



The lecture is dead, long live the lecture!

Christopher W. Harris

Executive Dean, Academic & Industry Engagement, Kaplan Higher Education Singapore

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2018.1.2.9>

The Lecture is dead.

You hear it from educational technology companies, you hear it from publishers, from industry leaders. In a wonderful bit of irony, I even once heard it in a lecture!

Law Professor Peter Waring from the Singapore Murdoch Campus recently even won a debate in the affirmative, the topic? The Lecture is dead (Murdoch University, 2018).

So is it? I contend it's not and if I'm wrong I really don't want it to die and I'll *lecture* you as to why. Here are my responses to some arguments getting around the place:

1. We don't need lecturers now that we have The Google (any company whose executives don't need to turn up to Senate hearings deserves the definite article).

The idea that because information is widely available, the novice does not need a guide to orient them through it is a flat-out fallacy and unsupported by research. Worse, the Google hasn't had to learn this information itself; as Monash Professor Neil Selwyn proffers: the beauty of human lecturers is that they've had to go through the method of learning it themselves and can model that process of thinking out loud as they go (2018).

2. Technology has made the necessity to go to a place of learning obsolete.

Ah, but we've heard this presumed before, with the invention of a superior technological invention: writing. Thus was Theuth's contention to Ancient Egyptian god Thamus, according to Plato's telling, at the discovery of writing; it would make the Egyptians "wiser and give them better memories" when compared to pure speech (p. 1). And yet later, despite this foretelling, would come another great period, the Greco-Roman one with its forum and parliament, not dissimilar to ours today, ringing anew with rhetorical cadences. As Isocrates so said: "there is no institution

devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish." (Delphi, 2016). Sure, they (nay) say, but they didn't have the internet. True, so what do we see when the internet we surf? Why TEDTalks! A beautifully *lectured* discourse on the subject of the orator's passion, perfectly distilled to a teasingly brief 14-minute shot of inspiration.

3. Whole institutions exist with online only courses.

Yes but many of them are for mature-age or non-traditional students with cognate work or other higher learning pedigrees and most rely on some online re-packaging of what medium exactly? The lecture! And, while I'm at it, why the sub-text about lec. and tech. being mutually exclusive? A good lecturer will know when other media are better for the message or, conversely, when a good story will do the trick, and a reflective lecturer (Brookfield, 1995) is able to make this determination by virtue of the fact that they are not a machine.

Yet despite these virtues, Dr Bror Saxberg from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, in an interview in this very volume of JALT, is quick to caution us on the limits of lecturing, notwithstanding what Saxberg says are its values for learning tourism and for enabling the audience to think about the world in a different way for 20 minutes. Saxberg says, "despite these values, we must never be confused into thinking a 20-minute talk about string theory has made you a string theory physicist!" (Saxberg, Harris & Rudolph, 2018, p. 48).

So maybe then with all the options available to academics, it is only that the bad lecture is dead, so long live the good lecture.

An earlier version of this article was delivered at the Introduction to the Inaugural Kaplan Singapore Provost's Lecture, Pomo Campus, Singapore, September 25, 2018.

References

Ab Razak, Muneera (2016, August 5). More interactive lessons with tables that flip and tablets linked to wall screens. *The Straits Times*, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-interactive-lessons-with-tables-that-flip-and-tablets-linked-to-wall-screens>

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Delphi Complete Works of Isocrates (Illustrated). (2016).

Mitra, S. (2013). Build a school in the cloud. *Ted Talk*. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/sugata_mitra_build_a_school_in_the_cloud?language=en

Murdoch university Singapore symposium on applied teaching & learning by Murdoch University, Singapore & Kaplan Singapore (2018) Retrieved from Murdoch University: http://www.murdoch.sg/news/singapore-symposium-on-applied-learning-teaching/_1010461/

Plato (360 BC). *Phaedrus*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Retrieved from <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>

Selwyn, N. (2018, June 12). Six reasons artificial intelligence technology will never take over from human teachers [Blog post]. *Australian Association for Research in Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=2948>

TED talks (2018). Retrieved from TED talks: <https://www.ted.com/>

Wong, J. C. (2018, September 5). Google snubs Senate hearings on election meddling. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/sep/05/google-senate-hearings-facebook-twitter-russia-meddling-latest-news>

Copyright: © 2020 Christopher W. Harris. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.