Professional Learning/Curriculum Development

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Project Title	Professional Learning/Curriculum Development Northern Midland Cluster
Project Team	Dr John Kenny (SiMERR Tasmania), Marj Colville (Principal, Pert Primary School)
Period	February 06 – September 06
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR Tasmania

Description

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Authentic science investigations are seen as a key part of scientific literacy. They are also a key means of meeting the thinking component of the Tasmanian Curriculum. Annual awards such as The Science Talent Search (STS) invite students of all ages to investigate suitable scientific or technological problems.

As primary teachers in general lack confidence in teaching science, many students are missing out on the motivating and rewarding opportunities offered by such experiences. This project aimed to raise awareness of a small group of primary teachers to some of the benefits for their students and of the range of resources available.

A preliminary survey was given to the ten teachers seeking to understand their attitudes and confidence in teaching science and what organizational, policy and support issues affected them. Three workshops that focussed on Investigating the Natural and Constructed World and Inquiry key element outcomes were conducted for teachers from eight schools in the Northern Midland Cluster. The workshops provided teachers with ideas and resources that assisted them to involve their students in conducting their own science inquiries. They were also able to participate in hands-on activities and discuss implications for their teaching with their colleagues. This resulted in teachers being more comfortable with conducting research investigations in the classroom and enabled them to access opportunities such as the Tasmanian Science Talent Search and SPECTRA. It also better equipped them to support students in-depth learning around a particular topic and enhanced their understanding of related scientific processes.

Two evaluation surveys were conducted and analysed with the results presented in a research paper for the “Teaching Science” Journal.

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8 schools, 10 teachers, 2 expert providers

Findings

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The main outcomes for the schools aside from the professional development received, included a greater awareness of the potential of science to engage students and a better understanding of the difficulties to be faced when initiating it in the primary classroom.

Six of the ten teachers indicated they were using the science talent search to engage their students in science, which was a key aim of the project.

The teachers emphasised the importance of opportunities for teachers to meet with staff from other schools to encourage more teaching of science in primary schools and to share ideas. The teachers also pointed out that developing science policies was not enough, because policy needs to be backed up with the provision of adequate resources for effective professional development, curriculum and material resources for teachers.

Outcomes

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- Kenny, J., & Colvill, M. (2008). Primary science: Professional learning and curriculum development in Northern Tasmania. Teaching Science, 54(1), 35-38.

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Since the project, the organising teachers have won an $80,000 ASISTM grant and are carrying on further research to support teachers in the area to do more science investigations:

- Science on the Land, Caring for our Future: Taking Care of Our Future aims to enhance science and technology education for upper primary and lower secondary students in rural schools in the Northern Midlands of Tasmania. The use of quality, accessible and user-friendly resources modelled on Primary Connections and using Learning Federation Objects will allow teachers in the cluster to expose students to experiences that stimulate further study in science. Students will be supported in their understanding and management of their environment through local rural and agricultural scientific initiatives by practicing scientists in areas such as agricultural chemistry, pasture productivity, water conservation and livestock management. This project will strengthen student transition from primary to secondary science education.

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