Classroom Management in the Digital Age

Introduction

As schools increasingly integrate technology into their learning environments, concern is growing about the distractions caused by electronic devices in the classroom. For many of today's students, unfettered computer access has become a way of life, as they rely on the PC for entertainment, shopping, and connecting with friends. This freedom becomes a problem in class, however, when teachers don't know if the students are working or surfing the Net.

What it all comes down to, of course, is classroom management. In this eBook we'll share strategies on handling the issues that come up in class when kids and computers are combined, from lesson plans and class arrangement to preventing online cheating. We will examine software solutions that allow teachers more control over what happens on their students' screens. With the right classroom management tools, teachers can not only minimize distractions but also use the software to promote collaboration and communication.

Wishing you success as you manage your own digital classroom.

—Jo-Ann McDevitt, Publisher

One-to-one Computing and Classroom Management

by Mike Hasley

If you spend some time observing the best, most-respected, teachers you will discover that one of their essential skills is good classroom management. Classroom management is essential if

you want the students to learn. There is much literature and many theories on the topic. Gone are the days of "Do it because I say so!" Instead we have the era of Dr. Fred Jones and his theories, such as, "For teaching to be enjoyable, you must be able to simply relax and teach. Classroom management must be built from the ground up so that most problems do not occur."

Many teachers would ordinarily feel challenged by the demands of managing a classroom of 25-30+ students. To complicate matters, add the prospect of laptop computers. Every year, more districts across the country begin laptop initiatives, but since one-to-one computing is relatively new, finding classroom management resources for this environment is difficult.

Luckily, managing a classroom of students with laptops is mostly about managing the students. This means that you use the same tools for classroom management with laptops as you use for basic classroom management.

The following examples emphasize management strategies that work for any classroom, but are especially important with laptops:

- **Lesson development:** First and foremost to any classroom management technique is your lesson plan. A good lesson plan that keeps the student involved will reduce classroom problems, whether you are using laptops or not. I always had written lesson plans, even after 10 years of teaching. In your lesson plans, spell out exactly what you expect your students to do with their laptop. Create your own expectation. Furthermore, make sure any use of laptop in class is appropriate, and not its own distraction.

- **Consistency:** Isn't that what you're always told about classroom management? It's the same with laptops. Be consistent with rules and how laptops are used. One way to reinforce this is to have VIP (Visual Instruction Plans) in your classroom. These are simply posters with instructions for laptop-use: how to get to your web page; how to get to your virtual share; how to print. Posters should address the most-asked questions. Then all you have to do is, calmly and coolly, point to a poster on the wall, instead of being distracted by answering the same question 100 times. Keeping a cool attitude also impresses students.

- **Use timers:** Timers are great for any activity such as quizzes, warm-ups, discussions, and more. If you're doing a class activity that involves the laptop, use a timer (preferably one that ticks loudly), so the kids know they don't have all day.

- **Expectations:** At the beginning of the year, we tell our students what we expect from them. Good pedagogy requires this be done for every class and every lesson, whether or not laptops are involved. As for laptops, tell them clearly what you expect, such as no idle surfing, no Instant Messaging, etc.

- **Class arrangement:** This is important and goes hand-in-hand with "Management by Walking Around." Sometimes you'll want the students in groups, so MWA is essential. Other times, you'll want them in rows (testing, for example) so you can see each laptop screen at once. If you have kids without laptops, sit them out of view.

- **Daily sign off sheets:** Again, along with daily expectations, let them know that you expect to see what they completed for the day. Students are less likely to goof off on their computers if they know you expect a two-page paper.

- **Down time:** If students finished the work for the day, or some are done and others are not, let them do their own thing. They could do work for another class, or wander the Internet as a reward for completing their tasks. You can ask them to show you a favorite site of theirs. If they know they might have time to do their own thing at the end of class, they'll be less likely to get off-task during class.

The following help promote rules and strategies specifically for employing laptops in your classroom successfully:

- **First use:** Often, the laptops are deployed a few weeks into the school year. Be sure to take time to teach proper use and never assume they know how to use the laptops. Depending on the students involved, it might be a good idea to at first put students in groups around one computer. Employ the rules heavily at this time.

- **No secrets!:** On the very first day, Mark Apelt, a science teacher in Henrico County, demonstrates all the ways he has to check on what students have been doing. For example, he shows them how he can find their Internet history and search the hard drive for illegal downloads. By showing them that he knows how to search their computers, they stay on task.

- **First full use:** When you're ready to have the entire class use the laptops at once, make sure everyone is doing the same assignment. Don't let them do their own tasks yet. Furthermore, for class notes, have kids use pen-on-paper rather than using their laptop. Instill proper procedure when introducing laptops for note-taking since this is a natural time for students to wander.

- **Lesson plans:** Make sure you include time in your lesson plan to review how to use the technology. If you are having them do a PowerPoint presentation, don't assume they know how to do one properly. Build in time to teach these skills.

- **Laptop time:** Let the kids know when and when not to have their laptops out for use. I am amazed at how many times I walk into classrooms where the teacher is teaching a non-laptop lesson, and kids have them out on the table, using them. I know teachers wouldn't let a kid pull out a book or PSP. Some teachers figure the kids might be taking notes. If so, ask the student to see his notes.

- **Power cords:** One problem with laptops is that, after awhile, they lose their charge, especially by the end of the day when you may have kids with poorly-functioning computers that need recharging. As safely as possible, have power bars around the room, but make sure they're set up in a way that you don't create tripping hazards.

- **Battery chargers:** Sometimes you might be given a charger box of five batteries so kids can swap out their dead batteries for good batteries. Keep this box behind your desk for obvious reasons. If you don't, it won't take long before your box is empty.

- **Student leaders:** Find students who seem to be naturals with computers and use them to help with general troubleshooting and application help.

- **Testing online:** This can simplify a teacher's job as well as supply a lot of data. With a little upfront work, teachers can easily create tests their students will take online. But be careful, as cheating can be an issue.

In summary, when it comes to managing a classroom with laptop computers, do what you already do. Just reinforce the laptop part of the equation. Then, add a few more rules specific to the laptops. By doing this, you will have a more successful experience with laptops.

Excerpted from an article by Mike Hasley