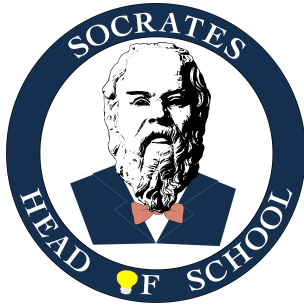


Distracted: Why Students Can't Focus and What You Can Do About it by James Lang



Think you might want to read this book?

In his book *Distracted*, James Lang explains that “the human brain is an eminently distractible organ. We thus are fighting a losing battle if we try to solve the problems of attention by eliminating distraction. Banning devices from the room still leaves pencils for doodling, windows to stare through, coughing and sniffing humans to irritate us, and the endless chaotic swirling of our thoughts. Instead, we need to think about how the learning environments that we build for students can be safe and supportive spaces in which they are inspired, encouraged, and rewarded for directing their attention toward the hard work of learning.” While technology has created a new dimension, distraction concerns are not a new concept, but one that has been a point of conversation for decades. If you are interested in reorienting your thinking away from distraction and toward attention, you should read this book.

What would Socrates ask?

- How do the brains of 21st century students fundamentally differ from students in the past?
- What education do our students need in both the present and the future?
- What would banning technology do to our classrooms?
- How can we create environments conducive to attention?
- What is the relationship between attention and achievement?
- What novelty exists in your current teaching? How do you currently vary your teaching? Delivery? Assessment?

Research

- Aristotle’s theory of distraction - distraction comes not only from the pleasant nature of the distraction but also from the boring nature of the current experience
- A 2015 study showed only 3.3% of students reported never succumbing to the temptations of digital distractions in the classroom. Distracted students were: Texting (86.6%) Email (76.2%) Checking the time (75%) Social networking (70.3%) Web surfing (42.5%)
- Students were 25% more likely to multitask in their online courses than in face-to-face ones

Concepts

- Crucial connection between attention and learning
- Processing and retrieval will not happen without attention (We learn what we pay attention to).
- We cannot pay attention to two things at once (e.g., trying to learn something while simultaneously answer emails will not work), especially when both tasks require your attention or operate in similar regions of the brain
- Banning digital devices is not the answer. Create a policy instead and communicate the policy to students.

- Change things up to increase attention: Rearrange the classroom, Vary delivery methods, Vary technology use, Vary your position in the room
- Situational Interest vs. Individual Interest - as educators, we have control over situational interest, not individual interest
 - Individual curiosity/interest - students want to know more about the subject
 - Situational curiosity/interest - students are unexpectedly intrigued by the subject
- Create modular approaches to teaching
 - Example:
 - Opening writing exercise (5 min)
 - Discussion of responses (10 min)
 - Lecture (15 min)
 - Class creation of character map (20 min)

Quotes from the author

- “That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t still try to cultivate and sustain their attention; it means that we should not jump so quickly to the assumption that a distracted student is a poor or inconsiderate one.”

Quotes from others

- “When you feel like you’re multitasking or paying attention to two things at once, you’re actually switching back and forth between the two things you’re trying to pay attention to, and...going back and forth between two different tasks involves switch costs that decrease efficiency and slow down reaction speeds in both tasks.” - Megan Sumeracki and Yana Weinstein
- “When I go outside at night and look up at the stars, the feeling that I get is not comfort. The feeling that I get is a kind of delicious discomfort at knowing that there is so much out there that I do not understand and the joy in recognizing that there is enormous mystery, which is not a comfortable thing. This, I think, is the principal gift of education.”
- Teller
- “Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things.” -Steve Jobs

Implement tomorrow?

- Create an opening-day activity that gets students engaged in thinking about or trying to solve the mystery/questions that you have identified in your course/lesson/topic.
- Present a topic and allow students to spend 5 or so minutes researching that topic to learn more. Share what they have found to start the conversation.
- Encourage students to create during class: Annotate pieces of writing, Concept maps, Short answer polls, Critique an example

Gateways to further learning

- [7 Ways to Increase a Student’s Attention Span](#)
- [Tips for Increasing a Student’s Attention Span](#)

Referenced books with the potential to impact leading and learning in education

Author(s) Last Name	Title
Gazzaley and Rosen	<i><u>The Distracted Mind</u></i>
McGilchrist	<i><u>The Master and the Emissary</u></i>
Eyal	<i><u>Hooked</u></i>
Standage	<i><u>Writing on the Wall</u></i>
Carr	<i><u>The Shallows</u></i>
Agarwal & Bain	<i><u>Powerful Teaching</u></i>
Weinstein and Sumeracki	<i><u>Understanding How We Learn</u></i>
Schwartz	<i><u>Connected Teaching</u></i>
Lemov	<i><u>Teach Like a Champion</u></i>
Eyler	<i><u>How Humans Learn</u></i>
Harrington and Zakrajsek	<i><u>Dynamic Lecturing</u></i>
Emdin	<i><u>For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Y'all Too</u></i>
Chabris and Simon	<i><u>The Invisible Gorilla</u></i>
Langer	<i><u>The Power of Mindful Learning</u></i>
McGuire	<i><u>Teach Students How to Learn</u></i>
Ambrose, et. al.	<i><u>How Learning Works</u></i>

The applicability of this book to education is



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