OXFORD FORWARD

E-learning

Forward Foreword

> People have been raving about e-learning and it's easy to see what the excitement is about. Under our examination-driven system, classroom teaching is sometimes reduced to downloading content into students' minds, with success or failure measured by standardized tests. Too often, kids are trained for exactly the rote tasks that can be done much more effectively by computers.
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> E-learning sets out to change all that. With the smart use of technology, e-learning promises to make the most mundane learning task palatable, even alluring, by framing it not as a chore, but a challenge. As such, e-learning is part of the larger global trend of what has come to be known as gamification.
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> It's a brilliant idea. Yet there is so much more to learning than just fun and games. And there is only so much that you can and should do to take the pain out of learning. Learning can certainly be made pleasurable but it's the difficult pleasure of making your brains work hard and exercising your intellectual faculty. Whatever else e-learning can do, it cannot erase the distinction between processing information, which gadgets and tablets are good at, and transmitting knowledge, which they are not.
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> The increasingly varied tools for e-learning should best be used as teaching assistants in the classroom. They can never take the place of teachers. That should be good news for teachers as well as students.

Perry Lam
Editorial Director, English Language Teaching Department

In this issue

Students' workshop series: Translating Exam Skills into HKDSE Success

To help students get off to a flying start in their preparation for the HKDSE English Language exam, OUP is organizing a series of workshops to review crucial exam skills and offer students suggestions on how they can study in an effective manner. The first in the series, 'Setting the Tone', was held on Thursday, 15 October 2015. Our guest speaker was Mr Theodore Tam, a top performer in the 2014 HKDSE Examination. About 340 students and teachers from over 20 schools attended the event.

The star student talked about personal strategies and tips for undertaking each of the four papers, referring to examples taken from his own DSE papers and giving attendees a glimpse of the standard examiners are looking for. He also encouraged students to read extensively, and to go into the exam with a positive mindset and an action plan. The event was followed by a Q&A session which prompted various questions from the enthusiastic audience.

Rethinking learning in the 21st century

The promise and potential of digital devices for use in and outside of the classroom have been generating much interest over the past decade. But how is Hong Kong coping with the revolutionary potential of e-learning in education?

Where is e-learning headed in Hong Kong?

Oxford Forward recently met with Ms Emily Lee of Fung Kai No.1 Secondary School to talk about the merits and drawbacks of plugging in to Hong Kong classrooms.

How did talks for e-learning begin at your school?

EL: E-learning at our school has been steadily developing over the past two to three years. We became increasingly aware that the shift to a digital age is making e-learning an inevitable trend, and we wanted to embrace this opportunity. It all began with our introduction of eClass, a digital platform that allows us to manage homework and learning materials online. Following that, we revamped our junior forms' book list to one that is made up mostly of e-books, and asked each student to purchase a personal laptop so they're able to use these e-books.

How does this work on a day-to-day basis?

EL: Before students come into class, we ask them to go through the preparatory exercises that we've uploaded onto eClass, and to download the relevant units of the e-book for use in class. During class, students access their e-books using their own laptops. We give them group tasks to complete during lesson time, and before the end of class, we ask them to upload their work onto our shared drive for everyone to access and to explain what they've done to their classmates. After class, students are required to supplement their learning by completing some individual tasks online. We also ask them to give presentations to review what they've learnt from previous classes. For English classes, we use our devices 60% of the time, mainly to supplement reading comprehension, as well as grammar and vocabulary learning.

What are the greatest benefits of e-learning for students?

'Students find it more interesting and fun to learn on a computer'

EL: Students find it more interesting and fun to learn on a computer, and this has led to a huge change in their learning attitudes. Now, when they come across something they don't understand in class, they'll take the initiative to look for the answer online, or ask their classmates, before seeking help from teachers. I believe students learn a lot more when they do their own research, interact and ask each other questions. For language and humanities subjects, e-learning helps a lot with understanding abstract concepts. This is thanks to the huge library of pictures and videos immediately available on the Internet.

Another benefit of e-learning for students is learning how to make smarter use of their digital devices. For example, due to our students' frequent exposure to presentation preparation, they've become much more creative in their use of presentation software. I think these are skills that will be incredibly useful in their future careers.

Have there been any complaints from students or parents about the compulsory use of e-books and laptops at school?

EL: Yes, there have been parents who are sceptical about the benefits of e-learning and are reluctant to purchase laptops for their children. That is why we have to make sure that the laptops we choose are within the budget and are most appropriate for student use. Fortunately, the parents have begun to realize that e-learning is where education is headed. They understand that it's important their children are not left behind technologically.

The students' complaints are mostly to do with the slow Wi-Fi speeds at school. Although we've installed a Wi-Fi router in every classroom, capacity is still an issue. This is especially problematic when students who don't have Internet access at home try to download all their e-books during class time. Also, as the students approach their senior years, the laptops that they have bought in Form 1 will require a lot of updating and repairing. The school will need to send these laptops to the manufacturer, and the whole process can get quite frustrating. The other thing is that these laptops are

relatively big and heavy items for students to bring to school. Of course, there are smaller devices, such as tablets, but the texts on these devices are smaller in size as well. The supporting software for tablets is also quite expensive. So there's a trade-off.

How has it been for teachers?

EL: E-learning has created much more work for us, I have to say! Not all of our books come with electronic versions. We often have to weave through the materials, pick out the most relevant information, rearrange and type it up by hand, and upload the documents onto the system for students to access. The whole process is extremely time-consuming. And when the books do come with electronic versions, they're not always editable or directly transferable onto eClass. This is why, at the moment, we can only afford to use e-learning for reading, grammar and vocabulary learning in our English classes. We still have to depend on printed materials for other aspects of our students' English learning, such as writing and listening.

Because our students work on their own laptops during class, teachers need to make sure they're accessing material that is appropriate and accurate. Students of this age are understandably curious, and their devices make it easy for them to get their hands on all kinds of information on the Internet. We also don't want them to use the laptops for playing games or watching entertainment videos.

That said, e-learning has helped teachers move away from the 'talk and chalk' style of teaching. We no longer have to spend time writing model essays or answers on the blackboard. In some ways, digital devices have made teaching a lot more efficient compared to in the past.

Do you think e-learning will completely replace paper-based learning in the future?

EL: No, I don't see e-learning replacing traditional ways of learning, at least not in the near future. Although we use e-books in our teaching, we make sure that the school is equipped with printed versions of the same material. If the students run into any technical difficulties with their devices, they'll still have something to revise with at home. Another reason is that Hong Kong's public exam system is still based on handwriting. If students only learn with digital devices, their writing speeds may become an obstacle for them during exams. There might also be problems with handwriting and spelling that we don't notice when using e-learning.

'The biggest hurdle to developing e-learning remains the time and effort required of teachers'

In my opinion, though, the biggest hurdle to developing e-learning remains the time and effort required of teachers. It's just too much work for us at the moment. For the e-learning market to really flourish, teachers need a lot more supporting materials from publishers. We also need concrete school policies to support e-learning, as well as committees to help us put these policies forward and monitor the use of electronic platforms, devices and books. Only when these needs are met can e-learning truly revolutionize secondary education in Hong Kong.

Flipped classrooms: an alternative way to learn?

The flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the 'traditional' classroom where students listen to the teacher and are given homework is reversed. Students watch a video before the class, giving them a basic grounding in what the lesson will be about. In-class time is then devoted to exercises, projects or discussions. We met up with the English Panel Head, Ms Emily Mak, at Kit Sam Lam Bing Yim Secondary School to find out what she thought about the method and what her personal experiences with it were.

What do you understand by the concept of 'flipped classrooms'? Where did you first hear about it?

EM: I'm not sure exactly when I heard about this concept. My understanding of flipped classrooms is that instead of just learning in the classroom, learning time is extended outside the classroom. In our school, we require students to do lesson preparation before coming to class. For example, I might ask the students to watch a video before class that is about a particular grammar point. Then, hopefully, before coming to class they gain a basic understanding of it; or if they don't understand it, they can tell me from which point they don't understand it. Students can then learn better during class time, and if they are still uncertain of the grammar point, they can go back to the video after the lesson.

Any specific examples of how you have used the 'flipped classroom' model in your teaching?

EM: I used it in one of my Form 4 composition classes. I asked the students to watch a video before the lesson. Their task was to write a feature story about the Sichuan earthquake, and to write it from the perspective of a volunteer who helped out after the earthquake. Of course, the students can't draw on their own personal experiences for this task, so the video helped them get an idea of what it would be like to be a volunteer helping out during the aftermath of the earthquake.

Did you encounter any challenges when using the 'flipped classroom' model, and do you think that using this model makes preparing for lessons easier?

EM: Well, I didn't face any major challenges because I used material prepared by others. The video was on YouTube, and I made use of it by giving the link to students and asking them to watch it at home. Of course, if teachers cannot find relevant information on the Internet and need to produce it on their own, then that could be a problem. Teachers need to be careful to not just use technology for the sake of it. It is really important to consider how we can use it meaningfully and how it is facilitating students' learning.

'Teachers need to be careful to not just use technology for the sake of it'

Honestly, I think using the 'flipped classroom' model creates more work. Teacher-centred lessons are the easiest in terms of planning, but student-centred lessons or lessons that include videos take more time to prepare. We need to search for the video and watch it all to ensure that it is appropriate first.

How frequently do you use flipped classrooms?

EM: Not a lot. I used the method once last year. But we only started having Wi-Fi support this year.

Do you think there is a reason that the 'flipped classroom' model is not widely used in Hong Kong secondary schools?

EM: Language teachers are very busy and just don't have the time to think about how to do it. We need time to consider how we can use this method meaningfully. Ideally, the EDB could help and provide us with some examples of how this model can be used in English classes effectively.

In your opinion, what is the main difference between a 'flipped classroom' and a 'traditional classroom'?

EM: Flipped classrooms provide us with a way to extend the lesson. Teachers often complain that they are unable to teach everything that they want to teach because the lesson time is too short. Flipping the classroom is a way we can gain time, and it encourages us to think about the key points that the students should take away from the lesson.

Do you see e-learning as more applicable to 'traditional' teaching styles or to 'flipped classrooms'?

EM: It can be used in both teaching styles. Students can make use of e-learning inside and outside the classroom. It is important for students to be motivated, but they won't be motivated just because we include videos in the lessons as the novelty will quickly wear off.

In a flipped classroom, do you believe it is possible to accommodate those who prefer to learn in a more private environment?

EM: It depends on how the model is used. If we use apps which display everybody's answers, then it can be intimidating for some students who prefer to use pen and paper so that no one else can see their answers. However, if the students have no choice in this matter, then they will soon get used to it.

If flipped classrooms focus on 'collaboration' and 'doing', what happens to individual reflection?

EM: For self-regulated learning in junior forms, the focus is definitely on collaboration among members of a group. Tasks are actively designed in a way that students have to work together. This means that students are more engaged during the lesson, compared to when a teacher dictates the lesson and students listen but have nothing to do. However, we do allow time for students to reflect. We use the last lesson of the day as preparation and reflection time. Students who struggle during reflection time will be able to ask members of their group for help, and often stronger students learn by teaching the weaker students.

Do you envision the 'flipped classroom' method being used more often in the future?

EM: Yes, I think that e-learning and the 'flipped classroom' method will be used more in classrooms in the future. What concerns me is whether they will be used meaningfully. It will take time to fully integrate these things into education. The infrastructure needs to be built, and teachers need time to work on it. We have infinite information, but people need to sift through it and find the relevant material for students to read. That's why, despite the increasing use of e-learning, I don't think teachers will ever be out of a job.

Did you know …

E-learning is a constantly growing industry. The three countries with the highest growth rate of self-paced e-learning are:

India (55%)

China (52%)

Malaysia (41%)

Eight million iPads have been sold directly to educational institutions around the world.

E-learning is eco-friendly. According to a study by Britain's Open University, e-learning courses consume 95% less energy and produce 85% fewer CO2 emissions per student than conventional classroom courses.

Eighty-seven per cent of students would like to use digital textbooks instead of traditional textbooks so that they won't have so much to carry on their backs.

The word 'e-learning' became an entry in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2004.

E-learning helps students learn better. The Research Institute of America found that e-learning increases the retention rate of information by 25% to 60%. This is due to the students having more control over the learning process and the possibility of revisiting the material at any time.

Sources: thejournal.com, elearningindustry.com, info.shiftelearning.com

WORD PLAY!
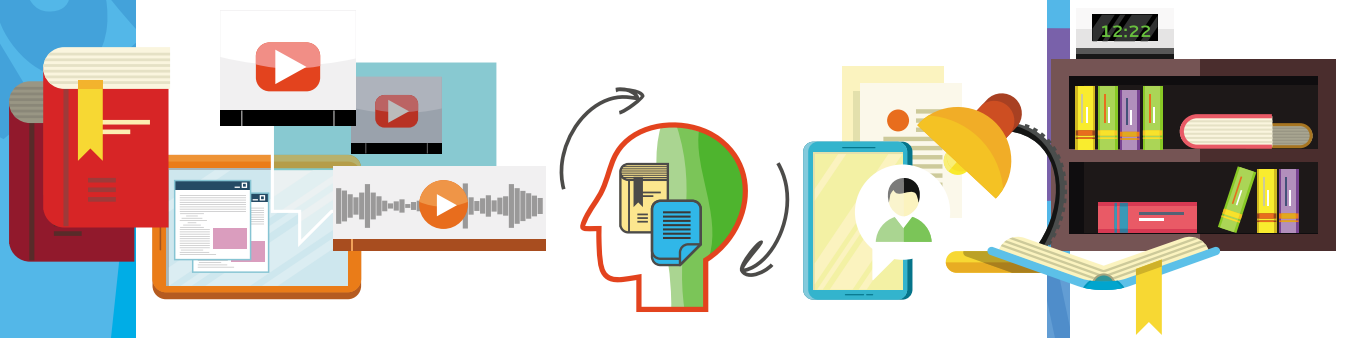
Etymology and technology

Technology has changed the English language. Words that did not exist a few decades ago can now be found on the web pages of OxfordDictionaries.com. The words below have been added to OxfordDictionaries.com because of technology. See if you can match the word to its definition.

screenager

meatspace

netiquette

cyberchondriac

egosurf

hashtag

upvote

clickbait

1 a person in their teens or twenties who has an aptitude for computers and the Internet

_____

2 a person who compulsively searches the Internet for information about particular, real or imagined symptoms of illness

_____

3 register approval of or agreement with (a post or poster) by means of a particular icon

_____

4 the physical world, as opposed to cyberspace or a virtual environment

_____

5 search the Internet for instances of one's own name or links to one's own website

_____

6 content whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page

_____

7 a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media sites such as Twitter to identify messages on a specific topic

_____

8 the correct or acceptable way of using the Internet

_____

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Dated definitions

As time passes, many words fall out of use or become obsolete. Can you work out the meaning of the archaic words highlighted in red from the context of the sentence? Be careful, the obvious definition for some of these words will not be correct.

1   In a 1692 publication John Locke used the word 'jargogle': 'I fear, that the jumbling of those good and plausible Words in your Head..might a little jargogle your Thoughts …'

Definition: _____

2   In Shakespeare's *Romeo* and *Juliet*, the nurse enters Juliet's bedroom and says, 'Mistress! Mistress! Juliet! Fast asleep, I'll bet! Why lamb! My lady! Ha! You slugabed!'

Definition: _____

3   The sun had just set, and they were sitting in the twitter-light by a window in the kitchen.

Definition: _____

4   During winter, few people ventured abroad from the comfort of their warm houses.

Definition: _____

5   In his 1776 publication *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon wrote, 'Camelopards, the loftiest and most harmless creatures that wander over the plains of Ethiopia.'

Definition: _____

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Events

Students' workshop series

Translating Exam Skills into HKDSE Success

Oxford University Press (China) Limited is proud to present 'Translating Exam Skills into HKDSE Success', a series of workshops aimed at helping students cross the finishing line of their secondary English education. Our guest speaker is **Mr Theodore Tam**, a top performer in the 2014 HKDSE Examination.

The November workshop, 'Reading and Listening for Success', is the second in the series. In this workshop, Theodore will provide an in-depth review of strategies and tips for Paper 1 (Reading) and Paper 3 (Listening and Integrated Skills) to get students geared up for the English Language exam. He will also discuss common and costly mistakes that students make in the two papers and give advice on making the most of exam practices under timed conditions.

Reading and Listening for Success

Date: 26 November 2015 (Thursday)

Time: 4.30–6 p.m.

Venue: Lee Kau Yan Memorial School
            (596 Prince Edward Road, San Po Kong, Kowloon)

Language: Cantonese

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

In the next issue of *Oxford Forward*

- Focus on the HKDSE
- More news, interviews and students' activities

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

Students' pages (Answers)

Etymology and technology

1 screenager
2 cyberchondriac
3 upvote
4 meatspace
5 egosurf
6 clickbait
7 hashtag
8 netiquette

Dated definitions

1 jargogle: to confuse, jumble
2 slugabed: a lazy person who stays in bed late
3 twitter-light: twilight
4 abroad: out of doors
5 camelopard: a giraffe