

Extending the language classroom with Edmodo

Keith Graham describes how he is knocking down classroom walls.

Like most teachers, I have never felt there was enough time for all of the language experiences I would like to afford my students. With only a few hours a week, an ever expanding curriculum, and testing pressure, it seems the school year flies by, and I am left reflecting on all the things I wish I had time to do. However, this school year has been exciting for me as a teacher because I have extended my classroom by using Edmodo.com. This has allowed me to move some of the more time-consuming or ignored language experiences out of my brick and mortar classroom and into my online classroom. In this article, I would like to introduce Edmodo and how I have used it to address the four language skills. To get the most out of this article, it is recommended to follow along within Edmodo.

Setting Up Your Edmodo Classroom

In your Edmodo account, create a group for your class. You will want one group per class. Each group will have a group code in the upper left hand corner. Give your students the group code and have them sign up on Edmodo. Once you and your students are signed up, you are ready to extend your classroom online. As an additional step, you can also create small groups within each group to keep things organised, or you could do everything within the main group.

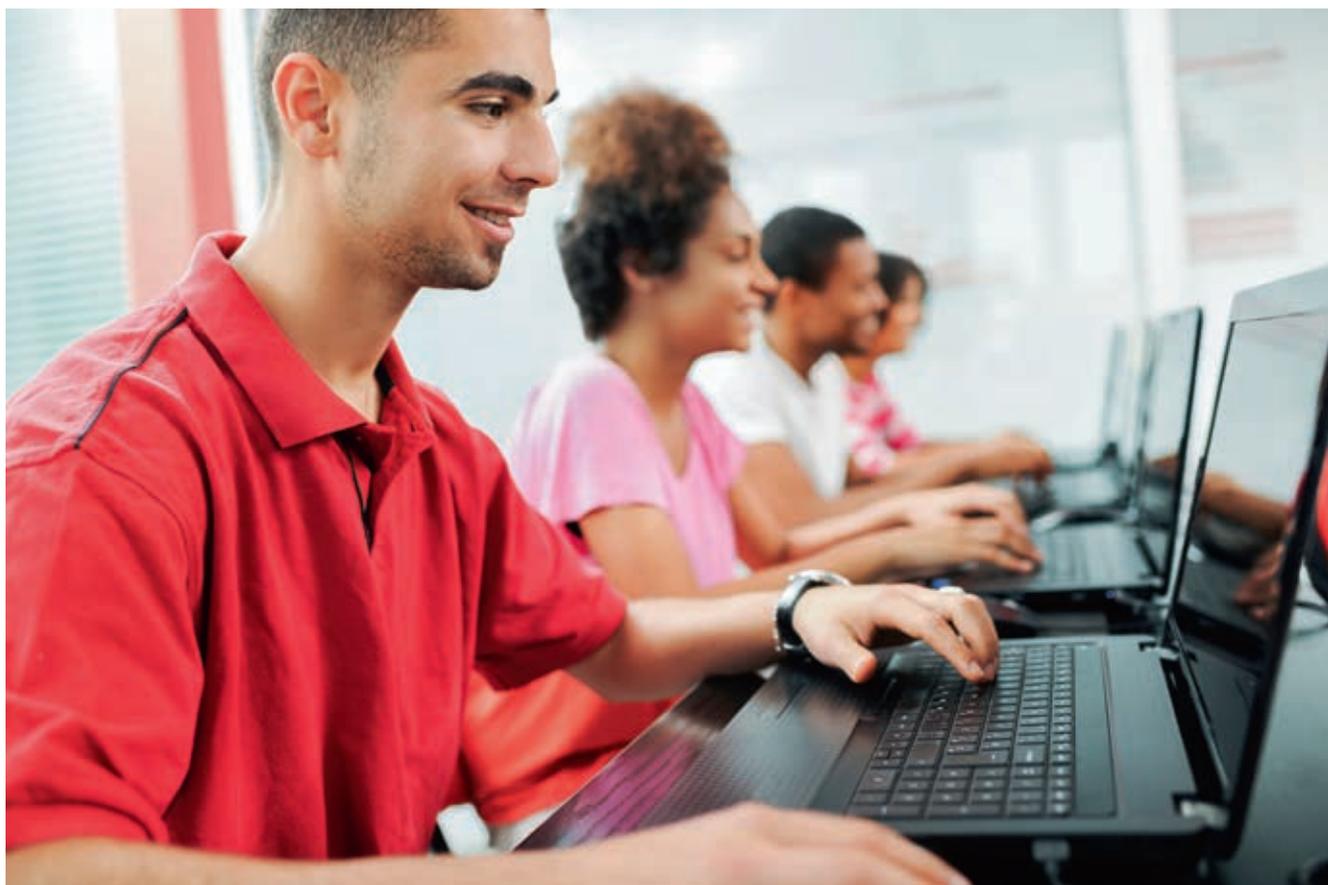
Listening: dictation exercises

Dictation is a classic listening exercise done by many language teachers. With Edmodo, the process of administering and grading dictation has become a whole lot smoother. The first step to creating a dictation exercise is to record the excerpt. This recording can be made using any of the many recording apps for smartphones. For those using a computer, I recommend using <http://vocaroo.com> as this will work for both PC and Mac users. To upload the MP3 to Edmodo, go to your library page (looks like an open book on the top navigation bar), and click 'Add'. Then, click 'Choose Files', locate the MP3 on your hard drive, and then click 'Add File'.

Now that you have a recording, it is time to set up the dictation exercise. Inside of Edmodo, click on the 'Quiz'

tab and select 'Create a Quiz'. Starting from the top, give the quiz a name and a time limit (this can go as high as 1,440 minutes/24 hours). On the question type dropdown menu, select 'Fill in the blank' and press 'Add first question'. Now you can create your dictation question by using an underscore (_) for each word in the dictation. For those who want to do a partial dictation exercise, simply add the words in the question field between the underscores. Below the question field, there is a blank for each underscore you used. Here you can type in the answer. The final step is to add the recording to your question. You will see the library icon below the question field. Click the icon and add your MP3 from the library. You can add multiple questions by clicking the '+' button on the left side. When you are finished, press 'Done' and you have a self-grading dictation exercise for your students.

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Reading: reading discussion groups

Another way I use Edmodo is for reading discussions outside of my classroom. For books, I recommend setting up a group separate from your regular class group. Inside the group page, you can post a syllabus for the book as well as any preview or background knowledge material that will help the students before they read.

Once a group is set up, create small groups for your weekly readings. Decide whether you will go by chapters or page numbers. Then, name your groups accordingly, such as ‘Week 1: Chapter 1’ or ‘Week 1: pp. 1–20’. You will have to add members to each small group on the small group page.

Once your groups are set up, it is now time to add content. Each week, I give my students an open-ended prompt dealing with the reading. This prompt often asks them to comment on elements within the text, such as themes or characters, and extend past the

reading by making connections to their own lives. Not only do I ask students to respond to the prompt, but I also ask that they read others’ responses and respond to them as well. It is likely that you will have to explicitly teach how to respond as students may not be familiar with this from past experiences.

Outside of the discussion, many English language learners may need a bit more support with the reading itself. First, it is often helpful for students to have a recording of the reading so they can listen as they read. You can record an MP3 of you reading the text and attach the file to an announcement in Edmodo. Second, you can post a brief summary of the week’s reading to help support the learners as they read the full text. Also, consider adding a vocabulary list of potential unknown words with definitions, pictures, and/or translations. This could further be supported by creating a vocabulary quiz using Edmodo’s quiz feature. Finally, create a comprehension quiz to help students gauge how well they comprehended

the text. These, as well as many other techniques, can help students better understand the reading and support them in their online discussion.

Writing: the writing process

Edmodo has also changed the way I approach writing assignments. I have now moved all writing to Edmodo, which has allowed my class to keep everything in one place and to make the writing process much more collaborative.

To begin the project, I create a new small group within our class Edmodo group for the writing assignment. Once I have created the small group and added my students, I post documents that will help my students with the assignment, including assignment requirements, authentic examples, a scoring guide and any support materials such as graphic organisers.

Once the small group is set up, it is time for students to begin the writing

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process. The first step is brainstorming ideas. I usually ask my students to post topic ideas in our small group. This gives students a chance to see what other students are writing about, and it can help students who are struggling to find an idea of their own. You could take this a step further by having students post a completed graphic organiser or outline to the group for classmates to review and comment on.

Edmodo makes it very easy for students to engage in the peer editing process after writing a first draft. To share work with other classmates, students simply need to post their papers to the small group. Once posted, their classmates have access to read and review their work. Students can leave their review as a reply under the post. To help students do a meaningful peer review, it is best to have some type of response protocol or be instructed to use the scoring guide when commenting.

To collect final drafts, create an assignment within the small group. Once I receive students' work, I like to use the annotate feature within Edmodo to give feedback. To open the annotate feature, click on the icon with a pencil located under the assignment submitted by the student. Annotate gives you many options on how to mark student work. For grammar, I typically use the 4-color highlight feature so that students can error correct on their own. When addressing content issues, I use the comment feature.

Now that the students have gone through peer review and a teacher review, they should be given one more opportunity to make a final revision for a grade. Teachers should refrain from giving a score during the first review. This is to ensure that students really take

the time to review the feedback and not to just settle on a grade. Once they submit their papers for the final time, teachers can complete a digital scoring guide and attach it to the submission.

Speaking: oral assessments

Assessing speaking individually in class can be one of the most time-consuming activities for language teachers. Using much of the same process that we used for creating our dictation recording, we can have students do speaking exercises as well. Before assigning an assignment, teach students how to record either using a smartphone app or vocaroo.com. I would recommend teaching students to use a smartphone app over Vocaroo because of the potential issue of calibrating microphones on computers. With a smartphone, the microphone will be ready without hassle.

The next step is to set up your speaking activity. At this point, you need to decide whether you want the student-created recordings shared with the whole class or only accessible by you. Sharing can be good if you would like students to listen to their classmates' responses and comment or critique them. If you decide to have them shared, create a small group, post a prompt, and have students respond by attaching their recording to their post. Students can then listen to their classmates' recordings and post a comment below the post. As for recordings only meant for the teacher, create an assignment and have students attach their recordings within the assignment and submit.

One last thing to address is the type of speaking prompts. This largely depends on the type of course you are teaching and what your goals are for a speaking

assessment. One idea for the beginning of the year is to provide students with questions to introduce themselves to the class. This takes away the pressure of doing this in front of the class. Students can then listen to everyone's introductions and respond.

For those preparing for exams, there are many possibilities. Many exams involve picture prompts. You can post the pictures as an attachment on Edmodo and have students submit their recordings. Edmodo is also great for exams that involve integrated tasks. You can post the text directly on Edmodo and attach an MP3 of the listening for students. Since you can listen to the recordings outside of class time, this frees up time for the teacher to address or facilitate other activities.

Conclusion

Technology is quickly changing the way we teach language. Classroom activities are no longer confined to four walls inside a school. This article presents a few ideas on how Edmodo has helped me take many language activities outside of my classroom. Edmodo has freed up more time in my classroom to engage and interact with my students. If you are ready to knock down your classroom walls and extend your language teaching online, head over to Edmodo.com and sign up for your free teacher account.



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