



inquiring minds

What happens when you mix childhood curiosity and everyday materials with the skills of keen observation and careful analysis, under the guidance of inspiring mentors and teachers?

Education lecturer Ms Anne Forbes from the Strathfield Campus is finding out, through a collaborative project involving ACU National, the University of Sydney's Science Foundation for Physics, IBM and the Western Sydney Region of the NSW Department of Education and Training.

Using a children's science website which features simple but startling experiments contributed by more than 400 science centres around the world, www.tryscience.org, teachers introduce the skills of investigating scientifically to their students, who then go on to apply them to their own scientific investigations, with the help of trained mentors from universities, IBM and the school community. Students' projects are then submitted to external award schemes which provide added incentive and acknowledgments for student achievement.

Throughout the project, MyScience primary school teachers receive significant professional learning and support in authentic scientific investigation while scientist mentors provide advice and support to students and teachers.

Ms Forbes, who is also the primary education coordinator of the Science Teachers' Association of NSW (STANSW),

is conducting an online survey of the more than 500 children who have been involved in the project since it began last year, and will compare and contrast their attitudes towards science with those of students who have not been involved in such a scheme.

"Some outstanding outcomes are already evident, with three student group projects receiving awards in the STANSW Young Scientists awards in 2006, and a further two receiving awards this year," Ms Forbes said.

School participation in MyScience is growing, from a humble pilot of two primary schools in 2006 to an expected eight primary schools and three secondary schools set to participate in NSW in 2008. That equates to 28 teachers, 840 students, 50 scientist mentors, three secondary schools, and over 50 Year 10 scientist mentors.

Next year, MyScience will also be available in Victoria for the first time, where two primary schools, four teachers, 120 students, 15 Scientist mentors, one secondary school and 15 Year 10 scientist mentors are expected to sign up. Staff and students from the University's Melbourne Campus will support the program.

"Primary school is the place to lay the foundations for learning in science," Ms Forbes said. "It is where students make connections between classroom activities and everyday events."

"MyScience encourages students to practically investigate the answers to

their own questions. Working in teams, with scientist mentor support, they learn to define problems, take careful observations with measurements, critically analyse results to draw evidence-based conclusions, and go on to ask more questions!"

Mutual discovery

As a voluntary MyScience mentor, Sydney-based IBM IT consultant Mr Gregor Erdmann added meetings with Beecroft Primary School students to his corporate calendar. He then used IBM's MentorPlace, a controlled email environment, to interact with six students to provide guidance on their science experiments.

"I do enjoy teaching and mentoring," Mr Erdmann said. "It really isn't that much of a time commitment and, who knows, I might make a difference. There are many people out there who would love science, but unfortunately they never get to find out. MyScience gives young kids a chance to discover something they may not have considered doing on their own.

"Growing, changing, striving forward and overcoming our inner fears throughout life is to me the essence of being human, but I can't do it alone, and I don't want to do it alone. By helping others I meet, I am really also helping myself."

Visit <http://myscience.com.au> or contact the School of Education (NSW) via may.ortiz@acu.edu.au for more information.