

Teacher judgment, student agency, and the Computing classroom:

How teaching professionals translate policy into practice

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Abstract

This qualitative embedded case study of how the new Computing standards of England's National Curriculum are being implemented in one rural village primary school aims to reveal the process by which educational policy is translated into teaching practice. It also aims to clarify whether civic computing skills such as student agency – while not explicitly included in the Computing standards – are being unknowingly taught by primary school teachers as a natural byproduct of a well-taught computing lesson. This is based on the premise that the cognitive skills developed while learning computing (e.g. computational thinking) also make one able to think and act agentically.

This study's research questions are motivated by an interest in teachers as professionals working within education. How much influence does teacher judgment have on the classroom and, in turn, what influences teacher judgment? What judgments will teachers make while translating England's Computing standards into teaching practice? Will those judgments result in a civic education not accounted for in the policy but needed by students living in a knowledge society?

Findings from the interviews and classroom observations of two teachers at one primary school found that, while both external factors such as government-sponsored training and internal factors such as the absence of an ICT coordinator did have an impact on teacher perceptions of Computing and constrained their lessons in some ways, ultimately it was teacher beliefs and judgments that dictated whether a Computing lesson would be taught in a rigorous (if not wholly fidelitous) way. Teachers who actively shaped the learning experiences in their classroom while also allowing room for student-directed learning – including some behaviors typically considered disruptive – taught Computing lessons that had the most actual computing content (as opposed to ICT content) and also best facilitated the development of student agency.

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