

DTiF

Digital Technologies in focus

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Transcript of teacher reflection interview by Peter Lelong with Stacey Cooper of St. James Catholic College, Cygnet

Peter Lelong: Today is 18th June 2019 and I'm at St. James Catholic school in Cygnet with the assistant principal Stacey Cooper, who has also been in charge of the DTiF project for the last two-and-a-half years at the school.

Stacey Cooper: I would say the main aim has been to build teacher confidence in teaching Digital Technologies and assessing and reporting on it so that students' competencies in that area are improved.

Peter: So what strategies have you been ... and have been finding effective in working towards that aim?

Stacey: We've focused largely on the teachers, which I think has been quite effective building teacher confidence and their familiarity with the new curriculum. Their familiarity with the resources we have available to us, as well as sourcing more of those resources through grants and things like that. Using the money we do have to give time to those teachers and sit together and support each other in planning and in setting SMART goals and in tinkering with the resources that we have to use with the students – that not only built interest but also built the competence of the teachers in what they can roll out in classes.

Peter: So with all of that, I'm sure there have been some challenges.

Stacey: Initially it was difficult because obviously it's something new and new things can be hard. So there was a level of fear of trying something new and making it work in the classroom that we had to face. As well as that, it was just the knowledge gap, building people's confidence when ICT is not their area of strength. We've had high staff turnover. So once we get someone feeling confident they would go and we'd start again with another staff member or have to bring them up to speed with where we were up to. The team directly involved in this project has changed, I think every year, if not six months, and then this year we changed the structure of how we were delivering Digital Technologies, which meant the responsibility wasn't spread across the entire team – it was more with one specialist teacher. So that was difficult because we had to look again at keeping it relevant and keeping it an area of urgency in terms of professional development and improvements.

I was surprised by the power that students have to share their enthusiasm with teachers and just by letting them have a little unsupervised, well not unsupervised, unstructured play or

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experiment with the devices – that that can kind of put the pressure on and encourage teachers to just have a bit of an unstructured explore of it themselves and to get more involved. And just surprising how far the kids can take it with barely any guidance; if you give them a lunchtime session with some new technology it's pretty incredible and that gets parents talking and it gets teachers talking and it just builds our case a little bit to support Digital Technologies as an area of interest and an area that is exciting and not scary.

Peter: So what changes in student or teacher capacity, Digital Technologies knowledge and skills, can you identify?

Stacey: I think the biggest change for us has been moving from that mindset of Digital Technologies just being an extension of ICT, that it's, 'Oh, we use iPads to take photos and type things in our class, so we're doing Digital Technologies.' That was a big focus to start with in our baby steps stage of just making sure we understood the difference that yes, it's great to be able to type and yes, it's great to be able to use different software, but we're looking at bit deeper than that and identifying what those main differences were. I think that's reflected in teacher planning, so even before we had the specialist teacher doing it I saw people trying really hard with their planning. It showed they'd been reflecting on the curriculum. It showed that they'd accessed the Digital Technologies Hub. And just a general increase in teacher confidence and competence in their planning and delivery and assessment, which is pretty exciting. We've still got a way to go but people are really trying.

Peter: Just a final question – how have your perceptions of the Digital Technologies subject changed?

Stacey: Because we had to start so small with distinguishing Digital Technologies from ICT, it seemed we had a very long way to go but I think I see it more as a subject that can be readily integrated now, rather than just something else to deal with and another subject to fit in a busy week and I've had the chance to explore it and see all the links that can be made and how readily it is linked in with maths or science or other areas, literacy as well. So that's changing my perception and made it seem more doable.

To build teaching capacity, build student interest through the focus on the smart garden, because that's an area of engagement and high motivation of the students already. [It's] working better this year because we had a lot of change in who was running the garden and structure of the garden lessons whereas I'm running the garden as well this year so it's easy to marry the two together and to collaborate with the teacher who's taking Digital Technologies lessons as a specialist this year.