

Resourcing Secondary Science Teachers

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Project Title	Resourcing Secondary Science Teachers in Rural and Regional Areas of Tasmania
Project Team	Dr John Kenny (SiMERR Tasmania), Dr Andrew Seen and Dr John Purser (Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology, UTAS)
Period	2007 - 2008
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR Tasmania

Description

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There is a need to provide more encouragement to secondary students to undertake studies in science. This can be done through using relevant multi-disciplinary science based activities that will provide a more meaningful educational experience for students. The project aimed to draw on expertise of academics from the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology at University of Tasmania (UTAS) to support science teachers in schools, through the provision of science teaching resources, equipment and techniques.

This project looked specifically at the development of an efficient and effective delivery mechanism for providing resources to secondary science teachers in rural and regional areas of Tasmania, by linking the Science Faculty at the University of Tasmania to some local schools to support a science project. The project aimed to use an online discussion board to connect schools and provide curriculum support as well as resources.

The decision to develop and evaluate web-based technology was a deliberate attempt to minimise ongoing human resources needs, and thus provide a cost efficient method of providing educational resources to rural and regional teachers. It was hoped that teachers would share their findings with each other and help each other to solve problems.

In 2006 two teachers at Deloraine High School trialled an activity to test water toxicity using brine shrimp or "sea monkeys" with the assistance of Dr Andrew Seen and Dr John Purser. The teachers developed a learning activity using the Brine Shrimp Bioassay activity funded through ASISTM. SiMERR support enabled this project to be expanded to other schools by funding the materials for the resource kits. It was advertised to science teachers and the seven schools that volunteered each received a resource kit for 2007. One of the Deloraine teachers offered to be a peer mentor for any teachers needing assistance.

To evaluate the project outcomes, a survey was developed and emailed to the schools concerned. In the end only four schools used the kit in their teaching.

Participants

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7 schools, 7 Department of Education teachers, Tasmania, 2 UTAS science experts.

Findings

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The secondary science teachers who used the kit appreciated the kit and the full range of equipment that it contained. However, the techniques were complicated and some teachers found it difficult to master the processes required. A professional learning session at the beginning of the year would have been useful for teachers to become familiar with the techniques involved. One teacher suggested a DVD showing how to do the techniques.

Most teachers were unaware of the potential of ICT to enhance the learning experience and didn't utilise the web resource. No sharing occurred between teachers in different schools. A key constraint of teachers engaging with the resource kit was lack of time.

Outcomes

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- Kenny, J., Seen, A., & Purser, J. (2008). Supporting and resourcing secondary science teachers in rural and regional

Impact

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The finding of this project is informing other projects seeking to assist teachers with resources and professional learning. The impact on the key science academic involved has also been interesting – much more understanding of the issue teachers face and a review of his own teaching methods at a university level. He is now interested in exploring Problem Based Learning pedagogies.

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