leaves a lot of time to study Mandarin, go out with friends and on the weekends and numerous national holidays, travel within China. All of these will build up my experience and understandings of contemporary China, which will be useful to the further study of it.

Teaching students in China feels like a real privilege. Whilst I am employed to teach the students, I also learn a great deal from them. Leaving school everyday after work and knowing that I've made a direct difference to someone's day is extremely fulfilling and rewarding. Teaching certainly builds confidence and character. Standing in front of 50/60 teenagers for 4 hours each day demands lots of energy, organization and drive. In China, it goes far beyond teaching them information, also building the students' confidence in their oral English, their ability to debate concepts and opening their minds to the world outside of China.

AFTER THE PROGRAMME

I knew for certain that I wanted to continue studying after my undergraduate degree and was really excited when looking at potential programmes, in the UK and also abroad. I was seeking further study evaluating the rise of China and a programme that focuses on the study of China. I used the 'throw spaghetti at a wall and something will stick' philosophy and applied to many different programmes and institutions that all covered the study of China.

Three key factors were driving my plans: the high standards of learning of a leading university, the location and the cost. The location seemed very important to me, I was contemplating between staying in the UK to complete my masters or moving back to China. Also I wanted to attend a high-ranked and well-regarded institution and one of my choices was Oxbridge; however, the cost of doing a masters at Oxbridge and college fees were very high and made the reality of it quite unattainable.

I knew that the study of China, further development of my Mandarin fluency, and overall lifestyle would be better suited to a programme actually based in China. After doing some research the two China-based programmes that stood out were the Yenching Academy and Schwarzman Scholarship. I had heard of them both throughout my time at university in the UK and in China; however, I also connected the words 'extremely competitive' with them. When reading through the Yenching Academy website I was extremely impressed by the scholars' profiles and their significant achievements. I thought the programme looked absolutely incredible and right up my street; but, realistically, I applied knowing the likelihood of getting a place, with a 2% acceptance rate, would be very competitive.

It's hard to say exactly what experiences of mine they valued in terms of admissions. They have a broad selection of students, 125 places to fill and thousands of applications. On their website it states: 'Successful candidates have outstanding academic backgrounds and broad curiosity. They demonstrate strong motivation and potential to become leaders in their chosen fields. Candidates' personal statements should offer specific and persuasive explanations of how they could benefit from studying in our interdisciplinary China Studies program. Evaluation criteria include academic merit, leadership potential, international experience, and long-term aspirations.'



I submitted my CV, two academic references and a personal statement to them and kept every finger crossed. A few months later, I received email confirmation of successfully passing the first stage and now onto the interview stage. I had a Skype interview with a professor of International Relations and two of the admissions team members. I felt the interview went really well; it fully allowed me to introduce myself and I was asked some really interesting questions about my experiences and views on China and the world. I guess my total commitment to the further study of China partnered with my international experience was decisive in their offering. It is easy to talk about something you are so passionate about, so I presume this must have come across well; initially on paper and later on during the interview.

In September 2019 I will begin my next chapter in China as a Yenching Scholar at Peking University. The Yenching Academy is an elite fellowship China Studies masters programme that is fully funded. It takes 125 scholars from all over the world and teaches them in both core modules and their selected academic discipline. Yenching Scholars complete core and elective courses that introduce them to major topics in the field of China Studies. Each Yenching Scholar also selects one of six research areas in the field of China Studies, and writes a thesis with guidance from a faculty advisor. Research areas are as follows: Economics and Management / History and Archaeology / Philosophy and Religion / Politics and International Relations / Law and Society / Literature and Culture. I am enrolled onto the Politics and International Relations research area discipline. The Academy also organizes field studies to culturally, economically, and socio-politically significant regions within China. The Yenching Academy provides a generous fellowship to all scholars, including: tuition fees, accommodation, living costs, one round-trip travel fare and field study costs.



The Yenching Academy programme will be an intense two years of study concerning the International Relations of China and will facilitate my wish to become a more knowledgeable scholar and a better Mandarin speaker. In the past, I have found studying International Relations within China and from a Sino perspective to be absolutely fascinating. Furthermore studying this subject in a country so essential to International Relations is a unique privilege. The global system in its contemporary is undergoing a tectonic shift in which we can see the advance of the East in liaison with the slumping of Western states. Studying about China within the nation state has previously been extremely interesting, as aspects of politics were analyzed from a Sino perspective and outside of class I could see the very case studies that were being utilized within my course. I know this will be the same when studying my masters in Beijing. Furthermore, the Mandarin skills I have attained already by studying in China have been extremely gratifying, but I wish to get to a higher level. This will hopefully prove invaluable to my future.

'Find a job you love and you will never work a day in your life'. Teaching in China has definitely taught me to chase a more hands on job where I can interact with people, continue to learn and attempt to share my experiences and understandings with others. Academia is incredibly powerful, meaningful and allows for constant learning. Following the masters programme at Peking University, I wish to pursue PhD level studies. This is a route that over 30% of Yenching Academy graduates also take, with the other graduates pursuing careers in diplomacy, esteemed companies and government bodies. I will harness these in-depth studies on all aspects of China taught at the Yenching Academy to complete a PhD. It is imperative that leading Sino specialists understand China's past, present and future – looking at these behaviours through both Chinese and international perspectives. Subsequently I hope to use what I have learned throughout my career in academia or diplomatic consultancy. This balance between Chinese and international perspectives will be essential to bridge the gap between academic research and international policy-making concerning the rise of China.



FINAL THOUGHTS

The world belongs to the askers. As my mum has drilled into me from a young age, 'you'll never know if you don't try'. The Yenching Academy accepts 125 scholars each year, with just a 2% acceptance rate. I explicitly remember having a conversation with my parents about the difficulty and competitiveness of the application process. I had total confidence in my suitability for the programme - I felt it had been made for me! But felt the competition was extraordinary. The alumni is extremely diverse, with people from a range of different academic and professional backgrounds; this means they are very open-minded with who they select for the scholarship. If you are open minded, desire to create positive change in the world and are interested in the study of China, I would strongly encourage you to apply! There is no harm in trying and, like me, you may be completely surprised by the outcome.

if you have any questions for Natasha about her teaching experience or chosen career path, she will be happy to help. Feel free to get in contact with her at: natasha-lock@hotmail.co.uk

We'd like to say a big thank you to all who contributed their story to this e-book. We hope that the experiences and advice of our alumni members have inspired you to think beyond your teaching placement and where this experience may lead you next.

If you have any questions about how to make the most of your teaching placement, what you can do next or how to get started in a new industry after teaching, please don't hesitate to ask us. And, if you later think your story will be useful to future applicants to our programme, please let us know,



Photo by Bruce Roettgers: <https://unsplash.com/@bruceroet>

All content in this e-book is original and included with the full consent of all contributors, each of whom took part in a Teach English In China programme before progressing into their chosen career.

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