Peer to Peer

Everyone's a Language Teacher

On Saturday 20th January 2024, 50+ teachers gathered to discuss ideas and develop professionally through community. This short summary shares the main ideas, takeaways and practical ideas for other educators.
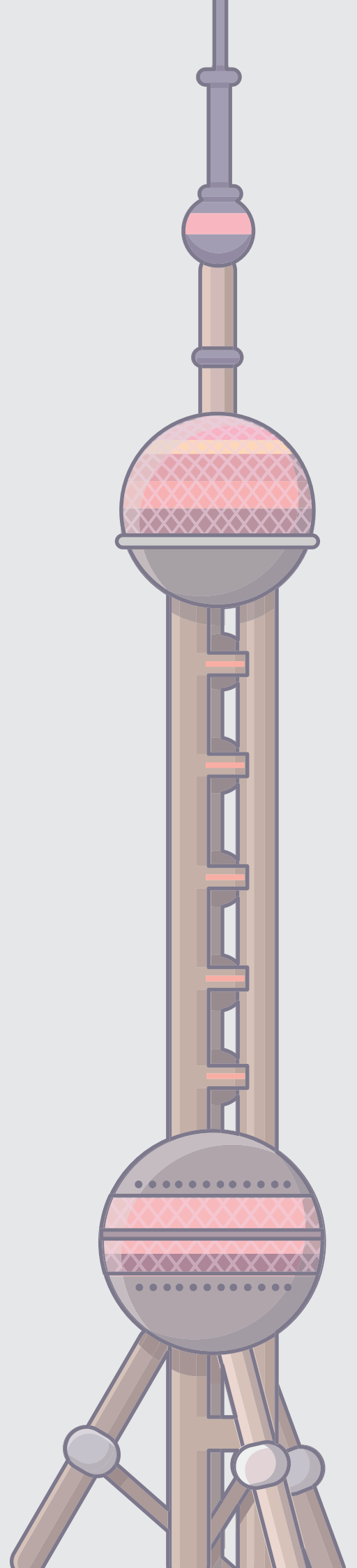
The Shout

We went out
into the school yard together, me and the boy
whose name and face

I don't remember. We were testing the range
of the human voice:
he had to shout for all he was worth

I had to raise an arm
from across the divide to signal back
that the sound had carried.

He called from over the park - I lifted an arm.
Out of bounds,
he yelled from the end of the road,

from the foot of the hill,
from beyond the look-out post of Fretwell's Farm -
I lifted an arm.

He left town, went on to be twenty years dead
with a gunshot hole
in the roof of his mouth, in Western Australia.

Boy with the name and face I don't remember,
you can stop shouting now, I can still hear you.

By Simon Armitage
From The Universal Home Doctor (Faber & Faber, 2004)

This poem was read at the beginning of the day in the Simon Armitage Library in Harrow Shanghai and reflects themes of childhood, connection and creativity; all driven by a passionate and inventive educator. Or as Simon Armitage puts it in his own words: "At the junior school I went to we had a very excitable science teacher and no equipment which was a bit of a bewildering combination. And he used to give us these little missions - they weren't experiments they were more like missions. And one day he asked me and another kid to go outside and not come back into the school until we'd measured the size of the human voice without any equipment. So we devised this little experiment - we decided that we would keep moving further and further apart and shouting at each other until we couldn't hear each other any longer and that would be the size of the human voice. Unfortunately, the village we lived in wasn't that big and there came this point when this other kid just fell off the edge into Lancashire or some dark place and it's at that moment when the science breaks down that I try and get poetry to rush in and fill the gap."

Top Ten Takeaways Ranked!

What did P2P teachers find most valuable? We've taken all 75+ takeaways, grouped them by frequency, then summarized them here using the main ideas and inspiration teachers took with them from the day.

1. AI Tools in Education:

Strong emphasis on the use of AI tools in language teaching, including trailing sentence frames, using Excel for student data, and the excitement about trying ChatGPT with EAL students.

2. Cultural Inclusion:

Recognition of the importance of incorporating and celebrating all languages and cultures in the school community for students' identity, confidence, and contribution to class discussions.

3. Collaboration and Networking:

Positive experiences of sharing expertise, ideas, and strategies with colleagues.

4. Inclusivity:

Emphasis on inclusivity in language teaching, both in terms of AI tools and creating an inclusive learning environment for students.

5. Supportive Strategies and Resources:

Recognition of the value of dedicated peer sharing platforms, gaining knowledge of supportive strategies for different proficiency levels, and the mention of specific resources like POE, Magic School, and Flip.

6. Engagement with Community:

Importance placed on reminders of how to engage community members, indicating a focus on community involvement in language teaching.

7. Educational Technology:

Positive remarks about some great tech tools and the breakdown of strategies for language learners.

8. Panel Discussions and Workshops:

Recognition of the value of panel discussions, particularly those emphasizing the importance of inclusion, cultural diverse lessons, and AI resources.

9. Reflection and Learning:

Positive experiences of learning new strategies and gaining inspiration during the workshop, along with reflections on the importance of ethical use of AI.

10. Strategies for Teaching:

Specific mentions of learning about new strategies for teaching, including differentiation strategies, using opportunities to bring students' culture into lessons, and sharing personal culture with students.

For School Leadership

Summarised from all of the responses, these were the top 5 areas that teachers felt schools and leaders could better support multilingualism:

1. Sufficient Time for Language Development

Prioritize allowing sufficient time for students to develop their languages, emphasizing instructional language.

Example: integrate extended language learning periods into the weekly schedule, allowing dedicated time for students to engage in language-rich activities and practice.

2. Professional Development in Practise

Advocate for more professional development opportunities that not only teach successful practise but allow time and support for teachers to practise implementing these practices too.

Example: Establish a regular series of professional development workshops within the school, focusing on language teaching strategies, culturally responsive practices, and the effective use of AI tools for language learning.

3. Continuous Learning and Sharing

Emphasise continuous learning, sharing experiences, and creating a culture of multilingualism and bilingualism.

Example: Create a platform, either virtual or in-person, for teachers to regularly share their experiences, success stories, and challenges, fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaboration.

4. Creating a Culture of Multilingualism and Bilingualism

Recognize the importance of honouring student culture, meeting emotional needs, and viewing EAL as foundational to the curriculum.
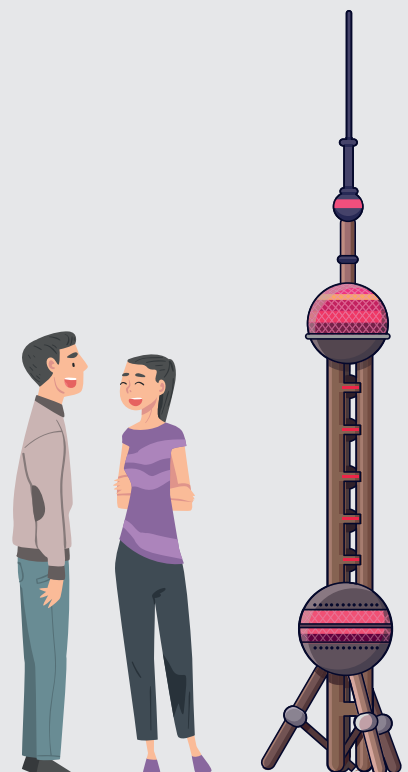
Example: Organise language celebrations where students can share aspects of their culture through language, food, and activities, promoting a sense of pride in linguistic diversity

5. Consistency in Language Support

Implement school-wide policies to provide regular learning opportunities for teachers, and ensure consistency in supporting language development across the school.

Example: Develop and implement school-wide language policies that outline expectations for language development, ensuring all teachers are equipped with resources and strategies to support language learning across subjects. Regularly assess and refine these policies based on feedback and evolving educational practices.

Breakout 1:

Effective Teaching Strategies for Different Proficiencies

As classrooms become increasingly diverse, it is essential for teachers to employ strategies that effectively engage and support students at various levels of proficiency. During this session, participants dove into theoretical underpinnings of differentiated instruction, as well as explored and showcased strategies and teaching techniques that can be applied across various grade-levels and content areas.

1. Translanguaging

Translanguaging is using more than one language in the same context. This Breakout Session discussed how and why teachers should support students to utilises more than one language within a classroom lesson in the name of inclusivity.

2. Inclusivity

Those with lower language levels should still be involved in class discussions even if in their native tongue – there is value to native languages.

3. Differentiated Instruction

With differentiated instruction, all the students have the same learning goal, but the instruction varies based on students' interests, strengths, and struggles. In the context of language learners, this can look like utilising more or less of the native language depending on the students – by using both languages, students can make connections between the two languages, adding context and firming understanding.

"Great to know how translanguaging can be utilised to support MLLs"

"Its good to see other teachers facing the same concerns: how to balance praise with strictness?"

"I have now realised we should allow for more teaching in Chinese. The students are thinking in Chinese and we should support the expansion of both languages' vocabulary in academia"

Breakout Session 2:

Using Data to Inform Instructional Practices

In the era of data-driven education, it is crucial for educators to harness the power of data to inform their instructional practices. During this session, participants explored and showcased various types of language-related data including in-class assessments and standardized assessments. Furthermore, participants considered and demonstrated how to leverage such data in order to make informed decisions on how to support students' language learning.

1. Data to inform placement into language support programs

Data can be used to inform placement into language support programs by assessing students' language proficiency, understanding their strengths and weaknesses, and identifying specific needs.

2. Benefits and limitations of using standardised assessments

Benefits of using standardized assessments to measure language proficiency include providing a common benchmark for comparison and facilitating consistent evaluation. However, limitations may arise due to cultural bias, limited scope, or inability to capture certain language skills. To account for these limitations, educators can supplement standardised assessments with diverse measures, such as authentic tasks, teacher evaluations, and student portfolios, ensuring a wider understanding of language proficiency.

3. Using data to differentiate instruction and provide targeted support

Teachers can tailor instructional strategies, materials, and activities to address individual needs. For example: Flexible Grouping. Forming flexible groups based on language proficiency levels, allows targeted support through focused instruction and collaborative learning experiences.

4. Get students involved in data analysis to foster a sense of ownership

Involving students in the process of data analysis fosters a sense of ownership in their language learning. This can be achieved by incorporating student self-assessment, goal-setting, and reflection into the data analysis process. Teachers can guide students in understanding their own language proficiency data, setting goals for improvement, and actively participating in their learning journey.

"I'm impressed by the way student data can be displayed with Excel to get a comprehensive profile to share with staff and students. This is a new skill I never would have known about otherwise"

Breakout 3:

Developing Culturally Responsive Lessons

This session explored the critical role of cultural responsiveness in creating inclusive and engaging learning environments. In today's diverse classrooms, it is essential for educators to develop lessons that honour and reflect the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of their students. This session facilitated participants in sharing and gaining practical strategies that bring the students cultural and language backgrounds to our classrooms.

1. The value of culturally responsive lessons

Cultural Relevance: Culturally responsive lessons reflect students' backgrounds, making learning more relatable and engaging.

Identity Affirmation: Acknowledging and incorporating diverse cultures validates students' identities, fostering a positive and inclusive classroom atmosphere.

Enhanced Learning: Culturally responsive teaching enhance understanding, critical thinking, and academic performance by connecting learning to real-life experiences.

2. Strategies to harness various cultures and languages

Inclusive Curriculum: Integrate diverse perspectives, authors, and historical narratives into the curriculum to represent various cultures accurately.

Cultural Experiences: Invite guest speakers, organize field trips, or leverage technology to bring authentic cultural experiences into the classroom.

Student Contributions: Encourage students to share their cultural backgrounds, traditions, and languages, creating a collaborative learning environment.

3. Promoting a more inclusive learning environment

Differentiated Instruction: Tailor instruction to accommodate diverse learning styles, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.

Inclusive Materials: Use diverse and representative teaching materials, including images, examples, and stories that reflect a variety of cultures and perspectives.

4. Engaging with community members to foster diversity and belonging

Community Partnerships: Collaborate with local community organizations, cultural centers, or language-specific groups to bring diverse perspectives into the classroom.

Parent Involvement: Encourage parents and caregivers to share their cultural expertise, traditions, and languages during special events or classroom presentations.

Cultural Events: Organize multicultural events or celebrations that involve the community, showcasing the richness of cultural diversity.

Thank You to our Hosts!

"A thoroughly wonderful experience. Thanks for making me feel so welcome!"

"The snacks were great! The use of classrooms was ideal"

"Thank you Harrow! You have a great school, it was the perfect location"

"Thank you Harrow!!!"

"Thank you for a lovely afternoon of learning and sharing, valuable connections and opportunities to learn from each other. Much appreciated!"

"Thank you very much Harrow School!"

"Thanks to all at Harrow who have supported this event! Well done!"

"Thank you for the invite and the exposure to all the other wonderful teachers."

PeerSphere

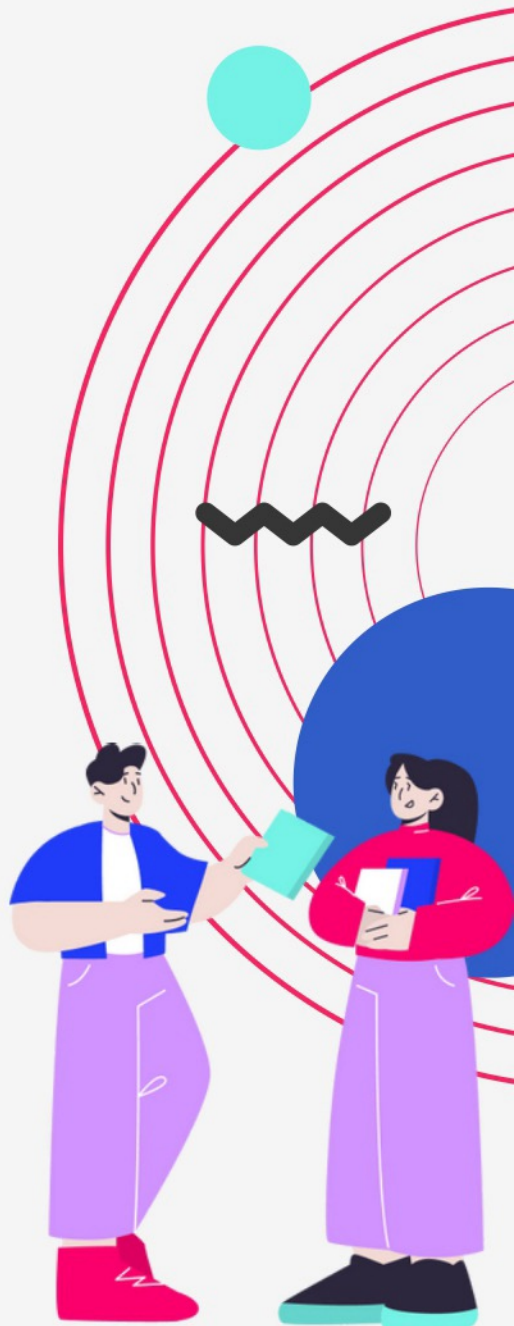Tomorrow calls for new collaborations and connections.

Connect to Peers
And learn together

We build thriving communities for education professionals that want to collaborate and solve meaningful problems related to their role.

All of our 2023/24 communities are up and running with peers from over 100 international schools!

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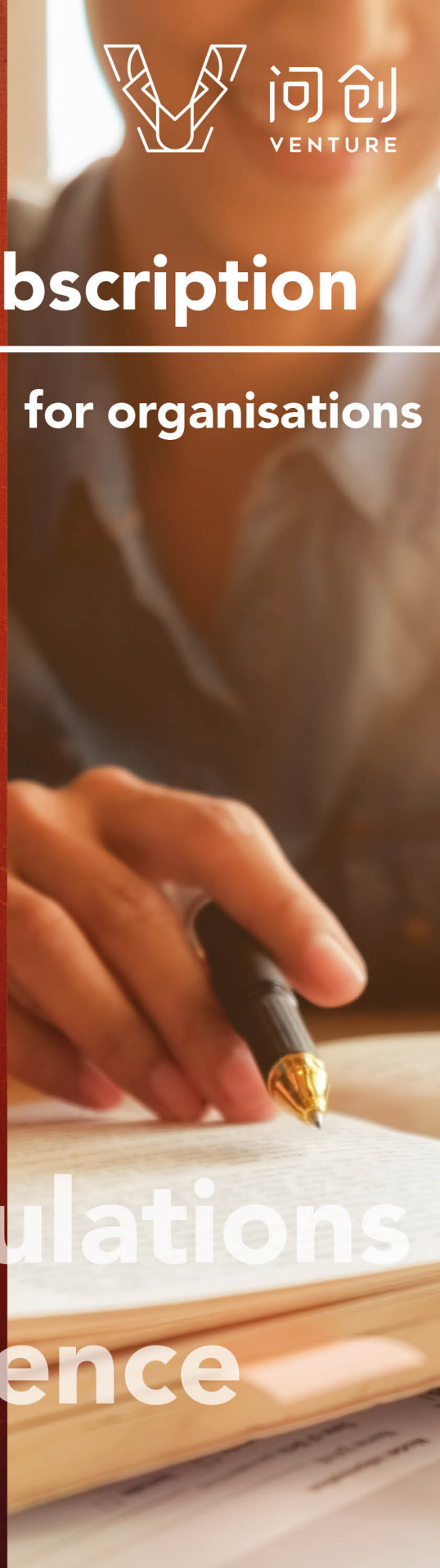SINCE 1992

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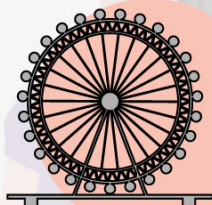**Interactive Peer Sharing and Learning for all School Staff**

A participant-driven gathering of educators providing the opportunity to connect in-person, share practices, and explore common professional inquiries.

Shanghai
Jan 20
Multi-Lingual Learners

Tianjin
Feb 24
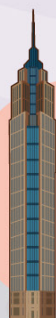Teacher Wellbeing

Beijing
Mar 16
AI in the Classroom

Nanjing
May 18
Student Agency

Hangzhou
Apr 25
Diversifying Leadership

Chengdu
June 8
Intercultural Relationships

Guangzhou
Sept 7
First 90 Days for Leaders

Wuhan or Fuzhou
Oct 19
Assessment for Learning

Shenzhen
Dec 7
DEI & Recruitment

Ningbo
Nov 9
Pastoral Care

All times and locations will be shared closer to the date

Scan the QR for more information!

Free for all PeerSphere members and Venture Subscribers
300 RMB per participant

Useful Resources

Below are the four most-mentioned digital resources used by teachers

ChatGPT

Using ChatGPT for trialling sentence frames or even interviewing a famous person in a second language.

Microsoft Flip

A great resource for shy students to express themselves verbally through video feedback.

Magic School

An AI tool specifically made for educators to help them plan classes, write assessments and make everything differentiated

Microsoft Excel

Student data can be displayed with Excel to create a comprehensive profile to share with staff and students.

Final Thought

I am grateful to be a part of such a wonderful and caring community of educators. The collective willingness and bravery displayed in sharing was crucial to the success of the event. Thank you all for sharing your experiences and exploring new ideas to facilitate an equitable education for our English language learners. Together, we have all played an integral role in providing support to multilingual learners, not only in our own classrooms, but beyond.

Celina Mathews | Host of P2P Shanghai