ENGLISH ENTRANCE EXAM: JUNE 2007

Name and Surname(s): _____

Time allowed for this exam: 2 Hours

Before starting, please read the following carefully:

- ☞ *All mobile phones must be turned off*
- ☞ *Make sure you write your name on this exam sheet (unless already correctly labelled)*
- ☞ *The exam consists of two parts:*
  - *I. Reading comprehension / Vocabulary Work;*
  - *II. Essay.*

Both** parts must be answered in **English

- ☞ *Write all your answers in this exam booklet in the spaces provided*
- ☞ *All rough paper will be collected after the exam*

POLITE WARNING
ANY TALKING DURING THE EXAM WILL MEAN AUTOMATIC AND IMMEDIATE DISQUALIFICATION

I. Reading Comprehension	
A. Questions	_____
B. Vocabulary work	_____
	_____
II. Essay	
	_____

'In class, I have to power down'

Children have been quick to grasp the joys of new technology, so why are schools lagging so far behind? At a recent digital education conference in San Francisco, one of the more memorable remarks quoted came from a child: "Whenever I go into class, I have to power down." That roughly translates as: "What I do with digital technology outside school - at home, in my own free time - is on a completely different level to what I'm able to do at school. Outside school, I'm using much more advanced skills, doing many more interesting things, operating in a far more sophisticated way. School takes little notice of this and seems not to care." It is a sentiment that might (and should) shock educators, but one that an increasing majority of today's kids would understand and agree with.

Most kids probably cannot tell you whether they are actually learning anything from that freedom and control, from the hours spent playing computer games, joining in chat forums and (for the more adventurous) setting up websites. But isn't that where the education system should take over and work out what the golden nuggets of learning might be? Might there not be something important here in terms of being creative and confident, of communicating and collaborating with others, of solving puzzles - those same soft skills so much in demand for the promised "knowledge economy", but not particularly well covered in the formal curriculum?

Those educators to whom YouTube, MSN and Nintendo Wii are a closed book need to start by understanding what it is that children are doing in their spare time. They need to work out how that experience and enthusiasm can feed into, complement, or act as a catalyst for formal learning - how activity outside school can benefit activity inside school. Academic achievement rates have improved encouragingly over recent years, but this overall improvement masks some worrying areas of underachievement - and underachievers. We might be reaching the limits of what the current system can do for students without some radical change in culture.

That, at least, is the suggestion of a recent report from the think tank "Demos, Their Space - Education for a Digital Generation". This found that digital technology had been completely normalised by today's children. It was an integrated part of their daily lives, and yet a part that schools largely ignored (although, needless to say, there are some pockets of enlightenment). Schools may be missing out on their most valuable resource: the experience, skills and interests of their own students. Anything that children can be so passionate about, and feel so comfortable with, merits at least some understanding by the high priests of formal education.

There is a fair amount of material out there, with hundreds of items listed on Curriculum Online, the government's e-learning database. This varies in quality, though some is very good. But it's a crowded marketplace, with supply probably outstripping demand, and too much of what is available is mediocre. Starting, as it inevitably had to, from the needs of the teacher rather than the learner, its aspirations were bound to be limited. As last year's report from the Curriculum Online content advisory board said, extra spending on content has "probably not led to a step change in the level of innovation".

In the meantime, I should like to issue a challenge. Let us start a serious public debate about how and whether we can bridge this gap between children's experiences inside and outside school. How much are they really learning through their passion for computer-based entertainment? How do we maximise the educational benefits of that passion, without, of course, killing it stone dead? Or - and there will be some who continue to believe this - should education and entertainment remain on entirely separate tracks?

There is an argument that we may never be able to prove a direct causal link between the use of new technology and educational achievement. But I doubt if anyone would be so negative about the impact of an earlier technology, the printing press, 500 years ago.

I. READING COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following questions based on the article, using your own words as much as possible.

1. Does the author believe that new technology can promote formal learning in children?

2. What criticisms are made of potential education material on the internet?

3. Does the author suggest that academic achievement is positive or negative?

4. What criticisms are made about educators?

5. Why does the author refer to the "printing press"?

B. Vocabulary Work

1. Find a word or phrase in the text that means the same as the following:

- understand
- establishing
- exceeding
- deserves

2. What do the following words or phrases mean according to the context of this article:

- roughly (*l. 4)*
- closed book (*l. 18)*
- masks (*l. 29*) –
- high priests (*l. 33* –

3. Who or what do the following words specifically refer to:

- That (*l. 26*)
- its (*l. 38*)