

Scientist in Residence

A role for students in solving the problem of marine pollution

Grade 4 and 5 students at Oppenheimer Elementary delved into the problem of marine pollution this year. Oppenheimer was one of eight schools participating in this year's Scientist in Residence (SIR) Program.

The lesson was taught by UBC oceanographer Sara Harris, in collaboration with teachers Liza Archer and Scott Lundell.

"It's a fantastic program," said Archer. "I've had many volunteers doing science in the past but this was by far the best. Sara was so knowledgeable and really connected with the kids." In addition, the program enabled students to work with equipment and do hands-on work that isn't often possible. "The big fish tanks were really exciting."

Harris said she didn't realize that "just gathering [scientific] supplies for a lesson is a huge time sink for teachers." She said she'd like to find ways to make the university equipment available to other teachers in the district. She said she saw that "there's a lot of interest out there among the community of

teachers in Vancouver about how to do science in the classroom and the kids are very interested."

Harris said the discussion with students about how to deal with marine pollution led to many possible solutions ranging from simply reducing the amount of plastic we use to a more ambitious suggestion of draining the ocean, putting the fish somewhere safe and then doing a proper scrubbing of the ocean floor.

The lessons seem to be having a lasting impact. "They learned how to be better stewards," Archer said. "They learned how humans really impact the environment and the effect of oil, sewage and plastics in the ocean and that they can make a difference with little things." Students are now bringing reusable containers for their lunches so that they create less garbage.

The marine pollution theme was also supported by the students' participation in the week-long Aqua School offered by the Vancouver Aquarium.

The Scientist in Residence

Program, for students in grades 1 to 7, focuses on the experimental process of science. This VSB program is unique in that it partners a scientist with two teachers at each participating school. Together, they develop six hands-on science lessons on a specific theme. The lessons are co-delivered in the winter or early spring and lesson plans are documented and posted to the VSB web site.

Approximately 90 lessons, developed between 2004 and 2007, will soon be available at vsb.bc.ca/vsbprograms/kto12/ScientistinResidence.htm. Some can be downloaded now.

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- Vancouver Foundation
- Rix Family Foundation
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Trafalgar climate change

In March, Trafalgar Elementary held a bilingual Climate Change Awareness Day. Students in Gr. 5, 6 and 7 designed projects to raise awareness about climate change. Projects included experiments, posters, games, a skit and a web quest. All 515 students in the school visited the stations set up in the hallways and learned about the causes and solutions to climate change. Notable projects included a model house demonstrating ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at home, a method for measuring your eco-footprint and a comparison of environmentally friendly vehicles. •

