Distraction and digital media

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# Abstract

Research shows that multitasking implies that we use more time, remember less, learn less and perform worse than if we single-task.The article: ”Mobile Phones in the Classroom” (Kuznekoff et al. 2015) is worth highlighting as it is one of the most cited articles on multitasking. It shows how damaging written interaction is for learning in teaching situations. But does this mean that social media and written interaction should not be used in teaching? And that social media and written interaction only can harm learning? In this paper we provide a critical review of Kuznekoff et al. (2015). We argue that their laboratory experiment is taken out of real educational context and that this distorts the results they achieve. With a background in medium theory and media didactics we analyze the laboratory experiment and point out its shortcomings. Based on a qualitative real-life action research project we demonstrate that it is possible to set up conditions that make written interaction (through social media like Twitter) beneficial to education. Furthermore, we clear up the issue theoretically by distinguish between and discuss teaching situations in the new medium environment in relation to different kinds of concentration: diffused concentration (multitasking), non diffused concentration (singletasking) on one axis and the use of only one medium (singleplexing) and the use of several media (multiplexing) on another ortigonal axis.

# Outcome

"In this article we have rendered it probable that the view taken by researchers like Kuznekoff et al. (2015) is both reductionistic and damaging for the debate about digital media in relation to education. What is properly
justified in their article is that they, like others before them, show that we do learn less if we are
distracted by digital media providing us with content which has nothing to do with what we are trying
to learn. In this article we define this as a multitasking situation in which we try to follow other
intentional objects than the one we are trying to learn about, a situation which does not have a
constructive influence on our understanding and learning. Moreover, in the article we have defined
singletasking as something that includes the constructive situation in which the student, for instance,
discusses the intentional object with the teacher and other students. This is where the concept of
multiplexing becomes relevant, defined as the situation in which we have our attention on the same
intentional object using more than one medium. What we have rendered probable using the theory of
the three waves and the examples from the SME experiment is that the use of social media for written
interaction makes it possible to multiplex in a wide range of different educational situations in
educationally beneficially ways." (p. 12)