

DTiF

Digital Technologies in focus

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Transcript of teacher reflection interview

Kim Vernon with Rebecca Keough of St Mary's Primary School – Moruya

Kim Vernon: Hi, my name is Kim Vernon, New South Wales curriculum officer on the DTiF project with responsibility for the Central West New South Wales and down here in the Eurobodalla. So today I'm with Rebecca Keough at St Mary's Primary School in Moruya. So Rebecca, did you want to tell us a little bit about your role here at the school first?

Rebecca Keough: Yes, thanks Kim. I am the teaching and learning coordinator here at St Mary's Primary School. Part of my role over the past two years has been working alongside yourself on the Digital Technologies in focus project and to support teachers with the implementation across our school. There have been a few ways that that has happened. In a nutshell, number one is awareness. The fact that it's out there, it's happening. I also think that the understanding around the differences between ICT and Digital curriculum have been something that we've highlighted and something that staff are starting to grasp an understanding of. There's still a little way to go there.

Another big area for us has been support. Where we live, it's pretty isolated so accessing professional learning and finding those opportunities can be challenging sometimes and similarly skills in that area as well. So it's obviously a really new area to all of us teachers. We're in the learning pit so to speak and I feel that the support that we've been provided with via sharing of information or workshops or access to professional learning in a variety of platforms has been a really big way that it's had an impact upon us.

At this stage, I would say that it's certainly moving forward. At the beginning, as I mentioned, we were quite a reluctant school. We had limited skills in this area and I feel that we're at the point where staff are starting to be more aware of it, of the requirements of the curriculum, and staff are just at the point where they're starting to put their toe in the water with actually accessing professional learning.

Our big picture goal has been for staff to actually use an integrated approach with Digital

curriculum and embedding that into authentic learning experiences in the classroom context with the big big picture being to engage community. So at this stage I believe that our staff are accessing professional learning and exploring the curriculum within their classroom and sometimes through unintentional methods. Sometimes they're doing things and they don't quite know they're doing them and that's the beauty of Digital curriculum because it can pop up in unexpected places and it's a beautiful surprise.

There's been quite a few strategies we've employed; we've tried a lot of different things. As I mentioned, sending invitations for professional learning opportunities – whether that's online or in person, in support from yourself and from ACARA. The website's been an ongoing resource and a developing resource. I know myself, I've been able to access bits and pieces from there so that's been good.

Workshops have been really good. We've run a few workshops here at school through staff meetings and feedback has been a lot of those hands-on workshops have been extremely beneficial and staff are saying, "Can we have more of that?" The dem lessons that you provided, and then working alongside the teachers, have also been instrumental in giving teachers an understanding around the way that we don't have to reinvent the wheel; we just need to look for purposeful ways of embedding the curriculum into what we currently do.

As with any change, as we've discussed, there's always challenges. People are still uncertain about how it fits into their classroom: "how do I do this, what skills do I use, what tools should I employ?" People are feeling a little bit vulnerable about that, which is okay, because we're currently moving through this and we're currently learning about this really new area.

I feel that changes in the roles with people within the school and the way that timetabling occurs and those sorts of things have an impact. I mean, we can't consistently have the same thing happening year in year out at schools and sometimes this impacts upon people's capacity to commit to things and I'm going to say myself, I know my role has changed dramatically over the last two years, which has had an adjustment to the way I have actually approached it, so that's been a challenge for me.

The time provided for teachers to actually dive in and have a play ... teachers aren't giving themselves permission just to give themselves a little bit of time to play, a little bit of breathing space to either fail or succeed or to share their journey with somebody else, and a reluctance to jump in.

I've seen a real growth in the commitment of staff to actually trial unplugged, which is brilliant, and making connections. Data is a really easy one that we can make some connections with but I feel that now the next challenge to move to plugged is where we're at. I feel that that's a big challenge for a lot of people because these aren't tools that

we've had in our classroom before. They're not tools that we've had the training for in our previous education so putting these additional tools into our toolkit is a little bit intimidating in some ways, because most of the kids know more than we do! So part of that is also us embracing that and going, "Okay, let's get in the learning pit alongside and let's learn with the kids."

For me, it's been the opportunity to say to people, "Oh my gosh, did you do that?" or "You've attended that learning, like who are you?!" A couple of little fun things like that – having a little bit of fun with staff actually diving in and having some really rewarding experiences. For example, staff members attending a PL session where they travelled away together and the power of that: going away with other people and having conversations there and then having those team members to have those conversations with when you come back, that's been brilliant. There were staff members that I thought maybe wouldn't be as interested in learning but, oh my gosh, it's been amazing! They have done some really brilliant things and I know that one particular teacher has taken that back and transferred it into their classroom, which is really positive.

Another really positive thing for me is I have seen some brilliant ways that staff are starting to do integrated things. We've had some teachers this year looking at gardening and sustainable practices around gardening. We have a waste warriors group that's also developed. Now these aren't designed or they haven't been created with Digital Technologies in focus but the potential for them then to inform how we can use that in the classroom – simple things like collating data around how we're using our waste management processes in the school, the ability to look at the processes behind gardening and how we actually create a garden within the school and the planning around creating a garden, and all those brilliant things.

But I don't think these teachers realise the brilliant things that they could be doing with this and that for me is really exciting – being able to say, "Hey, that's awesome! Do you know that this also marries with that and this is the next level that you could take this to?" The sky's the limit for those guys! It's really exciting. There definitely has been some growth in that particular area. As I mentioned, the attending of PL but also the collection of work samples from the students and having conversations with students about what they're doing in the classroom.

Information also comes through our newsletters as to what classroom teachers are doing and also onto our social media feeds as to when teachers are actually employing these new strategies in their classrooms. With that little bit of information we're seeing definite growth in that area and those little work samples are a nice little way for us to go, "okay, where to next?"

There has been an increase in student capacity so having one-on-one conversations with students done recently just conducted some interviews with some students where

they were talking about their experiences in the classroom. Their language is still developing around the Digital curriculum area but to some of them this is completely new, just like it is to us, and so that more explicit language is something we need to work on, but yet these kids get what they're doing. One example is having a conversation with a student around how using Lightbot then relates to how they were putting together their Awbie programming but then that also links into what I did next, which was looking at a bit of Scratch programming, and that sequential development of skills. So they're seeing links and connections there when you're having those conversations.

The other way is by looking in the student workbooks – what they have been doing? In one of our classes they have spent some time looking at design and they've actually designed some products – some reusable, recyclable products – and so talking about sustainability but also then looking into design process and how that works and how we can design new products. So the kids are certainly starting to think differently and moving more towards thinking like 21st-century learners.

For me, personally, right at the beginning I thought it was an add-on. I thought, “here I go, I'm going to have to teach another subject area. How the heck am I going to find time to do that?” Over the term of the project I became quite frightened. I was really in the learning pit, thinking, “Oh my giddy aunt, how the heck am I ever going to manage this? This is over my head. I'm in way over my head! I know little about technology, how am I going to do this?” But the more exposure and the more I read about it and the more I put my toe in the pool, I realised that it really needs to be about making it purposeful. It has to be authentic and it has to have – not only for me but for the kids in my classroom because otherwise it's just this random subject that sits out there and we talk about, “well we do computers” and or “we do programming” – whereas it should really be “we're looking at how we analyse data, we're looking at how systems work,” and it should be more along those lines. So for me it's been a big mind shift.

In relation to staff, people are at the stage – look, there's varying stages across the school – we've got people who have been away for various reasons and they are right at the beginning of their journey but then we've got people who are in the middle of the journey and they're just starting to embrace this idea that, “It's coming, I've got to do something about it”, and then we've got people pushing up the other end who are going, “I think I'm doing something, is this right?”, right up to those staff members who want to dive in and do integrated learning and we've got one or two of those teachers on staff, which is brilliant.

Into 2020 we need to re-evaluate our current policies and practices around Digital curriculum. Now that people have a better understanding, we're developing understanding around it that it's quite timely that we do that so that people are aware that this is something that's – it's here. It's not something that's a fad; it's something that we need to embrace and find a way to fit every day in our classrooms. So definitely re-

evaluating policies and procedures as a staff so that it fits us as a whole. Not just me, not just one particular staff member, but everyone at their own point of need but also marries in with what the expectation is around what children need to know stage by stage so that there aren't these little gaps in learning and we're not playing catch-up as the children move through the stages and ages.

I mentioned earlier on regarding ICT and Digital Technologies and there is still a little bit of disparity around understanding the difference between the two, and there's just a little bit more work just to polish that a little. So that's something definitely to tackle.