

In late March (March 29-April 1st), four of us from District #8, JoAnn Brown (Princess Elizabeth School), Jillian Pacey (Centennial School), Shona Gowens (Centennial School), and I (Jaclyn Hetherington, Princess Elizabeth School) attended our first international teachers' conference, the National Science Teachers' Association convention in St. Louis, Missouri. This was an amazing experience, as we not only were attendees at this huge conference (over 15000 Science teachers in one location), but we were there as presenters as well.



Our initial impressions of the conference were that it was well organized, and huge! The main hub for the conference was located in the “America Centre” in the middle of downtown St. Louis. This new convention centre contained rooms for presenters (including one from Bill Nye, a “rock-star” in the world of science teaching) as well as a huge hall containing over 400 exhibitors and vendors. A full day could (and was!) spent in this hall examining, learning about, and interacting with the most current science resources available. Some examples include: levelled science readers that allow students of all reading levels to learn and engage with science content, digital and electronic microscopes and scientific calculators, aprons featuring the skeleton and other body systems, “Cogno’s Challenge” – the top educational board-game in the United States, and “Versatiles”, a hands-on activity that allows young students to learn and master important science vocabulary. We were all very thankful we had brought extra luggage with us in order to be able to return with all of our belongings as well as many useful new resources for our classrooms and schools!



The opportunities for professional development, in particular learning new ideas for classroom use and networking with other teachers, were incredible. In one session, I met a teacher from Texas who also teaches Grade 7. We exchanged information and hope to look into distance learning and sharing opportunities between our two classes next year. Another presentation featured classroom ideas from teachers who won the Presidential Awards for Science Teaching, the United States highest teaching honour.

On Saturday morning, we presented on our experiences in both the Whoo (elementary) Science Clubs and the Eco-Action (middle level) Science Clubs, both of which are part of a long-term study on science learning in conjunction with UNB-Fredericton and Crystal Atlantique.

We were nervous to be presenting in the first time slot (8:30 a.m.). We were worried that presenting in a small conference room in one of the down-town hotels on a Saturday morning might mean we would have no attendees, but we had an enthusiastic bunch of teachers who specifically wanted to hear what we had to say. Our hour-long presentation turned into more conversation, and the teachers present wanted more information from the research team that would allow them to start a similar program with their students. We are excited that this experience might help create after school science opportunities for students in the United States.

The city of St. Louis also offered wonderful learning opportunities for us outside of the conference. Highlights included: the City Museum, a one of a kind, hands-on museum/play ground constructed entirely of recycled and re-used materials, The St. Louis Zoo, one of the United States' top zoos, and the Gateway Arch and Westward Expansion Museum.



This was by far the best professional development experience of our careers to date, and we are already anticipating next year's conference in Boston. We hope that other New Brunswick Science teachers will have the opportunity to become involved in this conference in the future as it is definitely worthwhile.