Managing Devices in the Elementary Classroom: 5 Tips for Educators

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With the first iPhone introduced in 2007, and the iPad following just three years later, teachers just a decade ago never dreamed of the possibility of using such devices in the classroom. And yet more school districts and classrooms alike are trending towards the use of technology for blended learning. With a whole host of useful and interactive apps being created for classroom use, it's easy to understand why teachers are taking advantage of new ways to manage and teach students.

While every district and school has its own unique policy concerning the use of technology, there are some tips and tricks to using devices in the classroom in a way that's conducive to learning, and beneficial to all. Let's explore some of the best ways to manage and facilitate device use in the elementary classroom.

Setting routines and expectations early

When it comes to classroom management, it is often said that prevention is the best form of discipline. Many classroom issues stemming from inappropriate technology use in the classroom can be mitigated by simply setting expectations starting from the first time devices are used in the classroom. In the early education classroom, this can be done by reviewing the rules and routines before the devices are given to students. Anchor charts, and pictures displaying the rules can be used to help kids understand expectations.

Teachers must also be consistent in enforcing the rules, and reminding all students of the procedures in an upbeat and positive way each time the device is used. For older kids that may bring their own smart phone, rules can be implemented that lets kids know which days or lessons the devices may be used. For instance, a teacher may display a picture of a stop light, and set it to red for lessons that students are not allowed to use their phones or tablets.

Using apps that encourage parental participation and communication

Whenever possible, the apps that teachers choose should feature a parent login, or a way for parents to check progress. For reading comprehension apps and learning games, encourage parents to play along with their children. Parental involvement is always helpful, because caregivers provide valuable feedback and quality learning time. [Reward systems on games](#) should take the place of a caring adult, and any app that facilitates feedback from an adult is a useful tool to help children learn and grow.

Closely monitor device usage during class time

This probably goes without saying, but oftentimes with comprehensive apps that provide instant feedback to kids, it's easy to forget that all students must be monitored. Some school districts use programs to monitor the device using in the classroom, and some even include a feature that allows teachers to see each child's screen. If your district or school does not have this helpful technology, it's easy enough to walk the classroom often to monitor students' progress and focus.

Additionally, just as parents monitor TV time for their kids, limit screen time, and keep in mind the attention span of most children. For most kids, attention spans match their age. That means for first graders, most kids can only pay close attention for around six to seven minutes. That means that it might be unlikely that students are growing their skills after thirty minutes of playing with the same app. Keep exercises short, and the topics moving.

Use apps that are developmentally appropriate for student's abilities

Most kindergarteners don't already know how to read when they enter school in the fall. Likewise, many of the same kindergarteners can only read some sight words by the end of the school year, and may not be ready to read full sentences with ease. If such a child were to use an app that only includes written directions, that child might not be able to understand the task at hand. That said, teachers should review apps carefully to make sure they are aligned to students' current capabilities.

Usage of technology should supplement and enhance what students are already learning

As always, technology shouldn't be used to directly teach the skills in a classroom setting, but should be used to enhance skills the students are already working on. For instance, an educational program for 1st grade would feature exercises to grow skills that students are already learning in class. Any app used should be looked upon as yet another tool in a teacher's toolbox to reinforce a skill. It should not be a full replacement of a lesson, and should technology shouldn't be used just as an excuse to play a game or use a device.
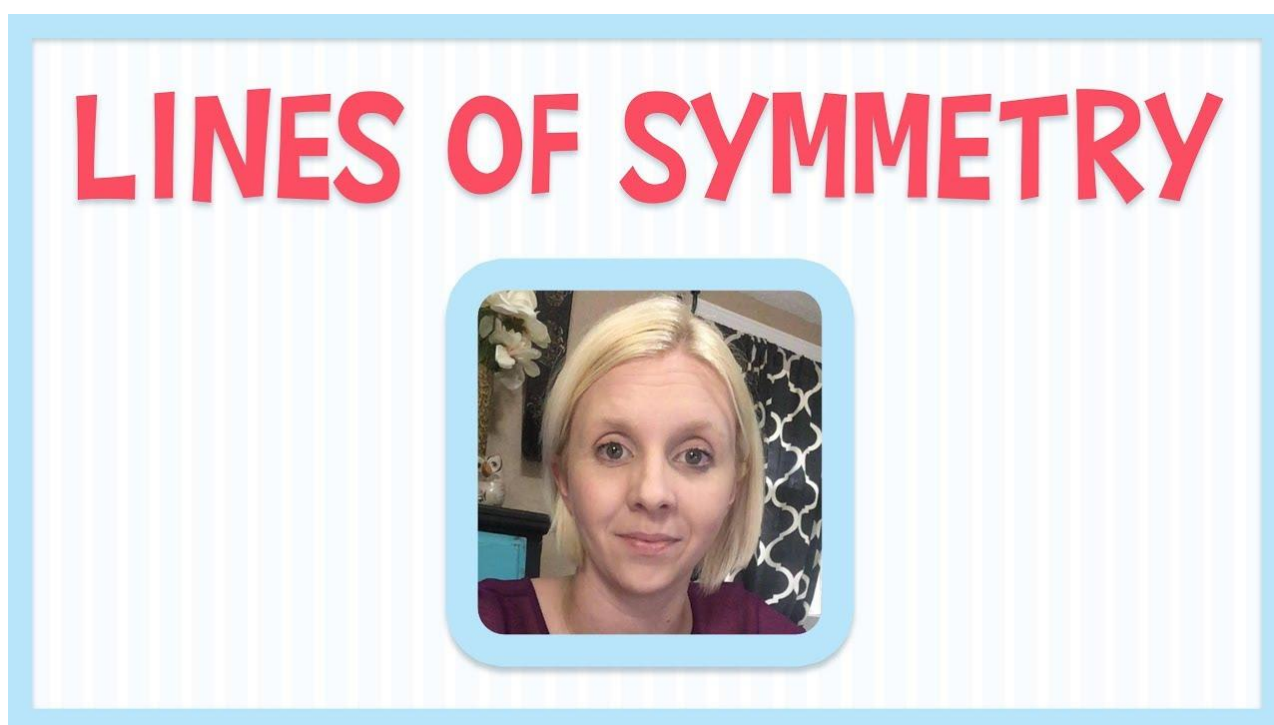
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Technology in the classroom has revolutionized education from kindergarten all the way up through college.