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SiMERR

The National Centre of Science,
Information and Communication Technology,
and Mathematics Education
for Rural and Regional Australia

SiMERR

Professional Development in ICT

Project Title	Creating an Online Community for Professional Development in ICT: The way forward for teachers in rural and regional schools
Project Team	Associate Professor Catherine McLoughlin (SiMERR ACT), Ms Thea van Os (Catholic Education Office), Dan Morris (Director, Information Technology, Educational Services, Colorado Springs), Gene Bias (USA consultant for ISTE's Education Leadership Department)
Period	January 2007 – June 2008
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR ACT

Description   ⬆ Top

This project is designed to support the aims of SiMERR by enabling and supporting professional learning experiences for teachers/coordinators of ICT in regional schools. It leads to the creation of a research base that will support teacher professional learning, by overcoming the culture of isolation that characterises teaching. The project aims to investigate the professional learning needs faced by rural and regional teachers with respect to ICT integration in schools. In addition, the project developed an online community for delivery of professional learning for teachers in regional and remote areas. The participants were introduced to Web 2 tools (eg, Wikis and Blogs) to support professional conversations. These social software tools reduced the feeling of isolation that many country teachers experienced in networking with colleagues.

The project brought together staff from the Catholic Education Office in Canberra, school principals and ICT leaders in six regional schools in the ACT and NSW, with ICT leaders from the USA who acted as mentors and a cluster of associated ICT teachers in rural and regional schools who entered a mentoring relationship with the six ICT leaders. These ICT leaders/principals underwent professional learning in social software tools such as Blogs and Wikis, initially to learn these new skills and then to engage in professional conversations with mentees about the challenges of ICT integration across the curricula in schools. A series of workshops was held to introduce teachers to the potential of social software tools. The six leaders then acted as mentors for a cluster of ICT teachers, with the intention of demonstrating new tools for learning, engaging in professional conversations and assisting in the integration of social software tools in the school curricula. A customised web site was established on Moodle to facilitate the sharing of ideas and expertise regarding the challenges and possibilities of Web 2.0 and social software in the schools.

Participants   ⬆ Top

ICT coordinators in all Catholic Schools in the Canberra Goulburn Diocese, Catholic Education Office staff and school Principals – 30 teachers in all.

Findings   ⬆ Top

At the initial stages of the project, participants were novice users of the social software tools to support networking with other. All participants have demonstrated a degree of competency in and enthusiasm for the use of information and communication technologies to enhance student learning. Many teachers wanted to have professional development in the area of social software, and opportunities to use it for professional networking and pedagogical innovation.

Outcomes   ⬆ Top

The project outcomes were manifold but the major one was the creation of an online professional learning, site, on the Catholic Education Office sharepoint site. This lead to a sustained conversation among teachers on blogs and wikis, sharing of professional knowledge, and exchange of resources. More practiced teachers engaged in e-mentoring others through online discussion, and increased levels of engagement in professional conversations through a specially designed wiki site. Communication was facilitated through the use of blogs and wikis and was moderated and facilitated by the project leaders. The website is still running and is an example of a thriving online community, where educators meet to

exchange ideas, extend their practice and promote innovative ideas and pedagogies.

Refereed publication

- McLoughlin, C., & Lee, M. J. W. (2008). Future learning landscapes: Transforming learning through social software. Innovate: Transforming pedagogy though social software, 4(5), online at http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=issue&id=26 .

Conference presentations

- McLoughlin, C. (2007, July). Digital literacy skills and competencies for the 21st century: Productive uses of ICTs. Paper presented at the ICT and Leadership in the 21st Century Conference. Hosted by the Catholic Education Office at the Rheinberger Centre, Canberra.
- McLoughlin, C. (2007, September). Learning in an era of communication, connection and collaboration. Paper presented at the Learning Futures Symposium, Canberra.
- McLoughlin, C., Brady, J., Faragher, R., Wilson, S., & Broadbent, C. (2007, November). Nurturing Professional Learning - The SCoPE approach to professional learning: Sustaining communities of practice for educators. Paper presented at the Summit of the National Centre for Science, Information and Communication Technology, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia, Canberra.

Impact

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Feedback received from participants has been very positive and the Catholic Education Office is maintaining the site and supporting it. The ICT coordinators have reported continued activity and sharing of resources online, thereby enabling regional and rural schools to remain in contact with urban colleagues. The continuation of the professional online community is an indicator of the success of the project and its continuation beyond its intended life is evidence that it is a sustainable way to offer professional development to rural and regional teachers.

Related documents

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