ELA: Online Interaction

Todd Jepperson & Karen T. Arnesen

🌿 7.1 Online Interaction in the English Language Arts Classroom

Review foundational knowledge about <u>Online Interactions</u> in K–12 Blended Teaching (Volume 1).

ELA classrooms thrive on interactions with and between students. Both in-person and online interactions and feedback provide students with ways to share and support their positions, give and receive feedback, and to present both written and spoken opinions and positions with both civility and evidence. Trent Mikesell sees many opportunities and advantages of students' intereacting online.

Teachers Talk: Interacting Online

Trent Mikesell

One thing I really enjoy about blended teaching is the opportunity students have to interact with each other online. Here are some of the things I've done:

Write an essay together on a Google Doc.
Peer check each other's writing.
Make Kahoot games or quizzes together and share them with the class.
Write reviews on Goodreads and comment on each other's reviews.
Interacting online teaches students skills they don't get by interacting in-person—skills they will need in the future. Online interactions tend to be a little more formal. You have to learn to explain yourself in a different way when you don't have body language and tone to convey meaning. Even simple things like setting up a meeting through an email are done online. In today's culture, it's critical to have those skills.

7.2 Student to Student Interactions

Talking, discussing, reading, sharing, writing, and revising are at the heart of English language arts classes. Conversations around these activities can help students to build critical thinking skills; express themselves; listen and respond civilly; and revise their opinions, writing and speaking techniques, and discourse when needed. Technology can enhance these activities, increasing student confidence, collaboration, and engagement. Here Dave Lee and Todd Jepperson tell how they used technology to solve students' hesitation, to increase communication and creativity, and to increase offline communication.

Teachers Talk: Zombie Collaboration (3:18)

[Watch on YouTube](https://edtechbooks.org/k12blended2)

Reflection Question: How can using the online space help students be more willing and eager to participate?

Teachers Talk: Collaboration

Todd Jepperson

Jamboard was great because it's like this giant open space. Kids just click a spot and start typing. I've had infographics that students collaborate on, and when it's an online tool, you can have several different contributors to the same thing. And they don't have to all contribute right now, today, but they can get to it later on this afternoon. So you do your stuff now and I'll go and do my stuff later. Then we can come back together and revise together.

Online interactions have the additional advantage of keeping students focused and constructive.

Teachers Talk: Online Collaboration and Feedback

Trent Mikesell

Collaboration is generally better online than it is in person. It's a more productive use of time, because you have a goal you are trying to accomplish, and you're focused on it. When we're in person, I have to tell you about how I got a ticket on the way here, or we're chatting over lunch. I probably wouldn't tell you those things if we were working together on a Google Doc. Right now, I'm helping to write a toolkit for struggling readers for the state. We've basically just got the document, and we're making changes, but we're not having random conversations. The students are the same way. They are more focused on the specific task when they're collaborating online.

Online feedback often works the same way, but I have to teach the students how to give good feedback. I'm very explicit at the beginning of the year about what peer feedback should look like and why it's important. I might suggest finding two things they have done well and two ways they could improve. I've also found that giving students the same rubric I use to grade their papers helps them direct their feedback and keep it civil and constructive.

There are many technologies that support online collaboration and discussions. Here are a few of them and how they can be used in ELA. (You might want to become proficient with one technology then branch out to another one. Don't try too many at once.)

- Discussion Boards: Usually part of a learning management system (LMS), they allow threaded discussions that can be tied to the grade book.
- Padlet: An online bulletin board where students can post and reply to comments using text, images, audio, and video. Students can also create timelines, storyboards, and collages individually or collaboratively.
- Flipgrid: a video discussion board. Instead of using a text-based discussion, flipgrid allows students to post and respond with video, which can increase the sense of nearness and community in the discussion. Flipgrid also allows students and teachers to create and share screencast videos.
- GoReact: Another video tool that allows students to submit videos of themselves for observation and feedback. This can be useful for helping students create, evaluate, and receive feedback on their presentation and oral skills.
- VoiceThread: A video/audio tool that allows students to add pictures or text on a project, give feedback on writing, and explain their work. It can also be used to make instructional videos with interactive abilities (that can also be turned into quizzes), and create situations where students think aloud about their writing process and share their videos with each other.
- Google Docs: A collaboration tool, where students can write and receive feedback and suggested edits on their writing and where students can collaborate on projects and all forms of writing.
- Google Slides: Similar to Google Docs, Google Slides allows students to individually or collaboratively create presentation slides. Google Slides is also increasingly used to generate quick ideas and brainstorming, with each student or group of students having one slide.

Just like in-person discussions and interactions, online interactions can become stale if they do not include variety and contrast, inviting students to think deeply and/or creatively. Responses can easily become formulaic. As you create your discussion response prompts, ask yourself what you are hoping to see in student replies? How can the reply prompt help students be more creative in their responses to peers?

Here are some online discussion ideas that are relevant to an ELA classroom.

Table 1

Online Discussion Ideas

	In-person	Online
Book Introduction (focus on characterization)	2. Read the biography 3. In class, pair students with different biographies to present the character of the biography they read and compare the two. 4. Reveal that the two biographies are of the same person (but have vastly different biographies).	1. Give each student online access to one of two (contrasting) two-page biographies of the same real person. 5. In an online discussion, group four people together (two for each biography) and discuss what they learned from the exercise.
Comparison/Contrast	1. In a full class explanation (with video backup) explain what it means to compare and contrast two items. 3. Have the groups meet in-person in the classroom. Have them make two lists, one of the comparisons and one of the contrasts,	2. Divide the class into small groups (4-6 people) in an online discussion. Give each group two things to compare and contrast (two paragraphs about the same topic from two different writers, a scene from a book with a corresponding scene from a movie of

	In-person	Online
	adding evidence from the text (or movie) to support their claims.	the book, or two poems with the same author, time period, topic, or theme.) Set the discussion up so that students cannot see posts of those who have written before them until they have posted their own ideas.
Role Playing 1	1. Have students meet in small groups, assigning each group a character from a novel you are reading (or have them pick their own as a group). The students brainstorm character qualities of their person using evidence from the text. 3. Discuss in person new insights the students gained about the character and about characterization.	2. Divide the students into new groups with a representative from each character in the group. Give the students a scenario. Members of the group respond to the scenario in the discussion board as if they were the character they were assigned. (You may wish to follow up by having students create a video of the situation.)
Role Playing 2	1. Students read a non-fiction text. As a class brainstorm key ideas and takeaways from the text. 3. Regroup students according to the role they performed (putting all of one role—conformer, for example) into one group. Discuss insights they gained from acting in that role.	2. In the discussion board assign students one of the takeaways/ideas and give each person a role: defender, devil's advocate, peacemaker, summarizer, encourager, conformer, rebel, teacher, etc. The students react to the takeaway or idea, responding according to the roles they have been assigned.
Role Playing 3	2. Students who had the same literary elements gather to create a poster of their findings.	1. Students in a discussion group read the same text, each one looking for different literary elements: setting, symbol, alliteration, vocabulary, literary point of view, similes/metaphors, characterization, motifs, etc. They share what they found in the discussion.
Giving Peer Feedback	2. Students individually brainstorm and record the following in a Google doc: a topic/argument and explanations and evidences to support their views. They write an introductory paragraph, including a hook.	1. Students watch a video about how to write a persuasive paper. 3. Students share their documents with a small group, who comments on what they have written and asks questions.

	In-person	Online
Thoughts, Questions, and Epiphanies (The TQE Method)	2. To prepare for the in-person discussion, the students write thoughts, questions, and epiphanies they have had from the reading on different white boards. 3. Using the boards for ideas, the students discuss the work in-person.	1. During in class reading time, students read a text online (such as Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"). They respond to the text online in a "They Say, I Say" document. (See below for an example.) 4. Each person follows up in an online discussion, adding new or different insights, experiences, thoughts, questions, or ephiphanies.

In this "They Say, I Say" exercise, a student responds to a text (student-content interaction), pulling out content that interests them and responding to it.

Figure 1

They Say, I Say Example

Student Example: They Say, I Say

They Say, I Say
Willing to be Disturbed

Instructions:
Use the boxes below to annotate the text, "Willing to be Disturbed" by Margaret J. Wheatley. In the left column, you'll choose those quotes from the text that are interesting to you in some way. In the right column, you will respond to Wheatley's words with your thoughts, questions, and epiphanies. You should have no fewer than five quotes and responses before you submit.

The text says...	And that makes me think...
1) "Most of us were taught to sound certain and confident, to state our opinion as if it were true."	1) The first example i can think of when it comes to this concept is in writing. We are taught to not say "I think" because it does not use the confidence that needs to be used to convince someone or convert them to your opinion. We are taught to use words "…. Is the .." it is a lot more "Certain and confident". Coming back to the topic, we are taught this and it pops up in our conversations and arguments. This can be good and bad.
2) "We don't have time or interest to sit and listen to those who think differently than we do."	2) It's sad to think about it but this is the reality. Even if we are wrong we don't have the interest in learning that we have the incorrect opinion. We naturally don't want to hear about how we could be wrong or, sit through someone else's opinion that contradicts our own. I talked to my dad once about his political opinion and this same topic came up. He said, "I don't like to listen to their opinions about it because i am so invested in politics that it is inevitably going to end in me, 1: being pissed off 2: getting into a heated discussion that leaves us both of hating the other person a little more and 3: i don't like to sit through someone trying to change your mind". My dad also made a connection to how a solicitor comes to your door and continuously tries to sell you something no matter how many times you tell him your not interested, not just because your irritated and don't want what he's selling, but because he's trying to change your mind about the product. It's uncomfortable and no one wants to sit through a discussion contradicting your own opinion.

The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies, compiled by Jennifer Gonzalez, is a longer list of ideas that could be done online, including socratic seminars, gallery walk, affinity mapping, etc. Use your creativity to modify them for use in both the online and in-person space. Here are some ideas other teachers came up with.

Teachers Talk: Ideas

1. Practice literary elements by modeling them from a piece of writing your students are studying. For example, if you were reading *A Christmas Carol*, you could have students each create 10 "as dead as" similes (from the first paragraph of the book) and share them in online discussion groups. In person, have the students choose the top five or ten similes from their group. Post the similes on the wall or on an online bulletin board.

2. Randomly assign students one of seven or eight plot outlines of different short stories. Each student writes a story in a Google Doc based on the plot, creating their own characters, settings, themes, and style. They post a link (with editing permissions) to the discussion board. Each student in the group reads two other students' stories and comments on the differences and similarities in one of the elements of literature in the story they wrote and how the differences influence the final impact of the story. Each student creates a chart showing the theme, style, setting, and characters for his or her story. The groups meet together in person to create a similar chart for the original. They discuss the similarities and differences between the original story and their individual stories. Conduct a whole class discussion on how plot influences theme, character, style, and setting.

An online discussion is most effective when the instructions are clear. For a review of how to create an effective discussion board post, see 5.2.2 [Building Community and Setting Expectations](#) in *K–12 Blended Teaching (Volume 1)*.

✎ Blended Teaching Workbook

In your Blended Teaching Workbook create an online discussion for the lesson/content area that you are addressing with your problem of practice. How will you make it engaging for the students? How will you target your problem of practice?

If you haven't already opened and saved your workbook, you can access it [here](#).

Not all online interaction has to take place in a discussion. It can take place in a shared Google Doc, in a real-time Zoom meeting, through blogs or social media, through visits to each other's websites, etc.

- Students could share their favorite books on a class (or classes) web page, including a summary of the book and why they like it (something like Goodreads). It could include both current or past readings from any time of their life. You might have a day to share their favorite childhood picture book, first chapter book, favorite book of different genres, etc.
- Create a page for students to share their writing: poetry, essays, drama, stories, etc.
- Create an "I found" page for students to record examples of literary elements they find in their reading (or in commercials, movies, etc.): alliteration, similes, metaphors, irony, hyperbole, satire, etc. The Jamboard example below is from *The Tempest*.
- Have a contest to see who can find the most typos in texts they read (and maybe, if you're brave enough, even in your assignments and emails). Create an online bulletin board for students to share what they find.
- Have students make an online gallery of characters from a book you are studying with a brief character sketch, using evidence from the book. (Hide the gallery until all students have contributed.) In class, group students who depicted the same character and have them create a fuller character sketch together, making sure everything they present is supported by evidence from the book.

Figure 2

Example of Online "I Found" Board for Literary Elements in Shakespeare's The Tempest

Online interactions don't have to be formal. They can just be a quick sharing of ideas, as Trent Mikesell explains:

Teachers Talk: Article of the Week

Trent Mikesell

In our school we have an article of the week, the same article for the whole school. Anyone in the school can use the article, but often English classes use it the most. The articles are not just the traditional, written article. They may be a video, political cartoon, or some other kind of communication. So, I'll divide the students into groups, have them go to the article and answer some questions. They'll read the article silently and give their thoughts online. It's sort of a quick, online, silent discussion that gets them thinking.

Student to student or peer interactions can be powerful. Students can help each other, answer questions, give feedback, take feedback, explain concepts, and counsel with each other. In the next videos Dave Lee and Todd Jepperson share some of the experiences they have had with student to student interactions.

Teachers Talk: Power of Peer Interactions (2:03)

The Q&A Board

Dave Lee, Ph.D.

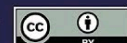ELA Teacher

Online Interaction

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Reflection Question: How can you use peers to help other peers in your classroom?

Teachers Talk: Authentic Conversations and Butterfly Feedback (5:42)

[Watch on YouTube](https://edtechbooks.org/k12blended2)

Reflection Questions: How can you facilitate conversations between students outside of classroom? How can you teach students to give helpful, kind feedback?

Todd Jepperson shows this "Austin's Butterfly" video to help his students learn about peer feedback. As you watch it, think how you could use this video or this method in your classroom.

Teachers Talk: Austin's Butterfly (6:32)

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Reflection Questions: What ideas do you have about how to encourage authentic, specific feedback in your classroom? How can you create a culture where feedback is valued?

🌱 7.3 Teacher to Student Interactions

Teachers Talk: Responsive Pedagogy and Quick Feedback (4:33)

[Watch on YouTube](https://edtechbooks.org/k12blended2)

Reflection Question: How can you use feedback to improve student learning and strengthen relationships with your students?

Interactions between students and the teacher are also important in an ELA course. Experienced blended teachers often report that their interactions with students online have strengthened relationships and contributed to student growth. Trent Mikesell has experienced this type of growth in his classroom.

Teachers Talk: Student Growth through Online Help

Trent Mikesell

The online space makes it possible for me to catch students who have missed the boat somehow. Because they are working online, I can see that they are getting off track and quickly give them feedback and instruction, so they can change before they get too far into the assignment. I can say, "Here's the problem right here. Here's how you can fix it and resubmit it." Or I can grab an example from a different student (with their permission) and share that example with the student who is struggling. That has been a great tool for helping students who get behind or discouraged.

What are some ways teachers can foster these interactions?

- Participate in online discussions. You don't have to chime in and respond to everyone's posts. Instead your role in a discussion board is to guide and facilitate the discussion. You can monitor what is said for civility as well as content. If a discussion is going in a nonproductive direction, you can gently guide it back. You can respond honestly to good ideas and interesting insights. You can suggest further resources.
- Provide feedback. Students appreciate and need feedback. Teachers find that giving some types of feedback online is much easier than feedback with traditional paper and pen.
  - Give feedback on assignments through the LMS you use. Check out the ways your LMS allows you to communicate with students about their assignments. If you are using rubrics for grading, you can give very specific feedback then allow your students to improve the assignment. Your LMS may have additional ways to contact students.
  - Use written, audio, or video feedback. Some students prefer written feedback because they can access it easily; others prefer audio or visual because it's easier for them to understand and feels more personable. There are also times when it's easier to provide audio or video feedback compared to typing out feedback comments. For instance, Mote is a Chrome extension that allows teachers to quickly add audio recordings to Google Document and Google Classroom gradebook. There are also several free screen-recording tools that allow you to create quick video recordings and then share them with students using an unlisted link. There are times when text, audio, and video feedback are the most effective and you can use all three during the year.
  - When students are online working during class, walk around the classroom, answering questions and giving verbal feedback as needed.
  - Schedule one-on-one meetings with students to discuss their progress and provide feedback.
  - Alternatively, if students are writing online on a Google Doc, for example, you can pull up as many documents as your computer will allow and give real-time feedback as they are writing. Students are more likely to rewrite when they receive feedback during the process of composing a piece of writing.
  - In your feedback, share personal anecdotes that their writing brings to your mind. Let them get to know you.
- Explain to students your process for receiving emails from class members. Encourage them to email you with questions, explain when you will be available to look at emails, and answer them as promptly as possible.
- Email students who are not in class, letting them know that they were missed.

Below are two teachers sharing their ideas and experiences of interacting with their students. As you read the quotes and watch the video, think of your own classroom. What do you already do that you could easily adapt to an online

space? What could you begin doing?

Teachers Talk: Journaling

Jenifer Pickens

In our class, we have daily journal prompts. Students have very few parameters: write four sentences and use best grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The topics are usually open ended, and if they don't like the prompt, they can respond to something that is on their mind. They write their journals online. The students have really opened up in this format. Before I had them write online, I collected their journals every other week or so and just glanced through it to make sure it was done. But now, I can look through them quickly every night and read them. It gives me a good read on what is happening in the lives of individual students. I know so much more of what they are thinking and what is going on in their lives—even of the quiet ones—and I can comment on things that are important to them. They seem to really appreciate it.

Teachers Talk: Feedback

Jenifer Pickens

Using a blended approach has allowed me to create a lot of assignments that grade themselves. It also makes it easier to give feedback, because I can do it from the gradebook and I can give audio or video feedback, which doesn't take me as long as writing it would. I am able to give better feedback. Interestingly, being able to grade more assignments has increased engagement in my classroom. More students participate and complete assignments than before I blended my classroom.

Teachers Talk: Relationships (5:44)

[Watch on YouTube](https://edtechbooks.org/k12blended2)

Reflection Question: Mr. Jepperson talks about three ways to build relationships. What are they, and how could you use them to benefit your classroom?

The online space significantly increases opportunities for interaction between students and content, students and other students, and students and teachers. Students who never or rarely speak in class may find themselves suddenly communicating on a regular basis. The results of learning through a combination of content, interactions, instruction, and feedback can improve student outcomes, investment, and engagement with the subject matter. You don't have to start all at once. Just choose one interaction that looks promising to you—and begin.

Previous Citation(s)

Arnesen, K. T. (in progress). ELA: Online Interaction. In C. R. Graham, J. Borup, M. A. Jensen, K. T. Arnesen, & C. R. Short (Eds.), *K-12 Blended Teaching (Vol 2): A Guide to Practice Within the Disciplines , 2*. EdTech Books. https://edtechbooks.org/-eYwb

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