Make no bones about it

He loves loud Hawaiian shirts, talking to people and, most importantly, poring over old bones.

Which is why “Professor Fozzil”, aka Balranald Central School Science teacher Phil Harding, felt at home excavating dinosaur bones at the Australian Museum’s Dinosaur Unearthed exhibition.

“The experience of digging a dinosaur that has been buried for 75 million years is the chance of a lifetime,” he said.

Mr Harding, who has an interest in palaeontology, spent two weeks honing his skills and knowledge with the museum’s scientists and curators late last year as part of the Teachers in Business program.

The professional development initiative allows NSW public school teachers to gain experience in different workplace settings outside the classroom. Coordinator Janice Martyn said teachers involved in the program – which is run by the vocational education in schools directorate – use their new knowledge to enrich learning in their classrooms.

“It’s a professional development activity which gives teachers opportunities to network and develop stronger links with the community and with their school,” she said.

“It gives them the sense of having a wealth of talent, being able to show that to an outside audience and then bring that back into their school environment.”

As part of the program, teachers undertake a work placement of up to a fortnight with a business or organisation in NSW. The application must be approved by the principal and needs to demonstrate links to the Quality Teaching framework and the relevance to school management and planning.

Participating teachers have worked with businesses like AMP, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation and local councils.

Mr Harding, one of 30 teachers involved in the 2006/07 program, said he hoped to use his work placement to develop an interactive computer resource with the museum based on the Dinosaur Unearthed exhibition, which involved excavating the fossilised bones of a Centrosaurus that roamed the northern hemisphere 75 million years ago.

He would also like to develop educational books based on his Professor Fozzil character, a graduate of “Bones University” who makes palaeontology fun. Dr Fozzil is aimed mainly at younger students to make Science “a bit entertaining and light-hearted but also educational”, he said.

BEN WYLD