

Why teach IT?

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Pre-session

To prepare for this session, you should have a preliminary look at some of the reading listed in the 'Resources' section below – including the National Curriculum web site.

Introduction

In this session you will have to prepare a presentation to the group on the reasons why Information Technology should be taught in your school. As IT specialists, you need to have a clear idea of why your subject should be taught – what the point of IT is.

While all schools now have some I(C)T in their curriculum, there are still severe problems with its teaching. At the heart of the problem are two main issues: accessibility and purpose. Pupils do not have sufficient access to I(C)T and there is still considerable debate (and variation in experience) about the purpose of I(C)T teaching. In this session we will concentrate on the latter problem. Broadly, three views of the role of IT can be seen:

1. Is IT a set of skills? Courses such as CLAIT and the European Computer Driving license are examples of two skills-based courses taught in schools.
2. Is IT 'just' a tool to help learning in other curriculum subjects? If so – what (if any) is the purpose of discrete IT lessons?
3. Is IT a subject in its own right? If so – what is the content and pedagogy of this subject? The National Curriculum for IT sets out a subject content in terms of IT capability – but it is hard easily to relate this to 'teaching software' and harder still to assess whether pupils are at any given level of attainment.

Learning objectives

The learning objectives for this session are that by the end you should:

1. Know, and be able to distinguish between, the different approaches to IT teaching seen in schools.
2. Understand the difference between IT capability and skills.
3. Understand the difference between developing IT capability and using this to promote learning in other subject areas.
4. Be able to argue for the teaching of IT capability.
5. Be able to use the National Curriculum web site.

Task

In this session you will be divided into groups. Each group has the task of preparing and presenting a case (as if to a head teacher or board of governors) for the teaching of IT in their school.

At the end of the session each group will have 10 minutes to present their case to everyone else, following which there will be a general discussion of the points raised.

Please note that today we are focussing on **why** IT should be taught – not **how**. We will look at the ways in which IT teaching can be organised in the session this afternoon.

Your case should examine each of the three roles listed in the introduction, distinguish carefully between them, and indicate how a focus on capability (which is required by statute) can encompass both skill development and help the use of IT as a tool. One way to approach this is to answer the three questions listed below.

1. What is meant by IT capability?
2. How can it be distinguished from IT skills?
3. How is it related to (and different from) the use of IT (ICT) to help promote learning in other curriculum areas?

Resources

For an Ofsted's overview of IT teaching in secondary schools, see its ['Subject Reports 1999-2000: Secondary Information Technology'](#)

For a summary of its criticisms of the current position in schools see the [extracts](#) from the Chief Inspector's reports.

The way in which capability is exemplified in the National Curriculum can be seen by browsing through the various sections of the National Curriculum [web site](http://www.nc.uk.net/servlets/Subjects?Subject=ICT#), (<http://www.nc.uk.net/servlets/Subjects?Subject=ICT#>).

My article '[The Third Way](#)' sets out (briefly) the arguments for teaching IT capability. (<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/scitech/Staff/TB/thirdway/index.htm>)

A more detailed discussion can be found in the article by [Roger Crawford](#) (<http://www.hud.ac.uk/ITsec/roger%20professional/itcap.htm>)

For further discussion of the meaning of capability browse through some of the articles in the [Virtual Teacher's Centre](#). (The link <http://vtc.ngfl.gov.uk/docserver.php?temid=15&title=Capability> takes you to the search results for 'Capability' on this site.)