

LISTENING TO FIRST YEAR BIOLOGY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LABORATORY ACTIVITIES: IDENTIFYING PROPERTIES OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND STUDENT LEARNING

Pam Hurst

Presenting Author: Pam Hurst (p.hurst@latrobe.edu.au)
Department of Zoology, La Trobe University, Bundoora VIC 3086, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Focus groups, discussing laboratory experiences in the previous semester were conducted with first year La Trobe biology students to explore their perceptions of laboratory activities. Students in a first year animal evolution and diversity subject had previously reported, via the university wide 'Student Feedback on Subject' survey instrument, that laboratory activities most contributed to their learning. The aim of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of what laboratory characteristics were perceived as important to students. A grounded theory approach was used to qualitatively identify from the focus group transcripts the main characteristics of laboratory activities recalled by students. Four properties of laboratory activities were identified that possessed a dimension on which student comments could be placed; *sensory*, *attractiveness*, *structure*, and *instructions*. In addition to these properties, properties attributable to student learning were also identified from the transcripts, *confidence* and *attitude*. Although identified from discussion around laboratory activities, these properties are also applicable to other learning activities. For a first year science student, having the confidence to learn is essential for successful future study.

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