Science on the Oval

Page Index

Description
Participants
Findings
Outcomes
Impact
Related Documents

Quick Links

Download Infosheet
Download Report
Visit Website

Project Title	Science on the Oval
Project Team	Hilary Whitehouse, Annette Ryan, Anthony Constance, Ruth Zee, Leah Simons, Wendy Cahill, Linda Saunders (James Cook University), Paul Parkinson (ASISTM Critical Friend)
Period	January 06 – September 07
Funding Agency	Australian Schools Innovations in Science, Technology and Mathematics (ASISTM – Round 1)
Organisational Base	SiMERR Queensland

Description

Top

Science on the Oval aims to introduce concepts of physical and biological sciences to early childhood, primary and middle school students outside the classroom, using school grounds.

Science on the Oval developed a suite of integrated, hands-on science activities that have been conducted on the oval, in the sandpit, in school sheds, on sports fields, and in school rainforest plots. The project included a whole-day activities program, teacher professional development and coordination and trialing of activities. It culminated in a 'Roadshow' for Cairns and Kuranda schools. All materials were developed for national dissemination as a curriculum resource called the National SOTO Handbook that will be published on the web and in print in October 2008. The aim of the Handbook is to guide teachers in implementing outdoor, hands on activities, especially in tropical settings.

The one day event included the following activities: slime shed, physics on the oval (such as pump action and alka-selzer rockets, glove guns, flying ringers, catapults, fruit cannons, eggstravaganza), whiz fiz, robotics, rainbow silk, animal vision, forensics, obstacle course bubbleology and dinosaur dig (an activity developed for school sandpits).

Participants

Top

Participants of the Whitfield day included 152 pre-service teachers from James Cook University; 1,178 students from six Cairns region schools and staff and some parents. Participants at the Kuranda day included 92 pre-service teachers from Jams Cook University; 651 students from seven schools, staff and parents. 1,371 students participated in this program in 2007 at the Bellenden Ker day from 12 regional/rural schools with staff and some parents. Participating regional and rural schools all had high levels of indigenous enrolments.

Findings

Top

The project was increased the professionalisation of JCU pre-service and in-service teachers in providing alternative and fun science projects that were enthusiastically received by students.

Outcomes

Top

This project provided pre-service and in-service teachers with education and PD on how to create well-conceptualized, physical, chemical and biological science activities for students aged 4 to 14. Creation of the National Handbook for Science on the Oval (edited by Hilary Whitehouse) was a further outcome. This was published in 2007 in print and in electronic form.

Impact

Top

Science on the Oval ideas have been implemented in schools around the far northern regions and JCU graduates gained employment. Strong evidence has been collected regarding impact planning for and participation in SOTO events by students who expressed willingness to teach science in early childhood settings and primary schools upon graduation and employment. Long term national impact is attributable to the National Handbook publication.

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Top

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Top