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From Plato to iPads: Dialogical Opportunities in Twenty-First Century Secondary English Classrooms

Emily Ensign

Brigham Young University - Provo

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From Plato to iPads: Dialogical Opportunities in Twenty-First Century
Secondary English Classrooms

Emily Shipp Ensign

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Gregory Clark, Chair
David Stock
Jonathon Ostenson

Department of English
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

From Plato to iPads: Dialogical Opportunities in Twenty-First Century Secondary English Classrooms

Emily Shipp Ensign
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

Technology offers students and educators an uncharted digital landscape of possibilities. Some educators feel strongly that technology enhances the classroom; others feel that it doesn't necessarily improve traditional teaching methods, and some even feel that it is detrimental to students' ability to focus or engage in face-to-face conversations. My project focuses on critical dialogue as defined by various theorists, and explores whether or not secondary English classrooms that use iPads continue to use the dialogical methods as outlined by these theorists (most of which could not have foreseen today's technological advancements). By relying on these theorists and scholars to provide definitions and descriptions of dialogue and its benefits, I explain unique opportunities that the iPad offers students for dialogical learning in general. In particular, I describe ways educators can use iPads in the secondary English classroom that clearly overcome the potential disadvantages that concern some teachers.

Keywords: Dialogue, Dialogical learning, iPads, Kenneth Burke, Secondary English classrooms, Plato, Wayne Booth

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From Plato to iPads: Dialogical Opportunities in Twenty-First Century

Secondary English Classrooms

Introduction

Millions of digital devices like laptops, smartphones, and tablets are sold each year. And as they become increasingly affordable, the way students communicate with one another, learn new skills, consume information, and spend free time are rapidly changing. As a result, many secondary English teachers are debating if—and if so, *how*—to integrate into their curricula the new possibilities that these devices afford (online forums, social media, interactive web-based applications, educational games, tutorials, global research, and more). Teachers pushing for greater integration of these digital technologies claim that “traditional definitions of reading, writing, and communication, and traditional definitions of best practice instruction—derived from a long tradition of book and other print media—are insufficient in the twenty-first century” (Intl. Reading Assoc. 1). However, others are less enthusiastic about deviating from their traditional print-centric curriculum. For example, the editors of *Adolescents’ Literacy and the Promises of Digital Technology* describe two English teachers, Jane Agee and Jeanette Altarriba, who found that the students in their classes were “not nearly as engaged or preoccupied with computer technology as might be presumed from case studies of similar populations” (Dressman, McCarthey, and Prior 347). Their students, they said, were already so connected to technology that integrating more screen time into their curriculum did not make a meaningful contribution to student learning.

The debate is complicated by the broad spectrum of ways these personal digital devices can be used as teaching and communication tools. Some teachers choose to simply stimulate student discussions through social networking sites (e.g., Facebook or Twitter), or with a class

blog. Other teachers dedicate entire lessons to digital literacy and multimodal projects. And still other teachers—usually with the help of cost-defraying grants—are implementing “one-to-one” programs where each student is issued their own portable computer, usually a laptop or tablet, to use in class and sometimes even at home.

While the principles and practices discussed throughout this article apply across that entire spectrum, I focus primarily on the third type of classroom—specifically one in which each student receives an iPad. Although tablets, and particularly iPads, have not been available until recently (and, consequently, there is little research evaluating their general impact), they have become increasingly affordable and popular among secondary school students. A few months ago, the state offices of education in Utah and Idaho awarded large grants to help whole schools implement one-to-one iPad programs, and schools nationwide are likewise transforming. My project in this article is to examine what curricular consequences follow from these transformations, and to suggest that iPads provide educators an opportunity to make instruction in writing and reading, listening and speaking, more productive than it has yet been.

Because the research evaluating iPads is relatively limited, I will first review the common arguments for and against the general integration of technology (laptops, tablets and the internet) in secondary English classrooms. On one side of the debate are teachers who claim the marketplace demands that students be able to use technology skillfully, and on the other side are teachers who feel that technology in the classroom may be detrimental to their students because it may promote skim reading and offers many distractions. To further muddle the situation, many teachers do not receive adequate training to know how to maximize the opportunities afforded by technology—and consequently do not use it to implement new modes of teaching. As I survey these arguments—and later make my own arguments—I focus on how digital technologies can,

through various platforms and applications, promote or discourage communication and learning, rather than focus on how they offer new ways of computation (like the option to type rather than write by hand, for example). I then argue that using iPads “dialogically” solves both the need for increased expertise with technology, and resolves teachers’ concerns that technology integration detracts from focused learning. The idea that the most effective and productive communication is practiced as a dialogue has been present in theories of rhetoric and education since Plato. It is possible to read modern theorists of the teaching of rhetorical and critical practices such as Kenneth Burke and Wayne Booth as proponents of dialogue. And scholars of English pedagogy like Kenneth Bruffee, James Zappen, and Rupert Wegerif focus on the power of dialogue as well. By relying on these theorists and scholars to provide definitions and descriptions of dialogue and its benefits, I explain unique opportunities that the iPad offers students for dialogical learning in general. In particular, I describe ways educators can use iPads in the secondary English classroom that clearly overcome the potential disadvantages that concern some of these teachers.

Practical Issues and Concerns

In *The Evolution of College English*, Thomas Miller argues, “We need to develop new ways with ‘reading and writing as modes of involvement with the lived world’” (246). Later, he points out that “the broader technological and cultural transformations . . . are redefining what it means to be literate” (249). Many educators (as well as administrators and parents) are uncomfortable with the “stark contrast between the print-centric curriculum of conventional secondary schools and the multimodality of contemporary workplaces and everyday life” (Dressman, McCarthy, and Prior 345). They argue that “adolescents today seem to be anticipating and preparing for lives of work and play that leave the traditional practices of

schooling far behind” (345). Certainly, students may miss valuable opportunities altogether if they are not familiar and comfortable on the web: “80% of Fortune 500 companies post job openings exclusively online” (“Connecting America”). Additionally, “sixty-two percent of working Americans use the internet as an integral part of their jobs” (“Most Working Americas”)—indicating that students will likely need technological skills once they are hired. Knowing how to navigate the internet to find information and communicate, and understanding how to engage with and *through* digital devices, is increasingly critical for professional life.

The emphasis on job preparation has influenced researchers studying the integration of digital devices into secondary education to focus on whether or not these outcomes are achieved. Most studies evaluating one-to-one programs primarily highlight whether or not students and teachers feel the program affords them increased opportunity to hone technological abilities. For example, the results from a 2007 study evaluating the impact of a one-to-one program (named “Freedom to Learn” or “FTL”) in Michigan, showed that the 5,770 students who participated in the program had “greater advantages than non-FTL students” (Lowther 3). Specifically, FTL students “exhibited significantly greater ability to locate and utilize internet resources [and] develop computer-based presentations.” The FTL students also indicated that “they were more interested in learning and felt they would get better jobs in the future as a result of using the laptops” (3).

Despite these gains, many English teachers are unconvinced that they should digitize their classrooms. These teachers are concerned that today’s students are not honing valuable concentration skills because they are already too immersed in the never-ending hyperlinks and fast-paced entertainment that computers and mobile devices offer. Consequently, these educators balk at the idea of integrating more screen time into their classroom, arguing that English

classrooms must be preserved as a space to “unplug.” While their concern remains controversial, they are correct that students are spending proportionally less time with print (books and magazines) than ever before.

For example, one study, conducted in 2005, reports that this age group “spent an average of nearly 6 hours (6:21) a day with media [namely TV, music/audio, computer, video games, print, and movies]—and managed to pack more than 8 hours (8:33) worth of media content into that time by multitasking.” At that point it seemed that “young people’s lives were filled to the bursting with media” (Foehr, Rideout, Roberts 2). However, just five years later, a second study found that the past levels had been “shattered.” The 2010 study reports “young people have increased the amount of time they spend consuming media by an hour and seventeen minutes daily, from 6:21 to 7:38—10 hours and 45 minutes if you don’t account for multitasking” (Foehr 2). That is more than the amount of time most adults spend at work each day, and these students are immersed in media seven days a week instead of five. Most significantly, the study also reports, “[T]he only media activity that hasn’t increased among young people over the past 10 years is reading traditional print media. In a typical day the average amount of time spent reading print media is 38 minutes” (Foehr 15).

Whether or not the increased time with digital media (and the reduced proportion of time dedicated to print media) affects students’ ability to focus remains debatable. But eye-tracking technology *has* proven that individuals read online text in a pattern of the letter F—reading the first few lines carefully, and then increasingly ignoring the right corner of the page as they continue down the page. “F is for fast,” the study explains; people do not read online text carefully or slowly, but rather they skim (Nielsen). Consequently, in an article entitled “Online Literacy is a Lesser Kind,” Mark Bauerlein distinguishes online reading from “academic

reading” by claiming that the latter requires focus and contemplation. He argues that screen reading is “a kind of literacy, but it breaks down in the face of a dense argument, a Modernist poem . . .,” and ultimately concludes that “fast scanning doesn’t foster flexible minds that can adapt to all kinds of texts, [nor does it] translate into academic reading.” In the article “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” Nicolas Carr provides a personal account illustrating Bauerlein’s argument. He writes,

As the media theorist Marshall McLuhan pointed out in the 1960s, media are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.

Carr’s description of “zipping along” from one subject to another, highlights a risk of ever-present hyperlinks: the constant temptation to move on from one webpage to another without ever fully digesting any of the information the pages provide. A *New York Times* article, “Growing up Digital: Wired for Distraction,” explains, “Researchers say the lure of these technologies, while it affects adults too, is particularly powerful for young people. The risk, they say, is that developing brains can become more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks — and less able to sustain attention” (Richtel 1). The lengthy article presents a variety of case studies featuring students who are distracted by the online world and consequently getting Ds and Fs in school. In short, the ever-present allure of something *new* prevents them from remaining with a text or project long enough to truly concentrate.

Because English classes in secondary education have traditionally been the place for students to learn how to engage deeply with a text, and technology presents the risk of increased distraction and skim reading, teachers concerned about technology integration claim that doing so actually offers minimal—or even zero—academic benefits whatsoever. For example, Baurelerin also asserts in “Online Literacy is a Lesser Kind” that Texas schools spent millions of dollars to install wireless devices only to find that “there were no statistically significant effects of immersion in the first year on either reading or mathematics achievement” (4). He also cites the example of a New York State school district that “decided to drop its laptop program after years of offering it” (4). Apparently the superintendent explained that “After seven years, there was literally no evidence it had any impact on student achievement — none” (4).

However, because other one-to-one programs I will examine later *have* seen improved student achievement, the claim that these programs do *not* impact student achievement remains controversial—and leads us to wonder what other (unmentioned) variables may have caused the Texas program’s failure. For example, Stanford Professor Larry Cuban’s research finds computers to be “underused” in classrooms (179). After investigating various classrooms “where computers are readily available” to determine how “teachers and students use the machines in classrooms for instruction” (19) and whether or not they changed teaching and learning, Cuban revealed some sobering findings. He found that half of teachers with technology in their classrooms, are “non-users” and less than 10 percent are “serious” users. Of those classrooms with teachers who are “serious users,” most students used the computers only for reasons that were “peripheral to their primary instruction tasks” (133). In other words, the vast majority of teachers with access to technology only use it to “sustain existing patterns of teaching, rather than innovate” (134). He writes in his book *Oversold, Underused* that “teachers

at all levels of schooling have used the new technology basically to continue what they have always done: communicate with parents and administrators, prepare syllabi and lectures, record grads, assign research papers” (178-179).

Thus, concerned teachers and administrators have a point; it seems wasteful to invest in expensive technology if it does not improve student achievement. But before concluding that computers simply have nothing to contribute, we must first look at whether or not teachers are changing their curricula and teaching methods to take advantage of what they have to offer. Furthermore, the fact remains that students must prepare to participate and contribute in the future marketplace—and society at large—and doing so requires technology skills. I argue that the solution to this need (i.e. technology skills are needed to be marketable and to thrive in the twenty-first century), and the resolution to the concerns teachers have with technology integration (it presents distractions), is the *dialogic* implementation of mobile technologies. Moreover, as teachers gain an appreciation first for the theoretical elements of dialogical learning—including core characteristics of dialogue—they will be better equipped to recognize the unique opportunities technology offers for dialogical learning and become prepared to practically implement new modes of teaching, thus providing students with new and exciting possibilities.

Dialogical Learning

To clarify, in this article “dialogue” denotes two or more people sharing ideas about materials in order to learn from one another and move in a new (and improved) direction in understanding because of the interaction. Dialogic instruction leads to dialogical learning, and has been used since ancient times to foster student engagement and education. For example, in the second speech on love in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates explains to Phaedrus that all students

retain various parts of the divine and that only through collaboration do they ultimately obtain a fullness of truth. Later, he re-emphasizes the importance of dialogue by sharing a myth about the origin of writing, highlighting how written text can be dangerous if it is stagnant. According to the myth, when the lesser god (Theuth) presents writing to the more powerful god (Thamus) he explains that it is “a recipe for both memory and wisdom” (Plato 62). However, Thamus is concerned because when individuals ask writing a question it remains in “quite solemn silence” (63). It is not necessarily *text* that Socrates takes issue with, but anything that remains inflexible and inadaptably—anything that does not grow from questioning applied and new perspectives gained dialogically.

Similarly, an ancient Indian tale tells the story of how seven blind mice investigate an elephant and each obtains different—yet correct—perspective about what they are encountering. The story illustrates how an individual’s knowledge can be enhanced through communicating with and learning from others; in isolation, individuals may reach incomplete conclusions. For this reason, dialogue informs students’ thinking and helps them avoid the “ethnocentrism, inexperience, personal anxiety, economic interests, and paradigmatic inflexibility” that may otherwise constrain their ability to reach correct answers (Bruffee 639). Had the blind mice, for instance, been limited to their own individual perspective, it would have been much more difficult for them to ever gain a full understanding of the complete elephant that they were encountering.

Few educators will disagree that there are important lessons to be learned through conversing with others, or that personal knowledge can be enhanced through a variety of perspectives. Yet, even without the added variable of iPads, these intuitions are not necessarily transferred to the English classroom. One researcher of dialogue, Martin Nystrand, noted,

Although classroom discourse . . . can never be truly monologic, it can be organized and treated as though it were. Teachers regularly strive for monologism when, for example, they prescript both the questions they ask and the answers they accept, as well as the order in which they ask the questions. Furthermore, teachers control discussions by the topics they allow to be formulated and the off-topics they ignore. . . . By evaluating student answers rather than responding to student comments and ideas, teachers effectively thwart dialogue by controlling or curtailing the nature of audience participation in any ongoing exchange. (12)

Moreover, Nystrand also found in his research that these types of classrooms—where dialogue is lacking—are almost always characterized by a teacher functioning “as a transmitter of specific knowledge and the students as passive recipients mostly relegated to learn sanctioned material” (172).

In contrast to classrooms where the teacher ignores the students’ ability to acquire their own knowledge from their “daily experiences in and outside of the classroom,” as well as their “capacity to teach each other and even to contribute to their teacher’s growth,” dialogical pedagogy “enhances the understanding, retention, and application of the content” (Fernandez-Balboa and Marshall 173-174). Mikhail Bakhtin explains the difference between monological pedagogy and dialogical pedagogy as the “difference between an authoritative voice and a persuasive voice,” and also underscores that a major distinction between the two types is the motivation: the authoritative voice tries to transmit all of the ‘right’ answers, and the persuasive voice encourages individuals to think and learn together” (qtd. in Wegeriff 18).

While perhaps not all English classrooms are dialogical in pedagogical design, it seems clear that they *should* be. Learning is a process that affects more than the facts a student knows;

it also molds the way students think and impacts how they respond to future problems when the answer is unsure. Although the information the students learn from their teachers may be correct, a monological teaching method “often leads to students looking for the *right* answer to the teacher’s question instead of developing their own ideas and sharing them with others” (Fernandez-Balboa and Marshall 172). This is appropriate when there *is* a right answer that students must learn, as some disciplines demand, but it is problematical when what must be learned requires the application of criticism and judgment. Further, while scientific facts remain facts in any context, humanistic learning requires the sort of connections to their daily lives that dialogue can provide. Students carry the learning habits that they cultivate in the classroom with them to the outside world. If they are dependent on their teachers to give them answers rather than problem solving on their own, they will most likely not transform into independent learners upon graduation who know how to interpret problems and propose solutions.

Considering the obvious benefits of dialogical pedagogy—and the disadvantages of a monologic classroom environment—it would be detrimental if iPads (or any new technology) isolate students or limit their opportunities for dialogical learning. Even teachers concerned that technology jeopardizes concentration can easily agree that focused reading is foremost a manifestation that the student has awareness—or at least is gaining awareness—of the larger, ongoing conversation. Furthermore, they would likely admit that English classrooms are ideally not spaces where students sit isolated from one another reading quietly, but rather a place for conversation through stimulating face-to-face and written interactions. Because “good education is . . . about expanding awareness” (Wegeriff 9), classroom practices and environments are best “organized around forms of learning which serve to prepare students for responsible roles as transformative intellectuals, as community members, and as critically active citizens outside of

schools” (Fernandez-Balboa and Marshall 173). Luckily, research shows that dialogue can be effective in a variety of teaching genres, including new technology; Whether or not a method of teaching (lectures, case studies, group projects, etc) is effective or not depends more on whether or not the teachers create “a sense that everyone is working together,” than on a particular genre (Bane 100). Teachers can foster this sense of community by encouraging students to either “work on a problem silently while listening to the processor” or by “reasoning aloud with other students and the processor,” and by asking authentic questions (100). Issues, problems, and questions are “authentic” when they are “important to students and are similar to those that professionals in the field might undertake” (100). In short, the revolutionary changes in curriculum and teachings strategies afforded by iPads do not preclude opportunities conventional for dialogue simply because they are new or unique.

In fact, iPads offer many occasions for dialogical learning because of their wireless internet capabilities. Although most schools nowadays have a computer lab where students can go online, iPads offer students internet access much more conveniently. Rather than walking down a long hallway to the lab, students can use their iPads in the classroom and log onto the web with the simple swipe of a finger. In *The Rebirth of Dialogue*, James Zappen says, “Like other forms of digital media, the World Wide Web seems to offer unusual opportunities for dialogue—opportunities to explore and express one’s self-identity, to test various versions of oneself, to contest traditional structures of authority, and to create new ideas in collaboration with others” (156). Because dialogue is so essential for classroom learning, career success and community involvement, I argue that these “opportunities for dialogue” are the primary reason iPads (or similar digital devices) should be integrated into English classrooms. Although rhetoricians like Plato, Robert Kane, Paul Woodruff, Kenneth Burke, Wayne Booth, and others

lived before iPads, their theories can identify and contextualize the unique dialogical opportunities digital devices offer. When understood in this context, these older theoretical principles can equip instructors with the skills necessary to successfully integrate technology into their courses—combining new modes of teaching with principles that have stood the test of time.

Dialogical iPads

I had the opportunity to travel to four different schools in Utah and Idaho that received grants from the State Office of Education to become one-to-one iPad schools. During these visits I participated in the professional development and talked with the teachers as they received their iPads for the first time. Additionally, I have been assisting in an ongoing study examining how various teachers and students describe their experience using iPads in their English classes. The research is qualitative in measure, and data gathering consists of observation and interviews. Although the study does not address directly the case I am making regarding ways that online, digital communication devices like iPads help students develop facility with thinking and critical judgment through dialogical learning, some of the participants have reflected on their experiences using iPads in teaching English in ways that suggest four ways the use of iPads have worked dialogically for them, ways that align with what dialogical theory, ancient and modern, promises. These four areas clearly overlap one with another, but I will do my best to illustrate each characteristic individually in an effort to make its practical application easier to identify and implement.

Openness

Dialogical learning tends to develop in those who practice attitudes of openness to others' ideas. But first, before highlighting characteristics of successful dialogue, I need to clarify the distinction between “knowledge” and “truth,” since dialogue plays a critical—yet different—role

in obtaining both. Various theorists assert that knowledge is “an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers constituted by the language of that community” (Bruffee 646). In this sense, knowledge is a social artifact that can be made and remade according to what the society maintains is correct. However, that does not imply that absolute truth or values are merely constructed by a consensus of the classroom community or of any other sort. Although it is tempting to adopt an attitude of relativism—which is the view that there are “no objective or ‘absolute’ values that hold for *all* persons and *all* times,” (Kane 1, emphasis in original)—when we find ourselves in the context of pluralism, there is an alternative: individuals may instead adopt an attitude of openness empowering them to recognize that the truths they believe to be absolute “may in fact *be absolute*—just not necessarily *complete*” (Kane 17). Practiced in a classroom, this perspective simultaneously allows students to remain loyal to their perception of truth (until proven wrong) while also becoming willing to learn from others.

This “attitude of openness” is necessary before genuine dialogue can occur. And it requires much more than just a surface-level commitment of tolerance to differing views. Dialogical learning requires that students acknowledge the potential incompleteness of their knowledge; they must be willing to learn from one another. Paul Woodruff identifies this attitude as reverence, the “well-developed capacity to have the feelings of awe, respect, and shame when these are the right feelings to have” (8), and explains that without it, individuals “will never listen to the other side, never enter into discussion, never consider a compromise” (18).

Functionally, students manifest this attitude in English classrooms as they accept feedback on their papers from their peers and teacher, or as they converse and consider new insights that have escaped them before. Classrooms that employ iPads, however, offer students a unique opportunity to exercise this attitude (and consequently engage dialogically) simply

because the iPad is such a new and sometimes unfamiliar device. As “digital natives,” students may be more skilled with technology than their teachers. A recent AVG study found that more children aged two to five are able to operate a smart phone than tie their shoes, more children are able to play basic computer games than ride a bike, and more are able to open a web browser than can swim unaided (“Mastered Computer Games”). Consequently, teachers who are unfamiliar with an iPad may realize that if they are unsure how to navigate a new application or platform, they can ask their students for help. In these moments, teachers will have to demonstrate a “willingness to learn from others”—the very attitude that Woodruff described as essential before genuine dialogue can occur. What better way for students to likewise internalize and develop this attitude than to learn from their teachers’ examples? A 2009 study revealed that in contrast with comparison teachers who do not use iPads, iPads can indeed increase teacher-student collaboration (Bebell, Burraston, and Holder).

However, not *all* teachers are unfamiliar with iPads, and not *all* students are exceptionally skilled with them. Moreover, new apps are constantly being released, so even after students and teachers have mastered the hardware, a constant learning curve remains as software is updated to include new features. Both of these realities also contribute to the opportunity for students and teachers to hone an attitude of openness—as skilled peers may assist other less-skilled peers through working together in small groups. This type of interaction is common, as “students [of one-to-one programs] collaborate in pairs or small groups [more] frequently” (Babell). More experienced students certainly assisted their less-experienced peers navigate the iPad in one of the English classrooms I observed. To make this peer-to-peer interaction more convenient, the teacher of one of the classrooms I visited arranged her students’ desks into small

groups. And several students expressed how much they enjoyed this type of a set-up to me and the teacher because they are able to learn from one another as well as teach one other.

Another dialogical benefit of iPads is that, until now, the opportunity for conversation (promoted by “openness” and a willingness to learn) has been primarily limited to interactions between people face-to-face. However, digital technology offers students new platforms to interact and collaborate digitally. iPads present various applications that offer instant feedback to the student and instant feedback to the teacher, as well as facilitate communication between student and teacher. For example, some applications allow teachers to administer quizzes and receive real-time analytics revealing the scores and times of each student. Other applications guide students as they read out loud and learn new vocabulary, and provide them with immediate assessments of their accuracy. Whereas in traditional classrooms, a teacher may ask a question to twenty students at a time (each with varying skills and understanding), these applications engage students individually—tailoring the questions perfectly to his or her understanding and responding accordingly. This is especially beneficial for shy students who may be hesitant to participate in classroom conversations; the opportunity to express his or herself and gain valuable feedback offers the benefits of dialogue while minimizing the perceived risks of being publically wrong or embarrassed. I do not believe that these apps *replace* teachers, however, but rather that they can *empower* teachers if used correctly. For example, a 2011 survey of a Chicago school using iPads indicated “eighty-seven percent [of teachers] strongly agreed or agreed that using iPads helped increase the quality and frequency of teacher feedback, and 99% strongly agreed or agreed that using iPads helped the quality and frequency of differentiated materials and lessons” (CPS).

Listening

Following openness, a second element of dialogical learning is that of listening. Although some of the apps described above offer an alternative to face-to-face feedback, iPads do not isolate students from other people altogether. On the contrary, the internet is primarily made of people connecting to other people through email, blogs, twitter, instant messenger, etc. These interactions can take place face-to-face through video camera, or in what could be described as a hybrid of text and verbal communication, since, unlike printed text found in books, online text is malleable. Like Socrates described, printed text does not respond when asked a question or when challenged. In this way, it is “monologic,” assuming that “there is one correct version of reality and one correct method of thinking” (Wegeriff 6). In contrast, however, the internet “assumes that there is always more than one voice” (7).

Some researchers have found that online interaction encourages students’ literacy processes to “bec[o]me more public, collaborative, authentic, and iterative, with greater amounts of scaffolding and feedback provided” (Warschauer 64). In order to best maximize these opportunities on the iPad, teachers can draw upon older rhetorical theories of listening to help them explain the importance of careful listening to their students. For example, Kenneth Burke explains in “The Rhetorical Situation,” that because we all find ourselves in an embodied situation we must rely on the symbols of language to communicate. Burke also points out that, at best, communication remains imperfect. Although he underscores the effort required to avoid *miscommunication*, his purpose is not to dissuade individuals from striving to communicate but rather to think more carefully and critically about *how* they communicate. “The Rhetorical Situation” emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between dialogue in which participants

willingly share insights and learn from each other and casual dialogue, which may lead to inaccurate identification.

As Burke discusses the constraints of our physical bodies, and the consequential impossibility for one individual to *truly* know what another is experiencing, he writes, “The centrality of the nervous system is such that, although I as a *person* may sympathetically identify myself with other people’s pleasures and pains, in my nature as a sheer *body* the pleasures of *my* food and the pains of *my* toothache are experienced by me alone” (266). The best someone can do is describe bodily sensations and thoughts through symbols, or language. Considering that face-to-face interaction can lead to miscommunication—even with body language and facial expressions—it is no surprise that messages typed online can easily be misinterpreted. Teachers that emphasize this principle can do wonders for their students' developing digital reputation, which is both permanent and public.

Despite the high potential for misunderstanding, however, conversation is natural—and needed—in daily life. In fact, the ability to participate in unending conversation is, according to Michael Oakeshott, the very characteristic that distinguishes human beings from other animals. He writes, “We are inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves.” (qtd. In Brufee 199)

This statement has since become somewhat controversial, because Oakeshott fails to address the problematic reality that not all students have equal access to dialogue (due to limitations of poverty, class, etc). However, it still correctly conveys how conversation does shape thought, behavior, and society as a whole despite our limiting physical situation. And because the world is

becoming increasingly digitized, and students are more and more connected through social media, it is not such a stretch to also claim that online interactions are starting to define how students feel about themselves and each other. Never before has it been more essential that teachers help students understand that only by listening carefully when making choices of identification, will students become better equipped to leverage dialogue and make “collective progress towards truth” (Clark 24).

Teachers can use the iPad to help their students learn to be careful listeners. For example, Google Drive offers the hybrid of text and verbal communication described earlier—it is a space for written collaboration and sharing in real time. One teacher I talked with requires his students to write all of their papers in Google Docs and grant him access. As they write, he opens up their document and reviews their work—leaving comments and questions. This is similar to what English teachers traditionally do as they read papers and leave comments and questions in the margins, or use “track changes.” However, the benefit of leaving these notes in a google doc while the student is working is that the feedback conveyed is much more relevant to the student. In particular, this teacher found that students are more likely to ask for clarification, and seem to internalize his feedback more than they did when he offered it the traditional way. He also felt like watching their writing process helped inform his teaching and helped him be better equipped to offer meaningful suggestions (Davis). Research shows that because of this type of online, instantaneous feedback “[s]tudents were also able to more readily create documents or presentations that synthesized their learning and modify them continuously rather than stopping revision and modification with a hard copy document” (CPS).

Additionally, beyond making teacher feedback more convenient, iPads also offer increased possibility for feedback from a variety of outside opinions. Blogs, Twitter, Facebook,

and forums allow readers to post comments. Students may gain extra insights as they publish their work publically online—especially because the people responding could potentially have a different background or be from a different geographical location.

Learning from Conflict

In addition to allowing students to learn from and listen to *others*, iPads allow students to express *themselves* on a variety of platforms and to a large audience of listeners. Educators at a Chicago middle school found that when they gave their students iPads, “[c]ollaboration, discussion, and feedback amongst students often occurred beyond required amount with little or no teacher directive, something teachers noted as both rare and logistically difficult in pre-iPad classrooms” (CPS). In other words, iPads can provide students the opportunity to engage not only as listeners (one-way or monologic communication), but as active participants that provide feedback to their peers (a two-way dialogue). The iPad seems to encourage group work and collaborative projects, which are great contexts in which students can learn from differences of opinions.

Considering their comprehensive understanding of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke and Wayne Booth’s correspondence make an impressive case study of the practical application of dialogical theory—and highlights the importance of students exercising judgment while providing and responding to feedback from one another. Ironically, Burke and Booth’s correspondence (consisting mainly of letters exchanged over the course of several years) underscores many consequences of disregarding principles of dialogue they themselves advocated. Studying Burke and Booth’s letters purposefully to find examples of effective—and ineffective—dialogue illuminates many implications of the theoretical arguments they make.

For example, I earlier emphasized the importance of an “attitude of openness” for genuine dialogue to occur. Without this attitude, individuals are unlikely to compromise, enter into a discussion or carefully listen to the other side. It is a pivotal first step in meaningful dialogue, and necessary for “transcendence” as defined by Burke—“a process by which rhetorical partisans can rise above the pursuit of individual advantage through dialectical-dialogical exchanges that transcend their narrow interests” (“Rhetorical Situation” 290). Without exercising reverence, transcendence is almost always impossible because individuals are unable—or unwilling—to move to a higher plane of thought and bridge conflicting ideologies.

Despite his deep understanding of the importance of transcendence on a theoretical level, Burke himself seemed to demonstrate an unwillingness to transcend his own point of view when faced with a difficult situation. Although Booth had good intentions when he first published “Kenneth Burke’s Way of Knowing,”—and clearly expected that Burke would feel he had done him justice—Burke felt misunderstood. In both his published response, “Dancing with Tears in My Eyes,” and in the letters he continued to send to Booth, he made it clear that—at least from his vantage point—Booth had *not* depicted his work accurately: “Booth makes me scare myself” he wrote (“Dancing” 31). Booth’s article and the ensuing disagreement eventually led Booth to distance himself from Burke.

Even years after the incident, Burke again underscored his disapproval with Booth by writing in a letter to him, “Do you agree that you got me wrong?” (2 Jan. 1979). Burke’s unwavering resolve to prove his point to Booth resulted in the opposite of Robert Kane’s “attitude of openness”—the willingness to accept that one’s answer (although correct) may be *incomplete*. Had Burke accepted this possibility, he may have read Booth’s essay differently—

recognizing that although parts may have been incorrect, other parts may actually have been correct.

Interestingly, in a letter dated December 12th 1974, Burke wrote to Booth “Wow! I never knew what ‘dialogue’ really meant until you and I started one.” Considering how somewhat one-sided their exchange had become at this point (Booth had become increasingly distant), Burke might have written sarcastically. However, by taking him at his word we see an interesting perspective clarifying that one of dialogue’s defining characteristics is *conflict*—meaning an incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests. Conflict is different than contention, and does not imply a heated exchange—in fact, contention may be detrimental to true dialogue as it almost always hampers the participant’s ability to listen carefully, transcend, and exercise judgment. This distinction sheds additional light on Burke’s insight from “The Rhetorical Situation” that describes how our bodies isolate each of us and demand that we communicate through symbols (language), and underscores that a difference of opinions is not just a reason to engage in dialogue—but potentially a necessary element *for* dialogue.

Nystrand explains it this way:

. . . discourse is dialogic not because the speakers take turns, but because it is continually structured by tension, even conflict, between the conversants, between self and other, as one voice ‘refracts’ another. It is precisely this tension—this relationship between self and other, this juxtaposition of relative perspectives and struggle among competing voices—that for Bakhtin gives shape to all discourse and hence lies at the heart of understanding as a dynamic, sociocognitive event.

(8)

While voices certainly “refract” off each other when individuals interact face-to-face, Burke and Booth’s correspondence illustrate how *written* communication also facilitates this type of discourse—and how students who use the iPad to collaborate can do so on a variety of platforms and online forums.

For example, many English classrooms using iPads (as well as more traditional English classrooms) leverage class blogs as a space for their students to express their opinions about various topics and to reconcile (through comments and responses) any conflicts that may come up as they discover differences of opinions. Overall, it appears that these classrooms are quite successful; one English instructor described how his students responded “positively” because “the idea of approaching writing from a non-traditional direction seemed to encourage them, if nothing else.” Additionally, he reported that he noticed a stronger “class community” and that students had “an easier time working in groups, peer review situations, and other collaborative activities” and were more positive about these types of activities (Husberg 54).

Wikipedia is another online platform where students (and others) can voice and respond to conflict. Because Wikipedia allows anyone to participate, and is constantly changing, it requires users to adapt their attitude from that of a passive consumer to that of an engaged participant in the process of building shared knowledge. “At its best, Wikipedia consists of the intelligent words that Socrates valued, words that can be questioned, that answer back, and so that participate in the development of understanding” (Wegeriff 20). Some educators question the validity of Wikipedia since anyone—not just the experts—can weigh in. However, one scholar, Pierre Levy, points out that with collective intelligence often comes greater wisdom than any one person could offer: “Collective intelligence exploits the potential of network culture to allow many different minds operating in many different contexts to work together to solve

problems that are more challenging than any of them could master as individuals” (qtd. in Graber 1). Yet, achieving solutions to these types of problems and challenges require more than just careful listening. Students also must exercise critical judgment when facing conflict, and decide whether to “transcend” the differences through common ground, or to “separate.”

Critical Judgment

Burke and Booth’s correspondence also illuminates the dialogical necessity of judgment, a fourth lesson promoted by dialogical learning and encouraged by iPad classrooms. Like students in English secondary classrooms, Burke and Booth were peers. And with no clear authority over the other, both of their opinions held equal value. What if Booth *did indeed* portray Burke inaccurately? On the flip side, what if he truly had not? The answer is not something that can be proved empirically one way or another. Surely, sincere progress cannot be achieved by insincere acknowledgments or superficial words. It would not be enough for either Burke or Booth to pretend that they agree with the other, if internally they did not. Consequently, their decision to maintain their personal opinions at the cost of losing their relationship may not necessarily be a bad thing—and it illustrates how, at the root of identification, is the potential for separation. Their situation highlights how individuals who are unwilling to identify with each other must either remain stuck at an impasse, perpetually bound to talk *at* each other without making any lasting change or improvement, or make a judgment to end the dialogue and move in a different direction.

Although Burke explains, “rhetoric builds social communities” by individuals identifying with and thus becoming consubstantial’ with others (meaning “their interests are joined or . . . they are persuaded that their interests are joined” (qtd. In Zappen 288), he also argues that a rhetoric of identification simultaneously leads to separation. “We miss the full import of Burke’s

definition . . . if we fail to understand identification in relation to division, as a process that cuts both ways. On the one hand, when we identify with another person, idea, or group, we overcome our divisions; on the other hand, we thereby also divide ourselves from someone or something else” (qtd. in Zappen 289). Thus, because Burke and Booth identified with conflicting philosophies—and neither was persuaded to abandon their viewpoints—their dialogue came to an end. At some point, all participants of a dialogue must consider their situation and determine (hopefully through careful listening) whether or not they will continue down the path of sharing ideas, learning from one another and moving in a new direction.

For this reason, crucial to dialogue is critical judgment; simply engaging with others as a passive receptacle, discovering endless accounts of how other people see the world or perceive truth, is not enough. Rather, listening to one another is a means to an end—not the end entirely; dialogue requires students to exercise good judgment, and, at times, decide to distance themselves from viewpoints that prove themselves to be wrong. How Burke and Booth’s works may have been influenced (for better or worse) had one or both identified with the other, remains unknown. What we do clearly see from their correspondence, however, are foundational principles of dialogue—transcendence, identification, and separation—at work, and dialogical learning demonstrated in reality.

From Burke and Booth we learn that the goal of using dialogue as pedagogy is not for students to simply form and convince one another of their personal opinions. That type of discourse does little for a student’s or a community’s progress. Rather, learning to engage in the type of dialogue that Burke advocates prepares students to encounter new information with confidence. And in contrast to the teachers described by Booth who are primarily concerned that their students score high on tests (“Ethics” 46)—and in contrast to administrators who are

primarily concerned that their students become competitive in the workplace—a better objective is for students to develop into “independent learners who have the capacity to govern themselves wisely” (Mantle 5). This can only be done as students are given the opportunity to “build habits” of discussion and challenged to “practice penetrating criticism of one another’s readings—and of the teachers own biases” (“Ethics” 52). In short, they need “daily practice in genuine critical conversation” (52). Teachers can leverage the iPad—and the myriad of online applications that connect students to other people (Wikipedia, blogs, discussion boards, etc)—to encourage students to practice exactly this type of genuine critical judgment. As students encounter conflict, they will have to evaluate whether or not they should internalize or disregard the conversation, transcend or to separate, and determine how best to respond.

While browsing the internet, students have access to information from reliable, trustworthy, scholarly sources as well as false, uniformed, and undependable sources. Furthermore, without the help of visual cues that accompany face-to-face interaction (i.e tone of voice, facial expression, body language) even the first type of sources can end up in miscommunication. This makes Bauerlien’s claim that online reading equates with “skim reading” especially problematic. If students speed along the surface of the web without fully paying attention to or digesting what they are reading, they will almost certainly end up consuming false information. However, rather than this risk being a deterrent, I argue that the higher stakes (caused by iPad integration) actually create the unique opportunity to emphasize this type of careful listening and for students to hone these listening skills in a highly relevant and interesting way.

One teacher that I talked with, Mr. Davis, explained that he has leveraged this opportunity by giving his students group research projects. Working together in Google Drive,

these students tackle different questions by browsing online sources. As they dump their research into a collective document, they often find conflicting answers to the same question. For example, one group was writing a research paper about suicide rates in Utah compared to suicide rates in the rest of the country and found several different—and contradictory—statistics. Because they were working together in the document at the same time and could immediately see the discrepancies, they knew that they had to double check their sources and determine which statistics came from trustworthy sites. Also, contrary to the argument that hyperlinks are a liability, Mr. Davis believes that they are an asset, fueling his students' interest. The constant opportunity to uncover new, pertinent information on their topic engages his students and ignites their curiosity--reminding them that there is a vast amount of information to consider. Rather than distract students from the topic they are researching, these links often prompt the students to contemplate new angles or other areas of research connected to their topic. Mr. Davis admitted that this opportunity exists on any technology connected to the internet, but explained that there must be a certain "Wow" element that is specific to the iPad. He described how his students will visit his classroom during their lunch break or after school in order to continue researching on the iPad—rather than continue researching on a laptop or desktop computer at home. By emphasizing critical judgment, teachers can empower their students to not just click mindlessly from hyperlink to hyperlink, skimming quickly over the text without thinking about its implications, but rather to engage in conversations in responsible and ethical ways—listening carefully and making critical judgments.

Conclusion

Although iPads have been (correctly) touted as devices that can help students learn cutting edge of twenty-first century technology skills, their ability to improve students'

thinking and critical judgment through increased opportunity for dialogical learning are possibly their greatest selling point. Specifically teachers who recognize the opportunities for openness, listening, learning from conflict, and critical judgment will find their classrooms enriched as they integrate iPads into their curriculum. For example, a recent study of some iPad using teachers found that “[b]eyond the expected increase in technical literacy they lent, iPads also challenged students to become more critical and innovative thinkers, often in collaboration with others” (CPS).

Admittedly, almost any secondary English teacher who applies the theoretical principles of dialogue (with or without technology) to their pedagogy recognizes it “as a way of engaging students more deeply” with the subject (Bruffee 635). Whether employed during a lecture, case study, or small group project, one of the reasons that dialogue is an effective learning strategy is because “people learn best when they ask an important question that they care about answering, or adopt a goal they want to reach” (Bane 31). Dialogue engages students because it involves them in a conversation where their input is valued and paramount. Although dialogue is not unique to iPads, iPads do facilitate new—and perhaps more frequent—opportunities for dialogue, which in turn contributes to increased student engagement and increased positive feelings about learning. Research found that out of 1,141 students surveyed at the end of the 2011 academic year, “90% strongly agreed or agreed that iPads make school more interesting or enjoyable. . . and 90% strongly agreed or agreed that iPads make them feel more confident about school and lessons learned.” (CPS). Another educator found that in “marked contrast to conventional measures of in-school literacy, which find that many adolescents struggle to read and write with efficacy, when literacy is digitized and made personally and socially empowering,

adolescents become highly engaged and excel as readers and writers across a broad range of print- and image-based formats” (Dressman, McCarthey, and Prior 345).

Of course, the technology on its own is not enough; ultimately, effective classrooms rely on the “quality of teacher-student interactions and the extent to which students are assigned challenging and serious epistemic roles requiring them to think, interpret, and generate new understandings” (Nystrand 7). Although it has been discovered that teachers using iPads more frequently give “students opportunities to apply their learning to authentic tasks” (Babell), whether or not classroom dialogue is enhanced or not remains dependent on whether the teacher capitalizes on all that the iPad has to offer. Furthermore, administrators must acknowledge the steep learning curve that most teachers will experience as they adapt their curriculum to accommodate the technology. Various secondary English teachers at the professional development I attended in Utah and Idaho reported to me that they felt frustrated with the lack of training they received prior to receiving the iPad. Although they believed the iPad must have great potential to enhance their classrooms, they felt that they did not know *how* to leverage the iPads to take advantage of all they have to offer. From their perspective, the integration would have gone more smoothly if they had not been expected to make the switch immediately and all at once, but rather been expected to make small adjustments over a long period of time with plenty of professional development provided along the way. Additionally, they stressed the importance of having access to tech-support at all times, since the mere possibility of frustration and wasted time spent trying to resolve technology glitches often deterred them from trying new things. With the proper training, and specifically with an understanding of the dialogical opportunities iPads present, however, I believe English teachers will find their classrooms transformed for the better. Ultimately, these dialogical opportunities will empower students in

ways advantageous for their careers, *and* also for their education as citizens of an expanding global society.

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