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# Simple revolution:
blackboard in the cloud

Magdalena Fijalkowska

So simple, it is pure genius.

'Gone with the Wind`?
What are we talking about?

Let's ask ourselves a few questions first.
1. Do I have a laptop? (most of us do)
2. Do I use it in my classes? (most of us do)
3. Do I have the Internet in my classes? (most of us do, and if we don't, we have it at home)
4. Am I making most of the technology at hand? (most of us do not)
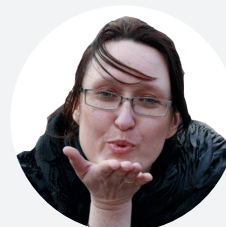
Magdalena Fijalkowska

Magda dreamed of becoming an English teacher when she was a child, and so she did. When she grew up, she worked as a teacher, manager or director with International House Kraków, UEC-Bell in Warsaw, Eurocentres, Macmillan and Pearson Longman publishing houses, Stafford House, Experience English and International Quest in the UK. While working with Newcastle University and Strathclyde University in Glasgow she discovered her new love: English for Academic Purposes. She has recently completed Cambridge University Delta as well as Learning Technologies course at the University of Sheffield. Since 2007, she's been running NaukaBezGranic, offering schools multicultural workshops and theatre shows performed in English. Check out *www.naukabezgranic.pl* to find out more.

We are talking about a very simple change to our teaching approach. Let's stop using blackboards or whiteboards or smartboards. When we make a record of the emerging vocab or give grammar examples to the students in the lessons using those, it's like gone with the wind. When the show is over, it gets wiped out. So, what I am suggesting here is very simple: keeping a record of what happens in the lesson on a shared google doc in the cloud and giving students access to it.

Why should we do it? Because our students have decided not to buy that Volvo!

Let talk about money. How much does one need to learn a foreign language? A typical course is 120 hours with a teacher. Let's say that we need 10 years to learn a language up to the C2 level. So that is 1200 hours.

Scenario 1: Let's assume that the cost per each private lesson, on one-to-one basis is PLN 70. The total is PLN 84 000. One could buy a car!

Scenario 2: Companies pay for their employees let's say PLN 120 per hour. So, times 1200 this would be PLN 144000.

Scenario 3: Students learn in a group, each lesson costs them PLN 15. There are 10 students in a group. The course thus generates 120 hours x PLN 150, that is PLN 18000. Times 10 years, it will be PLN 180000.

Learning a foreign language is not for the poor, and yet many people who invest in their education will not have that Volvo, that would serve them well if they decided not to learn English! They chose not to buy it!

Why is this relevant to our teaching? Well, time is money. And we, as teachers, have been entrusted with the students` investment. Let's respect that by making our classes as effective as we can. Sharing class notes with the students is a way of increasing the course effectiveness and showing that respect.

Let's have a look at several examples of how cloud board **can help you be more effective and save time preparing lessons**, too.

Cloud board example 1: homework

Simple. When a student misses a lesson, they can always check what was covered in the lesson and what the homework is.

Cloud board example 2: **dialogue building**

Simple. Here is a record of a dialogue a group put together during a lesson.

Cloud board example 3: **dialogue building - revision**

Simple again. Here, we have the same dialogue, a lesson later, gapped for revision.

Cloud board example 4: **feedback on language**

Simple. During the lesson, as students speak, I take notes. They do not see the screen then, so are not worried much. Towards the end of the lesson we get back to some of what they said, and we correct the errors or upgrade the language.

Cloud board example 5: **pre-teaching vocab and vocab revision**

Simple. The beauty of keeping a vocab set in the cloud is that you can pre-teach it before a reading or a listening slot, but you also have it ready in the following class to use for revision. Yes, I know, I am lazy.

Cloud board example 6: **photos**

Simple. If one day you just do not feel like dragging your laptop with you? Hey, what are smartphones for. You can still keep the record of the board work on the doc.

Cloud board example 7: **reading and colour-coding**

You can also copy parts of a text into the document and highlight interesting vocab as you discuss it in class. Again, it makes revising vocab, in context, easier later as well.

Cloud board for self-study: **my Spanish**

I am currently learning Spanish via Skype. My teacher, Adam, who is Polish, lives in Mexico. He's a traveller, moving from one *playa* to another, visiting exciting places. He does not bring handouts to my lessons, though he shares with me some very boring grammar exercises. We share the screen and we share the documents. But mainly he helps me with my learning. I take notes on a document he has access to, so can correct my mistakes and generally watch over my progress.

Here Adam has corrected my mistakes:

And here are my lesson notes, based on our chat in Spanish.

What do the learners think?

Below are some comments from the students. Thank you Monika, Ewa, Grzegorz, Marcin, Dominik, Tomek, Agnieszka, Monika, Marek.

Pierwszy raz się spotkałem z czymś takim, i to bardzo dobry pomysł.

Po każdych zajęciach mamy możliwość powrotu do lekcji i nic nam nie umknie.

Treść lekcji, słownictwo, w jednym miejscu. W każdej chwili można zajrzeć i powtórzyć materiał.

Jestem pod dużym wrażeniem pomysłu i skuteczności.

Zaskakująco prosty, interesujący i zabawny sposób na przyswajanie słownictwa i gramatyki, jestem pod dużym wrażeniem.

Sometimes our lessons are very dynamic, and we do not have the time to take notes on our own. Our teacher makes sure we don't miss anything.

This way of organising materials is very useful for students because they are always available and updated after class.

All new words and idioms are there, so you can easily revise them.

The notes are always available, so students can revise them using smartphones e.g. when on a bus.

I like the way in which materials are distributed. I especially like the use of modern technologies: computer, projector, the Internet. On the other hand, traditional methods of teaching are also used. Therefore, I have the feeling that there is an ideal balance between those two ways of teaching.

For me the mind-blowing feature of our lessons is the teacher taking notes and sharing them on the Internet.

I think that sharing lesson notes in the cloud is very handy for the students. It would be better if all the students used them!

Easy access to materials encourages us to learn.

So, what are you going to do about it?

Ask ourselves these questions again.
1. Do I have a laptop?
2. Do I use it in my classes?
3. Do I have the Internet in my classes?
4. Do I have a projector in my classrooms?
5. Am I making most of the technology at hand?

Now, you may not have the internet connection – well, get it via Bluetooth off your phone. You may not have a projector! Well, get one, they have become very cheap, or better insist on your employer buying it. After all, you are a true professional and your students are not buying that Volvo!