💻 **Computer:** Computers and Humans

What if a computer lesson helped us think about being human?

Jane was responsible for computer and IT classes in her elementary school. She wanted to stimulate children to think about what it means to be human. Computers are taken for granted; they are part of school routine, but they raise big questions about life, faith, and values.

"Before the children came into the computer room, I went around and gave the computers name labels. I placed paper faces on the document stands next to each computer. The students came in, and I asked them to sit in groups of three by a computer. I asked them to say hello to their computer and address it by name. Together we went through some of the things the computer could do. At the end of the session, I asked them to say goodbye and shut down their computer. We spent a few moments thinking about what we had learned and then had a short discussion:

- Does giving a computer a name make it a person?

- Let's imagine we gave a computer your name and he or she went home instead of you. Would people notice the difference? What would be different?

"I put up a large drawing of a computer screen on the display and added arms and legs made of accordion-folded paper. To the screen I added a question to think about: 'In what ways are we different from computers?' Students were allowed to add responses (with adults as writers) over the next week."

What's going on here?

Jane **saw** her introductory lesson on computers as a way of encouraging students to wonder about what it means to be human and to ask big questions.

She **engaged** students in the experience of acting out an alternative perspective and then thinking about it critically in relation to big questions.

She **reshaped her practice** by changing the way she set up the room to introduce the lesson, by assigning students specific ways of interacting, and by choosing questions that promoted reflection in the lesson.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Wonder at how we are made is part of the Christian response to a loving creator (Psalm 139:14; Psalm 8:3-4). This sense of wonder is often present in young children, but IT is not often a context where it is stimulated. Information technology has the potential to make us think about what it means to be human. The Bible talks of people as made in the image of God with the ability to **love**, create, think, and act as moral beings.

Where could we go from here?

IT could be a stimulus for thinking about our ability to choose between right and wrong: Can computers be naughty? As students get older, wider issues concerning what makes us human can be considered, along with the positive and negative role of computers and other technologies in our lives. Developments such as the growing trend for people to buy outfits for their iPhones could be discussed — do we sometimes treat technologies too much like people? Do we ever treat people like machines?

What difference does it make?

Jane indicated from the beginning that information technology was a place where big questions of life, faith, and values could be asked. She helped students to stop seeing computers as routine and to begin engaging with issues they raised.

Digging deeper

Exploring a subject like IT from a Christian perspective might involve exploring the big issues, asking ethical and religious questions, changing frameworks and attitudes, and

making connections across a range of areas. For the Christian, spirituality is a dimension of all subjects, including information technology; it is not just a separate area in itself.

Mention spirituality and most people think in terms of something vague and other-worldly. In contrast, the spirituality of the Bible is a very earthly one, rooted in daily life and the things of this world. This attitude is derived from God affirming this world as good through creation (Genesis 1:31) and through Jesus coming as a human being and sharing our world (Galatians 4:4). Our relationship with God is expressed through the body and its senses, and via the things and people of this world (including technology). Our experience of God usually comes the same way. For Moses, it was a burning bush (Exodus 3:2-3), which he could have ignored; but he chose to turn aside and investigate.

Curiosity and asking questions can be part of a growing wonder at God's world and taking God, others, and the world seriously. Curiosity is not idle speculation; it can be seeking answers as part of a lived faith. To use St. Anselm's phrase, it can be "faith seeking understanding."

> *The first key to wisdom is defined, of course, as assiduous and frequent questioning. Peter Abelard*