Managing Technology Use in Your Classroom

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By Karen Hume and others

Don’t let classroom management concerns prevent you from making effective use of technology in your classroom! Technology can play a big part in project-based units. The use of technology enhances the learning experience and allows students make connections to the outside world. It gives students a place to find resources and to create work products. Efficient management of available technology during projects takes planning and organization.

- Always run through a technology lesson before presenting it to the class -- and always have a back-up lesson prepared in case the technology fails.
- Make it a class rule that students can help one another but cannot ever touch another student's computer. That way, you can be sure that learning occurs even when students help one another.
- Help students recognize that technology in the classroom has to serve a learning purpose. Have them complete preparatory work away from the equipment. For example, storyboarding before creating a video or a PowerPoint/Keynote presentation ensures that students will know what they are going to do and can get to work right away. According to presentation experts Nancy Duarte and Garr Reynolds, preparing “offline” also means that ideas aren’t constrained by the templates provided by the presentation software.
- Teacher Kris Odette uses the word **Click** to indicate that when he or a student is speaking to the class, everyone needs to turn off their computer monitors or put down their hand-held devices.
- Give each student a colored sticky note. Anyone who is having difficulty with a task can quietly signal you by putting the sticky note on the top corner of the monitor or desk. Another example would be to keep a red plastic cup at each computer. When students need help, have them place the highly visible cups on top of their monitors.
- Attach laminated cards to all portable technology equipment. Include school information as well as a list of any accessories -- batteries, cords, headphones, and so on -- contained in the case. Number each case, and keep a list of the numbers and assignments for easy tracking.
- Post a list of all your rules for technology use in a visible place. When a rule is broken, ask the offending student to read the rule aloud.
- Turn your classroom into a museum. After a lesson using presentation software, allow students to walk around the room and view everyone else's work. They might get some good ideas for the next lesson -- and finding something positive to say about other students' work teaches good manners.
- Keep keyboards clean -- and hopefully cut down on germs -- by always having students wash their hands before going to the computer lab or using classroom computers.
• Actively monitor student use of the technology. Walk around the classroom, looking over students’ shoulders to check such things as windows that have been minimized at the bottom of a computer screen. It’s good to trust your students, but they need to know that you expect them to be focused on learning.

• Arrange classroom seating so that it is easy for you to move around the room and get to students quickly. If you have to weave through a path of desks, chairs and bodies, it’s much more difficult to stop a problem at an early stage.

• Post anchor charts that provide technology tips or put them in a binder near the computers. A teacher of secondary design and technology classes had good success with providing software instructions in several different forms—as podcasts, screen captures, and step-by-step instruction sheets.

• Take full advantage of student expertise. Students often know more than we do about a technology, and teaching someone else what they know is a great way to reinforce their own learning and foster a caring classroom community. When you don’t have to be the technology expert in the classroom, your time is freed up to manage your real area of expertise—the teaching/learning process.

• Establish at the beginning of the course your policies for how to name, store and share files. Many of these policies may already be in place in your school or district; making sure that you and your students understand them will go a long way toward preventing mishaps and misuse.

• When students are working on small group technology projects on classroom computers, divide the tasks so some students are working on the computers while others are working at their desks on another part of the project. Provide a sign-up sheet for the computers. When one group is finished using the computers, they must notify the next group that it’s their turn.

• When you have a limited number of computers or hand-held devices available for group activities and students have to share, consider assigning specific roles to group members. If everyone has a specific job to do (even though some may not get to actually touch the device), it’s much easier for students to focus on the learning goal.

The One-Computer Classroom

One of the biggest challenges many teachers face is the lack of computers. Even with only one computer in the classroom, there are many ways to use technology effectively to improve student learning.

• Pair students up and set up a daily computer use schedule.

• Try to find time to have open blocks of time for individual student use.

• Use a timer to keep students to their time limits.

• Make sure computer time is used for creating products and doing research. All other pre-planning work should be done ahead of time (storyboards are a good way to do this).

• Use teacher-created templates for students to fill in to save time.

• Display posters using computer terms and commands.
• Make sure computer etiquette and guidelines have been modeled.

In a one-computer classroom, students can conduct research in smaller chunks of time, create work products piece by piece, and send and receive email to outside experts. Time is probably the biggest issue with a one-computer classroom, but through creative scheduling, computer use can happen. For example, allowing students to work on the computer when they have finished with other subject work is a resourceful solution. Another solution is to group students and give them a day of the week for their computer day.

On the designated days, particular groups of students have access to the computer. They can work independently or in pairs depending on the work that needs to be completed. If a computer is open and not being used by a member of the assigned group, anyone can use it until it is needed.

**Learning Stations**

Learning stations provide teachers and students a structured way to rotate through a small number of computers during class time. With access to three or four computers, students get more time and extended opportunities to work with technology to create projects.

Stations should be connected to one another in a way that makes sense for the students to rotate through in a timely fashion. These stations can be set up so the content they are learning and work they are producing relates to each other. For example:

- Station One: Storyboard planning
- Station Two: Peer reviewing and feedback
- Station Three: Revising and drafting
- Station Four: Computer use to create work products
- Station Five: Computer use: researching, working with experts on the computer, publishing

The amount of time devoted to learning stations effectively is making sure students are aware of what to do at each station through teacher modeling and monitoring. They should be held accountable for their work with checklists and/or teacher conferencing and have a place to store their works in progress for the next day.