



## The Department of Pediatrics at McMaster University's MCIU pilot project for children is an over-the-top success!

No need to wait for evidence-based data, just check out the smiles on the faces of the first McMaster Children & Youth University (MCIU) 'graduating' class 2011.



Dr. Katrin Schienemann



Dr. Sandeep Raha



Top left: MCIU founder, Dr. Katrin Schienemann, Department of Pediatrics, Assistant Professor, Division of Hematology & Oncology. Top right: MCIU founder, Dr. Sandeep Raha, Department of Pediatrics, Assistant Professor, Pediatric Research In between: Inaugural class of MCIU students who received 'graduation' certificates in 2011-12 for their excellent attendance, participation and enthusiasm for learning.

Patterned after the successful European model that now exists in 200 locations across Europe, Dr. Katrin Schienemann and Dr. Sandeep Raha launched a pilot project in 2011, the first of its kind in Canada, designed to create a stimulating learning environment in a university setting for children 7-14 years of age. The program, eight one-hour lectures taught by professors from varied McMaster University departments, quickly became so popular that this year; the location had to be moved to a larger lecture hall to accommodate the growing attendance. Since then, the MCIU program continues to grow and flourish in its second year, expanding the program to include post-lecture activities and special science fair projects.

At first glance, it might appear to be a near impossible task for a university professor to capture the attention of up to 300 energized kids for a whole hour on a Saturday morning. So what happens at MCIU that keeps kids in their seats and engaged in the lecture? Agreeably, the main ingredient is the children's natural love of learning, but when coupled with the enthusiasm, warmth and creativity of the professors, who skillfully adapt their subject material to capture and sustain the interest of young children with a mixture of fact and humour, drama and interactive participation, this vibrant combination provides for an engaging and memorable learning experience.

Here's a couple of snapshots from two of this term's lectures that MCIU kids (and their parents) aren't likely to forget. In September of 2012, renown historian and author, **Dr. Viv Nelles**, brought a dark period in Canadian history to life with his child-sensitive lecture that, while fact-filled, was presented in such a way that kids and parents alike were quietly intrigued one minute and belly-laughing the next. Read on to find out how a little humour and theatre helped to create an age-appropriate lesson in Canadian history.



## The War of 1812

The lecture hall, filled with the buzz and chatters of children, fell silent when Dr. Nelles strode to the podium carrying an overstuffed suitcase and a rusty old musket, and announced that he had brought the War of 1812 with him, inside the suitcase. He proceeded to ask permission from the class to open the suitcase, with a dire warning that unknown horrors might be awaiting escape after being locked away for 100 years. Entirely undaunted, a sea of nodding heads instantly responded, 'yes! yes! open it! open it!'

Dr. Viv Nelles, historian and author of best-seller 'A Little History of Canada'.

On first attempt, it was kind of like opening Pandora's Box; Dr. Nelles cautiously peeked inside and then, horrified, quickly slammed it shut again. All eyes were on Dr. Nelles as finally, in spite of his obvious trepidation, he mustered-up enough courage, took a deep breath and opened the suitcase.

To everyone's surprise, two magnificent hats appeared; one trimmed with feathery white plumes, and the other, a braided Napoleon-style wedge. The hats were followed by bright red and blue coats adorned with gold buttons and gold braiding, so grand and colourful, one child was prompted to ask, "Why did the soldiers dress up so fancy for war?"

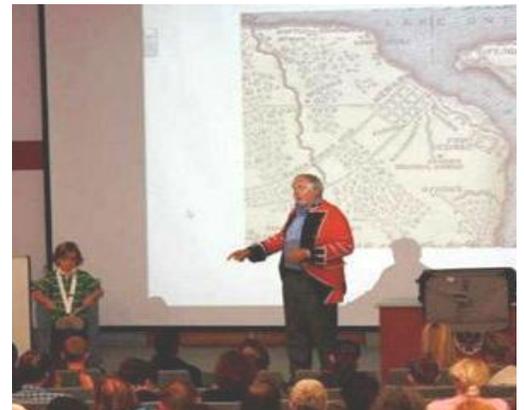
The class thought Dr. Nelles looked pretty funny when he donned the Napoleon hat (too big) and the red jacket (too small). After that, the hats were passed around as the students took turns role-playing. One student, whose task it was to perform a drum-roll to signal each major pronouncement, was relieved to finally sit down, exhausted from so much standing and drumming!

Dr. Nelles read accounts of the war as seen through

the eyes of Hamilton-area families whose home and farmlands had been occupied by soldiers. Stories ranged from feelings of great loss and grief, fear and confusion, to the excitement felt by a young boy, accustomed to quiet rural living, who woke one morning to find, that during the night, more than two thousand soldiers had camped out in the fields surrounding his farmhouse.

The impact of war on children their own age and the battles that were fought right on their own doorstep, perhaps on lands where some MCYU students now live, proved to be particularly captivating and meaningful; the discussion period that followed kept Dr. Nelles well after class to answer questions from a long line of inquisitive children.

But the well-crafted history lesson and the lively exchange between the children and professor that followed, is not the sum total of the program's benefits. As with all the MCYU lectures, it may be difficult to gage the far-reaching benefits that live on after the lecture, as the introduction to the campus and university environment, the parent-child learning experience which prompts continued dialogue after class, and the positive encouragement from the professors who prepare child-friendly lectures and patiently answer all manner of questions, all work together to sow the seeds for future university studies.



## Robotic Surgery

### Would you let a robot remove your appendix?



In January of this year, children and parents alike were treated to a spellbinding lecture on Robotic Surgery by **Dr. Mehran Anvari**, Professor of Surgery at McMaster University and Scientific Director & CEO, Centre for Surgical Invention & Innovation (CSii).

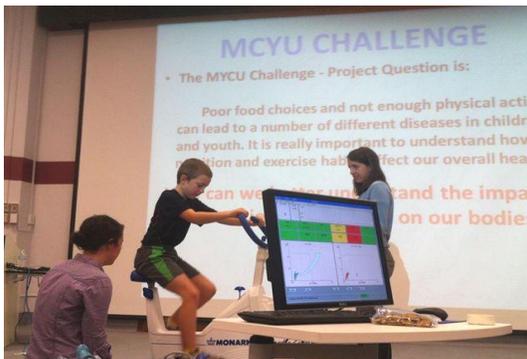
A video of the current and potential use of robotics in non-invasive surgery and the future of surgery in space, showed

Dr. Anvari floating around in zero gravity to stress the need for surgeons to be tied down in order to perform surgery in space. Then came the appendectomy. The response

from the class scored a big '10' on the yuk-factor scale when a robot held up a diseased appendix that had just been removed through a patient's mouth!

It was easily apparent that Dr. Anvari had little difficulty transforming his subject material into a fun-filled, interactive learning experience as evidenced by the packed lecture hall, and the seemingly endless flow of questions from the young participants. Kids love robotics and thankfully, Dr. Anvari was only too willing to encourage their interest.

Now throw in an out-of-this-world 'Starry Sky' lecture at the McMaster planetarium taking place in March, 'Our Genes, Our World' in April and 'The Power of Young Consumers' in May, and its little wonder the MYCU is rapidly becoming a popular concept in extra-curricular learning for children. Oh yes, one more bonus item... MCVU is free!



**If exercise were you medicine, would you take it?**

**Buried Treasure: Reconstructing History in South America.**



**Science group post-lecture**



**Anybody out there? How to take the power back from bullies!**



WRITTEN BY Catharine Griffin March 2013



## TESTIMONIALS

**McMaster Youth and Children's University -  
it's a family affair..... kids, parents and grandparents  
share in the joy of learning at MCYU!**

10 year-old Jordan Dawoud, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year at MCYU, received his 'graduation' certificate and is working on his second for 2012-13. Jordan's younger brother Noah says that he 'learns a lot of stuff', and when asked what he likes second-best about going to university he adds, 'getting lunch at the hotdog stand near the bookstore after class!''.



Henry and Mary Ernst accompany 8-year old granddaughter Annalee to class. Their enthusiastic response to the program says it all, 'the MYCU is the best thing happening for kids in Hamilton!'.



Family photo here with quote.....

Photo with quote

**Here's a list of the folks to thank for this inspiring and innovative project sponsored by:  
The Ron and Gina Fraser Foundation:**

MYCU founders, **Dr. Katrin Schienemann**, Department of Pediatrics, Assistant Professor, Division of Hematology & Oncology; **Dr. Sandeep Raha**, Department of Pediatrics, Assistant Professor, Pediatric Research, and their assistants: **Brianne Robertson**, assistant to Dr. Schienemann, **Janice Penney**, MYCU coordinator and assistant to Dr. Raha, **Raba Mirza**, assistant coordinator; **Cheryl Crocker**, Communications Coordinator, and all the **participating professors, graduate and under-graduate volunteers** who give generously of their time to contribute to these invaluable educational events for children.

➔ To sign up, get more information, see more photos, get a lecture schedule and directions to class, visit the MCYU website control/click on the link: [McMaster Children & Youth University](#)