

THE B.C. 'SCIENTISTS IN THE SCHOOLS' PROGRAM

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the many facets of the challenges of attracting more women into science involves reaching into the educational system to interest young children, generally, and girls, in particular, in pursuing science studies. An innovative, cost-effective program developed by the Province of British Columbia in 1989 brings volunteer scientists into classrooms, where their enthusiasm for their work can be conveyed through direct interaction with children.

2. BASIC CONCEPTS

Program coordination and administration is contracted to an existing science museum, Science World; **no new government bureaucracy is created.**

Volunteer scientists, engineers, technologists are sent throughout the Province; there are currently 423 registered volunteers.

2,900 class visits in 1991/92 resulted from 1100 requests from schools.

Volunteers' travel expenses are paid by the Program, which is funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

In 1991/92, 2.5 FTEs administered the program, whose budget was C\$175,000 (about 50% was allocated to volunteer travel).

Many staff from the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, including the author, postdocs, engineers and senior astronomers are volunteers and have found participation to be very rewarding and agreeable.

3. INITIAL EVALUATIONS

Two external evaluations have been done to date, with the following results reported by the Program Office:

- 1) Secondary Level: Program appears to be having a positive impact on students' willingness to continue with science and math throughout high school.
- 2) Elementary Level: Program has a positive impact on students' interest in science as a career, but multiple visits appear necessary to reinforce the impact.
- 3) Volunteer Training: 700 evaluations from teachers indicate an overall high level of satisfaction with the Program. However, not all volunteers are equally effective. Training aids have been developed, including a brief video showing three particularly effective individuals in action. An effective manual for presenters has been prepared; for information, contact: Innovators in the Schools, 235 Queen St., 8th Floor, West Tower, Ottawa K1A 0H5 Canada.

4. AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The early success and cost-effectiveness of the B.C. Program led to it being used as a model by the Federal and Provincial Governments to establish a network of 13 similar programmes throughout Canada.

In Ontario, the 3 dozen-odd chapters of the Association of Professional Engineers are running a program involving more than 600 scientists and engineers.

The program appears to have the potential to become a major grassroots movement that could dramatically alter the future of science and technology in Canada.

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