

Let's Talk Science

Bonnie Schmidt began her science outreach activities while pursuing her doctoral degree in physiology at the University of Western Ontario. After graduating in 1993, she formally launched Let's Talk Science. In 1995, the organization was recognized with an Honourable Mention at the Peter F. Drucker Awards for NonProfit Innovation and a Michael Smith Award for Science Promotion presented by Industry Canada.



By Bonnie Schmidt

Our children will be facing a world that is significantly different than the one in which we grew up. We don't even know the names of the jobs or the nature of the work that will be created in the next 10 years.

How do we prepare our young people to thrive in this unknown environment? It's not an easy question to answer, nor is it clear there is a single answer or a single direction in which to move.

Nevertheless we all realize that we must continue to do the best job possible to ensure a bright future for our next generation. This challenge places teachers at the forefront as a critical force in shaping the future of Canada.

But, in a world that is changing so rapidly, teachers cannot be expected to be the only source of expertise for their students, particularly in math, science and technology. International tests rank Canada in the middle of the pack and Ontario trailing the pack when it comes to the performance of our students in science and mathematics.

How can we do better? As the new year begins in the classroom, consider the resources in your community that are available to enhance your science program. The parents of your students, science centres and museums and

scientists in local universities, colleges and industry can all play a role in ensuring the best education for our youth. Then there's *Let's Talk Science* – an organization that can help you bring science, technology and mathematics alive in your classroom.

Let's Talk Science is a nonprofit organization working to create a society that embraces science in everyday life



Let's Talk Science gives students hands-on science experience with readily-available materials.

and values the development of skills required to thrive in a global economy.

We offer innovative science programs that engage people and encourage them to understand the importance of science in our world. We believe that educators – in particular elementary school teachers – play a pivotal role in the development of a science culture in Canada.

Our programs aim to increase teachers'

confidence and ability to teach science more effectively. Our focus on elementary school teachers ensures we are contributing to the development of a generation of young people who must be better prepared to meet a future where science and technology are an integral part of life.

We believe that everyone learns best by doing and by having fun doing it.

Therefore, all *Let's Talk Science* programs include an extensive hands-on component. Through the national office at the University of Western Ontario, regional offices in Vancouver and Edmonton and volunteer-run partner sites at 11 Canadian universities, *Let's Talk Science* offers a variety of fun and effective programs for teachers and youth. Thanks to the generous support of sponsors including DuPont Canada, The Esso Kids Program, and Industry Canada, these programs are available at low, or no cost to teachers.

The award-winning *Partnership Program* is available at no charge to elementary and high school teachers who are interested in developing an extended science partnership with a university graduate student volunteer.

Although each partnership is unique, volunteers usually visit classrooms, bring students to their university

campus for hands-on science activities, help teachers update classroom material, act as mentors for student projects, judge science fairs, correspond with students through the Internet and provide career information. This program is available at six Ontario universities.

Science Delivered professional development workshops for elementary school teachers are available in your community on PD days, after school or on weekends. Sponsored by The Richard Ivey Foundation, these hands-on workshops have been developed and tested

outcomes listed in the Common Curriculum and the Pan-Canadian Protocol for Science Curriculum.

Every spring, the *Science Now!!* conference brings a full day of hands-on science to hundreds of elementary teachers, sponsored by 3M Canada. Sessions facilitated by elementary and secondary school teachers, consultants, scientists and community leaders demonstrate that science in the classroom can be exciting, challenging and relevant.

Our newest program, *Focus on Youth*, offers in-school science programming

super science challenges and more. Many of these workshops include a take-home component so that children are better able to involve their parents.

Finally, please check out the *Let's Talk Science Meeting Place* on the web site (<http://johns.largnet.uwo.ca/lts>). This site allows teachers to communicate with other teachers and scientists. Sharing your successful science strategies, posting your questions and responding to other questions will not only enhance the science culture in Canada, but around



Students at Our Lady of Fatima School in Chatham enjoy talking science with The Blue Whale.

by a creative team of scientists, teachers and adult educators who excel at designing relevant, innovative and fun hands-on scientific activities that use everyday materials. Blue-box and other household materials are used so there is minimal cost to implementing the activities in your classroom. Workshops include Good Vibrations – music connections – Batteries Not Included – a look at energy – Wet 'n Wild – a study on wetlands in a dry classroom – and more. Designed to bring more open-ended, student-directed science to the classroom, these workshops also meet

delivered by *Let's Talk Science* staff and associates. Have a whale of a learning experience with *The Blue Whale*. This life-sized (30 metres) model, designed by the Canadian Wildlife Federation, enables children to sit in the belly of a whale and provides a unique introduction to the world's largest mammal.

Six sessions (360 children), tailored to each elementary grade, are available in a whole-day presentation. For single elementary classes a number of hands-on workshops are available including aviation, chromatography, inventing, magnets, mystery festival,

the world!

Let's Talk Science can help teachers spread the message that science is fun and surrounds us daily. Preparing your students to thrive in a world of science and technology may be easier than you think. ■

For more information on any of our programs, or to find the *Let's Talk Science* site nearest you, please contact the national office at (519) 661-4029 or fax us at (519) 661-3490. Visit the web site (<http://johns.largnet.uwo.ca/lts>) or e-mail bschmidt@julian.uwo.ca