

# Digital development: what it means for teachers

TECHNOLOGY CAN BE LEVERAGED FOR TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. [AMY LIGHTFOOT](#) EXPLAINS HOW.

The mobile phone that you currently have in your pocket contains a more powerful computer than the one which was on board Apollo 11 and responsible for Neil Armstrong's visit to the moon. Incredible, isn't it? Few people could have predicted the pace at which technology has developed in the last few decades, or how dependent we would become on it. We are still working out exactly how technology might best support teaching and learning, but it's clear that there are a number of ways it can be used. This has been accelerated further as schools around the world attempt to continue teaching and learning remotely during the COVID-19 crisis.

There are three main areas in education where technology has a potential role:

- for large-scale data gathering, analysis, and reporting
- to assist learning in and out of the classroom for our students
- to support the continuing professional development of teachers

As educators, we don't hear that much about the first role – that tends to be managed and discussed by administrators or government officials. In some schools, there may be a system that has been established for recording student attendance and centralised assessment scores. Ideally, this would be used by educators to help them understand learning gaps and ensure that these are plugged in future lessons – more on this later.

The second role – supporting our students' learning – is probably the one we hear about the most. There are multiple resources available that aim to augment classroom and remote teaching. These vary from ICT equipment such as projectors and audio-visual devices which make it easier to share knowledge with our learners (and for them to share with each other), to apps and platforms which seek to both provide input both within and outside the classroom and

test and track their progress. Countless start-ups have attempted to develop software that can either support or in some cases bypass teachers to try to improve learning outcomes across the curriculum.

However, it's the third function of technology – supporting teachers' professional development – which often doesn't get as much attention. How can technology be harnessed by teachers and other educators to help them develop their skills and knowledge, making them more effective in their roles?

#### Courses and resources

Perhaps the most obvious support that technology can provide to teachers for their professional development is opening up a world of online content to which they may otherwise not have access. This includes websites with content aimed at improving their teaching of particular subjects or topic areas, but also opportunities to develop their own subject knowledge. Many of these are free – for example, Khan Academy offers excellent tutorials on aspects of the maths and science curricula. Many apps including Duolingo, Memrise, and Busuu support teachers to develop their language skills.

#### Communities of practice

Social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have multiple uses in terms of keeping in touch with friends, family, and events, but in recent years they have also been co-opted by education professionals seeking to learn and share ideas. Knowing how to use hashtags on Twitter can help you find people who share common interests, as can joining Twitter Chats on specific topics. WhatsApp groups can be very successful for sharing reflections on practice, as long as they're carefully moderated with group members agreeing to appropriate usage guidelines. There's even a global community of practice specifically for teacher educators working in English language teaching that has been set

up by the British Council – you can find it on the TeachingEnglish website.

#### Tracking progress

Whether or not our school or district has invested in an online tool for tracking our students' assessment scores, individual teachers can still make good use of technology for this purpose. By keeping accurate records of our students' progress, we are undoubtedly in a better position to be able to plan lessons that meet their learning needs and goals. It can also help us to keep information about what we have covered and reflections on our practice. Microsoft Excel can be used for this purpose, setting up a simple spreadsheet to record our learners' scores on formative assessments with dates and information about the content focus.

In addition, there are several tools such as Evernote, Padlet, and Wakelet which educators can use to create online professional development portfolios, including storing links to articles and resources of interest for future reference, notes on lesson reflections and ideas for future classes – with the opportunity to share with others online.

#### Challenges

We've discussed some of the ways that technology can benefit teachers, but it's not without its challenges. Not all teachers have access – either to the hardware or software they might need or to a reliable internet connection. It can also be expensive – streaming videos or audio can use up data quickly. It can be distracting. Social media wasn't really designed for professional development purposes and it can be difficult for some teachers to feel comfortable or willing to use it in this way when they're used to using it just for fun and staying in touch with friends and family. Technology can also let us down sometimes. It freezes, won't connect, or otherwise stops working.

Perhaps most importantly, some teachers report that they just don't have the skills or

the confidence to engage with technology—either for use with their learners or for professional development purposes. This is undoubtedly changing as the majority of teachers have smartphones and know how to navigate these, but there are still some gaps that might need to be addressed sometimes in areas that might not seem immediately obvious.

### Navigating through the content

There's so much content out there that one of the biggest challenges for teachers (and others) is knowing how to make sense of it. How do we know which websites have reliable information? How do we choose between one classroom resource and another? One thing to be aware of is the different types of content – from blogs to ebooks to online courses, there are lots available. Taking time to research and think critically about what might be the most appropriate is important. Many teachers find their favourite sites and stick to them, but remember to look out for new sites every now and then. Communities of practice are good places for sharing these finds.

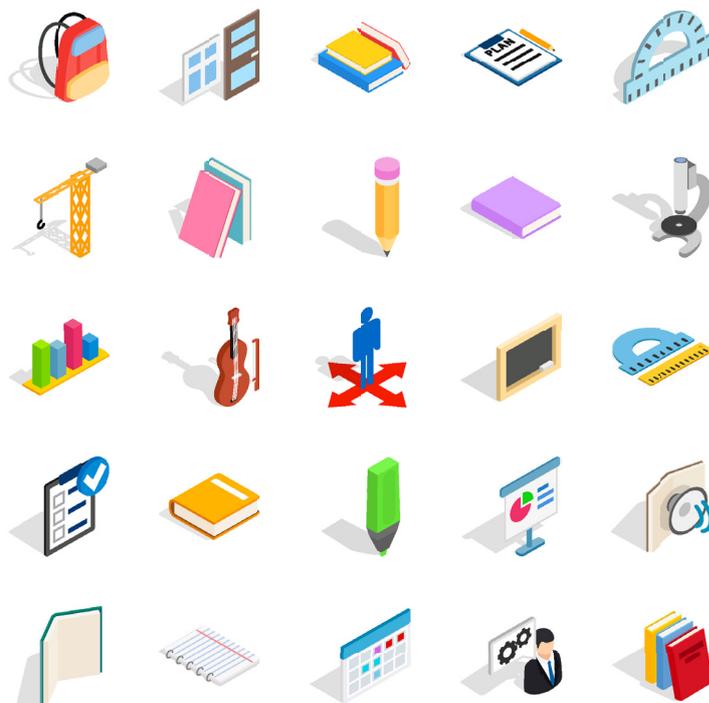
### Building confidence

Some teachers don't like using technology either in the classroom or outside because they are worried about making mistakes or looking foolish in front of their students. It's true that many students these days are more tech-savvy than their teachers. This is a resource – why not ask your students to take charge and share what they know? Or help you when you get stuck? In most cases, this could be very positive in terms of building the teacher-student relationship.

### Making time

Finding time to develop our skills and knowledge is an issue for many of us. However, taking half an hour to set up a system of note-taking and bookmarking of websites can save a lot of time and help us to keep track of interesting things we've seen but haven't yet had time to fully read through. Getting organised is key to any

professional development activity – whether it involves technology or not. **1**



### REFERENCES

If you're interested in learning more about the issues related to the use of technology in education, why not listen to *Episode 7 of the British Council's Education in Focus: South Asia audio series?* It's available for free on all good podcast platforms, or via the hashtag #EducationSouthAsia.

The British Council has also produced a set of free *Technology for Teachers guides*, covering several topics including using apps and online collaboration tools, making the most of social networks, giving webinar presentations, and more. Access them here: <https://www.britishcouncil.in/teach/resources-for-teachers/technology-teachers-series>.

Finally, the TeachingEnglish website contains many free resources for teachers of English (includes the teacher educator community of practice): <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk>.

### AUTHOR

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