The successful partnership between East -- the Center for Science and Technology Education at the China National Institute for Education Research in Beijing) and the West -- CSULB’s Department of Science Education, continues to flourish! Associate Professor Wang Su, who directs the center in Beijing, and Professor Emeritus William C. Ritz, CSULB Project Director, are collaborating to bring ‘A Head Start on Science’ to even more far-reaching provinces of China. In July 2010, presenters Deborah Greenwade and Greg Potter returned to China to present another workshop for teachers of pre-kindergarten through early elementary school children. This workshop, again focusing on helping pre-K teachers to integrate science into their classrooms, took place in Nanjing, a community close to Shanghai. Hopefully, our collaboration will continue to bring “sense of wonder” science to increasing numbers of Chinese and American children, educators, and parents in our two nations.

This was Greg Potter’s and my second trip to China presenting “A Head Start on Science,” and we once again found ourselves working with a friendly and enthusiastic group of people. Our second workshop took place in mid-July, shortly after the summer A Head Start on Science workshops on the CSULB campus. We were received as honored guests and our first evening began with a formal press conference given by the President of the local college, and we were warmly welcomed by teachers and directors of nearby schools.

3rd from left: Wang Su, Deborah Greenwade, our translator Cedric and Greg Potter
We modified last December’s four-day “Shenyang” plan back into a five-day workshop by adding more information on our approaches to science teaching and learning, explaining the benefits of “sense of wonder” teaching to young children. Understanding the reasons why we use the approaches that we do is important to share with our Chinese colleagues, and the teachers were interested in how we work with children and the methods we use. Their approach often seems to focus more on the teacher, who knows the information, as the ‘teller’ to the children, who are to receive that information. Our approach is different. As Bill Ritz has often said in our workshops, “If I were to want to see a teller, I’d rather go to a bank.” It was important that we showed our fellow educators the importance of discovery, and that it is through discovery, a serious mixture of questioning and investigating, that children seem to learn best. Because of this, we also spent much of our time reviewing questioning skills and classroom management. Despite some difficulties with communication, our classes seemed to love what we were sharing with them.

Even our translators were interested in what we were doing, and they played along with the participants. Sometimes they were so fascinated by the activities that we had to regain their attention so they could continue to translate for us!

In Nanjing, instruction took place at a junior high school site. We did many of the same activities that we do at CSULB Summer Head Start workshop. We each had two translators from the local college as well as one room assistant to make sure we had everything we needed. Our fellow teachers and educators became excited by what we were doing, seemingly eager to implement the things we were doing in their own classrooms. One participant told me that they have seen some other presenters from other countries, but our workshop was more exciting, fun, and the reasons behind the lessons were made more explicit.
Our workshops in China were so successful that Wang Su is currently planning another for the coming spring. Just as with our first workshop, others also are interested in more opportunities to learn about how we teach science to pre-school aged children, how we introduce abstract science ideas, the importance of a strong foundation with early education, as well as classroom management.

The participants in China enjoyed the same excitement for learning and discovering the wonders of science. No matter place, no matter the culture, no matter the language -- the wonder of science bring enthusiasm to all!