

Evaluating a Professional Development Process

Project Title	Evaluating a Professional Development Process to Support Teachers of Mathematics in Rural and Regional Areas of SA
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Description

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The purpose of this study is to examine a model of professional development being trialled by the Mathematics Association of South Australia (MASA). The vehicle for the professional development will be a series of workshops run by MASA partially funded by the SiMERR National Centre via the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT). Ongoing support will be via the participants in the project supporting each other and through the MASA website.

The teachers in the MASA project will also be exposed to the findings from AAMT Professional Learning Using the Mathematics Standards project (PLUMS) to:

- Develop their own understanding of ‘high end’ performance of mathematics teachers across the country, including in regional and remote areas;
- Guide their professional learning; and
- Map their progress.

This study will examine how teachers of mathematics in relatively isolated schools can take advantage of the PLUMS findings, and attempt to identify any issues related to mathematics that are specific to teachers in regional and remote schools. In doing so, it will provide a good source of evaluative data that will, in the first instance, be useful to inform MASA’s ongoing attempts to support its country members.

The project will also examine how school-based or regional-based support structures and personnel are able to support the professional development of these mathematics teachers. This will include the newly appointed Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) Teacher/Leaders in science and/or mathematics in regional centres. The MASA project aims to involve these people in the workshops and ongoing support program.

Workshops were conducted for two country districts in South Australia, one in the mid-north and the other in the Riverland. Teachers were interviewed about their Professional Development requirements and preferred delivery mechanism.

Participants

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40 teachers from a range of rural schools; two experienced teachers (MASA members); one AAMT representative.

Findings

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The first workshop was held in Port Augusta with strong attendance from middle and senior school mathematics teachers from the region. The second workshop was held in Berri with a mix of Primary and Middle years mathematics teachers from the surrounding area in attendance.

The evaluation process indicated that attendees thought the workshop focussed on their needs and provided a rich range of resources and teaching approaches. They also greatly appreciated that the workshop “came to them”. An online discussion group provided further information to teachers and allowed these geographically dispersed teachers to be mutually self-supportive. A critical component in success of the professional development was the considerable expertise and experience of the presenters. The project demonstrates that bringing such expertise directly to rural and regional teachers is on considerable benefit to both teacher confidence and competence.

The interviews indicated that there was no single model of Professional Development that would meet the needs of the teachers. That the “expert” running a workshop was seen as being very important to stimulate ideas and challenge the

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teachers, but that there was also a need for regular, ongoing activity. Some of the participants had been involved in the Monday Night Mathematics project (Professional Development delivered via video conferencing) and strongly supported this model as a way of getting regular contact.

Outcomes

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A two day workshop has been developed and trialled as part of this project. An email discussion list has been set up for workshop participants to facilitate ongoing discussions and support.

Impact

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The teachers who participated in the workshops were very positive about the material that was delivered. They indicated change on a number of levels, for the majority they indicated that there were activities that they could immediately implement with their classes and others that they would use in the future. The focus of the workshops on engaging activity based mathematics had for some of them also challenged their approach to the teaching of mathematics and that they would rethink their overall approach.

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