

## Gross-out factor sells science

Dr. Googles' club gets students interested with fun hands-on lessons

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By Helen Fallding

Electrify them and gross them out -- that's apparently the secret to getting kids interested in science.

"It's good, fun, gooey -- stuff like that," Derek said as he played with home-made slime during the final session of an eight-week after-school science club.

The Mad Science program, which attracted more than half the Grade 4 to 6 students at Chapman School this spring, aims to get elementary school children excited about science.

"Science, historically, has been one of those subjects that kids have not really thought of as fun," said Manitoba franchise manager Gabriel Markiw, also known as the lab-coat-wearing Dr. Googles.

Chapman Grade 6 teacher Ted Mickaniec said it is especially hard to get girls interested in science, but more girls than boys from his class signed up for the Mad Science club, which costs parents \$62.

Tierannai Lewis, 8, said she will "probably" become a scientist when she grows up.

"You get to make things."

Things like cotton candy, a periscope and slime -- the latter for a Mad Science lesson on the flexible properties of polymers.

For kids who want to try it at home, dissolve borax in warm water, then mix it with white glue.

Around the corner from the slime-makers, another Mad Science employee is teaching students about light -- how to break it down into a rainbow of colours and how to identify powdered metals by the colour they turn a flame.

In another room, a student's hair stands on end -- the well-known science centre trick -- to demonstrate a lesson on electricity.

Mad Science has portable equipment that is too expensive for most schools, Mickaniec said.

Tierannai's dad, Geoff Grawberger, said the science program gets kids away from after-school television.

Since the Montreal-based company's Winnipeg franchise opened about 18 months ago, Mad Science clubs have started up at 35 elementary schools.

Mad Science offers a free science show at school assemblies -- where students float across the room on a hoverboard -- to recruit pupils.

Part-time instructors are typically university students with experience working with children.

Markiw said the kids learn to risk being wrong -- the essence of the scientific method.

Teachers have told him they can tell which students have taken Mad Science.

"Guess whose hands are always up in the air?"

Between science clubs, assemblies, summer camps and birthday parties and festival shows, the bilingual Mad Science of Manitoba will connect with about 8,000 students this year, including some in rural areas.

The company has 135 offices in 20 countries and boasts on its Web site of 60 to 80 per cent gross margins for franchise owners.

Advertising itself as a major marketing vehicle with "a captive audience of millions," Mad Science has been criticized in the U.S. for helping market L'Oreal sunscreen to children.

Markiw said he was not aware that Mad Science had corporate partners other than the Scholastic Book Group. The Manitoba program has not promoted brand name products, he said.

It is rare for profit-making corporations to be allowed into schools to recruit students, but Mickaniec said it is not much different from non-profit groups that sign up kids for sports or arts groups.

Teachers are happy to see students explore academics in their free time, he said.

More information on Mad Science is available by calling 775-7959 or on the Internet at: [www.madscience.org/](http://www.madscience.org/)

[helen.fallding@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:helen.fallding@freepress.mb.ca)