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It has been an incredible year for Partners In Research's flagship program, Virtual Researcher On Call (VROC). Students have been reached in record numbers and we've established partnerships with more organizations and more teachers than ever. The VROC program grew exponentially during the 2011-2012 academic year and exciting things are to come.

A partnership with the colleges of Ontario will grant students access to new programs and will translate into new mentorship and career opportunities. We are actively pursuing an expansion into Alberta and Quebec and will engage more francophone students this year as well.

I couldn't be more excited about the possibilities for students and teachers that VROC participation will be bringing this fall - stay tuned to our new website which will have all of the information released in August! Thanks to everyone who helped make 2011-2012 a tremendous success!

Kevin Cougler, *Executive Director*

VROC has a new National Program Manager

Welcome, Nicole Tate-Hill!



Partners In Research is pleased to announce Nicole Tate-Hill has accepted the position of National Program Manager for the VROC Program.

Virtual Researcher On Call, or VROC as it is more commonly known, connects students in the classroom with researchers in colleges and universities across Canada.

"Nicole has demonstrated excellent leadership qualities and the ability to surpass expectations in her work at Partners In Research", indicated former VROC National Program Manager, Kevin Cougler. "I have every confidence Nicole will continue to thrive in her new role and bring passion and enthusiasm to the VROC program."

Congratulations Nicole!

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Changing Science Communication Roles



By Dr. Catherine Anderson, a.k.a GeneGeek

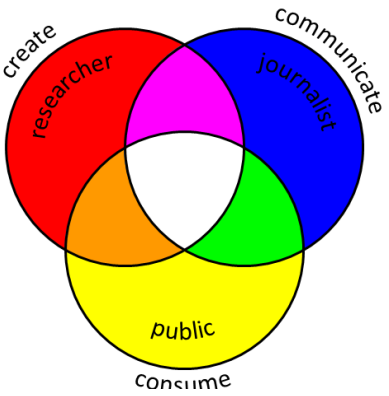
I love talking about science – as family and friends will tell you – and my various jobs all focus on engaging people in science conversations. With the internet and social media tools, these discussions are getting easier. Traditionally, science information followed a fairly obvious path:



When I was doing wet lab research, I knew my place: generating new information. It was not my place to communicate the results beyond the experts in my field. If the 'public' was to learn about my work, it would often be translated from geek-speak to regular-speak. [Note: 'public' for this conversation is any one who is not working in the field.]

The roles are fairly defined in traditional communication and the process is mostly uni-directional. It can be why many faculty believe that it is not the job of a scientist to communicate with people outside the field. Also, many of my colleagues still think of this model even when the discussion is centered around 'engagement' and interaction.

But #openscience and social media tools like twitter are breaking down walls. Everyone now has a chance to contribute in more than one area. The graphic needs to be changed:



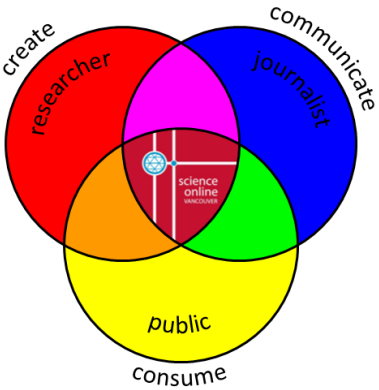
As you can see, there is overlap of contribution between each group. This is changing the landscape of science communication. Now, some researchers are starting to share their results as they happen on blogs or open notebooks. Non-experts are also commenting on the results and working as citizen scientists. It can be a bit scary because how do we decide what is a good source or story? The 'expert says X so it must be true' should be over. I find it exciting. As was tweeted by @MIT_Sciwrite:



We do need to encourage people to flex their critical thinking skills and not blindly follow but the overlap between the groups should make this easier. We just need to figure out a few things.

Despite the new approaches, we often still stay within our silos. For example, scientists talk more to scientists than journalists. In some countries, there are organizations like the Welcome Trust or the AAAS helping these groups get together. In Vancouver (Canada), we don't have these large networks so it is even harder to make connections and learn from other viewpoints. I wonder if that is why some local organizations seem to be stuck in the linear, one-way communication process.

We have now started ScienceOnlineVancouver to help like-minded people get together but more importantly, we can learn the best ways to share information and opinions. I'm also hoping that we will be able to collaborate on some interesting projects – communication, new science, etc. At the monthly events, we're hoping for a mix of people who focus on all parts of the graphic – and ScienceOnlineVancouver will help different groups connect:



Please note: the Venn diagrams were created by Peter Newbury (@polarisdotca) and this post was instigated by discussions with him.

Scientific Research 2.0

There are many excellent bio-medical researchers working to break down the traditional communication models, make their research exciting and accessible, and engage with the end-users of their researcher.

Partners in Research wanted to recognize these three:

Jason Tetro, a.k.a "The Germ Guy"



Jason is a Health and Hygiene Promotion Expert at the Faculty of Medicine, Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Ottawa.

He is very active on Twitter (@JATetro), appears frequently on TV and has an active Blog: Confessions of a Mercurial Microbiologist.

He even uses video to spread hand hygiene messaging!

Jennifer Gardy, a scientist who also plays one on TV



Jennifer is a Molecular Epidemiologist at the BC Centre for Disease Control and a freelance Science Communicator.

She has appeared on The Nature of Things--Myth or Science with Davide Suzuki, has done a great Tedx Terry Talk and has a delightfully simple website.

Robert Smith? (Yes, the question mark is part of his name)



Robert is an Associate Professor in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Ottawa. He researches the dynamics of infectious diseases using mathematical models. He makes science accessible by relating his studies to pop culture phenomenons like Justin Bieber and Zombies.

Check out this piece by Jason Tetro on Robert Smith? in the Huffington Post: Bieber Fever: The Scariest Infectious Disease Of All.

Positively Altering the Trajectory of Students' Lives

By Nicole Tate-Hill, National Program Manager

I had a fantastic week traveling around southern Ontario meeting the teachers who participated in the On the Fly pilot project. I am so happy as VROC's new National Program Manager to continue this program for the 2012-2013 school year.

As a student I remember that important teacher who changed the way I perceived my world and opened my eyes to new opportunities. I wanted to thank all of the teachers that participated in this year's program. You helped make learning fun while exposing your students to the exciting opportunities that will be available to them as young adults and professionals.

There were many examples of teachers using the program creatively to enhance the learning experience of their students. I wanted to share a few.

Carolyn Williams, a teacher in the Avon Maitland District School Board gave her students the freedom to ask questions directly related to their class and about the practical applications for their subject, "Chemistry in the Media".

Ryland Henderson, a teacher with the York Region District School Board ensured that his class' expert, Thomas Merritt of Laurentian University was able to listen to his students' questions and relate that information back to them at an appropriate level.

David Martin's, Durham District School Board Grade 11 and 12 computer classes were matched with Dr. Mike Katchabaw from Western University and Tania Dunn, from Cisco Systems Canada. David found their interactions so valuable he even included an exam question that centered around information provided by one of their experts.

I also must acknowledge the Experts for their time and enthusiasm!

This story blew me away...Tania Dunn enjoyed the experience with David Martin's class so much that she agreed to visit the classroom, in person, to talk to the students. Then, Tania invited the students to tour Cisco's head office in Toronto! When the students arrived she had an exciting day planned for them, which included a meeting with the Director of Sales.

For more information please contact me, Nicole Tate-Hill.

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Featured VROC Programming

Reaching Every Student

VROC's Reaching Every Student program had a busy season with 200 sessions! The topics included: climate change, green chemistry, endocrinology, food safety, biotechnology and many more!

Watch one of these sessions HERE.



This virtual learning session was provided by Lisa Neville, a PhD candidate at Carleton University. She tells grade 10 science students at Westview Centennial Secondary School about her research using microorganisms to test for contamination in the Alberta Oil Sands and surrounding areas. Lisa also suggests several potential job opportunities. Although, her job which includes flying in and jumping from helicopters seems the most exciting!

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