

Bubble-wrap and orange juice

Why I enjoy writing activities for young kids

By Kim Taylor

Think about it: when was the last time you brought bubble wrap into the bath tub and explored what you could do with it in water, or mixed ketchup and orange juice just to see what would happen? That's just what I encourage my kids to do at home and the sorts of explorations I tell early-years-educators to do with their children.

Once upon a time, there were few writers like me – writers of science for infants, toddlers, preschool and Kindergarten children. But thanks in part to reports such as the Ontario Early Years Study Report and research that supports the importance of quality learning experiences for young children, early-years education is now a hot topic and early years educators are beginning to clamor for science resources and professional development.

In 2001, Let's Talk Science embarked upon the development of Wings of Discovery, an inquiry-based early-years learning program for children from birth through age five, now available across Canada. For those of you unfamiliar with us, Let's Talk Science is a registered national education charity reaching youth and educators in early years, school, post-secondary, and community settings with high quality science literacy programs and products since 1993.

Writing Wings of Discovery has given me a unique glimpse into the world of young children. My field-testing of science activities with preschool children reinforced what I already knew as a parent: that young children are the greatest scientists on the planet. They ask questions constantly, are keen

observers, explore everything, repeatedly perform experiments (even if it's with bubblegum and hair), and draw their own



conclusions about the way the world works.

If you were to ask young children what they are doing when they are building structures out of blocks, making ice cubes melt with their hands, or scooping and pouring sand, they would say they are playing. I would say they were doing science. The difference between play and science is in the interpretation.

I particularly enjoy writing science resources for this age group because of the genuine, unbridled curiosity and enthusiasm young children have for learning. Young children want to learn about anything and everything and their desire to learn is infectious. As I worked with young children to test Wings of Discovery activities, I found that their love of learning and willingness to be open-minded and try new things renewed in me my own love of learning and science.

As grown-ups, I think sometimes we get so caught up in our day-to-day lives that we forget what it is like to explore and discover new things just for the sheer joy of it. Writing science for young children reminded me that there is a whole world out there to explore, not just for them, but for me as well.

Young children truly are a pleasure to write for, and I would say to anyone thinking about writing for young children – go for it! I would recommend spending time getting to know how young children perceive the world before embarking on such a venture. Experiment and explore the topic you are writing about, ideally together with young children. Do your homework about cognition, physical and social development, and learning styles. Be accurate in how you portray science concepts, but keep in mind the language you use and how you present ideas needs to be developmentally appropriate at all times.

Above all, young children are willing and eager learners, ready to go with you where no one has gone before. There is a lot we can learn from young children as science writers and I would strongly suggest that, if you ever get the chance, to spend some time at a daycare or early learning centre to watch and be inspired by these young scientists at work.

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