

Teacher Resource Exchange Research

1 The brief

A team of 10 experienced teachers/teacher educators were asked to spend a day looking at the TRE. Half a day was spent searching the site and looking at the registration process, navigation, the search facility and also the ease of publishing and adding a resource to the site. The remainder of the time was spent in writing up reports on the findings and recommendations on ways in which the TRE can be improved. The researchers were asked for general feedback on the functionality of the site and suggested improvements and to approach their research from the perspective of the inexperienced user.

The main findings are outlined below with full reports from each researcher attached as annexes. The main recommendations are also included under each section.

2 Main Findings and Recommendations

Accessing the site

Many of the team reported experiencing registration problems with the TRE. Login experiences varied between those who were able to login easily and at the first attempt and those who could not access the site at all for a number of consecutive evenings and whose passwords were rejected. This may be to do with the time of day the site was being accessed. In general, however, the researchers felt that the login process was not as easy as it could be and that more information needs to be provided on the VTC about the TRE with clearer links from this site and the DfEE main site. The research team felt that they would not have found the TRE easily had they not been told about it and given the URL for the purposes of this research. The main points were:

Findings

- Login information unclear;
- Confusion created with the need for two logins, one for the VTC and another for the TRE;
- The joining process is unclear;
- The TRE is not advertised well on the VTC, there is no explanation of what the site is about and how useful it could be.

Recommendations

- Clearer links needed from VTC and DfEE main site;
- Login process requires simplification.

The Home Page and Navigation

The team felt that the home page is rather confusing and needs more upfront information about the TRE. More introductory material on the site and how to use it is needed at this point. The help/support document was found to be very useful but needs to feature much earlier. It was also felt that the navigation needs some improvement. The main points were:

Findings

- Home page too busy and no site map for easy navigation;
- Difficult to navigate at times as instructions are unclear.

Recommendations

- Description of site needed on home page;
- Bring home page, information page and search page together on front end of site;
- Navigation on home page needs improving.

Searching

Some researchers found the search facility unhelpful and difficult to use, and not precise enough. It was felt that a better match to user needs is required. The subject searching was felt not to be specific enough and getting to a particular subject was cumbersome. A rating system was also recommended as helpful as was being able to search by contributor name.

Findings

- Difficult to use
- Not precise enough

Recommendations

- Searching needs to be improved in terms of matching content to profile;
- Would be useful to have themes such as by National Curriculum strand;
- Searching by author/contributor name recommended by most of the team;
- Rating system or top ten facility would be very helpful;
- Go or search button needed;
- ICT as a National Curriculum subject needs to be included, particularly in relation to searching, and not just the use of ICT in the teaching of other subjects.

Contributing

All agreed that it was easy to contribute a new thought and very easy to publish – the process is simple and straightforward. However, it was felt that the levels used were unclear, possibly confusing and that they need some clarification.

Findings

- Adding a Resource – all felt this was clear and simple to use;
- The menus and buttons in this section are clear and intuitive;
- Unclear whether you choose which section to contribute to or if the section will be decided for you by a moderator after submission;
- Several users unable to access the New Resources section and the lack of a help facility was very off-putting;
- Not keen on the labels being used for the levels – several researchers felt three levels were not necessary and that the titles used caused confusion;
- Distinction between First Thought and Developing Ideas, but in practice this is not clear. These terms do not match the purpose of the pages.

Recommendations

- Labels for levels needs clarification;
- Need to make clear the difference between Developing Ideas and Creating Resources;
- A step-by-step guide as you click through would be helpful.

Design Aspects

It was felt that the design of the site needs some attention. A simpler layout to encourage first time visitors is advised.

Findings

- Too much note text in the form of grey text notes which clutter up the screen and distract the user;
- Green toolbox unhelpful in current position.

Recommendations

- Site map needed with a step-by-step guide to the site;
- Spell check facility would be helpful;
- Green tool box and blue left hand navigation panel need to be improved or combined to bring processes down to their logical minimum effort;
- Broken links and spelling mistakes in places which require attention;
- Could be made more appealing and inviting for new visitors;
- Newsletter and message board area would be useful.

3 Issues

- At present the vast majority of contributions are from ITC specialists or subject teachers keen on ICT.
- There is little genuine peer review or critical assessment of materials or ideas. Objective, professional, critical responses are vital if exchange is not to end up actually disseminating poor practice and materials.
- It would be helpful to have a section for trainee teachers, particularly including lesson plan advice and exemplars for each subject; advice on writing schemes of work and meeting QTS standards.
A newsletter style section would be helpful to highlight areas of professional expertise and advice – classroom management strategies, interesting lesson plans etc.

4 Conclusion

The site is an excellent resource for teachers, values the work of teachers and offers an opportunity for the sharing of good practice. It is therefore important to advertise the site more, making teachers aware of what a useful resource it is. The research team were very positive about the usefulness of the TRE and those who had not come across it before were pleased to have found the site and will be making use of it in future and telling colleagues about it. A number of the team would like to see it available for the wider community to use.

However, It is important to remember that IT literate teachers carried out this research. As experienced web users and designers they found the process confusing at times, and many of the team had doubts as to how easy an inexperienced colleague would find using the TRE. Some thought needs to be given to simplifying the process. It was felt that the current design and navigation will not encourage less experienced teachers to access and contribute. The idea and concept of the TRE are good but more work is needed to make it work efficiently and effectively.