How important is outdoor environmental learning to students?

A: Environmental education is the teaching of "love". Children learn to love and treasure nature once they get in touch with it. I think that people who love nature tend to be more optimistic and active. So I think getting out into nature is very important to the personal growth of children. Many studies in other countries have indicated that young people of today commonly suffer from "nature-deficit disorder", resulting in a series of emotional and health problems due to lack of access to nature. In England, for example, four out of five children lack contact with nature. There is no local research on how children in Hong Kong are isolated from nature, but personally I believe the situation may be more serious than in other countries.

Dr. Ma believes contact with nature is essential for children's personal growth.
Q: Do you have the luck to grow up with nature?

A: When I was small, I did not have much chance to experience the outdoors with my family, as they were too occupied. My interest in nature began after my Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in Secondary Five. During the long holiday, I took a mountain climbing course and challenged Sharp Peak—one of the top three sharp peaks in Hong Kong. The trip was certainly memorable—a friend was defeated by the long hike, and wrong timing made us stay in the wild at night. However, this was also the first time I opened my eyes to fireflies. There was also an East Asian Porcupine (Hystrix brachyura), which seemed to lead our way by walking with us for some time. It was such a touching experience! I never knew the Hong Kong countryside was so amazing! I cannot overemphasise how important it is to get in touch with nature first-hand.

Q: Do you think eco-tours, which have become popular in recent years, can contribute to environmental education?

A: In recent years, many so-called "eco-tours" have been organised featuring fireflies, corals and Chinese White Dolphins (Sousa chinensis). These tours charge a low fee and attract many people. Yet they are totally different from genuine eco-tourism, which values giving back to the local environment and people. These one- or half-day trips do not benefit the environment; on the contrary, too many visitors add pressure to the local environment. The tour guides too often lack ecological literacy and pass on wrong concepts to participants. These "eco-tours" do not help environmental education, but bring harmful impacts.

Q: Many environmental groups also organise outdoor learning activities. What are the differences with your group's activities?

A: Our activities focus on plants, amphibians and reptiles. These are rather unpopular and few groups organise activities around them. On the other hand, these species are exactly our speciality.

두 명의 대화에서, 환경 교육의 중요성에 대해 논의하고 있습니다. 첫 번째 질문에서, 그는 자신의 첫 번째 자연 경험을 공유하고, 이후에 그의 터전으로 이동한 후 그의 주요 자연 계층에 대해 이야기합니다. 두 번째 질문에서, 그는 환경 교육의 방식에 대해 논의하고, 그의 그룹의 활동과 다른 활동 간의 차이를 설명합니다. 그는 그들의 활동은 꽃, 왜행성 및 파충류에 초점을 두고 있으며, 이러한 종은 일반적으로 인기 없는 반면에 그들의 전문성임을 강조합니다.
香港環境教育停滯不前
Hong Kong falling behind in environmental education

問：香港現有的環境教育有甚麼不足之處？
答：環境教育在本地已推行多年，市民大都
知道需要環保，可是大家往往只有初步
的認識，亦缺乏實踐能力。其中一個
原因，是現時很多環境教育活動仍屬
向的傳授知識，如講座、教科書等。多數
讓市民因受的去改變生活習慣。

我認為問題的確在於現代的環境教育
強迫環保工作的成分。環境教育工作者
並未得到任何與教育相關的專業培訓，
或欠實際的知識，故環保在社會上亦缺
乏相關研究，所以我們目前推行的環境
教育並未著力針對香港情況和不足
之處。

問：其它發展地區比較，香港的環境教育
情況如何？
答：環保教育是世界大趨勢，除了北
美、英國、美國等西方國家，亞洲的日
本、韓國亦發展了一段時間，香港
政府在1999年的環境報告書提出推行
環保教育的動向，但到目前為止，仍未
列入課程範圍。中、小學老師亦缺乏充
分的知識。反觀台灣及香港差不多
同時於二十年前引入可持續發展教育
的教育，現時台灣的相關教育已相當
成熟，有《環保教育法》規範教學質
素。

I think the core of the issue is that
environmental education is only a subsidiary
of environmental protection efforts in Hong
Kong. Environmental educators have not
received related professional training. There
is no accreditation system and research on
the topic is lacking. Therefore, the present
environmental education is not tailored to
the specific needs of Hong Kong.

問：你的環保教育有什麼願景？
答：現時香港當然有很多社團進行各類型
環境教育活動，但各自為政，如果不
同團體能夠增加溝通，彼此交流教育
活動的經驗和發現，將可進一步提升
環保水平。此外，現時的環保教育多
是去學生為對象，但成效似乎並不理
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馬栩溶博士小檔案
Biography of Dr Xoni Ma

馬栩溶博士，專門研究戶外環境教育，香港戶外生態教育
協會創辦人。現為該協會顧問，亦為嶄榮大學殼科課程及通識
教育班主任科學組小組任課，曾為多個中學及大學課程擔任
講座及導師。基於對環境教育的熱誠，馬栩溶博士積極參與
｢香港大學2015校園文化交流獎」、「Roadshow環保大使獎2016
環保大使大使（專業組）」，以及「北美環境教育學會EE30
Under 30」。

Dr. Xoni Ma graduated from the University of Hong Kong
with a PhD in outdoor environmental education. He is
founder and currently director of Outdoor Wildlife Learning
Hong Kong, a part-time lecturer at the Science Unit of the
Core Curriculum and General Education Office, Lingnan
University, and has been a coordinator and tutor of various
courses in secondary schools and universities. Dr. Ma was
awarded the HKU 2015 Faculty Knowledge Exchange
Award, Roadshow Eco Star Award 2016-Roadshow Eco Star
(Professional category), and North American Association
for Environmental Education EE 30 Under 30 for his
contributions to environmental education.