

OXFORD FORWARD

April 2016

Forward Foreword



“

The heavy reliance on standardized tests in schools is a global trend. But it is puzzling why public officials have made test scores the priority of education. Many of them were educated at elite universities which seldom judge students' knowledge and ability solely by their test scores.

The simple truth is some of the things that matter most in a quality education—critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, tenacity, self-discipline, resourcefulness and relationship skills—exist in realms that can't be easily measured by statistical measures and computer algorithms. They can only be detected by teachers using human judgement.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the most valuable education often emerges from live interactions between teachers and students, not from an obsession with high test scores or the algorithms built into computers to deliver scripted lessons.

The best teachers understand that human relationships are the key to reaching students. They devote themselves to their students with intense enthusiasm by recognizing and responding to their strengths and weaknesses. Instead of 'teaching to the test', they use a rich curriculum, hands-on projects, field trips and references to popular culture and topical issues to fire their students' interest in learning.

That's also where OUP fits in. We strive to help teachers prepare their students for the HKDSE by providing them with titles and teaching materials that are not just about exam skills and knowledge, but also the development and stimulation of individual minds.

”

Perry Lam
Editorial Director, English Language
Teaching Department

Strive for success in the HKDSE

In this issue



Students' pages

Puzzles and games for avid English learners—feel free to photocopy these pages for your students

p.6

Watch this space

Things to look out for in the coming months

p.8



Learning from your mistakes and going from there

Interview with Ms Margaret Wong of Tsuen Wan Government Secondary School about avoiding common exam pitfalls and performing to the fullest potential

p.4



Noticeboard

The latest events and developments in ELT

p. 2

Students' workshop series: Translating Exam Skills into HKDSE Success

To help students cross the finishing line of their secondary English education, OUP organized a series of workshops to review crucial exam skills and offer students suggestions on how they can study in an effective manner. The second in the series, 'Reading and Listening for Success', was held on Thursday, 26 November 2015 at Lee Kau Yan Memorial School. Our guest speaker was Mr Theodore Tam, a top performer in the 2014 HKDSE Examination. About 360 students and teachers from over ten schools attended the event.

The star student talked about personal strategies and tips for undertaking Paper 1 (Reading) and Paper 3 (Listening and Integrated Skills), referring to examples taken from the *Oxford Essential/Advanced Exam Skills* titles and past DSE papers. He also looked at common and costly mistakes that students make in the two papers, and gave advice on making the most of exam practices under timed conditions. The afternoon ended with an insightful question and answer session in which Theodore responded to concerns of the student audience.



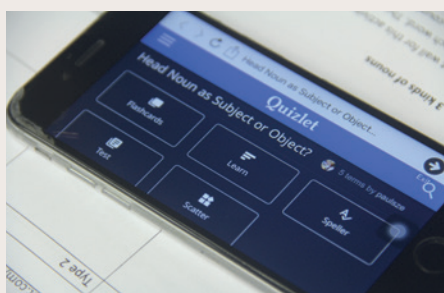
Playing by the Rules: E-learning for enhancing students' grammatical competence and language awareness



On 5 March 2016, Dr Paul Sze, Adjunct Assistant Professor at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Ms Jenny Leung, English teacher at Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School, co-presented 'Playing by the Rules', a workshop on e-learning for language awareness training. About 70 teachers attended the event.

The first part of the workshop began with Dr Sze's introduction of 'language awareness', a term new to most teachers. It is, in Ronald Carter's words, 'the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language'. Dr Sze then elaborated on

the meaning of the concept by citing ample examples from everyday life. For instance, he drew the audience's attention to the contrast between 'Thank you for travelling by the MTR.' and 'Thank you for travelling with the MTR.' Both announcements are grammatically correct, but they carry different meanings. The former thanks passengers for using the train instead of other means of transport such as buses, while the latter thanks passengers for choosing the MTR over other train providers. Dr Sze also remarked that language awareness is not all about grammar. Pronunciation, vocabulary and discourse are important aspects as well. For example, 'I bought many presents for my wife.' and 'I bought my wife many presents.' are not entirely interchangeable since there is a subtle difference between the two: the former emphasizes the things (the presents), while the latter focuses on the person (the speaker's wife).



In the second part of the workshop, Ms Leung shared with the audience her hands-on experience in turning students into motivated learners with the help of e-learning tools. She adopted the 'flipped classroom' approach, that is, students self-study at home before class by watching a short video clip and completing a pre-test online, participate in group tasks such as station games in class to apply what they have learnt, and do assignments at home after class to check their understanding. Ms Leung concluded her sharing with a Kahoot quiz game which allowed all teachers to have fun while gaining first-hand experience as student users.



Before the workshop ended, the speakers expressed their view that e-learning can make language awareness training more fun. A heightened awareness of how the language actually works can complement the often overgeneralized grammar rules and turn students into competent users of English.



Success in the exams—

Learning from your mistakes and going from there

Oxford Forward recently met with HKDSE invigilator and marker Ms Margaret Wong of Tsuen Wan Government Secondary School to talk about how students can avoid common exam pitfalls and perform to their fullest potential.

In your experience as an invigilator for the DSE English Language examinations, what are the most common practical mistakes that students make?

MW: One practical issue that springs to mind is when students attempt to edit previously written answers or passages. Instead of simply crossing out the relevant texts, they tend to spend time tidying their edits using correction fluid or tape, or colouring over them. This is quite unnecessary. Very often, students make the mistake of forgetting to insert the edited texts back into the blank, and this can cost them dearly in terms of marks.

Then there's the problem of bringing an abundance of stationery and laying it all out on their desks. I would advise against this because it can limit the space that students have for writing. All they need for the English papers are a couple of highlighters, ball pens and pencils, backups included.

What about as a marker? Have you seen students make silly, easily avoidable mistakes?

MW: From what I've observed, the silly mistakes that students make almost always stem from not having paid attention to the requirements of the questions. Take Paper 2 for example. Students like to read a question with the aim of identifying a

key word. Once they've identified one, they'll dismiss the rest of the question and start writing right away. Of course, this will become very obvious to us as markers when we read the students' answers and find that they have failed to address certain parts of the question. I had a student who was tasked with writing a piece about the impact of the Harbourfront development. He took one look and decided to put down everything he knew regarding the history of the Harbourfront. It was a very costly error, and could have been easily avoided if he had paid more attention to the question.

'The silly mistakes that students make almost always stem from not having paid attention to the requirements of the questions'

One problem that stronger candidates tend to have with Paper 2 is that they want to include the greatest number of words possible in their compositions, and to cover as many difficult words and complicated sentence structures as they can. What happens is that these students often run out of time for proofreading their work and eliminating the most basic mistakes, grammatical mistakes in particular. As markers, we look for the overall impression that a piece of writing gives us. Unnecessarily wordy sentences can affect this impression and cause marks to be deducted.

Have you made similar observations in any of the other papers?

MW: The same goes for Paper 3. A few years ago there was an exam question that required candidates to write an editorial. Quite a number of students glanced at the instructions and saw that the question was 'editor-related'. They immediately launched



into writing a letter to the editor. I've seen quite a few of these cases in which students misinterpreted the genre requirements of a question. It's not an uncommon occurrence.

And again, time management is a real problem for students attempting Part B2 in Paper 3. The majority of candidates struggle to sift through the Data Files in good detail and to adapt the information to fit with the context given. Very often, they find that they do not have enough time to complete Task 10, not to mention proofread their work.

Do you believe doing mock exams is an effective way for students to train themselves out of making such mistakes?

MW: Definitely. As teachers, we try to equip our students with the skills needed to excel in the English Language exams. But what we pass on to them is conceptual. To truly 'internalize' these skills, students need to practise doing the exams and discover what works best for them.

I find doing mock exams in class particularly effective in terms of training students to manage their time. When students do exam practices at home, very often they will make an attempt to time themselves only when they begin writing. When time is up, they will continue to write, at the same time telling themselves that they will be able to stick to the time limit the next time. In-class exams

are therefore a good way of highlighting different areas that need attention and act as a guide for moving forward.

Any other ways?

MW: In addition to doing mock papers, students should continue to read extensively outside the DSE syllabus. It could be a newspaper article, a magazine article, a blog post or a novel; it doesn't matter. Reading widely enhances students' general knowledge, and gives them the opportunity to become familiar with vocabulary and sentence structures in authentic texts. It also enables students to develop an awareness of how writers adapt their style depending on their audience, and encourages students to consider what is appropriate for different text types. I've seen students using proverbs in tasks that were meant to be casual and informal, and I find these quite inappropriately used.

'In addition to doing mock papers, students should continue to read extensively outside the DSE syllabus'

Turning now to some specific concerns that DSE candidates have about the English papers ... Many students are worried about longer, open-ended questions in Paper 1, such as those that require them to justify the views of the author or a character in the text. How can teachers help students tackle this type of question?

MW: In most cases, students will be able to adapt something from the passage. It's important that they review the text carefully, select the right answer and put it down on the page accurately. Students shouldn't worry about filling up all of the space given and writing a lot. If they write too much, they won't be able to finish the paper.

There have been more examples recently of Paper 1 questions testing students' higher-order thinking skills and requiring them to think beyond the reading passages in some way. Do you think students struggle with these questions?

MW: Some students may struggle to understand what is meant by the question 'What is your opinion?' They tend to think that this means coming up with something entirely new that is not hinted at in the text. In fact, for this type of question, students can often draw inspiration from

the passages. The skill is for them to find the relevant information in the text and adapt it to align with their own ideas.

Many students have difficulty organizing their writing for the tasks in Paper 3 Part B. How do you usually handle this with your students?

MW: For Part B, the method of taking notes continuously during the recording is especially important. Students tend to only write down information that they think is relevant and ignore information that they think is not important. I would encourage them to write down as much as possible, even if they think the details are irrelevant. This makes selecting the correct information much easier afterwards.

In Paper 3, students should avoid writing too much and adding pages to their work. They should be able to fit their answers in the space provided by the examination board. Writing too much can give markers the impression that irrelevant information has been included. If students have addressed all of the content requirements then in terms of quantity they will have written enough and instead they should focus on ensuring their work is concise, precise and accurate.

How do you approach the B1/B2 differentiation in Paper 1 and Paper 3? Do you generally tell your students which part they should attempt, or do you encourage them to make their own decisions?

MW: The practice in our school is to simply ask all students to attempt Part B2. Yes, even relatively weaker students. The decision was made taking into consideration that the vast majority of our students are going to continue their studies after Form 6. If some students choose to do Part B1, they will be barred at Level 4 in terms of grades and, as a result, lose the edge. The other reason is that my students are not very attentive kids. When they do the easier paper, they tend to think that it's a piece of cake and make a lot of careless mistakes. On the other hand, when they do the harder paper, they tend to be more alert and careful.

Let's talk a bit more about getting mentally prepared for the big day. As a teacher, do you find that your students get extremely nervous in the days leading up to the English exam?

MW: Of course. Students tend to become very nervous about their DSE exams once they've entered Form 6. They understand

that English, in particular, is an important subject and that it's half the ticket to university admission. So they worry a lot about whether they are able to perform to their fullest potential in this subject.

'They understand that English, in particular, is an important subject and that it's half the ticket to university admission'

Do you have any methods for dealing with this?

MW: Feeling well-prepared is one way of dealing with the stress, so we encourage students to keep up their practice with mock papers. At the same time, students should prepare themselves physically for the big day. I ask my students to develop the habit of sleeping and getting up early, and to get their brains used to working at 8.30 in the morning, which is the time when the real exam starts. The night before the exam, I ask them not to review an overwhelming amount of material. A quick review of their own errors from past practice papers should do.

The other thing that I discourage my students from doing is discussing an exam with their friends after it's finished. Students tend to get stressed over questions that have been answered differently by their friends, when in fact they may have got the correct answer. Getting upset about a completed exam can add to stress levels and affect their performance in subsequent examinations.

Can you offer a final piece of advice for students preparing to do their DSE English examinations in the coming years?

MW: Treat the subject in an important manner and start preparing from junior form. You'll need to make a start at some point, and doing it sooner rather than later is a good way of reducing anxiety when the big day eventually arrives.



WORD PLAY!

What is going on?

What's going on in the photos below? How do you know?
Unscramble the words below each picture to see if you're right.



What's going on in this photo?

How do you know?

het nam si vidngi iton trawe.

How do you know?

teh tac si btuoa ot unepco no emhtngsoi.

What's going on in this photo?



What's going on in this photo?



How do you know?

het anm sha tsuj smdesi sih sub ot wkro.

Although it is not possible to say with 100% certainty what is going on in these photos, you can infer what is happening with a high degree of certainty. Clues in the picture and your own life experiences help you. These same skills can be used when inferring information from a text (a key skill for the English Language Exam).

Solve it!

Being able to infer things from the text is a key skill needed to do well in the English Language DSE. Practise this skill by using the clues below to work out which author likes to travel.

Five famous authors live on the same street. Their houses are all different colours. Each author has a favourite drink, hobby and book.



Your challenge is to work out who likes to travel.



The 15 clues:

- 1 J.K. Rowling lives in the red house.
- 2 Haruki Murakami likes running.
- 3 Harper Lee drinks coffee.
- 4 The green house is on the left of the white house.
- 5 The owner of the green house drinks milk.
- 6 The person whose favourite book is *Macbeth* likes reading.
- 7 The owner of the yellow house likes *David Copperfield*.
- 8 The person living in the house right in the centre drinks tonic water.
- 9 The person whose favourite book is *Pride and Prejudice* lives next to the one who likes writing.
- 10 Leo Tolstoy lives in the first house.
- 11 The person who likes fishing lives next to the one whose favourite book is *David Copperfield*.
- 12 The owner whose favourite book is *The Catcher in the Rye* drinks tea.
- 13 Gabriel García Márquez's favourite book is *The Metamorphosis*.
- 14 Leo Tolstoy lives next to the blue house.
- 15 The person who likes *Pride and Prejudice* has a neighbour who drinks water.



Person	Colour of house	Hobby	Book	Drink

Watch this space

Things to look out for in the coming months

Events

Oxford HKDSE Exam Analysis Sharing Session

Expert insights on the 2016 HKDSE English exam



Insights on the 2016 HKDSE

Ms Jacqui Koo, English Panel Head (Secondary Section), Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary & Primary School



HKDSE Analysis (English Language Papers 1–3)

Theodore Tam, one of the 12 top scorers in the 2014 HKDSE exams, scoring 5** in all four English Language papers



Perfect Practice: the Oxford NSS series

Mr John Thompson, ELT Senior Editor, Oxford University Press (China)

Date 23 April 2016, Saturday

Time 10 a.m. – 12 noon

Venue Crystal Ballroom, 2/F, The Cityview Hotel, 23 Waterloo Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong (Near Yau Ma Tei MTR station Exit D)

For enquiries, please contact the OUP Account Executive for your school.

In the next issue of *Oxford Forward*

- Reflections on the 2016 HKDSE English Language Exam
- More news, interviews and students' activities

Look out for the next issue of *Oxford Forward* in June 2016

Students' pages (Answers)

What is going on?

- What's going on?** The man is diving into water. **How do you know?** Possible answers include: people cannot fly by themselves, the man is wearing swimming trunks
- What's going on?** The cat is about to pounce on something. **How do you know?** From seeing cats behave like this in real life, in films, on TV etc.
- What's going on?** The man has just missed his bus to work. **How do you know?** Possible answers include: there is a bus stop in the background, the man is wearing a suit and holding a briefcase, the background setting looks like it is nearer his home than his office, the man is running with his arm outstretched to try to stop the bus

Solve it!

Person	Colour of house	Hobby	Book	Drink
J.K. Rowling	Red	Reading	<i>Macbeth</i>	Tonic water
Haruki Murakami	White	Running	<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	Tea
Harper Lee	Blue	Fishing	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Coffee
Leo Tolstoy	Yellow	Writing	<i>David Copperfield</i>	Water
Gabriel García Márquez	Green	Travelling	<i>The Metamorphosis</i>	Milk