Towards dialogic literacy education for the Internet Age

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Overview

1. How literacy education has shaped our way of thinking
2. Unpacking dialogic theory
3. Dialogic as a practical issue in classrooms
4. Dialogic in history: why the Internet makes a difference
5. Future of literacy education
Part 1: how literacy closed the Western Mind
Dialogic was once the human norm

Cave paintings were not magic ‘tools’ for productivity but voices to speak with. Education into a living dialogue with cultural voices.
Socrates and the danger of writing

Socrates was an oral thinker but he lived at the time of the first great communications revolution: alphabetic writing.

He pointed out that it would lead to turning meaning into a thing – writing is like a picture that looks good but cannot answer back. Meaning is in the relationship and not in the words.
Essential dialogic distinction: Living word of dialogue versus dead external word

SOCRATES: I mean an intelligent word graven in the soul of the learner, which can defend itself, and knows when to speak and when to be silent.

PHAEDRUS: You mean the living word of knowledge which has a soul, and of which the written word is properly no more than an image?

‘for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’
St Paul, Corinthians
Inside and outside

Is this situated talk?
Situated in whose map?

On the inside of the dialogue a different kind of space opens up – a space of infinite possibilities
Around the 16th Century, from Montaigne to Descartes, the dominant image of thinking changed from being about utterances in dialogues to being about propositions in proofs. (Toulmin, 2000)
Writing changes the brain. Literates see words as well as hearing them. Meanings become visible like things. There is a shift from holistic perception to analytic. (Dehaene, 2009)
Transmission of knowledge

Print image of knowledge and meaning as representations in books leads to education as transmission

Compulsory mass schooling is about the 3Rs plus the book list
Summary of part 1

Monologic is a construction out of print literacy plus school education practices.

Truth as representation of reality.

Meaning not in experience but over there in the books.

A physicalist vision only acknowledging one ‘objective’ space. One ‘master viewpoint’ Voices become ‘supernatural’.

Literacy education has in some ways been used as a tool to close down the mind.

From joyful participation in meaning everywhere to isolation of the self and representations of the other.
Part 2: Dialogic Theory
The meaning of an utterance depends on its location in a dialogue. Simple observation with radical implications.

meaning ‘is like an electric spark that occurs only when two different terminals are hooked together’ (Volosinov).
Double dialogic

As well as dialogue between situated voices there is also dialogic tension with the context.

After all the context needs to be constructed in dialogues.

To situate you need a map and maps are never neutral but also imply a perspective.
Mutual envelopment of self and other

Other is not just physical is also an outside context that includes me within it.

pic
You exist within my world: I exist within your world. We know this. It gets complex ...

“mutual envelopment and intertwining” Merleau-Ponty
Chiasm. ‘I see the world: the world sees me’

(Merleau-Ponty)

Body and world constitute each other.

I create the horizon that locates me

Reversibility – boundary as ‘hinge’
Dialogic chiasm of figure ground refers also to letters

Meaning is about difference. The difference between a figure and a ground. Letters are differences that make a difference. Like the small and inaudible difference between ‘a’ and ‘e’ in Derrida’s made up word ‘differance’.
Levinas – not a representation

• The meaning of meaning
• Infinite other
Mallarme – meaning of white

Not just people but everything a voice
1) Monologic Identity (or $A=A \& A \neq B$)

But what is the unthought in this picture?
2) Drawing a boundary

Meaning for us starts with a boundary differentiating Figure from Ground, Self from Other, here from there, now from then etc.
3) A prior ‘space’ which is cut? The ‘abgrund’?

Mallarmé wrote of the pregnant white page cut by his pen
An infinite potential for new meaning lying beneath the boundaries.
3) Principle of non-identity

“The ancient Greeks did not know the most important thing about themselves: that they were ancient Greeks.” Bakhtin
### Summary of pt 2: dialogic vs monologic?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Dia-logic</strong> = meaning through and across difference</th>
<th><strong>Mono-logic</strong> = single voiced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always more than one voice in play</td>
<td>Reduces difference to one true perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning of signs depends on context (in a dialogue)</td>
<td>Meaning of signs defined as if unsituated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Augmentation: each new perspective adds insights</td>
<td>Progress linear: wrong views replaced by right views</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Representation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unbounded (infinity)</td>
<td>Bounded (totality)</td>
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</tbody>
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Or dialogic includes monologic?
Part 3: dialogue in classrooms

Talking is good for the brain

So say researchers Neil Mercer, Lyn Dawes and Rupert Wegerif after encouraging constructive debate among primary pupils.
oracy and computers

• Primary teachers mostly set children to work at computers in pairs or threes

• Our research found that the talk of children working together at the computer was not always very useful

• So we prepared children for working together at computers and the results were immediately impressive.

• Add cmps and talk
Some strategies for teaching Talk

- Modelling
- Norms for Talk
- Supporting talk in groups
- Intervention in group talk
- Supporting reflection on learning
- Evaluation of talk in plenary
Measuring effective talk

-
But why did the groups do better?

Pre-test start
Trisha: Square and diamond, it's 2
George: No it's not
Trisha: It is 2
George: No it's not
Trisha: It is
George: No it's not

Post-test start
Trisha: That has got to be a diamond, a square with a diamond with a circle in that one, number 6, do you agree?
George: No, what do you mean?
Trisha: OK no it's got to be square

Later ...
George: I don't understand this at all
Trisha: Because look on that they've taken the circle out yes? So on that you are going to take the circle out because they have taken the circle out of that one
George: On this they have taken the circle out and on this they have taken the diamond out and on this they have put them both in, so it should be a blank square because look it goes circle square
The key shift …

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Dialogic Talk as an inter-subjective orientations

1. Cumulative – identification with the group

2. Disputational – identification with self

3. Exploratory talk? identification with the space of dialogue itself

[4. Playful creative talk, also dialogic ...]
Bunny stuff

• transduction
Dialogues are not simply external things: they have an inside as well as an outside.
Disputational: clash of monologues, each identifies with self and does not listen
Or ‘dialogic’ talk: identification with the space ‘between’. This is how a real dialogue ‘feels’ from the inside
The key: being ‘open to the other’

The key to success was the children learning to listen and to change their minds. This suggests we were teaching not just talk but also dialogue: thinking as holding more than one perspective in mind and being open to other voices.
Need for dialogic theory

They were not just ‘constructing’ meaning with words and phrases used as ‘cultural tools for thinking’. This is to take an outside view. They became more comfortable with uncertainty, more ‘open to the other’, and they identified less with ‘self’ or ‘group’ and more with the open process of dialogue.
Some dialogic ideas:


Bakhtin: authoritative talk, which demands either yes or no, versus persuasive talk where words enter into my own words and change them from within.
Why dialogic is not just empirical dialogue between incarnate selves

A dialogue can be more or less dialogic
A monologue or single text can also be more or less dialogic
Individual thinking can be more or less dialogic
Voices in dialogic relations are not just physically embodied people. They are voices found in cultural texts and artifacts. In fact everything can take on voice.
Summary of part 3

- The importance of dialogic emerges from research on classroom practice
- Learning to think is about becoming more dialogic – (more multiple and open to the other)
- The dialogic principle is holding multiple perspectives together in creative tension
- Dialogic is not the same as external dialogue
- Dialogic is not the opposite of monologic but a bigger picture
Part4: dialogic in history
e.g: Encyclopedia Britannica vs Wikipedia

Authority of truth, One-to-many

A dialogue, Peer-to-peer Participation
Need to check
Participatory view of knowledge

According to the logic of the Print Age, education is the transmission of true knowledge through reading the right books. The logic of the Internet Age returns us to Socrates’ original insight that intelligence lies in dialogues and not in books. The essence of Wikipedia knowledge is not the passive representation of true knowledge but the active participation in dialogues that construct knowledge.
Monologic as a temporary error

1) Face-to-face dialogue supports a participatory sense of self as part of a community yet this tends to universal warfare because this dialogue community has physical limits in space and time.

2) Writing overcomes some of the spatial and temporal limits of oral dialogue but only at the expense of becoming disembedded from context. It has an affordance for monologism and tends to support empires governed from a center as well as turning ‘truth’ into a ‘representation’ – i.e. the sort of thing that can be found in a book.

3) The Internet combines features of dialogue (everyone can participate and have a voice) with features of writing (it transcends location) hence potentially enabling a participatory self that is for the first time global rather than local.
Oracy – bounded dialogue in a community
‘the breath’

Writing – one to many empires
‘the law’

Internet – unbounded potential dialogue
From authority to dialogue

Blogger ‘is a node amongst other nodes, connected but unfinished with the links and comments – a conversation rather than a production’ Sullivan 2008
Barton’s hills
Plagiarism and ‘New Literacy’

“The Committee was very concerned to hear the argument that it is acceptable and ‘common practice’ to ‘cut and paste’ other peoples work into a thesis and then simply reword it. The view of the Committee is that this is very poor practice and should be strongly discouraged.

xxx will clearly require support and guidance in re-writing parts of her thesis in order to remove all plagiarism, and this advice has to be based upon original thought and writing, not cutting, pasting and paraphrasing the work of others.”
So who are we now?

Teens in the USA spend on average 8 hours a day with electronic gadgets most of which now connect to the Internet. Where do they really live? Where do the events that shape them really happen?
Great time and ‘The democracy that is to come’?

“great time’ - infinite and unfinalized dialogue in which no meaning dies”.

Thought occurs first in dialogues. The Internet increasingly embodies the complex unity of humanity – the dialogue of all times and places.

Consciousness is not individual but ‘figure – ground’ dialogue. As we learn to think with the Internet we become part of one collective consciousness.
Global citizenship

• Unbounded openness
Summary 4
5 how to teach
Eg of superaddrressee
Dialogues are not simply external things: they have an inside as well as an outside
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and on the inside what constitutes them is the gap between perspectives.
In every dialogue there is a ‘third’ voice and so the call of infinity
Illustration: Invoking the absent addressee – seeing from the outside
audience

• Literacy issue
• Who writing for?
• Unbounded open
• Now real
• Contrast GO and COP
Dialogic space(s)

Invisible yes, but the ‘invisible of this world’
(Merleau-Ponty)

There is a point in time and space when and where they open and a point when and where they close

Spaces within the physical world where the gap between incommensurate perspectives opens up a potentially infinite space of reflection.
Dialogic space ‘concepts’

• voice, call, response, superaddressee, infinite other
• widening: more voices, different voices
• deepening: unpacking assumptions, deconstructing
• heightening: levels of bounded to unbounded dialogue which can be foregrounded or backgrounded
• Orientations: affective dimensions of the space
music
Eg l2l2
tbff
Towards dia lit

Li means of communication
With others
Dialogue with oracy etc
Exoaded notion
Global conversation participation
Inevitably also creation of future
Shared space
Dialogue as end in itself about bringing everything into dialogue
refs