

# MyScience - a Primary Science Initiative To Watch

By Alex Viglienze



*First piloted in 2006, MyScience is a new initiative aimed at developing skills in authentic scientific investigation within the primary school environment - an environment often constrained by competing curricular interests resulting in the marginalisation of teaching and learning in, and about science.*

A collaborative program between the Science Foundation for Physics at the University of Sydney, IBM, Australian Catholic University (ACU), and the Western Sydney Region of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), MyScience aims to inspire an enthusiasm for, and improve outcomes in Science and Technology education within primary school communities.

The MyScience program begins with professional development for teachers in authentic scientific investigation including aspects of experimental design, data collection and analysis, and scientific reporting. Teachers then introduce these skills to their students over a number of weeks using the TryScience website ([www.tryscience.org](http://www.tryscience.org)) as a launching pad, with continued support from trained facilitators.

In the final phase of the program students apply their newly acquired skills to their own scientific investigations based around a class theme or topic. In 2007 themes included Energy, Communication, Natural Disasters and Plants. This phase also involves at least two visits to the classroom by scientist mentors who are currently sourced from the school's local community including teachers from local high schools and from the University of Sydney, IBM and ACU. Face-to-face mentoring sessions are complemented by ongoing communication between students and mentors via a secure online environment (IBM's MentorPlace).

The scientist mentors receive a training session giving them a project overview and guidance on how to support primary students with scientific and technical advice during their projects.

Another aim of MyScience is to sustainably position schools so that after they are initiated into the program, they are supported for two years while they establish their own network of scientist mentors from their local communities.

Following a school celebration, student projects are appraised and submitted to the Young Scientist awards conducted by the Science Teachers' Association of NSW.

During the 2006 pilot the MyScience program was run with over 130 students (years 3 to 6) from two primary schools: Quakers Hill Public School and Beecroft Public School and 15 scientist mentors from the University of Sydney. Three of ten young scientist award winners in 2006 were students who had gone through the MyScience program.

In 2007, MyScience expanded to over 510 students (years 1 to 6) from four schools: Quakers Hill East Public School, Beresford Road Public School, Quakers Hill Public School and Beecroft Public School, 40 scientist mentors from the University of Sydney, the Australian Catholic University, IBM, parents and teachers from other local schools. In addition 12 Year 10 students from Quakers Hill High School were apprentice scientist mentors.

Survey data from teachers and students consistently praises scientist mentors for their generous gift of time and expertise. One teacher from this year's program said that having scientist mentors involved with the program was a great benefit to the students, who learned so much from the experience.

Currently the collaborators of MyScience are planning to expand into more schools in the Western Sydney Region of the NSW DET and interstate to Melbourne.

For more information on MyScience visit <http://myscience.com.au/>

If you are interested in becoming a Scientist Mentor contact:  
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