

# **“VISUAL LISTENING” – AN EXPLORATION OF CRITICAL THINKING AND HOW STUDENTS LISTEN WITH THEIR EYES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In today’s world of text messaging and emails, we found that students learn visually as well as aurally. In other words, students are learning from “visual listening” – listening related to reading texts, emails, and tweets. This exploration is a by-product of our earlier investigation of active productive listening as a key element in the process of thinking critically. Students stated, in interactive workshops, that in order for them to listen critically, professors must add visuals to their class presentations, have in depth knowledge of the subject matter, and explain to students why the material in the course is necessary in their “real” day to day lives. Students’ perceived need for practical information far exceeded their requirement for abstract knowledge for the future and superseded knowledge that was purely theoretical in nature. Students do not listen unconditionally. This paper explores student learning – listening and “visual listening” in order to think critically.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout history, societies had various needs and expectations of what the future would hold. Hence, they also had a variety of views on how to educate their youth so that the future society they envisioned could flourish. In western civilization, the history of educational ideas is very long; it goes back at least as far as Socrates. Ever since those ancient times, many educational ideas were put on a pedestal as solutions to existing and/or perceived problems, only to be replaced by new solutions and new perceived problems, which came into fashion at the time. Sometimes “new” ideas were really old ideas that had been forgotten, or they were old ideas whose time had come. Critical thinking is just such an idea.

The concept of critical thinking in the United States became prominent in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although the concept in fact had a much longer history. For instance, the words, critical thinking, were used by Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bacon wrote: “Critical thinking is a desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to

assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order, and hatred for every kind of imposture” (Goralski & Gorniak-Kocikowska, 2012, p. 102). These words of Bacon serve as the motto of The Critical Thinking Community, which is a part of The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking. But, even the words of Sir Francis Bacon already had a predecessor in the famous Socratic Method which was, in fact, a method of teaching through practicing critical thinking (Fabio, n.d.).

Given the recent prominence of critical thinking in college curricula, as well as in discussions among faculty; and given the fact that we are both dedicated teachers, it was only natural for us to decide that this problem, i.e., critical thinking and its place in the process of education required our close attention. Thus, several years ago we initiated our own inquiry into some aspects of the critical thinking pedagogy. Recently, we focused on one of the most urgent and at the same time severely “underrated” issues, i.e., the problem of listening, or not listening, in the critical thinking process. We have continued our exploration of this subject. In this paper, we evolve into a new area – the role of “visual listening” in the educational process of critical thinking.

Our interest in the role of listening as a component of critical thinking pedagogy brought results in the form of several presentations and publications. For instance, in June 2011, we presented the topic of active productive listening at Fairfield University’s *Learning in Action: Innovative Pedagogy & Course Redesign XI* conference. Academics in attendance were extremely interested in this topic of listening – not as a passive part of conversation – but rather as an active and productive part of conversation – as active and productive a part as speaking, which they had not previously considered.

Our research continued and became a workshop that we presented, among others, in November of 2011 at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), entitled *Listening as a Precondition to Critical Thinking*. Some of the student information presented in the abstract of this paper was excerpted from that workshop – students advised that professors should add visuals to their class presentations, have in depth knowledge of the subject matter, and explain the necessity of the information in a student’s day to day life; otherwise, students will not listen. Our research continued with a gathering of information from students in strategy courses at Quinnipiac University and philosophy and women’s entrepreneurial courses at Southern Connecticut State University.

In summer 2012, we published an article entitled *The Role of Active Productive Listening in Communication, Pedagogy, and Thinking Critically* in the Journal of Business Management and Change. In that paper, we discussed the significance of the report that was commissioned by the U.S. Secretary of Education in 1981, the Honorable T. H. Bell, to study excellence in education. Bell’s initiative was based on complaints from both military and business leaders. It was determined at the time that students entering the worlds of the military and business could not think critically – they were unable to take knowledge from one field and apply it critically or

creatively in another. Consequently, critical thinking was declared to be a crucial component of college education. Reading, writing, and speaking became of utmost importance in curriculum, but the key issue of listening was not included in the report or in subsequent educational reform.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education was created on 26 August 1981 with a charter that included among other priorities “assessing the quality of teaching and learning in U.S. colleges and universities; comparing U.S. colleges and universities with those of other advanced nations, and defining problems which must be faced and overcome if the U.S. was to successfully pursue the course of excellence in education” (Gardner, D. P., 1983, Introduction, para. 3). The final report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released in 1983. Selected excerpts from the conclusion of that report follow:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.... We have dismantled essential support systems which helped make ... gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.... For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence. (Gardner, D. P., 1983, *The Risk*, para. 4)

The Commission issued a call to all who care about America and its future by concluding emphatically – America is at risk.

One of the most important tasks undertaken after the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was to teach students how to think critically. However now, almost thirty years after the writing of *A Nation at Risk...*, academics are questioning whether critical thinking can indeed be taught successfully and whether students are listening and absorbing enough information to transfer the process of thinking critically from one subject to another (Willingham, 2007).

## **SILOS OF KNOWLEDGE – THE KANTIAN MODEL OF EDUCATION**

Some of the questions that had to be answered for the Commission included the following:

- How useful for the task articulated in *A Nation at Risk...* were the old theories of critical thinking?
- How could academia implement critical thinking into the educational process?
- Could this implementation be applied as a foundation for a new model?
- And/or, would it be necessary to modify the old theories drastically or even create an entirely new theory of critical thinking into education?

These are also questions which are still of utmost importance today.

One of the most successful models of the modern university was created by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in the 1700s to meet the interdependent requirements of a new industrial economy and emerging nation-states (Taylor, 2010). This new model was broken down into four silos in two divisions – higher and lower faculties. The higher faculties included theology, medicine, and religion and the lower faculty, philosophy. Ultimately even though philosophy was considered a lower faculty, it was designed to dictate and pass judgment on the ethics of the other three high faculties. In this, the Kantian model was still following to a certain degree the model of the medieval university which dominated European education for centuries. As a matter of fact, Kant himself received his formal education in a manner still strongly influenced by the medieval model. It took him decades to make a break-through both in revolutionizing philosophy with his three monumental *Critiques* and in revolutionizing the model of education.

In this latter endeavor, Kant was following the tendency in science of his time to create clear boundaries between disciplines as well as his own desire to ‘categorize’ knowledge. He decided that higher knowledge must be carved into different divisions and departments – the egoistic self-contained silos that still exist in academia today. His model was initially implemented in Berlin at Humboldt University and then transported to the United States in 1876 to John Hopkins University (Taylor, 2010), where it became familiar to John Dewey (1859-1952), one of the most prominent theoreticians and reformers of education in the United States and worldwide.

If one looks deeply at the Kantian model, one can perhaps glimpse why students today cannot easily transfer critical knowledge from one subject area to another as professors in the same university oftentimes do not know what information or tidbits of knowledge are being disseminated by other professors from the same university, albeit in other silos, through either written or oral presentation.

The only area of study that appears to have surmounted the challenges of the Kantian silo is cognitive science, where one can glimpse the great benefit that the research of evolutionary psychologists, linguists, neuroscientists, and philosophers, to name but a few, bring to the complex study of the brain and its intricate complexity.

According to Friedenberg and Silverman (2006), authors of *Cognitive Science – An Introduction to the Study of Mind*,

Cognitive science can be roughly summed up as the scientific interdisciplinary study of the mind.... The term ... refers not to the sum of the disciplines, but to their intersection and converging work on specific problems, the glue that holds them together is the topic of the mind and, for the most part, the use of scientific methods. (p. 2)

In light of the above, there is little wonder that the most successful and most advanced knowledge-based technologies like bio-nanotechnologies and other emerging brain based engineered and cultivated technologies are oftentimes called “converging” technologies. They broke free from the confines of “knowledge silos” into interdisciplinary study of the human mind and of the world, as was clearly demonstrated, for instance, at the *Bioethics Conference: The Moral Brain* (which we attended in March/April 2012, in New York), under the joint sponsorship of The NYU Center for Bioethics, the Duke Kenan Institute for Ethics, the Yale Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics, and the Institute for Ethics & Emerging Technologies.

No one field of study would be adequate to comprehend this elaborate interrelated and interconnected part of the whole, no one field of study would be adequate on its own – in its own silo. “Without this integration, each field would have only its own unique portion of knowledge, other knowledge would be lost and the combined energy and enthusiasm of cognitive science, would lose some of its drive” (Goralski, 2008, p. 97).

The Kantian model was created to provide nation-states with educated bureaucrats and researchers who would create new knowledge for the future. However, in today’s world, nation-states are breaking down as technology, communication, and the increasing power of transnational corporations have shifted economic power. Nation-states are still powerful, but the era of their domination is rapidly being diminished. Today we live in an almost borderless world where nation-states matter less and globalization is the new economic order (Dicken, 2007; Freeland, 2012).

New types of organizations – social, political and economic – require the re-configuration of institutions at every level of society. Boundaries – governmental, societal, and educational, once secure, have become permeable. Kant’s model of the university was created when the world was transitioning from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Consequently, there was an urgent need for a new model of education (especially higher education), which would satisfy the demands of the new economy and a new society. Moreover, the old university, the medieval university – even though it was officially still widely accepted as *the* form of an institution of higher learning and it was functioning universally – was dead as a place for creativity and new views long before Kant brought in his idea for the new one.

The medieval university’s slow death began with the introduction of printed books to the Western world. However, it is interesting to note that the connection between these two phenomena was not noticed for a long time – at least not in the United States. In Europe, it was seen earlier, although the full significance of it seems to have eluded even European scholars (Drucker, 1979). In today’s learning environment and due to the demands of today’s economy and other areas of public and private spheres, students and teachers must move past the university dictates of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and Kant’s desire to categorize knowledge. To do so, they must possess a will to listen – a will to think – a will to discover and evolve. As described earlier, in the United States, the awareness of this necessity became acute in the early 1980s, and

resulted, among other things with the publication of *The Nation at Risk...* with an emphasis on the role of critical thinking in the process of a fruitful, socially useful higher education.

## **THE WILL TO THINK – THE WILL TO LISTEN**

Thinking – and especially critical thinking – when taking place as a part of the communication process, is closely connected with listening. One can say that listening is an unalienable part of communicative critical thinking, i.e., of that kind of thinking which – according to the present standards – dominates, or should dominate the educational process. This is an important pedagogical problem.

A student today is used to the fast pace of video games; text-messaging friends between or during conversations, and listening to his or her iPod at the same time. Students are walking, talking, listening, processing, analyzing, storing, and using all parts of their brain and body in multiple capacities in most life experiences, and then, they enter a classroom where a professor expects them to sit and listen to a lecture attentively, oftentimes, without a break. (Goralski, 2008, p. 96; Goralski & Gorniak-Kocikowska, 2012, p. 96)

And this is expected even though students usually have no training and no formal educational background in how to be active productive listeners. It is as important for schools to groom good listeners as well as speakers for leadership roles in the future (Cain, 2012). Reading, writing, and speaking, but not listening, are being taught at all levels of education, even though various studies have identified that more time in one's life is spent listening than speaking, reading, and/or writing (Campbell, 1997; Fiumara, 1990; Gardner, H., 1983; Johnson, 2012). Critical listening is not just a classroom issue either; Wolvin and Coakley (1988) argue that it is one of the important life skills, especially in our times.

Now, as never before, we are confronted by speakers who want to change our attitudes and our behavior.... Since freedom of speech ensures equal rights on both the honest and dishonest speaker, we must be effective critical listeners if we are to protect and control ourselves rather than allowing others to control us. (Wolvin & Coakley, 1988, p. 283)

Unfortunately, being constantly exposed to background noise in public spaces, people are developing an ability to suppress sound and not listen, rather than develop an ability to willfully listen and willfully think.

Throughout history there have been two main actors in the role of communication, both verbal and nonverbal – the speaker – and the listener. Even though listening oftentimes plays as active a role in communication as speaking, the direct impact of listening on the process of communication is limited as speakers rarely truly listen to the responses of listeners.

And yet, as evidenced by Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), German philosopher and psychiatrist, when the issue of listening, after World War II, became an obstacle in his own attempts at communication; if one will not listen attentively, willingly, and critically, then there is, in reality, no communication. Consequently, although listening was not originally the primary focus in the philosophy of Jaspers (1950), it became a subject of his investigation. One of the crucial points for him in this context became the question of the will to listen.

Jaspers linked the will to listen to the will to think as a necessary condition for the type of communication philosophers, himself included, had most interest in. It was also a necessary condition for what Jaspers considered to be philosophy. In his viewpoint, the will to listen, without which any meaningful communication is all but impossible, is also a will to think and to philosophize. The function of the will for listening is indeed very important, especially in the process of thinking critically – purposeful, rational thinking seldom takes place unnoticed or unwanted by the thinker. Just as in the case of listening, thinking and the will to think are closely intertwined.

Gemma Corradi Fiumara (1990) in *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* concludes that the neglect of listening is a philosophical problem, “a thinking primarily anchored to saying-without-listening” (p. 3). She believes that this is the result of the dominance of *logos* in western philosophy. *Logos* from the Greek ‘word’, ‘opinion’, and/or ‘speech’ – for Sophists – discourse – for Aristotle – reasoned discourse. “Exploring the term *logos* Heidegger repeatedly wonders: If such is the essence of speaking, then what is hearing?” (Heidegger cited in Fiumara, 1990, p. 6). Fiumara observes that in a *logos* dominated western intellectual tradition, domination and victory, rather than mutual understanding and insight, is the primary purpose of conversation. Sentences e.g., “I am telling you” or “listen to me,” are oftentimes meant to communicate listener obedience rather than to promote a will to think on the part of the listener. They establish the role of speaker as a dominant and active player, and listener as subservient or passive. Without the will to listen and the will to think logically, as established earlier by Jaspers, it is almost impossible to hold a meaningful conversation.

Don Campbell (1997), author of *The Mozart Effect*, makes a clear distinction between listening and hearing.

The difference between listening and hearing cannot be overemphasized. Compared to hearing, which is the ability to receive auditory information through the ears, skin, and bones, listening is the ability to filter, selectively focus on, remember, and respond to sounds. Listening is active, while hearing is passive. Often we hear, but we don't listen. (Campbell, 1997, p. 44; Goralski & Gorniak-Kocikowska, 2012, p. 95)

In this sense, the listener can hold an active productive role in conversation if he or she is able to filter information, selectively focus and remember what is being said or store and selectively recall, and respond. This is an important distinction because the amount of attention devoted to

the research of speaking far surpasses the amount of research devoted to listening and yet, as mentioned earlier, we spend on average more time on listening than speaking. Research shows that in the course of a day “listening absorbs an average 55% of our daily communication time, speaking approximately 23%, reading 13%, and writing just 9%” (Campbell, 1997, p. 44).

Craig E. Johnson (2012), in *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership - Casting Light or Shadow*, states that group members do not have to carry as much of the conversation as in a one-on-one conversation, therefore, “If you belong to a team with 10 members, you can expect to devote approximately 10% of your time to talking and 90% to listening to what others have to say” (p. 292). And yet, in the formal sense of education, one is never purposefully taught how to listen.

According to Willard Spiegelman (2009), *Seven Pleasures - Essays on Ordinary Happiness*, when people listened to the radio in the 1920s through the 1960s, they became listeners rather than lookers. They “heard the human voice ... from a wooden box or a car radio [and] pricked up [their] ears and ... received sounds unaided by [their] eyes” (p. 132). He believes that people of his generation were born to become listeners – people who listen with their eyes closed – people who listen to the words, similarly to people who lived in oral civilizations, before the invention of writing.

Today, however, listening no longer holds the power that it once did - a power that held the listener engrossed in the act of listening and compelled one to focus his or her ears to willful listening and thinking. This is happening despite the fact that listening internalizes life and allows the content of what is being disseminated to become one’s own, and, is one of the main reasons why listening holds an important position in the ability to think critically. Active productive listening provides an opportunity for deep thought and inspiration for positive change.

## **A NETWORK-DRIVEN GLOBAL MODEL FOR EDUCATION**

A new model of the university needs to be established to transition the world from the Kantian model to a network-driven global model. Networks of global education must produce a new type of knowledge that encourages free flows of cultural and intellectual capital between silos within universities and between universities and nation-states - interdisciplinary knowledge that encompasses the virtual knowledge that exists in the world. Higher education that was created in the 1700s is no longer functional. The organizational structure and operating principles which were found deficient in 1981 by U.S. Secretary of Education, T. H. Bell, are still dysfunctional. The Kantian model can no longer meet the needs of today’s complex world of information technology, social networks, global expansion, etc.

New information, media and, most important, net-working technologies are transforming global, social, political, and economic infrastructures in ways that are revolutionizing the production and transmission of information. These technologies are ... recasting the very structure of knowledge and the means of its dissemination. Lectures and seminars offered in today's colleges and universities are still similar in style and format to those delivered in classrooms in the 1700s. It is necessary to find other pedagogical strategies to promote the exchange of ideas that is vital to the educational process. (Taylor, 2010, p. 14)

Innovation is dynamic, driven by a continuous search for new knowledge, ideas and technology that will deliver value. This is the process of 'creative destruction' that is at the heart of the economic growth process, because new technologies lead to better performance and increased productivity as they displace old technologies. (Ministry of Science and Innovation, 2012, para. 1)

Today's universities also need to embrace innovation as dynamic and driven by a continuous search for new knowledge, ideas and technology that will deliver value to students. If we look at the interrelatedness of cognitive science, which was presented earlier in this paper, then we can see the benefit that the research of evolutionary psychologists, linguists, neuroscientists, and philosophers, bring to the complex study of the mind and brain. No one field of study would be adequate to comprehend the elaborate interrelated and interconnected parts of the whole. The idea of creative destruction, "incessantly destroying the old ..., [while] incessantly creating a new" (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 83) is one that we, as educators, should keep in mind. Students in the future will need to be flexible as their lives will be unceasingly evolving. Education will be their present and future endeavor and listening is at the core of that basis of knowledge obtained through the process of critical thinking, whether they become world leaders or followers.

The rapidly expanding knowledge of the working of the human brain supports the statements presented above. According to Daniel Pink (2006), author of *A Whole New Mind: Moving from Information Age to the Conceptual Age*,

The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind – creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers. These people – artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers – will now reap society's richest rewards and share its greatest joy. (p. 1)

Creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and big picture thinkers – these are the words of Pink (2006, p. 1). We would add active productive listening, thinking critically, and adding value to a whole new world of opportunities.

## ILLUSTRATION, BLIPS, AND SOUND BITES

Another issue related to critical-thinking-in communication is listening with one's eyes – “visual listening.” This issue initially emerged with the invention of writing and it intensified tremendously with the invention of the printing press. Although textbooks were not unknown in medieval universities, they played a secondary role to lectures (requiring memorization of large amounts of information) and debates. A conversation was an event which took place face-to-face, contemporarily and involved mainly the physical activities of speaking and listening. Thanks to the invention of the movable type by Johannes Gutenberg, the accessibility of written texts grew rapidly and with them the concept of conversation changed (McLuhan, 1962). It became quite common among literate individuals to have a silent conversation with an author of the written text and - as Karl Jaspers, who was mentioned earlier in this paper, liked to phrase it - to communicate with the great minds across the ages.

One could “listen” to what these great minds had to say; but it was a different type of listening, a “visual listening.” The process of verbal communication was taking place, as well as a conversation, although the conversation was often somewhat one-sided. But even under these conditions a true dialogue could take place, provided that critical thinking was involved. Reading a text carefully and, if desired, multiple times, the reader who was a critical thinker could find answers to his/her questions or confirm his or her doubts about the value of the author's ideas. The reader “listened” to the author visually through the printed text and reacted to it by creating questions and commentaries in natural language; sometimes in the form of silent thoughts, sometimes in writing, sometimes spoken softly or loudly. Oftentimes, the text “spoke” back to the reader, if the reader “listened” carefully.

According to Umberto Eco (1989), *The Open Work*, people respond to their own patterning and supply their own credentials and sense of conditioning, which is particular to their own culture, set of tastes, personal inclinations, and prejudices. Thus, each person “listens” to the written word from his or her own perspective, making a work open to a multiplicity of meaning which he or she must hunt for and ultimately find on his or her own.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the revolutionary pedagogical ideas of Johann Amos Comenius (Komensky) the author of – among others – the first illustrated textbook in Europe, brought attention to the power of visual aid in the educational process.

Umberto Eco wrote about the significance of “visual listening” in the life of the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce (1866-1952):

Art [or illustration] for Croce was a purely mental phenomenon that could be communicated directly from the mind of the artist to that of the reader, viewer, or listener.... The material medium of the artistic work was of no real significance; it merely

served as a stimulus to enable the reader to reproduce in him- or herself the artist's original intuition. (Eco, 1989, p. ix)

In our times, the problem of the role of illustrations or other visuals in education, and in the critical thinking pedagogy in particular, became acute on a fully new level with the introduction of computers and ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) generated by them. The senses are overwhelmed and bombarded on all fronts. The art of critical thinking and the experience of critical thinking as outlined by John Dewey (1916) - as a perfect example of aesthetic appreciation - has fallen by the wayside.

New pedagogical issues – blips and sound bites – Twitter and Facebook– text messaging and emails have brought a broader dimension to “visual listening.” Students state that they listen more with their eyes than with their ears, even though this discovery surprises them. Books, magazines, and almost everything, except our beloved academic journal articles, have taken on the appearance of blips and sound bites. Magazine articles are short and many articles are set upon the page. They are basically a mélange of trivia. Case in point: Bloomberg BusinessWeek is color coded so that, for instance, global economics students do not have to waste their time wading through the politics and policy, markets and finance, or technology sections of the magazine. They can easily know that the color blue signifies global economics and go directly to the articles of interest. However, is this not creating knowledge with blinders – knowledge of one field of study only without the chance that one might become enthralled by an article in one of the other sections of the magazine if he or she had the opportunity to peruse at his or her own leisure? This knowledge seems even more contained within a silo than Kant's model of the university and brings into question whether, in reality, one can have a true sense of global economics without reading any of these other sections. As a side point, the advertisements are also conveyed to students as articles with interesting titles like “The Defense Never Rests – As cybercrime becomes more rampant and its consequences more ominous, improved public-private collaboration is necessary to create effective countermeasures” (*Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, 2012, p. S1) or “The Quest for Hidden Treasures – Panasonic's recycling-oriented manufacturing approach is mapping out a new life for e-waste” (*Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, 2012, p. S1 – S4). Typically, student readers, perhaps readers in general, miss the small print at the top, SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION.

Tweets are confined to short bursts of conversation, otherwise, it is assumed that one would go on and on; hence trivial blips have gained in importance. Topics like what one ate for breakfast have become a reason to tweet someone – and consequently carry on a short conversation. One now has the capability to accept or reject a conversation. If one is not interested in what “the speaker” ate for breakfast then he/she can reject the tweet and simply “not listen.” However, is the breakfast knowledge already embedded in the “non-listener's” brain? Can one also reject the sight of or “listening” to a tweet? Is the mind no longer capable of reading more than one short paragraph or is the mind becoming so clogged with irrelevance that there is no room left for true conversation the same as public noise has prevented one from listening actively and productively? In Facebook, one can “like” or invite one into their page, and one can share

advertisements with a friend by “liking” them. Often students restrict their use of ICT to tweets and their Facebook contacts to people of their own generation; this leads to breaking the lines of inter-generational and inter-cultural communication.

With social media, the listener has the capability of allowing or disallowing a speaker into the conversation. The listener perhaps has gained in power. The power to accept a conversation or reject a conversation, but philosophically speaking it is not actually a conversation at all if only one member is active. Students and faculty members will state that he or she “spoke with a person,” however, when asked when he or she saw the person, the answer is that he or she didn’t actually see the person at all. He or she “heard” the person visually through social media.

## **"VISUAL LISTENING"**

During the course of this body of research, we discovered that for students who send emails, tweet, post on Facebook, and are almost continuously on their smart phone texting; “visual listening” is the way in which they receive most of their information but often it is too selective. Students discuss “having a conversation” with someone, when in actuality he or she received a text message or email and there was no traditionally understood “conversation” involved.

Students are beginning to listen with their eyes more than with their ears, hence the title of this paper. But are people listening more with their eyes than they did with their ears or less? Is conversation more or less balanced on the parts of the speaker and/or the listener? Are students more capable of “listening” with their eyes? If they are, then has it impacted their ability to think critically?

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The implications of this research for the future of pedagogy are great. Students are demanding more interactive classroom “conversations” – even though their capacity for active productive listening and true “listening” seems to be somewhat diminished. Classroom conversations and interactions between students are changing. When given a topic to discuss with colleagues in class, students oftentimes divide the work, each person works on his/her own part, and then text or email his or her portion of the conversation to a colleague, who will then combine the dialogue and submit the final assignment – even though these students are sitting right next to each other in the classroom – texting is silent. When asked why they text instead of converse, students conclude that this is a “better use of time” than perhaps getting caught up in a conversation and losing focus.

If an assignment is given to five people, and one handout is dispensed so that the five students will have to read and discuss it together, then one student will photograph the handout with his or her smart phone and email it to the other students in the group so they can each have their own handout. This is another form of silent conversation.

PowerPoint slides have been deemed too slow by students and Prezi (cloud-based, collaborative, free software) is taking its place. Students can work together online, information is stored in the “cloud,” and students can visually watch each other work via the Prezi site. This is a new form of collaboration. This option is also available in the form of a Business Simulation Game (BSG). Previously, the BSG demanded an in-person discussion between colleagues and co-managers of the simulated company, now co-managers on a team can interact silently within the simulation software.

With the college classroom changing in such a rapid way the question remains open whether, and if so, how these new phenomena will impact the critical thinking pedagogy. Another question is how these phenomena should impact the critical thinking pedagogy.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We think that all university students, as well as all faculty members, would benefit from listening intensive (Listening Across the Curriculum – LAC) courses, as well as, or at least in the same way they are benefiting from writing intensive (Writing Across the Curriculum – WAC) courses in General Education. Unfortunately, in an era that puts pressure on universities to shrink the core requirements, this may not be a practical recommendation. This does not mean, however, that the issue should not be considered.

Having listening intensive (Listening in the Discipline – LID) courses, similar to writing intensive (Writing in the Discipline – WID) courses which already exist in the curricula of many universities and colleges, would probably cause general discontent since most professors in the majors balk at teaching writing intensive courses while trying to disseminate the specific material necessary for students to become proficient in their fields of study.

Therefore, this paper advocates introducing Active Productive Listening and “Visual Listening” Intensive Workshops into the educational requirements of First Year Experience (FYE) university students, as well as faculty members who are teaching FYE, in order to disseminate information and skills that both students and faculty members can use to become better listeners and critical thinkers – to enhance Western intellectual culture (or any culture for that matter) – whether by listening in person or “visually” listening in social media and other means of e-communications.

These workshops would stress the importance of active productive listening and "visual listening" in communication, pedagogy, and critical thinking. They would set the stage for a new type of learning – for a creative destruction of the Kantian “silo” model of production and dissemination of knowledge – and conception of a new network-driven global university model based on diversity, interdisciplinary research, and creative, critical thinking. An added practical value of enhancing the skills of active, productive critical listening, aural or visual, is the usefulness of these skills for a quick adaptation to the changing job market. The majority of today’s students will be life-long learners by either necessity or by choice. Many of them will have to re-train for new jobs several times during their productive years. The rapid development of new technologies will make obsolete at an even faster rate a great number of skills students learn presently, but it will also create the need for new skills which will have to be learned quickly. This, in turn, means the necessity to retain for a long time the critical thinking skills and therefore also the active, productive critical listening skills garnered in formal education.

## CONCLUSION

Professors have to take their cue from students and the global social media connected economy. One can no longer remain embedded within the Kantian "silo" model of education, lecturing for the duration of the class time, within and for one discipline only. Students are used to blips and sound bites of knowledge. Perhaps social media has decreased the attention span of students, or maybe the attention span was never there but students were more adept at pretending to be interested because they wanted to “get the grade.” Students, as listeners, have the choice to “listen” or merely “hear” without absorption. Students as “visual listeners” have the choice to become involved or merely glimpse. Students are now used to this new power, which they have achieved through social media, to accept or reject what the speaker says.

Paradoxically, the very characteristics, which cause professors today so much frustration, namely, the “multi-tasking” and short attention span displayed by students in the classroom could be very useful in the process of breaking out of “Kant's silos.” If properly understood and managed, these characteristics could help students connect the bits of information from various disciplines into one concept, one vision, and one knowledge of the ever-changing networked global reality.

This paper has delved into previous research that we conducted on the importance of active productive listening as a key component to critical thinking. It has allowed us to go even deeper into our research to identify “visual listening” and the components of teaching to students who are used to the power bestowed on listeners in social media. Our findings have allowed us to more fully understand the importance of the missing link in critical thinking – the role of active productive listening and "visual listening" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it is clear to us now that what we have explored thus far is only the tip of the iceberg and that we are only at the very beginning of a long journey through the critical thinking pedagogy in the age of emerging and converging technologies and a global society shaped by networks and a global economy.

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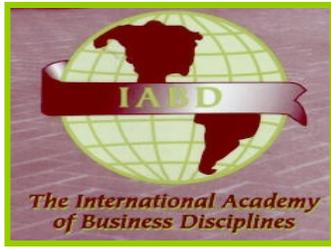
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*JOURNAL OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
BUSINESS DISCIPLINES*



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Volume 8, Number 2

November 2013

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ISSN 1934-1822

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