

EdTech Basics: What ELT Teachers Should Know and Use

by [Christel Broady](#)

The Issue of Disconnect

Let's be honest. Many of us reading professional publications feel like encountering another language when reading about technology topics such as

- The cloud
- Flipped classrooms
- BYOD (bring your own device)

If you are an educator trained more than a few years ago, you may not feel connected to the topics. This disconnect may result in a widening gap between your professional practice and your learners.

Learner Background and Digital Literacy

As teachers, we are keenly aware that students learn more if teachers connect learning experiences and materials to students' backgrounds. We also know that it is essential to know students, their life outlooks, their hobbies, and their preferences. However, in the area of technology, it can be extremely difficult for teachers to effectively connect with their learners.

Many of our students were born into a digital world where virtually all aspects of life are connected to technology. Here are some examples:

- Playing with toys (Webkinz)
- Gaming (Minecraft, Club Penguin, Poptropica)
- Creating things (3D printers, YouTube)
- Shopping (online stores worldwide such as Amazon and EBay)
- Searching for information (Google, Yahoo)
- Connecting socially with others (social media such as Snapchat and Instagram)
- Creating a reputation (social media, YouTube)
- Exchanging information (social media)

Our students perceive their digital and handheld devices as an extension of themselves, as the connection to others, and as the tool for learning. Our students are technology literate, and they enjoy their skill and the freedom to use it productively.

I would like to encourage all of us teachers to learn the "language of technology" and to connect with our students. Let us tap into the potential of creativity and infinite resources for authentic language activities while using technology to the fullest so we reach the highest degree of English language mastery in our students. Below are some key concepts I encourage teachers to research and use. With these, I hope to take the mystery out of some of the educational tech terms that may sound foreign.

The Digital Cloud or Cloud Computing

The digital cloud is an electronic way of storing and managing data. As teachers, we create and manage data: writing and speaking samples; tests; music recordings; authentic culture artifacts; program data; communication records with students, families, and colleagues; and so much more. We keep much of our data in the form of paper records in our file cabinets. Some of our data can be found on CDs, flash drives, or other portable data storage devices. Most of us have experienced problems with the traditional data storage procedures: Computer or flash drives fail, papers get lost or damaged. We can avoid data storage malfunction issues by storing our information on servers instead of or in addition to traditional storage methods. In addition to avoiding data loss by using server or hard drive space, we also open up many possibilities for our data use.

When using cloud storage, data, such as lesson plans and teaching materials, can easily be shared with students and families to access from outside of the classroom. Sharing our materials and lessons with students can be very beneficial. In fact, it can remove barriers to learning for many students. When accessing materials in their own time and for as long as they want to access it, students who need more processing time can extend their exposure. They can repeat lessons as many times as needed until they master the concepts. Parents can follow the curriculum and talk about it with their children.

When teachers also post voice recordings on cloud servers, students can do listening and pronunciation exercises as well. We can also extend the lessons to allow students to record their own speaking samples. This way, we don't need to worry about collecting recording devices and can access student work anywhere. In addition, we can hear *every* student's voice sample instead of those of the same few learners who tend to speak up in class. Using cloud servers can be a powerful tool to have a personal connection to our students and to get individual work samples. It also provides learners with another tool for success in English class.

Getting Started

It does not cost any money to use the cloud, and it is surprisingly easy to do. It is important to use a platform that allows for privacy and limited access to only those whom you would like to have access.

Many workplaces already provide server space for their employees; one example is [Microsoft Office 365](#). Start by asking your employer what server space is available at your organization. Ask one of the technology support colleagues to show you how to use it or give it a try alone. (I promise you cannot break anything!)

Outside of the workplace server spaces, there are many wonderful platforms that are free to use.

Google Drive & Google Docs

I am a huge fan of all Google products for use in education. Specifically, [Google Docs](#) offers teachers unlimited possibilities for cloud-based teaching and storage. The difference from using your computer software is that all of the documents are created on a remote Google server where they are stored and backed up.

You can upload existing documents or entire folders to our Google drive for storage. You can create word documents, slide shows, spreadsheets, and more. This applies even to those who do not have access to Microsoft Office products otherwise. Likewise, you can let students do the same. They, too, can create and share all forms of documents and presentations with us teachers and/or their peers.

In addition, our products will not be lost. You can access them anywhere in the world, at any time, from any Internet-connected device, desktop computer, tablet, or smartphone. You can share individual documents or entire folders with individuals or groups. Sharing with others is as easy as writing an e-mail.

Edmodo

Another safe and private teacher resource is [Edmodo](#). It is a cloud platform that allows you to share materials, post and receive assignments, and more. Edmodo is free of charge.

Versal

[Versal](#) is yet another platform, free of charge and offering many possibilities for teachers.

I encourage anyone to access one of the sites and to try using the cloud. Connect to your students outside of the classroom or even in your classes by posting assignments and resources for your learning activities that students can access with their devices during class. It will save much paper, and you can recycle and edit activities easily from school year to school year without re-creating them. In addition, your students will enjoy using electronic resources.

BYOD

This acronym stands for “bring your own device,” and describes a formal policy that invites students to bring their own handheld and digital devices to school. Many of us are used to seeing students with their devices already, even without an official policy. And many of us try to find ways to keep such devices out of the hands of learners during our class times.

Instead of spending time getting devices out of students’ hands and spending funds on purchasing class tablets or maintaining computer labs, invite your learners to bring their own devices to class. BYOD policies make digital devices allies for our teaching.

As English teachers, we can use student devices for activities and access to materials on the cloud. This is also a great way of either supplementing or replacing textbooks that are old or not useful. Teachers can create their own lessons and resources for learners based on current cultural and professional developments. Students of all ages appreciate the opportunity to use their

beloved electronic devices and utilize their digital knowledge to learn English. They are more motivated and learning will be maximized. I encourage you to consider a BYOD policy in your classroom.

The Flipped Classroom

The concept of the flipped classroom means outsourcing drilling and concept-exposure activities to time and space outside of the classroom. Doing this frees up valuable time in the classroom to actually apply concepts and to see how well learners are progressing.

In the world of English teaching, this is a powerful lesson-planning tool to consider. We can place our drilling, vocabulary practice, and other routine activities on the cloud. Students can access materials and activities at home and take as much time as needed to master the concepts before applying them in authentic and communicative activities in our classrooms. Also teachers can monitor their students' learning activity records in the cloud to have a data-based insight into individual students' learning. In a flipped classroom, everyone wins!

Bottom Line

As teachers, we are life-long learners. Instead of questioning the way learners use their devices and technology, we should capitalize on the potential technology offers to increase our teaching effectiveness. Just like other professionals, such as doctors, we must learn new procedures and new techniques to be even more effective in the future.

I hope that after reading the above information, you will consider dipping your toes and then your feet into the water and trying out some new technology avenues on the cloud. Ask your learners for feedback, input, and even advice when you want to learn more. And, if you feel lost, know that you can find excellent YouTube videos on all of the discussed topics; please find some links to a selection of resources below. They can provide free training for you in the privacy of your home. Best of luck in flipping your English classroom!

Links and Resources

Edmodo

YouTube: [Edmodo for teachers](#)

My Educational Technology Blog: [Edmodo resources](#)

Google Drive

YouTube: [Google Drive tutorials](#)

My Educational Technology Blog: [Google tools resources](#)

Flipped Classroom

YouTube: [Flipped classroom explained](#)

My Educational Technology Blog: [Flipping the classroom](#)

BYOD

YouTube: [BYOD education](#)

My Educational Technology Blog: [BYOD](#)

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