MEDIA RELEASE

NEW PROGRAM PROVEN TO UPSKILL TEACHERS

IN CRUCIAL DIGITAL SKILLS

November 4, 2021

Thousands of Australian teachers who participated in a program to support the teaching of the subject Digital Technologies in the classroom gained digital skills and confidence that proved vital for the switch to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACARA's Digital Technologies in focus (DTiF) project was a 4-year program, funded by the Australian Government, designed to upskill teachers and support them to teach Digital Technologies, a relatively new subject.

The unique project has now been independently recognised to improve student engagement and achievement in some of the country's most disadvantaged schools, but it also has provided timely tech skills to teachers.

"This has been invaluable for many schools and teachers who participated and then found themselves delivering remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said ACARA CEO, David de Carvalho. "Teachers told us they strengthened their own digital skills and felt more able to confidently cope with students learning from home."

Teacher Rebecca Keough from St Mary's, a small Catholic primary school in Moruya, New South Wales, said some staff were initially reluctant to engage but improved in ability and confidence.

"Our focus was meeting teachers at their point of need. Some staff are willing to dive in and some are more reluctant," she said. "A big win was that by the end of it, a lot of staff knew there are so many ways that you can engage with the Digital Technologies curriculum. Now teachers are asking questions and taking on challenges to improve their own practice. We've grown a lot in that respect.

"Our ICT capabilities have needed to really amp up due to COVID, and staff who had participated in the DTiF program were really empowered. It enabled staff to realise that if they need to learn something new, they can."

More than 160 schools participated in the DTiF project, which was funded by the Australian Government as part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA). It provided support to teachers in some of the country's most disadvantaged schools, including professional learning on how best to plan for and teach Digital Technologies.

There was a particular emphasis on regional and remote schools, with 49 per cent of the schools involved from regional areas, 29 per cent from remote or very remote regions and 22 per cent in metropolitan locations. The schools were from states and territories across Australia and all sectors.

"The need for professional learning nationally was high and particularly so in disadvantaged schools where students often have limited access to digital devices at home, and so the school's role is critical," said Julie King, ACARA Senior Manager, Curriculum.

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"Spending such a long time with the schools meant the mentors were able to build an ecosystem of support and that contributed significantly to the success of the program and to sustaining important long-term change.

"Students showed increased engagement in learning computational thinking, design thinking and problem solving. A lot of teachers told us they saw many students, who might normally lack confidence in the classroom, really shine, and every school involved reported positive outcomes for student inclusion and achievement. Many First Nations Australian students also benefited from learning Digital Technologies through a focus on story, exploring their local language, learning on Country/Place and programming robotic devices."

The benefits were highlighted in a review by a team of academics at the Deakin University School of Education, which undertook a 3-year close-up study of 6 participating schools, and in a report published by ACARA. The reports are published here: https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/about/

A large range of ACARA resources, including illustrations of practice, video content, vodcast tutorials, classroom ideas, lesson plans and assessment tasks can now be accessed by all teachers via the DTiF website: https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/digital-technologies-in-focus/

For journalists and media

For any media related queries, please call 0414 063 872 or email media.contact@acara.edu.au

Find multimedia materials here: https://bit.ly/3buXmxo

CASE STUDY: St Mary's Primary School, Moruya, New South Wales

At St Mary's, a small Catholic primary school on the Traditional Lands of the Yuin Peoples on the New South Wales south coast, teachers focused on ways to integrate Digital Technologies and ICT capability across the whole school during the DTiF project.

Classroom teacher and diocese technology "champion" Rebecca Keough said some staff were initially reluctant to engage with digital technologies, but many made great improvements in ability and confidence.

"Our focus was meeting teachers at their point of need. Some staff are willing to dive in and some are more reluctant," she said. "A big win was that by the end of it, a lot of staff knew there are so many ways that you can engage with the Digital Technologies curriculum. Now teachers are asking questions and taking on challenges to improve their own practice. We've grown a lot in that respect.

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Mrs Keough, who is now a classroom teacher at St Bernard's Primary School in Batemans Bay, New South Wales, continues to be a keen and active advocate of digital technologies in the classroom, including sharing ideas and resources through online networks.

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"The most exciting part for me as a classroom teacher is finding the way to include digital tech in an authentic way that's not an add on," she said.

Memorable examples included a kindergarten lesson using data based on students' favourite ice cream flavours as part of a maths lesson and integrating teaching algorithms to a Year 6 class by looking at the use of the school fruit recycling bin.

 "That is when the kids are most engaged – not when you have all the bells and whistles, but when they're making connections. When they can see a purpose in what they are learning. I think if students understand why they're learning it, and why it's important to them in their world, there's a big shift in the way that they actually engage."

CASE STUDY 2: Drummond Memorial Public School, New South Wales

Students and staff were supported in hands-on learning around wind turbines as part of the DTiF program at Drummond Memorial Public School in Armidale, New South Wales, on the Traditional Lands of the Nganyaywana People and Anaiwan People.

Years 5–6 students investigated engineering themes through a novel study and designed and built their own model wind turbines. Students tested the efficiency of their wind turbines by collecting and analysing data.

"This initiative has really impacted the school as we've been able to build the capacity of all of the teachers, so all students have the opportunity to achieve," said Drummond Memorial Public School Principal, Julianne Crompton.

"The students love accessing all of the equipment and the new ways of learning. The teachers are feeling that they're making progress and having success in achieving the outcomes through this way of learning. The teachers are also learning something worthwhile by building their own capacity to build and guide the students in their learning."

Students were particularly interested to discover that the first wind turbine was made in Iraq, where many have family connections, Ms Crompton added.

"We know very well the students are going to need coding skills and much more to do all of the different roles that are becoming available in our society today."

Find out more:

https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/stem/illustrations-of-practice/drummond-memorial-public-school-years-5-and-6/

Ends

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See more information on the Digital Technologies in focus website