

Investigating Computer Usage

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Project Title	Investigating Computer Usage and Perspectives of Middle School Students and Teachers in Rural and Regional Queensland
Project Team	Professor Neil Anderson, Ms Lyn Courtney (SiMERR Queensland)
Period	May 07 – Incomplete
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR Queensland

Description

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Due to abundant literature on the declining participation rates of girls in ICT subject and pathways to ICT professional careers, this project will investigate how middle school girls and boys use computers in rural and regional Queensland and how ICT teachers/Heads of Departments (HODs) perceive the ICT climate in their schools. A survey will be administered to students and the following questions are typical of the ones that were asked in focus group or individual interviews with students and ICT Teachers/HODs:

- What are students' perceptions of computer subjects and how much computer knowledge have they acquired by the middle school years?
- What computer resources are available at the targeted schools and how are they used?
- What computer subjects are available at targeted schools and what is the content of those subjects?
- Who is teaching the computer subjects and what computer skills and qualifications do these teachers have?
- What professional development (PD) in computers is available to these teachers and is it adequate? Is it effective?
- How prepared are these teachers to teach ICT subjects?
- What level of confidence do the teachers have in their ability to teach computer skills?
- How happy are teachers about the content of the subject?
- Are the subjects interesting and engaging enough?

A survey was administered to all students and small focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with selected students and teachers/HODs. In addition, a general census was taken of the number of students who had computers at home at Cooktown State School.

Participants

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Grade 8 - 10 from two regional/remote schools (Cooktown and Murgon State Schools) and the computer science teachers/HOD from each school. Approximately 200 students completed a two-page survey, 18 students participated in a focus group interview, and six teachers/HOD participated in individual interviews.

Findings

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The data has been collected from both schools and the interviews have been transcribed. Data analysis is underway and is expected to be completed in late 2008.

Outcomes

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A research report will be written and findings published in late 2008.

Impact

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This research should provide a better understanding of the middle school experience of computing and is expected to add

to the body of knowledge concerning the reasons for declining female participation rates in Information Communication Technology (ICT). Because boy's teacher's perspectives are also being obtained, it is anticipated that a comparison can be made between perceptions of girls and ICT with perceptions of boys and ICT. It is hoped that the findings from this research will further enlighten researchers on the decline of female participation rates in ICT in their middle school years, a time when male participation rates in ICT appear to increase. It is hoped that workshops/programs can be developed to address any deficits in teacher professional development, if this is identified as a contributing factor.

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