

Recommended Readings for the Teaching Institute, September 25, 2025 from Joanna T. Jen

The following three articles point to the interlocking issues of screentime/ literacy/ brain development/ social media/ misinformation/ AI/ democracy/ inequality we are trying to discuss at this Teaching Institute. The most important points will be incorporated into my presentation.

[Thinking Is Becoming a Luxury Good](#)

New York Times, July 28, 2025, By Mary Harrington

[Excerpt] Since so-called intelligence tests were invented around a century ago, until recently, international I.Q. scores climbed steadily in a phenomenon known as the Flynn effect. But there is evidence that our ability to apply that brain power is decreasing. According to a recent report, adult literacy scores leveled off and began to decline across a majority of O.E.C.D. countries in the past decade, with some of the sharpest declines visible among the poorest. Kids also show declining literacy.

Writing in The Financial Times, John Burn-Murdoch links this to the rise of a post-literate culture in which we consume most of our media through smartphones, eschewing dense text in favor of images and short-form video. Other research has associated smartphone use with A.D.H.D. symptoms in adolescents, and a quarter of surveyed American adults now suspect they may have the condition. School and college teachers assign fewer full books to their students, in part because they are unable to complete them. Nearly half of Americans read zero books in 2023....

[Producing Something This Stupid Is the Achievement of a Lifetime](#)

New York Times, April 10, 2025, By David Brooks

[Excerpt] Andreas Schleicher, the head of education and skills at the O.E.C.D., told The Financial Times, “Thirty percent of Americans read at a level that you would expect from a 10-year-old child.” He continued, “It is actually hard to imagine — that every third person you meet on the street has difficulties reading even simple things.”

This kind of literacy is the backbone of reasoning ability, the source of the background knowledge you need to make good decisions in a complicated world. As the retired general Jim Mattis and Bing West once wrote, “If you haven’t read hundreds of books, you are functionally illiterate, and you will be incompetent, because your personal experiences alone aren’t broad enough to sustain you.”...

[Laptops Are Great. But Not During a Lecture or a Meeting](#)

New York Times, Nov. 22, 2017, By Susan Dynarski

[Excerpt] But a growing body of evidence shows that over all, college students learn less when they use computers or tablets during lectures. They also tend to earn worse grades. The research is unequivocal: Laptops distract from learning, both for users and for those around them. It’s not much of a leap to expect that electronics also undermine learning in high school classrooms or that they hurt productivity in meetings in all kinds of workplaces....