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TEACHING OUTSIDE ONE'S COMFORT ZONE: HELPING DIVERSE MILLENNIALS SUCCEED

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Abstract: This paper discusses some ways educators may utilize their knowledge of generational characteristics and differences to enhance their teaching and inter-generational relationships with Millennials. It cautions against over-generalizing the popularly accepted generational characteristics to diverse students; it suggests that, like any other category of social classification, generational difference should be considered within the larger context of social diversity, including race, class, and gender, and geographical region. This paper critically discusses specific strategies that educators, who are working outside their comfort zones, can employ to increase the effectiveness of the educational experiences they facilitate for diverse millennial students.

INTRODUCTION

College campuses, like the pre-Kindergarten through Grade Twelve (pre-K-12) arenas, are rapidly becoming more diverse, especially in terms of students, who represent “nearly every ethnic background and ethnic background in the world”; students of color constituting approximately 40 percent of public K-12 school students, (U.S. Department of Education, 2005: p.16). Many educators, community members, mass media pundits, and politicians are discussing, researching, and even bemoaning the multicultural states of the education system. A growing number of educators have discussed the need for educating teachers to develop the cultural awareness that is needed to success

fully teach diverse students to achieve their academic goals. (Kunjufu, (2002), Sleeter and Grant (2009), Pitre (2011), Banks, (2008) Mlaren (2007), Freire (2010)). Because of the pivotal role teachers play in student success, proponents of multicultural education focus mostly on key systems of social stratification, especially race, class, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, linguistic difference, and geographical location, with more scholars now recognizing the impact of the intersecting diversity categories on education, (See for example: Anderson (1995), Hill Collins (2000) hooks (1984) Weber (2010), Sleeter and Grant (1999), Ornstein and Levine (2008)).

Another important dimension of diversity, generational difference, which encompasses both age and cultural dimensions, has received sporadic attention, depending on the perceived differences between the generations. College campuses are home to at least four generations, with the majority of students belonging to Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, and faculty, staff and administrators largely belonging to the older Generations, namely, X, Baby Boomers, and GIs or Traditionalists, (Oblinger, 2003). Members of one generation are born within roughly the same twenty or so year period; they have common and distinct characteristics and world view, which can be attributed to the social, cultural, financial, technological, and political environments at play during those formative years as young

people develop core personalities, (Howe and Strauss, 2000.) Inter-generational differences have been observed as an essential diversity area for higher education practitioners to pay attention to. (Borges, Manuel, Elam, and Jones, 2010; Srauss and Howe, 2000).

PURPOSE

This paper discusses some ways educators may utilize their knowledge of generational characteristics and differences to enhance their teaching and intergenerational relationships with Millennials. It cautions against over-generalizing the popularly accepted generational characteristics to diverse students; it suggests that, like any other category of social classification, generational difference should be considered within the larger context of social diversity, including race, class, and gender, and geographical region. This paper critically discusses specific strategies that educators, who are working outside their comfort zones, can employ to increase the effectiveness of the educational experiences they facilitate for diverse Millennial students.

GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

Generational diversity cannot be treated as an exclusive dimension; it should be examined in close connection with and within the context of the other systems of social stratification, including, but not limited to the ones mentioned above. Additionally, because people are constantly evolving, generational age categories are not absolute. As Neil Howe's organization, Life Course Associates writes: "People never "belong" to an age bracket. Rather, they belong to a generation that happens to be passing through an age bracket—a generation with its own memories, language, habits, beliefs, and life lessons," (<http://www.lifecourse.com/mi/insight/phases.html>). Therefore, in using "generation" as a category of difference, educators should be cautious not to over-generalize or use the

"mainstream" conceptions of generational characteristics to determine their interactions with all students.

Generational diversity has to be considered within the context of the other major social stratification systems prevalent in society. For example, given the effects of segregation and other separatist policies such as Apartheid in pre-independent South Africa, the experiences and worldviews of age-mates of different races living within the same country can be quite different. Even though they might share memories of certain nationally significant events in common, their perceptions of those events may lead to different worldviews altogether. In countries where income and digital divides are wider, discrepancies to access to timely and accurate news may cause different groups to view the same event quite differently. For instance, although the current Millennials in South Africa 'witnessed' the 1994 Independence from the Apartheid regime, the feelings and attitudes of most white Afrikaner Millennials may be different from those of their black counterparts; the former might have viewed independence as the defeat of their racial superiority, while the later are likely to have viewed the same event as either victory for all or as ushering liberation and equality for the previously oppressed majority. Similarly, the civil rights victories in the United States, including the 1954 *Brown v Board* victory for equal educational access, might be viewed differently by same-age people of different races and political persuasions. Such differing perceptions can bring about different outlooks among people of the same age "generation."

As educators use generational differences to inform their pedagogy, they need to keep in mind both the intergenerational and intra-generational diversity. Blanketed categorizations of all students as the same technologically savvy Millennials may lead to the maintenance of the status quo, where the norm is based on white, middle class, Euro-centric

views, which leaves many minority groups, including females, working class Caucasian, African American, Latino, Asian, Native American, and international students behind. It is essential to keep in mind that Millennials who come from African American, southern, working class backgrounds are likely to have significant different experiences from their white, northern, middle class college mates, regardless of whether they all like rap or loud music, for instance. Similarly, female Millennials in urban schools are likely to have different experiences from their counterparts in rural schools. Moreover, students' experiences are also affected by the affluence, histories, and cultures of their institutions; therefore, students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), majority public institutions, elite, private colleges or Ivy League and top twenty institutions, for instance, may have different college experiences that would warrant faculty to take into consideration in their efforts to provide their specific students with the most beneficial educational experiences. Consequently, when discussing the widely accepted generational categorizations, educators ought to keep other social factors of differentiation in mind.

COLLEGE GENERATIONAL PROFILE

Today's schools and college campuses are largely populated by members of at least three generations, with the majority of faculty being members, staff, and administrators belonging to what are commonly known as the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation X, while most students belong to Generation Y, also known as the Millennial generation. The median age of public school teachers is 44 years (US Department of Education 2005 p 18). Their students' ages are typically between six and seventeen. In the postsecondary sector, the average age instructor is 48 years, (<http://chronicle.com/article/Economy-Slows-Colleges/123636/>). While the number of adult and continuing education students is increasing, almost 60 percent of college students

are below the age of 23 and 17.3% are between ages 24 and 29. Therefore, about 77% of college students can be categorized as Millennials (<http://chronicle.com/article/Who-Are-the-Undergraduates-/123916/> 12/12/2010). The multigenerational nature of colleges poses both challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning, (Baily, 2007). It should be noted that these descriptions are not exclusive or absolute; students, faculty, administrators, and staff are found across all generations. With all these generations interacting in the educational arena, it is important to continually examine ways of helping educators enhance the development and maintenance of mutually respectful and appreciative relationships with each other..

OVERVIEW OF GENERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Members of one generation typically share some major characteristics, especially in the areas of work ethic, motives, cognitive styles, and personality. Their experiences are shaped—albeit to varying degrees—by the shared, influential, historical, social, economic, and technological developments, prevalent during their early years. In an effort to help educators more fully appreciate the four generations, general characteristics of the four generations are summarized below.

THE SILENT GENERATION

Colleges host quite a diminishing, but, significant number of members of the Silent Generation, also known as Traditionalists; most of them are professors emeritus, staff, or administrators. However, because of the national retirement age ranges, this generation is the least represented in on both K-12 and college and campuses. According to Life-Course Associates, between 1925 and 1942, and during the Great Depression, the Silent Generation was born. They “grew up as the seen-but-not-heard” children, when risk aver-

sion and “conformity seemed a sure ticket to success,” (<http://www.lifecourse.com/mi/insight/the-generational-constellation.html>). Gender and racial inequalities were prevalent. Perhaps the later led to the evolution of the sixties, when this generation, also known as Traditionalists, “became America’s leading civil rights activists, rock n’ rollers, antiwar leaders, feminists, public interests lawyers and mentors for [Boomer Generation] firebrands,” <http://www.lifecourse.com/mi/insight/the-generational-constellation.html>. As politicians, they called for inclusion and fairness. Martin Luther King, Collin Powell, Maya Angelou, Elvis Pressley, Ted Kennedy are examples of popular American Traditionalists. Their conventionalism and civic engagement, and love for social justice are characteristics that may be useful in mentoring the Millennials. Due to the scarcity of technological development during most of their early years, Traditionalists are the least technologically savvy of the four generations found in colleges. Being mostly on their way out, many may not be motivated to learn new educational technologies; thus they may find the technology—related demands of the academy rather frustrating.

THE BABY BOOMER GENERATION

Roughly between 1943 and 1960 came the generation commonly known as the Baby Boomers, who “grew up as indulged youth during the post World War II era of community-spirited progress,” (LifeCourse Associates <http://www.lifecourse.com/mi/insight/the-generational-constellation.html>.) Unlike their institutionally and civically focused parents, Baby Boomers were individualistic, perfectionists, who were rebellious, risk-taking, and not very academically focused, as it was during their times when SAT scores began to decline. Their politics were rather divisive; George Bush, Bill and Hillary Clinton, bell hooks, Cornel West, Patricia Hill Collins, Michael Eric Dyson, Michael Jackson, Bill Gates, and Alice Walker. Women fought for equality in the workplace as they strove to

crash the “glass ceiling.” Boomers “developed very close individual relationships with their children, to the point of hovering,” (LifeCourse Associates, <http://www.lifecourse.com/mi/insight/the-generational-constellation.html>. Due to the unfavorable economic climate prevailing during a significant period of their lives, most Boomers are staying longer in the workplace than they had anticipated; therefore, they are inclined to be more open to learning new skills, including technology, than the Traditionalists.

However, staying comfortable and within their comfort zones, both Boomers and their Traditionalist colleagues have a strong preference for traditional lecture formats and tend to be skeptical of the rigor and worth of technologically enhanced education. Some of them, also mostly tenured, full or associate professors, or top administrators, can hardly navigate the Internet, are uncomfortable using E-mail, and do not even attempt utilizing course management systems such as Blackboard, WebCT, D2L, MOODLE or Sakai, for their classes (<http://chronicle.com/article/Professors-Use-of/123682/>; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Given the number of working years left for a significant number of them, it is advisable that they get some basic training in using course management systems in order for them to stay current with the Millennials who will continue to fill their classrooms till most retire. Further, because together with Generation X, they form the largest contingent of college faculty, staff, and administrators, it is only fair to the students for this group to learn more about the generation of students they have to educate.

GENERATION X

The second largest group of college faculty members belongs to Generation X, those born roughly between 1961 and 1981. Members of Generation X are generally perceived as self-centered, self-driven, independent, entrepreneurial, multicultural, and pragmatic. Being largely skeptical, Gen Xers neither trust nor like authority and rigid rules, (Lancaster and

Stillman, 2003). They are quite different from the Millennials, who value rules and structure, as well as respect authority. Members of this generation include, Stephen Colbert, Michelle Obama, Jay Z, and Michelle Rhee. This generation is the more technologically adept than the other two generations of faculty, staff and administrators; because of the relatively long years they still face in the workplace, the majority of them are open to learning more ways of enhancing their technological skills. However, as highly independent individuals, they might face challenges as they attempt to accommodate the Millennials' parental dependency and high needs for peer connectedness and nurturing, for example.

These three older generations of educators have one major goal in common; they have to effectively interact with the Millennials they are employed to teach. Therefore, even if they are quite different in some regards, they need to sharpen their intergenerational communication skills, given the pivotal role of effective interpersonal communication in teaching. In order for Baby Boomers and Generations X educators to improve their success as they work outside their comfort zones, they need to pay attention to the general characteristics of millennial students.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS (GENERATION Y/MILLENNIALS)

Most traditional college students belong to the generation commonly known as the Millennial Generation or Generation Y, those born between roughly between 1981 and 1999. The exactness of the years they were born is not as important as the fact that they were born in the same general historical epoch, and generally share many historical, technological, and social aspects. Generation Yers are considered to be close to their parents and peers, achievement-oriented, and technologically inclined. The extent to which these characteristics apply vary

in from one social group to another, and generational theory, like most other social theories, should only be used as a guide. Consequently, as educators consider generational characteristics, they should keep in mind other diversity factors that might lead certain students behave in very different ways from their peers.

Millennials are known for their close relationships with, and reliance on their parents or guardians. According to Kane (2009), approximately seventy-five million members of this generation are being raised at the most child-centric time in recent history in the United States. Strauss and Howe (2000) describe this generation as the "most cared-for generation in American history," (p. 76). Their parents generally provide them abundant support, in accordance to their socio-economic statuses and other life circumstances; this support may be in the form of emotional, social, financial, technological, or educational support. It is not uncommon to hear parents (mostly Generation X) say that they have to rush home to help their adult college students complete class projects or assignments. Moreover, many would agree that this generation of college students is

largely being reared by the contingent of parents infamously known as the 'helicopter parents'; these parents operate as if they are "on call" for their children, as they are readily available to intervene for their children, irrespective of whether they have been invited to help or not. Educational institutions are notorious for their particular disdain of such parents, whom they accuse of interfering in their professional activities and spoiling their children so much that they hinder them from timely developing into mature students who can operate independently of their parents. As Thielholdt, & Scheef, (2004), observe, the abundant attention showered to the by their parents is probably responsible for their elevated self-confidence, which sometimes makes them look and act arrogantly. However, because they value their parents and embrace

their teachings and social values, Millennials are more inclined to be conventional. They work well in structured environments, with defined rules and regulations, which makes it easier for educators to work with this less rebellious group of students. Therefore, educators need to keep this need for parental support and guidance as well as a positive acceptance of structure and authority in mind as they interact with Generation Y students.

There is general consensus among educators that current students use technology more than the preceding generations. Research shows that this generation is generally characterized by technological dexterity, an increased social networking, and a familiarity with multiple media, the World Wide Web, and digital technologies (Strauss and Howe (2000); Boggs and Szabo, 2011; Bell, 2010). Generation Y was born and has grown up during perhaps the greatest technological advancements of all times; especially as regards abundant computer and television access, electronic and mobile phone communication, instant messaging, internet publishing (eg. U-Tube) and social networking (e.g. Facebook, My Space, and Twitter). Some members of this generation include, Mark Zuckerberg. A world without computers is unimaginable to the majority of US students, regardless of their own personal situations as regards computer ownership and affordability. This may help explain why this group is generally considered as technologically inclined, peer- and friend-oriented and influenced, and collaborative, (Strauss and Howe, 2000; and Twenge, 2006.)

Millennials also have different motivations from their parental generation, Generation X, in addition to other differences. Reporting on their empirical study of medical students, Borges, Manuel, Elam and Jones, write: “our study findings may substantiate the contentions of population theorists that, compared with previous generations, Millennials have greater needs to belong to social groups and to share

with others, stronger team instincts and tighter peer bonds, and greater needs to achieve and succeed” (p. 574). Generation Yers, a significant number of whom have a Facebook or MY Space page, cherish friendships and seem to be strongly influenced by the opinions of their peers. Combining such needs for social affiliation and the achievement drive could result in what has been described as one of the greatest generations ever, and a generation of heroes, (Strauss and Howe, 2000.)

Like any social group, Millennials are not a homogeneous group, with minority groups constituting 40%, while immigrants comprise 20% of the generation, (Baggott, p.30.) Their experiences and characteristics tend to differ along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, geographical region, national origin, mental and physical ability, intellectual classification, familial situation, and technological access. There are many students who do not enjoy the positive and / or abundant parental attention that has been observed of many of the middle class Millennials observed and studied by many educators. Similarly, there is a significant number that do not have the access to technology that Millennials are generally assumed to have. These may include students who come from working class and poor backgrounds, and cannot afford computers, mobile phones or iPads; those raised in working class one-parent families— where the parent is too busy juggling multiple jobs to even attend school meetings or take them to public libraries during the pre-college period; students who come from abusive homes— where the parental figures exhibit negative, authoritarian, and other abusive tend

encies; and, those students who have to work to augment household incomes or to survive. Intra-group differences exist within each generation; therefore, each of the general characteristics mentioned here should be considered only as a guide, and not a definitive factor.

STRATEGIES FOR THE INTER-GENERATIONALLY COMPETENT EDUCATOR

Students need educational experiences that enable them to become valued, equal, and responsible members of society. Any teacher charged with teaching students outside his or her culture therefore, “. . . not only has to help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective citizenry, but must also to develop a cultural awareness that permits such fulfillment (Neil, 2005). It is widely accepted that educators’ skills, dispositions, and knowledge play a major role in students’ success. Especially where students have different cultural backgrounds from those of their teachers, positive cultural competencies are crucial to learning and achievement. The converse is true; teachers’ cultural limitations and incompetence, together with the lack of skills to work with, and unfavorable attitudes toward students outside their own cultures, including outside their generations, may be largely responsible for the poor academic achievement that educators, politicians, and the general public lament so much. It is even more so for those teachers who perceive difference as deficiency operate from a “deficiency orientation,” who view students from different cultures, as lacking those characteristics, knowledge, and aptitudes that are needed for success in what the mainstream academic culture, (Sleeter & Grant 2009). Such views are not conducive to the learning of all students, especially those from different racial, gender, religious, linguistic, sexual orientation, and generations. Therefore, because the majority of college students belong to a generation that is different from that of the majority of faculty, it is imperative that, in their quest to enhance student achievement, educators familiarize themselves with the overall culture of Generation Y students.

McAllister cautions against radically changing proven best practices in our effort to fully embrace the Millennials. She writes: “While pedagogues can certainly make the learning

process more in line with generational characteristics, not all of their traits are conducive to learning, (p15). Therefore, educators should feel comfortable helping students mitigate some of their generational behaviors for the sake of maximizing learning outcomes. The section below critically discusses some of the common Millennial characteristics may inform educators as they plan significant experiences for the students. The characteristics examined are: their familiarity with technology, peer-orientation, the ability to multitask, their needs for nurturing and structure as well as how their high confidence levels affect their educational experiences.

TECHNOLOGICAL INCLINATIONS AND APPLICATIONS TO LEARNING

Millennials are widely considered the most technologically familiar of all the generations, having been born at a very technologically fertile period. In a survey of faculty use of technology conducted with 4,600 faculty members at 50 colleges and universities, the 2009 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement found that 20% admitted never using course management systems such as Blackboard or Desire 2 Learn (D2L), while over 70% said they never used technology for the following: “Plagiarism detection” (e.g. Turnitin); (79%) Collaborative Editing Software (e.g. Wikis and Google Docs); (84%) Blogs; or Video games, simulations, or virtual worlds (e.g. Ayiti, EleMental, Second Life, Civilization, etc), among other uses. <http://chronicle.com/article/Professors-Use-of/123682/> July 25, 2010.

Consequently, differing attitudes and aptitudes toward educational technology are among the most contentious of differences that exist among the Millennials and their older generation educators. According to the US Department of Education:

While technology in schools has become common, several related challenges have presented themselves. These challenges include providing adequate training to teachers on how to effectively integrate technology into the

curriculum and ensuring that benefits of educational technology are available to students of all socioeconomic backgrounds.” (2005 p. 17)

The most obvious challenge is the one identified by the US Department of Education in the statement above—training teachers to effectively utilize technology to enhance students’ learning. Some teachers are resistant to learning ‘new and ever-changing technologies’, mainly because they think that by the time they have mastered one skill, the technological application may have become defunct, and it would be time for them to learn something new. They also believe that having taught successfully for many years without using new technological enhancements, there is no valid reason for them to change. Others may feel that if the students were not so technologically inclined, teachers would not have to be “bothered” with the requirements to learn new technology, including simple educational tools such as Blackboard or even E-mail, in some cases. Therefore, such anxieties, fears and misgivings about technology can create tensions between teachers and their technologically savvy students.

As mentioned earlier, the Millennials are also commonly referred to as the Tech Generation because of their easiness with technology; they also earn this nickname because of what many in their teachers’ and parents’ generations consider excessive use of mostly electronic devices. Needless to say, most of these students do not believe that they are being excessive in their use of mobile phones, Blackberries, I Phones, I Pods, I Pads, video games, laptops, and other electronic gadgets. Therefore, when politely cautioned on the subject, depending on their inclinations and relationships some might get defensive or even offensive in their responses. Some do not believe they should have to take a break from social networking, simply because they are in some instructor’s class! After all, they argue, they are great multi-taskers and can learn while

surfing the net or texting. Consequently, teachers might find it hard to successfully educate them about appropriateness of using their technological devices, especially for personal, non-educational purposes, in class, for instance.

The challenges above notwithstanding, there are significant students and schools that do not have adequate access to technology, mainly because of their socioeconomic statuses. Students in undeserved rural and urban areas, most of whom are minority students, do not have easy access to technology; some cannot even afford mobile phones, which a significant number of their peers take for granted. Consequently, faculty need to be careful not to overestimate and generalize their students’ levels of familiarity and adeptness with technological applications, including the ability to effectively search for information on the Internet, to operate E-mail, and to navigate educational resources such as Blackboard or Desire 2 Learn (D2L).

Similarly, faculty should not assume that all students have access to laptops or computers at home. It might behoove faculty to offer or arrange basic training for those technological applications they most use in their classes; this is especially essential for those teaching diverse and minority students or those teaching at non-elite schools, where the overwhelming majority receive need-based financial aid, and are negatively affected by the digital divide. It is also essential to realize that while many students use Information Communication Technology (ICT) for communication, leisure, and other social activities, a good number of them find it difficult to transfer those skills to educational technology. In their discussion of using media literacy, to teach Millennials reading and writing, Considine, Horton, Moorman (2009) observed: “Their extensive use of ICT often creates a false sense of competency, as well as the misperception among many adults that contemporary youth

are “media savvy.” Hands on is not the same as heads on, (p. 172). In our classes, with predominantly working class, southern, African American students, the majority of which are technology enhanced, many students initially complain about being asked to use basic educational technology resources such as Blackboard, MOODLE or D2L, in their classes. Many say that they have never had to use so much technology for learning before; they also admit that and that it is a very difficult leap to make from social networking to submitting assignments and viewing instructor feedback in Turnitin! Therefore, educational technology training might be well received if it is offered to all students, as a component of the early semester classes; in an effort to minimize the complaints from those who are tech savvy, trainers could allow students to peer-tutor each other or to gain points for the experience. Students should also be helped to understand that they cannot know everything that is there to be known about technology, or any other topic; educators need to help Generation Y students develop a stronger willingness to learn.

Rewards are especially important to this generation, given that many of them believe they should earn something for their effort. Strauss and Howe (2000) argue that Millennials are externally motivated. This might appear a contradiction, given the amount of community service in which this generation generally engages. Close scrutiny of this service may indicate that a significant amount might be motivated by external rewards such as class credit, social recognition, resume boosting, future career intentions, and networking. Moreover, such thinking seems to support some observations about the possible effects of being brought up by Generation X parents. Strauss and Howe (2000) argue that given their upbringing by generally very hard-working parents, Millennials are very focused on building their resumes early and getting a head start on preparing for their careers.

PEER-ORIENTATION AND COLLABORATION

Millennials are typically team-oriented, work well in groups, prefer collaborative activities to individual endeavors. They generally enjoy well defined group assignments and projects, which many generally execute better than they do individual assignments. Along these lines, Borges, et.al. (2010) write: “Faculty members may motivate their Millennial students to learn by using group activities where they can apply course content and learn by doing, providing students with relationship-building opportunities in the classroom or online that contribute to collaboration and teamwork,” (p. 274). Therefore, faculty and students are generally well-served by such assignments as they help students develop those social-technological skills that they already have for educational purposes. Further, group assignments need to be structured as monitored for maximum effectiveness. Wilson and Gerber (2008) suggest that while faculty ought to provide students opportunities to work in small teams, they should be vigilant in training students to work ethically, and they “must protect conscientious students from both free-loaders and enthusiastic but simply incompetent team members,” (p. 34). Having said that, faculty should guard against assuming that all students will enjoy or benefit from working in a groups; they should balance group with individual assignments so that the course assessments are carefully distributed.

MULTI-TASKING AND LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS

They’re good multi-taskers, not only are they able to simultaneously text, talk, surf the net, listen to music and do their homework, they can also juggle sports, school, and social interests, (McAlister, A.(2009); Strauss and Howe, 2000). This agility can help students work on several assignments within the same period. This makes it more beneficial for faculty to give them information about all course

assignments at the beginning of the semester. In an effort to avoid overwhelming them and to help them budget their time effectively, faculty may consider breaking longer writing or project—based assignments into smaller tasks, with specific timelines to turn in drafts for formative evaluation and feedback. While multitasking may present advantages for the learner, it is also worth noting that studies show that multitasking may have negative effects on learning, especially on long term memory, and may slow down the learning process, (McAlister, 2009). Therefore, educators need to help their students understand that technology use in the classroom or during study should be generally limited to that which supports the learning task at hand. While this might seem to be “common sense” to their older generation teachers, Millennials need to be taught the art of maximizing learning time and activities, including using their multitasking skills to enhance learning.

NEED FOR NURTURING AND MENTORING

Millennials, regardless of their intellectual abilities and self confidence levels, generally value mentoring, nurturing, and personal attention. Just as they value very strong relationships with their parents whom they look to for extensive support and nurturing, Millennials desire good relationships with their teachers, (Oblinger, 2003). They expect their teachers and advisors to mentor them - both in their academic and personal endeavors. For many, mentoring and nurturing help make them feel more welcome and valued, as well as more connected to their teachers, which is likely to yield positive results for them. While their grandparents’ generation of educators—the Baby Boomers—are more inclined to provide nurturing to them, these expectations do not always match up with the characteristics of their highly independent, Gen Xers, who respect strict boundaries, and are less inclined to nurture students who are not their own offspring. Nevertheless, educators could

benefit from engaging in genuine dialogue about their reservations, and seeking to understand the nurturing needs of Millennials. Faculty self-disclosure may result in students developing more empathy with those teachers who do not feel comfortable providing students non-academic or non-course related mentoring. Further, frank conversations will also help educators identify those students whose cultural, religious, or familial upbringing does not support the formation of close relationships with adults to whom they are not related. In other words, educators should be careful not to assume that all students need mentoring and closeness from their teachers. Considering the Millennials’ needs for mentoring and nurturing within the contexts of other dimensions of diversity may help empower educators boost their rapport with this generation of students, while simultaneously helping the students increase their overall educational experiences.

NEED FOR STRUCTURE AND CURRICULUM CLARITY

Millennials learn better if faculty members provide clear objectives, explain relevance of lessons to the expected student outcomes, and provide details for assignment completion, and weekly schedules. Borges, et.al., (2010) found, “Achievement-oriented Millennial students . . . also expect that faculty clearly specify educational goals and desired learning outcomes, (274). This may be based on their formative, public school educational experiences, which were characterized by having their teachers post learning outcomes for each module, give frequent tests, use pacing guides, and provide syllabi copies on the first day of class to students and sometime to parents, too, (Wilson and Gerber, 2008). These authors also found that “college students do not function well in courses with loosely organized, schematic syllabi” (p.32.) Generation Y students need to know the exact objective of each class and how each lesson relates to the assignments and tests; they generally learn with the end goal

(course grades) in mind and, unlike their older generation teachers, they do not generally appreciate ‘learning for learning’s sake.’ Therefore, course syllabi have to be explicit and detailed especially as regards what, when, and how, assignments should be completed, and how much weight they carry in the final grading scheme, (Wilson and Gerber, 2008).

Similarly, assessment and feedback should be very explicit and transparent. Borges et.al. (2010) argue that Millennials “may express a strong need for feedback to monitor their progress and accomplishment,” (p. 274.) Using electronic grade centers such as those found in Blackboard or D2L provide easier ways for faculty to share their feedback with students. Additionally, to cater to both their need for caring adults and for feedback, faculty should provide Millennials with what Fink (2003), in his discussion of significant learning experiences calls ‘FIDeLity’: i.e. feedback that is ‘frequent, immediate, discriminating feedback that is] done lovingly’ Fink (p. 95.) Showing that faculty care for their progress is essential for developing positive relationships with students; this seems to give credence to the popularly cited expression, “No one cares what you know until they know that you care”¹ and its other variations. Providing Millennials ongoing feedback on drafts, class participation, and other components of the learning experience will help them improve their performance.

The challenge for faculty is to achieve this level of detail without producing ‘lengthy’ syllabi, given their general lack of strong affinity to reading long pieces. Wilson and Gerber, (2008) suggest that instructors deliberately *over-estimate* the desire of

students for clarity—and resist the temptation to regard those students as somehow deficient in character for the fervency of such a desire,” (p. 32.) Faculty may decide to provide periodic, detailed weekly schedules, samples, rubrics, grading schemes, especially via technological vehicles such as email or Blackboard/ MOODLE/D2L, and others. Because of the Millennials need for structure, predictability, and strict guidelines, it might be necessary to highlight a clause to the effect that syllabus details will be provided every so often via a specified vehicle. Therefore, structure, explicitness, consistency, and full transparency help this busy, overworked, and highly achievement-oriented generation of students understand what is required of them so that they may plan effectively, both mentally and emotionally, as well as manage their time accordingly, (Strauss and Howe, 2000; Wilson and Gerber, 2008.)

OVERCONFIDENCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON RESEARCH AND WRITING

One of the more pervasive characteristics of Millennials is that they are very self-confident. These students are very sure of themselves and they believe their voices should be heard, and their opinions should carry a significant amount of weight. They are “self assured go-getters” (Wilson and Gerber, p. 31.) who can sometimes appear “cocky”, Thielfoldt, & Scheef, (2004). This over-confidence may lead some students to believe that their personal opinions constitute facts, and that their personal experiences are more valid than proven best practices and academic research and theory. Perhaps also because of their strong love for their parents, Millennials also believe that their own personal sources of information, e.g. parents, pastors, mentors, blogs, and popular media, are the only ones they should consult, even for academic writing. Moreover, their over-exposure and reliance on technology might be partially responsible for their insistence that they earn grades by merely voicing their unsubstantiated personal opinions and non-academic sources in “research

papers.” Therefore, they may argue against most faculty’s insistence on students reading and conducting research for course assignments. We suggest that educators demonstrate that they value students’ opinions by providing them opportunities for reflective and commentary type of assignments; blogs and discussion boards provide good opportunities for such activities. Additionally, faculty need to systematically help students reach a healthy balance of supporting their personal opinions with research in their academic writing. Moreover, students should also be trained to differentiate between opinion-based and research-based papers; faculty can achieve this by developing diverse assignments that allow students to engage in both forms of writing.

In order to train them for sophisticated critical thinking and literacies, faculty should also make deliberate efforts to help their students understand the value of the opinions of others, especially those that differ or contradict theirs. This step will help teachers infuse diversity training in their lessons, but will help them transition into lessons about the significance of well-researched expert opinions that are based on rigorous research. Such teaching will be even more beneficial if faculty intentionally teach students anti-plagiarism skills and other important issues about academic honesty. Gerber and Wilson (2008 suggest that faculty “engage students in a significant, course-long conversation on the ethical dimensions of taking a college course,” (p.32.) Capitalizing on the high self-confidence levels of Millennials, educators can provide genuine, credit earning opportunities for students to engage in opinion sharing as well as those that train them the rigor required in academic writing.

CONCLUSION

Generational differences call for a new paradigm of teacher education. Traditional, pre-service, and in-service teacher education

programs ought to systematically infuse the important components of inter-generational competency into their diversity courses and programs. Just as they would do in relation to other diversity factors, teachers need to develop deeper insights into the general characteristics of Millennials, including, their preferred learning styles, skills’ strengths, their inter-personal communication styles, work ethics, and habits, and their general worldview, (Boggs and Szabo, 2011). Such multi-generational competencies call for the development of instructional strategies that bring about transformational, inclusive learning that can empower students to become more successful in their educational endeavors, (Freire, 2010; Banks, 1997; Sleeter and Grant, 1999; Anderson, 1988). Therefore, schools need to fully utilize their entire intellectual capital, including their students’ “knowledge, skills, capabilities, competencies . . . practices, and routines,” (Hargreaves, 2003 p. 7) in order to transform the experiences of their students and effectiveness of the educators.

At the center of all the reforms that should take place in both pre-and in-service education are mutual respect, appreciation for generational differences, strengths, challenges, and world-views. Good relationships between students and teachers are a good predictor of academic success; conversely, poor relationships between teachers and students are among the most significant contributors to the poor academic outcomes faced by many schools. Therefore, teachers who understand their students are better positioned to help them maximize their talents, competencies, skills and work ethic for academic achievement, (Oblinger, 2003, MaAlister, 2009.) Consequently, it is essential that educators continue to strive to develop the healthy rapport that exudes the positivity needed to help students learn, and turn schools into welcoming, socially just, environments for all, (Baily, 2009; Freire, 2010). Successful multi-generational education requires faculty to embrace diversity and help their students do

the same, developing a willingness to learn about and from the younger generation and to correct misconceptions and stereotypes about different social groups. As Paulo Freire says, education can either be used to train students for conformity and status quo maintenance, or it can be used as a liberatory practice that leads to freedom, creativity, and transformation for social justice. Teaching students for twenty-first century challenges requires educators to continually re-evaluate their pedagogy to help them better meet the needs of their millennial student. Contextualized generational theory offers an additional framework for examining ways of helping different generations of educators and students enhance their teaching and learning experiences.

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