Classroom management strategies

Teaching in a computer classroom is a very different environment to teaching in a 'traditional' classroom. The layout of the room, the engagement with technology and the focus and structure of classroom pedagogy change significantly in a computer laboratory.

If you don't feel overly comfortable teaching in a computer laboratory there are things you can do to maintain your own sense of control while providing your students with rich learning experiences:

- Discuss the routines and guidelines for the computer session with students before they sit down at the computer. Once in front of the computer, students usually just want to start using it.

- Minimise distractions. You can do this by ensuring each student is working on a computer on their own. If you don't have enough computers you could ask students to work in pairs. Any more than two students to a computer will prove problematic as students can get distracted easily when they are not operating the computer.

- If your school has remote access to educational software such as AB tutor, you can monitor your students' computer screens at any time during the lesson to ensure they are on task. Display this screen in front of the students through the data projector so students know they are being supervised. It also allows them to peer-monitor on your behalf.

- Chunk your instructions. Break your instruction into logical, achievable chunks for your audience. If your students are not confident with digital technologies you may need to focus on one or two software skills at a time. Explain what you are doing, demonstrate the skill, check for understanding and then ask students to practice the skills.

- Compile 'how to' videos for your students to refer to when learning new IT skills.

- Maintain students' attentiveness by developing a routine that ensures your students recognise that you are ready to move on to explain and demonstrate a new skill. Depending on the composition of the class you could even use a sound or action to indicate that you are ready to move forward. For example, you could use a visual cue such as raising your arm.

- Use capable students as class mentors. They will benefit from the additional responsibility.

- Adjust the pace according to your class. If you have a very capable class with regards to their IT skills, you may be able to demonstrate more skills at once or allow the class to explore the software themselves.