Science in the Bush

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Project Title	Science in the Bush
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Period	May 08 - June 08
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR WA

Description

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This project aimed to identify features of a science program at a rural primary school that has been recognised as a school with 'successful', excellent science education. In particular, the project addressed questions about: what is currently happening in the science programs at the school and how they have been developed; what features the school and local community bring to the success of the science program; what aspects of teachers' professional experiences have impacted upon the science programs; and what aspects of the science programs that are particular to a rural location contribute to the success of the programs.

The research team visited the school for two days to see the facilities and science projects that have been completed or are ongoing. Interviews were completed with seven school staff and small groups of students from all year groups.

Participants

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Teachers and students at a small rural primary school in the western wheat belt of WA; school enrolment of 50 students.

Findings

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A main feature of the science programs was their nature as 'real world' science projects that involve the students in activities of interest and relevance to their lives and local environment or community. Examples included establishing and maintaining: a recycling depot for the local shire, a tree nursery, a sustainable garden, a fish pond, a fruit orchard, gardens at the school entrance, and tree replanting on local grazing paddocks. The whole school was generally involved in the project, in an ongoing way over extended periods of time, and in this regard there was whole school commitment to the projects in planning how to effectively involve students of a range of ages and background knowledge and skills. The leadership from a teacher with a very strong science background had been instrumental in supporting other teachers' professional development in science. Since this professional development had been maintained over several years, and projects had been ongoing in that time, there was evidence that the science programs could be sustained, to some degree, if the leader were no longer at the school.

The integration of science across the curriculum was also a key aspect of the school's program, particularly with regard to using science as a focus for ICT, literacy, and mathematics learning. That is, ICT, literacy, and mathematics knowledge and skills were embedded into science activities. In fact, the use of ICT was prominent in the students' daily work, in particular for accessing, recording and communicating information. Also, the daily curriculum allowed for students to engage in learning about things that captured their interests; for example, bread mould or what lizards eat. In this regard the curriculum had flexibility and provided opportunities for science activities to emerge as part of what happens in students' daily lives. For example, when the local area received rain after a period of drought, the teacher planned an activity around examining how clouds and rain are formed.

Finally, it was noted that the curriculum was focused around investigating, so that students asked questions about their world and then planned ways to find answers, set up experiments, or apply ideas and techniques.

Outcomes

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Preparation of conference presentations and other publications have not been completed.

Impact

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Science in primary schools is often not given much attention as a curriculum learning area, with reasons given for this situation often related to lack of expertise or lack of resources. Thus, the science projects the school in this project has undertaken serve as models for other schools in efforts to establish relevant, effective and sustainable science education programs for all levels of primary school.

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