

# The Dumbest Generation

How the Digital Age Stupefies Young  
Americans and Jeopardizes Our  
Future



## **Knowledge Deficits**

History/Social studies. - 64% of teens could name American Idol winner, only 10% could name Speaker of the House.

Math/Science /Technology - only 6% of American HS students want to study engineering. 50% of all American engineering graduates are foreign. In a few years, 90% of all engineering graduates will reside in Asia.

Literature/Fine Arts - 22% of college seniors could not recognize a line from The Gettysburg Address, 99% could identify Beavis and Butthead, 98% could identify Snoop Dogg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYLFpajB7Mg>

## **Don't blame the school**

Failings don't originate in the classroom, as school represents only 1/11 of daily lives. Home, social and leisure activities have an anti-intellectual effect.

Paradox: If youth have acquired so much digital proficiency and if digital technology exercises the intellectual faculties so well, why haven't knowledge and skill levels increased?

“The ignorance is hard to believe...It isn't enough to say that these young people are uninterested in world realities. They are actively cut off from them...They are encased in more immediate realities that shut out conditions beyond - friends, work, clothes, pop music, sitcoms, Facebook.”

## **Bibliophobia**

Teens don't read books - and don't want to. They have a brazen disregard of books and reading. "No generation has trumpeted illiteracy...as a valid behavior of their peers."

Teens regard school and reading/writing as old fashioned and unnecessary. Using proper grammar, original thought, rich vocabulary or correct spelling get ridiculed on social media.

Reading time takes time away from keeping up with youth vogue, i.e. Film, fads, gadget, clothes

"Harry Potter" popularity was more about fandom, gadgets and bonding with peers than love of reading.

## Screen Time

8-18 year olds spend average of 6 hrs 21 min with media and because some of that is spent multi-tasking, i.e. playing video games while listening to music, they actually take in 8 ½ hours of media content a day.

Youth have vast amounts of information at their fingertips, they don't have the skills to access or process that information. Young people have remarkable visual acuity: they're ready for rushing images and updated information, BUT these skills don't transfer well to - they don't have much to do with - the non-screen portions of their life.

Changes in technologies have led to a new pattern of thinking....reflection and thinking are too slow for young people. Frequent TV watching is associated with rise in attention deficit and learning difficulty.

## **Loss of Mental Discipline**

People who read text studded with links comprehend less than those who read traditional linear text.

People who watch busy multimedia presentations - with multiple colors, animations, etc. remember less than those who take in information in a more focused and sedate manner.

People who juggle many tasks are less creative and productive than those who do one thing at a time. Heavy multi-taskers perform poorly on tasks, are more easily distracted, had less control over their attention and were much less able to distinguish important information from trivia.

What is sacrificed in surfing and searching is the capacity to engage in quieter, attentive modes of thought that underpin contemplation, reflection and introspection. Youth hate quiet and being alone. Because they are constantly restless or stimulated they don't know what it is to enjoy civilized leisure



## Online learning and non-learning

Argument - Teens are reading MORE due to webpages, blogs, ebooks. Media invite collaboration and community via blogs, YouTube, Facebook. The vast amount of information should improve knowledge.

BUT the OPPOSITE has occurred.

They may be reading more, but not deeply. The collaboration is mostly superficial - trends, pop culture. Teens are not accessing valuable information - games, fan sites, social media.

Teens are drowning in teen stuff delivered 24/7 by tools that adult realities can't penetrate.

So....

What do we do about  
all of this?????

## **One school of thought**

(“Return with us now to the thrilling days of yesteryear”)

Limit teens’ “tech time”

Increase rigor, eliminate “trophies for everyone” mentality

Teach perseverance, reflection, introspection

Require sustained reading

Align against youth ignorance and apathy

“If you ignore the traditions that ground and ennoble our society, you are an incomplete person and a negligent citizen”

## **Another school of thought**

(“It is easier to ride a horse in the direction it is going”)

Actually TEACH students how to effectively use the technology:  
ie credibility of sources

In lessons, weave together multiple threads of analysis using  
images, video, audio, artifacts

Create hybrid courses live and online which create the habit of  
thinking and making connections all of the time

Teach students to work in other genres, such as writing blogs or  
wikis, creating podcasts, participating in educational  
social-networking sites that require in-depth analysis