Transcript of teacher reflection interview

Steve Grant with Jez Graetz of Bethany Christian College, SA

Steve Grant: Alright, so we're here with Jez Graetz, who is the IT manager here at Bethany Christian School.

Jez Graetz: The aim that we would see is to equip our teachers to develop their TPACK, to actually see them understand the Digital Technologies portion of the curriculum and how it integrates throughout the other learning areas, and become competent so that they can really be equipped with the resources and the technology they would need to be able to apply this throughout different subject areas.

Probably having, firstly, teachers understand what the curriculum is asking of them in this area of Digital Technologies and expecting where they would like the students to be up to at each standard, but then having the opportunity to plan and, once they know how the curriculum works and understand the language, to then be able to apply that to their curriculum plans. So, between Digital Technologies as a subject and ICT Capabilities, we actually had to differentiate between what they are and show that just because you're using technology in the classroom doesn't mean you're covering the Digital Technologies curriculum.

From my experience over the last five to eight years, traditional professional development, going into sending staff off for a seminar for a day or a workshop and then bringing them back with the skills they need to be equipped, I just don't think it works, and so we've adopted a different approach where we utilise staff members in the school that are proficient and professionals in the area of ICTs and Digital Technologies to work regularly, on a weekly basis, with our staff. So our philosophy is if we're checking in each week, put your hardest Digital Tech or ICT Capability on that lesson during the week and then we will support you in getting it up and running. And so, being in the classroom, for our IT staff, is one of the best things we've done.

So, challenges would be teachers finding things difficult. New technologies can be difficult. The biggest one there would be around coding. It's fine when it's at simple block coding level and it's changing colours or moving short distances, but if you want to integrate it into a Maths or a Science topic, then you then have to have the ability to assist the students with some of that coding and it sort of crosses – there's like a level where teachers can handle and understand and then it goes too far and you definitely need that support person, which is, that's our model – serve that lesson up when our ICT support is available. I think if we were to rewind two years ago and we were just to simply ask the question, 'Are you competent in Digital Technologies?'

and then also ask that same question a year ago and then today, I think we would see a gradient moving towards feeling more confident.

The students, as we've allowed them, given them time, to use more Digital Technologies and ICT devices and options – they've taken to it, they love it. And so, what we've found is once we've introduced a piece of technology or an idea around technology, they can then start to apply that in other areas. So, they might – we found that a student was doing Bee-Bot and looking at directional – north, south, east, west, lefts, rights – could then take that into Year 1 and apply that with the next device that they use. Like, even just using the robotics as one example, so Google Classroom has taken off and so even though it fits more into ICT capabilities, it's just technology we used all the time as a communication tool and a work on assignments and handing up things. So that, just doing that, builds competency for the students and for the staff because they're using that technology all the time. So, to then pick up the iPad to do some robotics coding, it's easier, and we're seeing that. From the robotics point of view and coding, we didn't see yet – the teachers are incorporating robotics into other learning areas, which is just awesome. We've done a couple of Design and Technologies integrations now where the teachers are pretty much competent to just book the Spheros out and stick them into the classroom and use them for a lesson. We've had a few of our teachers allow Scratch integration into Mathematics. We had students make timetables, games, because it was just an interesting way to look at their multiplication and division. And that wouldn't have happened without one, the students being competent enough to build something for themselves, and two, the teachers feeling competent enough to give it a go, and we've seen that change, which is great.

The curriculum document, it can be easy to just grab the document and literally go, 'achievement standard, can the kids do this?', but when you pair it together with the other learning areas and resources, you actually understand that it's bigger than just kids achieving certain things and I think that was a good takeaway for our teachers.