One-to-One Computing and Classroom Management

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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 student’s 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 â€“ 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 the laptop in class is appropriate, and not its own distraction.

- **MWA:** In the 1890s, when Theodore Roosevelt was the Police Commissioner of New York City, citizens didn’t trust the police. Roosevelt wanted to address the problem. So what did he do? Create a task force? Audit management? No. He practiced MWA. Management by Walking Around. He took midnight walks and punished every police officer he saw not doing his job. Word got around, and the force shaped up. It works in the classroom as well, with or without laptops. As soon as you come near a kid, (s)he) shapes up. If you see a kid off-task because of his or her computer, deal with it appropriately. Make sure you circulate in a way that allows you to see the most in one view. As does Fahryka Elliott, a business teacher in Henrico County, watch for certain telli-tale signs, such as when kids eyes are more fixated on the screen, or they are typing faster than normal, or their heads remain in a downward position longer than necessary. These may be signs of kids off task.

- **Pick your battles:** Sometimes it’s just not worth telling a kid to put their hat away, or the water bottle, or to raise their hand to go to the pencil sharpenner. It’s the same with laptops. If you try to put out every forest fire in the classroom, you won’t get anything done. If you see a little goofing off, say students on the wrong Web site but otherwise are doing their work, let them be.

- **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 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 Apell, 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. Instruct 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 5 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.

**Classroom Set Up:**

  • Move your desks into rows, if you have to, so you can sit behind the students and see every screen at
once.
  • You will likely have students with and without computers, so move your paper-users to one side and your
computer kids to the other side. This reduces the number of computer screens you have to watch.
• Have any instructions on the chalkboard for everyone to see.
• Make sure you have chargers/batteries ready.
• Sit in the back of the room with a hard copy of the test. If a student has a question, ask him/her to come back to you with the computer instead of answering the question at their desk and thus turning your back on the other kids.
• Create a Visual Instruction Plan for your wall that indicates the teacher username students will need in order to access your test. Have this VIP on the wall nearest the side of the room on which your computer-using students are sitting.

Test Set Up:

• In your test set up, scramble your questions and answers so everyone has a different Question Number 1.
• Make sure the test can only be accessed once, and at a certain time.
• Set the timer. The timer makes kids nervous but keeps them honest. Just watch the IEPs.
• Only allow their final score to show up (or no feedback at all) when they complete the test.

Student Expectations:

• Tell kids to clear their computer desktops. You can stand/sit behind all of them and have them restart and then open only one file at your test.
• Explain the punishment for cheating.
• Have them put their computers away when they are done with the test. Most programs input the test results as kids finish. Follow this, and make sure the student closes his computer when his grade shows up.
• Do not allow paper-users to open their computers when they are done.
• Give them an Acceptable-Use policy to sign.
• Explain to the students that questions can be copied and pasted, and you will be watching for this. If you suspect a student, open up Word and see what their last document open was.
• On occasion during the test, remind students they are only allowed to have the test on their screen. It will reinforce to the students that you are watching them.
• On longer test, periodically remind students to check their battery power. If the battery gets low plug into a charger and then change the battery.

The most important strategy, while the most obvious is the one most often ignored: **Use the laptop in class.** Many teachers expect kids to be distracted by the laptop, so they rarely use them in class. They give up before trying. Then, when they want the kids to use the laptop, they are surprised when the kids are off-task, or they didn’t bring them to class at all. By using the laptops every day (even if it’s just for 5 minutes one day), kids are more likely to stay on task, more likely to bring them to class, and their laptops seem to break down less often when they are used more often.

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.

**Here are some useful websites for finding information:**

**Classroom Management**

**Student Laptops and Classroom Management**

**Classroom Management Tips Archive**

**Dr. Fred Jones**

**Classroom Organization and WorkStations**

**MultiMedia in the Classroom**

**Teaching With Laptops: Classroom Management**

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