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*In an age of distraction, how does technology help or hinder student engagement?*

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Three thousand years ago, Hesiod complained of the “frivolous youth of today,” in which he found no hope for the future. Hesiod would see nothing has changed. Today we have internet, cell phones, video games, all enticing us to instant engagement and equally rapid disengagement. Through them, we flit through the distractions of the day, just as our parents did and generations before them.

Nothing has changed. Technology doesn't make us *less* engaged. Technology reflects the way we were *already* thinking. It has evolved to match us. This is exactly why we latch on to it. In so doing, it opens the world to us. What took our parents days in the library to research, we can now discover during commercial breaks, clicking through our cell phone browsers. The world is at our fingertips, drawing us in as never before.

Does this mean we cannot pay attention for longer than two hundred characters on a screen? I think a plethora of Honour Roll students and their essays for competitions like these say otherwise. Nothing has changed. The one billion websites, billions of Facebook posts and millions of Tweets attest to our interest in each other, in sharing and learning about the world as it is happening. Technology is giving us fresh sources of information. It allows knowledge to come to us virtually unfiltered, when we need it, in the way we need it. It puts publication into the hands of the common person. There are no more middle people deciding what is worthy of our attention. As we, as a group, decide what we, as a planet, want to notice, we reshape the world. That does have our full attention.

Does it mean that traditional ways of learning are dead? That in-depth knowledge is fading like the print from a week old newspaper? Not entirely. Four hundred million Kindle books say otherwise. As the internet teases our intellect, books and lectures feed us wherever we become thirsty for more. And with so much enticing our minds, our appetites do not diminish, they grow. Now we know what is out there. Now we understand what we are missing.

The old approaches may change, however. Lectures are now delivered on YouTube. The book is already becoming more electronic and less paper based. This is a good thing. When the technology becomes more and more ergonomic, tailored to the way we truly think, learning will become more compelling, not less – and we will learn faster. The more you learn, the more you want to learn.

As Tom Kite, the American professional golfer, said, “You can always find a distraction if you're looking for one.” This is human nature. It's the way it's always been. So my bet is on the future. The speed and depth of our learning may well yet amaze the generations that have preceded us. The depth of our commitment will surprise you. I encourage you to join us in our banquet.

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