

In this series of articles on Information and Communication Technology, originally printed in *English Teaching professional*, Andrew Stokes offers help to the uninitiated.

ICT - Getting started

If you are an IT enthusiast, you'll know how frustrating it can be to try to convey the excitement you feel to your colleagues; conversely, if you have no real interest in computers, you are probably finding that pressure to use IT is growing from department heads, head teachers and the Ministry, but you don't really know where to begin...

Is ICT more than a gimmick?

To open the whole subject up, stimulate a discussion with your colleagues on the value of IT with this can't-fail activity from Pete Sharma's excellent *CD-Rom: A Teacher's Handbook*.

ACTIVITY

- Draw two columns on the board. On one side write *Strengths of the teacher* and on the other write *Strengths of the computer*.
- Put your colleagues in pairs or small groups. Ask them to copy the grid and to fill it in with as many ideas as possible.
- Finally, bring the focus back to the board: ask your colleagues for their ideas and initiate a discussion.

This activity is particularly useful in stimulating thought and discussion among those who see little or no value in IT. Some of the answers that are likely to arise are set out below, but this activity is very unpredictable and all sorts of exciting and unexpected ideas can pop up.

| Strengths of the teacher | Strengths of the computer |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ personalising learning by responding to students' individual needs ■ dealing with "fuzzy" language areas ■ setting up speaking activities, including activities where genuine communication takes place ■ <i>Can you think of any more ?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ helping students with finite language areas such as grammar or pronunciation ■ motivating students by providing a new interactive learning medium ■ empowering students - they have a greater control over what they learn, and the focus of expertise may shift from teacher to student ■ <i>Can you think of any more ?</i> |

The strength of this exercise is that it clearly shows to the most hardened cynic that computers do have a valuable role to play. This may be as simple as providing grammar practice (such as *Tense Buster*) or changing the focus away from the teacher in a pronunciation lesson, or it may be as complex as providing a complete online solution to school exams: the important thing at this stage is that the role is recognised.

But where do I start?

Once the value of CALL (computer assisted language learning) has been established in general terms it's time to get down to specifics. Teachers must be familiar with a program in order to use it effectively and with confidence. The second activity therefore aims to familiarise teachers with the contents, commands, strengths and weaknesses of

a piece of software. One teacher should be responsible for setting up this activity, and it does take some time to prepare, so allow yourself a couple of hours.

ACTIVITY

Your objective is to draw up a detailed list of questions that teachers will answer by working through the program, and that will require them to discover the workings and contents of the program. For example, for the video-based skills program *Issues in English*, you might start with the following questions:

1. *How do you select different language levels?*
2. *How do you start each video?*
3. *How do you access the glossary?*
4. *Name five of the eight topics the program is based around.*

Teachers come away from this activity with the confidence that they know how to find their way around the program: one of the greatest fears in the use of IT in the classroom is therefore overcome.

Which program do I use?

You probably have a number of programs installed on your computers or sitting on the shelf in the computer room. One of the barriers to integrating these resources into your teaching is that you can't pick up a program and flick through the contents as you can a book: a more systematic approach is required.

ACTIVITY

The final useful activity I would like to suggest is therefore to sit down with a program and work through it, cross referencing the contents with your syllabus or with your coursebook. For example, here is the first part of a table showing how Mario Rinvoluceri's *MindGame Elementary* cross-references with *Headway Elementary*.

| Coursebook <i>Headway Elementary</i> | ICT resource <i>MindGame Elementary</i> |
|---|--|
| Unit 3, simple present | 3 rd person singular 's' |
| Unit 2, page 15, opposite adjectives | Opposites |
| Unit 2 Workbook, page 13, Plural nouns (use <i>MindGame</i> for homework in self-access centre) | Singular and plural |
| Unit 3 p. 24 | Telling the time |

This chart should be made easily available to teachers, by being stuck up on the teachers' room wall for example, so that any teacher can quickly and easily find a relevant ICT resource to integrate a particular lesson.

Clarity has a mission to help teachers integrate ICT successfully into their teaching. Please contact us at any time for advice on which programs to use and how to use them effectively with your students.



Andrew Stokes
Director, Clarity

