**Cathy Davidson, *Now You See It***

**Study Questions**

**Introduction**

1. The gorilla video that Davidson talks about introduces the idea of “attention blindness,” which she says is “the fundamental structuring principle of the brain” and, so, sets the stage for the book by introducing it not as a “shortcoming of the individual” but rather as an “opportunity for collaboration” (11). Can you recall an event in which you were so focused on one aspect of the event that you missed important information about another? Were you able to reconstruct the missed part with the help of others who also witnessed and experienced the event?

2. How is a culture of collaboration different from the rugged individualism that has been promoted as the key to individual success in our culture?

3. “Learning is the constant disruption of an old pattern, a breakthrough that substitutes something new for something old. And then the process starts again” (15). Have you been forced to learn something new that replaced old knowledge? Describe your reaction to this experience.

4. What is the main point of Davidson’s book? In other words, what does she say is the reason she has written it? Why is this new way of thinking—this new knowledge she offers—needed in the 21st century? (Hint: See page 15, 20)

5. What does she mean by “multitasking our attention?” (15-17).

6. How are young people today “doing a better job preparing themselves for their futures than we have done providing them with the institutions to help them” (19), according to Davidson?

7. What are the four times in human history when “human interaction and communication have been switched so fundamentally that there was no going back?” (21) What were those four times? Why is she advocating for educational change at this moment of our history? (Hint: See page 23)

8. The comment about our “changed” brain (24) refers back to Hayles’ *How We Think*. Explain.

9. “Learn, unlearn, learn,” a key literacy skill of the twenty-first century,” is a theme introduced in this section of the book (29-31). Can you remember a habit that you had learned but had to break so that you learned another, more effective behavior? What was it?

10. What is the ultimate purpose of this book? In other words, what action is Davidson trying to get us to undertake for the sake of our future? (Hint: See page 31)

**Chapter 1: Learning from the Distraction Experts**

1. The Cymbalta ad, that Davidson recounts, provides an example of the way we tune out information and how this phenomenon is used for the purpose of influencing our behaviors and viewpoints by advertisers. Have you been influenced by an ad to purchase a product only to discover to that it was not what you expected? Describe this experience.

2. Davidson argues that “attention learned behavior” is “shaped by what we value” and is transmitted “one generation to another . . . . In the nursery we [begin] to learn what is important to pay attention to––and what isn’t,” and how to “prioriz[e]” and “organiz[e]” this information (41). What example does she provide us to highlight this phenomenon?

3. Why is early childhood education important to adult learning, according to Davidson? (Hint: See page 44). Why is it important to be mindful of how we interact with babies? (Hint: See page 49-50) How is the perception of kinship, gender, race and ethnicity learned at this stage of development? (Hint: See page 51-53).

4. Davidson equates the “capacity to learn” with the “capacity to change” (54). Explain this statement in light of baby Andy’s story. Imagine that he as a young man is required to work in a store as a salesperson. What value that he learned as a baby will need to be unlearned as an adult in order for him to be successful?

**Chapter 2 Learning Ourselves**

1. What is the connection between changing our patterns and changing our brain? Between focusing our attention and the amount of neurons we possess? Between repeating actions and developing the ability to multitask? (Hint: See page 56-7)

2. Why is repeating an action important to our intellectual development? (Hint: See page 58)

3. Davidson discusses language acquisition in context to “learn[ing]” and “unlearn[ing]” (60). Give an example of what she means.

4. “Attention is about difference. We pay attention to things that are not part of our automatic repertoire of responses, reflexes, concepts, preconceptions, behaviors, knowledge, and categories and other patterns both mental and physical” (61). What does this statement mean in light of our view of violent behavior as we are subjected to constant scenes of violence in the media?

5. Ancient Greek philosophy discusses the notions of *nomos* and *physis*. *Nomos* refers to “human created custom,” while *physis* refers to “natural law.” Later Christian theologists interpreted *nomos* and *physis* as “man-made” and “divine laws,” respectively. Difficulty arises when we realize something we always thought as natural may have originated as part of a custom unique to a particular cultural experience. The Women’s Movement upended the belief that women did not have the capacity to learn (as argued by Plato and Aristotle) and excel in higher education, for example. Davidson alludes *nomos* and *physis* when she talks about learned behavior feeling natural and our “need to unlearn the previous patterns because they are not serving us” (63). Can you think of any patterns you had learned that you have had to change because they did not serve you effectively anymore?

6. Davidson introduces the concept of “mirror neurons” and their impact upon teaching and learning. She tells us that “human are among the only animals that actually teach not just by modeling behavior, but by *watching and correcting* in a complex, interactive, and empathetic way” (My emphasis, 67). Based on your experience as students, what aspects of contemporary classroom instruction emphasize “watching and correcting” with “empathy?” Which ones do not?

7. Why is distraction “one of the best tools for innovation we have at our disposal–for changing out of one pattern and beginning the process of learning new patterns,” according to Davidson (69)?

8. What argument does Davidson offer in support of shifting modes of education to encompass “multitasking” and “media stacking” (69-70) rather than trying to eradicate these behaviors?

**Chapter 3: Project Classroom Makeover**

1. Describe the experiment Davidson introduces that she refers to as Project Classroom Makeover. What did it entail, and what made it so controversial? (Hint: See page 77-78).

2. What is “crowdsourcing” (78) and “collective learning” (80), and what role can they play in education, according to Davidson? What was the outcome of employing these new teaching methods?

3. What principles is traditional, “formal education” built upon (84). What reasons do Davidson give for this approach to education being ineffective today? (Hint: See pages 85-89).

4. What are the “three Rs” and what are they purported to be able to achieve educationally (90)?

5. What does Davidson say is the “biggest problem we face . . . between traditional curricular standards of content-based instruction and the new forms of thinking required by our digital, distributed workplace”? What is the best way to prepare students for a “real future in the digital economy” (91)?

6. Davidson suggests “inquiry-based opportunities” (92). Give an example of this approach to education from the chapter.

7. Knowing how to learn and having faith that you can learn emerges as a central concept of a “great education” (101). What is your best way of learning? When did you realize that this was your personal method?

8. Are “games and gaming” making in-roads in education? What do they offer? Teach? (Hint: See pages102-106)

9. What is “participatory learning,” “cognitive surplus,” and “collaboration by difference” (116) discussed in this chapter?

10. If students write better if they write for their peers instead of just for the teacher (118), then what is driving the impetus to retain the traditional essay or research paper? What can be done to change this paradigm?

**Chapter 4 How We Measure**

1. When teaching methods are introduced, why must innovative ways to assess student work follow, according to Davidson? (Hint: See page 122-123)

2. Where did grading potentially come from and what were the activities worthy to assess? What American school used letter grades? What kind of assessment method became known as “the symbol of American education” and when was it introduced? (Hint: See pages 129-130)

3. If current modes of assessment generated from the 20th century “assembly-line model,” then what model should a 21st century modes of assessment be derived from? (Hint: See page 131)

4. “College is a place to learn how to educate oneself rather than a place in which to be educated” (134). Do you agree or disagree with Kelly’s statement? Why?

5. What is ultimately the problem with standardized testing, according to Davidson? (Hint: see page 141). How does Cohen and Rosenweig’s H-Bot show that “search functions on Google have rendered the multiple-choice form of testing obsolete” (143)? What do these findings lead Davidson to suggest for changes to assessment practices? (Hint: see page 144-148)

**Chapter 5 The Epic Win**

1. In this chapter Davidson returns to the idea of incorporating game and gaming methods introduced earlier in the book, introducing the notion of the “epic win” and the idea that “we should try harder to organize complex, diverse, and unknown groups of people to come together for specific, challenging purposes defined by common interests and goals” (161-162). What does she suggest will be accomplished if we approach education in these ways?

2. Why are “[g]ames . . . the most elevated form of investigation” (163), according to Davidson (163)? What do they potentially offer education? (Hint: See pages 166-169) What has contributed to the perception that games are dangerous to young people rather than a positive influence? (Hint: See pages171-173) What is the truth behind the claims that young people are deficient from those from previous generations? (Hint: See pages 173-174)

3. Davidson states: “If kids cannot pay attention in school, it may be less because they have ADHD and more because we have a mismatch between the needs and desires of students today and the national standards-based education based o the efficiencies of a classroom created before World War I” (174). What is your experience with the contemporary educational system? Do you agree or disagree with Davidson. Why?

4. What is “flow,” and how does it contribute to a good education (178-179)? What is the “gamer disposition” and what qualities does this entail (179-180)? What is “game play” and why is it important (182).

**Chapter 6 The Changing Workplace**

1. Davidson asks the question, “Why are we still hanging on to institutions to support a workplace that no longer exists the way it did a hundred years ago” (186)? What do you think is the answer to this question?

2. In what way would you “makeover” your workplace? Think in terms of some of the issues Davidson raises (e.g. “basic architecture,” “organizational structure,” “personnel rules,” “management chart,” “conventional work hours”) (187).

3. What makes the computer different than “any other piece of office equipment” (188) and why is it important to understand this difference? (Hint: See page 188-189)

4. The blurring of work and leisure is addressed in this chapter (190). What is your experience with this phenomenon? Provide an example when you have found yourself doing personal chores at work and work chores at home.

5. Our brain is also on, always paying attention to something, according to Davidson. So, what does this mean for designing a workplace “to help us focus in a away that facilitates the kind of productivity the workplace values” (192)? What does she recommend? (Hint: See pages 192-195)

6. Why is multitasking a myth? Is it possible to “monotask,” according to Davidson? (Hint: See page 196-197)

7. “We are inheritors of a workplace carefully designed to make us efficient for a world that no longer exists” (202). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Point to examples from your own worklife to support your answer.

8. The “Taylorist workplace” described in this chapter, strove to “make labor as machinelike as possible” (203). What are the qualities of this approach to labor? (Hint: See page 204). What was “increasingly” the “problem” with this approach (206)?

9. What is the myth of “workplace disruptions” (207)?

10. Davidson cites IBM as a pioneer for the 21st century labor practices (210). What is IBM’s approach?

11. What does Davidson mean when she says that the “lack of preparation is at the heart of many of our difficulties in adjusting to the new workflow” (214)?

12. She provides an in-depth definition of “collaboration by difference” (214). What is it and what does it offer the workplace? Have you experienced this type of practice before? What were the results?

13. The idea of work being “playful” and “hard work” not being “the opposite of play” (218) are introduced in this chapter. What does she mean by this idea?

14. How is “endeavor-based work” (218-220) different than the assembly line approach to labor? What does it entail?

15. “If the world is no longer uniform, is it really effective anymore for the workplace to be” (228)? What do you think is the answer to this question? What may be the drawbacks to moving away from the industrial workplace?

**Chapter 7 The Changing Worker**

1. What two things does Davidson say we need in order to “succeed at work in the future” (236)?

2. The discussion about Specialisterne workers suggest a different approach to labor and views toward disability (238- 239). What is it that this company is doing that is drawing attention? Why does Davidson suggest that it serves as “a metaphor for work in the future” (240)?

3. “What is relevant in a new, decentralized world of work may not even be a skill for which we know how to measure or test” (242). What are the parallels between work and education, based on what you learned about changes needed for education and assessment?

4. What makes FutureWork’s approach to work unique (244)?

5. Do you agree that “[w]orkers have changed more than workplaces” (247). Why or why not?

6. DIY and Do It Together drives the work structure so unique for Wikipedia (252-253). What are these two concepts and what does it mean for the Wikipedia workplace? (Hint: See pages 252-255)

7. Davidson cites three principles that make for a successful workplace (258-259). What are they? Have you worked in a job that embraced one or all of these? What were the results? What example does Davidson provide to illustrate them? (Hint: See pages 262-267)

**Chapter 8 You, Too, Can program Your VCR**

1. Davidson provides an example from her personal life to highlight the effect that “a negative rhetoric and mind-set” have upon achievement (280) and to argue that “attitude plays a tremendous role, at any age, in one’s cognitive and physical health . . . and in one’s ability to make a change” (281). Can you think of an example from your own life in which you were able to surmount some challenge through a positive and confident outlook?

2. “Feeling confident and in control helps your memory; having a sense that your memory is good helps you have a good memory.” Explain this statement. (Hint: See page 285-287)

3. What is “cross-functional complementarity” (292) and what does it offer education and the workplace?

4. What are the implications of “cognitive reserves” (295) for aging? How does one “pump up” our cognitive reserves for future needs? (Hint: See page 296)

5. What is programming the VCR (297) a metaphor for in this chapter?

6. “We need to apply the lesson of attention blindness to our midlife anxieties about the Internet and rethink where those anxieties come from” (303). Who does Davidson use to exemplify this viewpoint?

**Conclusion Now You See It**

1. Davidson ends her book reminding us about the “narrative” of “focused, measurable productivity” (307). How does she define productivity?

2. What does Howard Rheingold’s experiment, cited at the beginning of this chapter, show us? (Hint: See page 308)

3. How is the brain really built to handle tasks? (Hint: See page 309)

4. What is answer to her question––“[w]as there ever such a thing as monotasking” (310)? Later, she cites scientific data that shows that monotasking does not exist. Why is this finding controversial in light of the current debate over multitasking? What is the myth of multitasking? (Hint: See page 310-313)

5. She asks a poignant question: “What are we learning by being open to multitasking” (313)? What do you think an answer to this question may be?

6. “Surprise” is good for our brain (315). How does this information challenge the current way education and the workplace are structured?

7. The last line of the book is “now you see it” (321). What do these words mean in context to the book’s message?