



# Classroom Connections:

**The Community Working for the Children**

by Janice Norton

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**Education budgets are currently so restrictive that many teachers are spending their own money on supplies for their classrooms. A new program from Classroom Connections offers a unique approach to education fundraising that promises great benefits to the school system and, ultimately, to the children themselves.**

**Classroom Connections is an innovative program that approaches various Canadian companies and offers them the opportunity to donate resources and materials to schools that request them. This not only brings needed supplies into the schools but also increases the visibility of each company's products and image.**

"Our mission is to provide good-quality tools to aid elementary schools, children, parents and corporate Canada to work together through sponsored pro-social programs that supplement school budgets and enhance the learning experience of our children," says Heather MacTaggart of Classroom Connections. "It is possible to have corporations sponsor programs in school without commercializing our education system."

Classroom Connections grew out of MacTaggart's recognition that both schools and corporations had needs that were not being met. "Schools need additional resources and many companies need to communicate to children," she explains. Her professional background in sales and marketing combined with her involvement in the school system with her own four children uniquely qualified her to explore finding a solution for this issue. MacTaggart believed that with some creativity and carefully enforced guidelines, she could bring together the two groups in a way that benefits school children. She met with students, teachers, principals, home and school representatives and other experts in the field of education and, after extensive research, Classroom Connections was born.

According to MacTaggart, two key elements are necessary to ensure the success of Classroom Connections. "First, there must be very clear guidelines about the types of companies and products that can participate," she says. "And second, the programs must be designed to add value at the school level."

This added value would come in the form of arts programs and hands-on learning, physical fitness and health activities, lessons on environmental responsibility, and the development of children's sense of responsibility, ownership and teamwork.

To qualify as corporate sponsors in these programs, companies must meet strict criteria. These requirements have been created by Classroom Connections in conjunction with the Canadian Feed the Children Fund. For example, food products must be low in sugar and chemical additives, and toys and games must be non-violent and reinforce positive social values and promote cooperation.

In terms of implementation, Classroom Connections comprises three components: teacher's kits, which outline the fundamentals of effective school fundraising; a children's magazine, which highlights



**Heather MacTaggart**

pro-social topics in a fun and interactive format; and a parents' newsletter, which informs parents about the program and its benefits.

An advisory board composed of students, teachers and parents has also been established to assess students' needs, to decide which companies qualify for participation, and to monitor the program's progress.

One example of a program that Classroom Connections might offer would involve a food company and a children's book publisher. The food company might donate coupons for applesauce snack cups to participating classrooms. After the children enjoy their nutritious snack, they would bring the empty cups to class for structure building. Classes are then invited to enter the "structure challenge" to build the best possible structure and send in a picture. The winning class in each region would receive a 100-book library from the children's book publisher. To further extend the benefits of the program, the applesauce lids would be gathered by each class and sent back to the food company. For every 20 lids collected, a package of "applesauce snack cups" would be sent to Canadian Feed The Children (or a school breakfast program). Lids would then be recycled.

The issue of world hunger could then be incorporated into class projects and the children's magazine and parents' newsletter, resulting in a fully comprehensive programming package. Not only would this program improve the supply of building materials and books to schools, but it also imparts important lessons about teamwork, social responsibility and environmental awareness.

Other programs could involve the banking community in a project to develop elementary money management skills, or a paper supplier in program dealing with environmental issues that could bring some basic supplies into classrooms.

This winter, Classroom Connections plans to present its concept to elementary school principals and home and school associations across Ontario through a sales kit containing an order form, a toll free number and a web site address. Principals can then order the appropriate number of teacher's kits and children's magazines for their school. In 1998, the program will be expanded across Canada.

"Ontario schools are facing difficult economic times," says Dr. Dale Shuttleworth, executive director of the Training Renewal Foundation and former superintendent of community services for the City of York Board of Education. "Classroom Connections seems to be a most innovative approach to community fund-raising and business/education partnerships. I particularly like [their] emphasis on curriculum development to support enterprise learning."

For more information on Classroom Connections, or on becoming a member of the Classroom Connections Advisory Board, contact Florenda Tingle at the Ontario Public School Boards Association. **ET**

*Janice Norton is a freelance writer.*

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