

Teaching and training the millennials: offline and an e-learning perspective

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Abstract

Millennials or Generation Y refers to the group of individuals who are born between the 1980s to the mid-2000s. This generation has seen several important technological events like the rise of personal computers, laptops, and tablets, the rapid increase of internet connectivity and wifi, the increasing use of mobile phones and later smartphones, telecom boom just to name a few. We note that each of these events has had an impact on the education sector and how learning and teaching take place. There has been a significant change in technology which the millennials have witnessed and the same changes have enabled a plethora of methods for both the students, the teachers & their trainers. This paper aims to study the learning styles of this generation and also the teaching/training styles which must be used to most effectively transfer knowledge and skills to the millennials. The paragraphs below discuss most of the preferred methods of learning by the millennials and how teachers/trainers can customize their pedagogy to engage this generation in the educational settings (both inside and outside the classroom)

Keywords: Education, Teaching Styles, Academics, Learning, Millennials, Technology based Learning

1. Introduction

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” – Maimonides

“You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.”
— Brigham Young

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
— Nelson Mandela

The above four quotes reveal the power of education in the modern world. Great Leaders all over history have realized and emphasized the power of education to cut across barriers like class, dogma, caste, prejudice. It has been called the great leveler in terms of opportunities for growth in the domains of power, wealth, prestige, and so on. Hence it is natural to see that people aspire to be educated and gain qualifications, skills, abilities & knowledge to capitalize on the opportunities opening in the job market. Earlier education

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was limited largely to the higher class, male, white men whereas now we see education to be much more accessible to all races, women, and all classes. This change has seen accelerated growth in the recent past especially with the millennials. Millennials or Generation Y refers to the group of individuals who are born between the 1980s to the mid-2000s. This generation has seen several important technological events like the rise of personal computers, laptops, and tablets, the rapid increase of internet connectivity and wifi, the increasing use of mobile phones and later smartphones, telecom boom just to name a few. We note that each of these events has had an impact on the education sector and how learning and teaching take place. There has been a significant change in technology which the millennials have witnessed, and the same changes have enabled a plethora of methods for both the students and the teachers.

2. Literature Review

Learning styles of Generation Y and effective methods of teaching for the same,

- A sizable chunk of generation Y has been found to place a fair degree of emphasis on continuous learning and personal growth. (Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007). These people possibly use resources like e-books, the internet, e-libraries, YouTube, podcasts, and so on to keep themselves updated in terms of knowledge and to stay motivated. These resources were not available to the previous generations during their college. Further, with online book retailers coming up like Flipkart and Amazon coming up, individuals of this generation can get access to most books from most areas. Further, these books are increasingly available at discounted prices which makes them relatively more accessible to even the middle classes.
- Experiential learning is one of the most preferred learning styles for generation Y (which involves a high degree of hands-on activities followed by a reasonable amount of time spent in reflection about the same). Further, a high degree of interactive assignments and a lot of activities taking place within the class itself are a part of the preferred pedagogy for teaching this generation. (Shih & Allen, 2007)
- Generation Y has also been used to learning using a high degree of technology which facilitates the same being entertained at the same time of being educated (Jonas-Dwyer, & Pospisil, 2004). There are several channels on YouTube which present education in a highly entertaining manner. The use of multimedia greatly facilitates the understanding of students. Channels like TED talks, Khan Academy, PBS Nova are all very popular in their respective domains. This makes the students used to a very high level of entertainment being combined with education which might not be easily reproduced in the traditional university settings)
- Generation Y also prefers to learn in a group setting where there is a high emphasis on teamwork and collaboration which can be executed in the form of group assignments to be presented in the class (Shih & Allen, 2007)
- Generation Y students exhibit characteristics like being conventionally motivated and showing respect towards elders and teachers. Generation Y students score high

on traits like conscientiousness (especially in the field of academics) and display high levels of responsibility. (Elam, Stratton, & Gibson, 2007).

- An emphasis on learning activities that are a part of daily life and the perspectives related to the same must be included in the academic curriculum to make the students more effective in dealing with their own lives (Partridge and Hallam, 2006). Further, the same authors found that the curriculum for the generation Y students must be flexible in terms of its contents and must be customizable to meet the demands and requirements of each section of the students. (Partridge and Hallam, 2006).
- Moreover, Wilson and Gerber (2008) posited that generation Y should be given plenty of opportunities to choose their combination of courses and students must be allowed to make their understanding, insights, and meaning from their courses rather than being force-fed by instructors. (Wilson & Gerber, 2008).
- The students of Generation Y want to learn consist of multiple dimensions with a mix of pedagogies that produce extremely diverse learning experiences (Kipnis & Childs, 2004). This could mean that the teachers to Generation Y must be competent in many diverse pedagogies right from the traditional methodology of lecture-based teaching to teaching through case studies and real-world examples storytelling, experiential learning, demonstrations, and so on. Simply planning to complete an entire course through the traditional lecture method is no longer going to work (McGuire, & Gubbins, 2010) despite the relative ease and convenience of conducting the lecture method. Kipnis and Childs (2004) have noted that the students of Generation Y dislike remaining passive recipients in the settings of the classroom in the school and university settings.
- The students of generation Y want their learning to pertain to the current societal and world situation to remain relevant and further, they want their knowledge, skills and abilities learned to be marketable in terms of jobs. (Kipnis & Childs, 2004). Thus few people in generation Y seem to pursue knowledge for its own sake and seem extremely professional in their outlook towards education and its outcomes.
- The students of generation Y are strongly competent with the handling of multimedia. (Brown, 2000). They have a relatively higher degree of handling visual-spatial information and hence can prefer to understand the information in the forms of graphs, charts, and so on, rather than in terms of plain text. Hence, we posit that the teachers for generation Y must be able to present knowledge in visually rich two-dimensional and even three-dimensional forms. PBS Nova, a popular Science YouTube channel, for example, is very compelling in terms of representing even very complex Physics concepts visually to enhance student learning.
- The students of generation Y are extremely good at multitasking. They prefer to study at their own choice of time and at their own pace and hence video lectures and podcasts are extremely popular among them (Skiba & Barton, 2006). These students are commonly found to do multiple activities at the same time, like going through a written lecture/ppt while listening to music or listening to a lecture podcast while at the gym or doing some other (cognitively simple) work or even listening to a lecture or an e-book while driving. Hence the teachers to the generation Y could develop academic content (like video lectures or podcasts) which the students can learn from even while performing some other tasks.

- Generation Y students are used to getting any information required in real-time and immediately. They have very little patience for getting information after long periods of delay (Skiba & Barton, 2006). These students routinely check up on information from the internet if they do not understand a certain concept in a classroom setting or otherwise. Hence, we can expect most students of this generation to look up websites where the information is presented in the most accessible and interesting manner and hence there is competition among many players for the attention of the generation Y students. Hence there is immense pressure on the teachers of today to present their information in an accessible and interesting manner just to get the attention of the students.
- Generation Y students have an extremely high degree of confidence and also display similar levels of optimism. They usually have very high goals and are very confident that they would achieve the same. However, not many of them are clear about the path that they would have to take to achieve the same goals (Monaco and Martin, 2007). Hence teachers of the generation Y students must teach them planning skills which would enable them to devise pathways by which they can achieve their own goals (as difficult goals would be useless without the generation of plans and possible pathways which would get them to achieve the same). Further, it would be reasonable to teach them the importance of prudent (and possibly some degree of negative thinking) which would enable them to probably anticipate the possible roadblocks which they might encounter during one of their paths to achieve their goals, and to proactively plan for overcoming the same.
- Generation Y is an extremely pressurized generation. They feel the pressure not only from people whom they perceive as evaluating them but also by the pressure they put on themselves to achieve. (Monaco and Martin, 2007). Hence teachers need to impart skills like setting up of personally meaningful and intrinsically motivating goals (goals which are possibly closer to their values or doing things which they love) rather than setting up goals that are relatively more extrinsic (like goals that are purely materialistic or to prove a point to somebody else or goals which lead to burnout in the long run). A further skill that enables the individuals to effectively handle the pressure and stress needs to be taught at schools and universities.
- Partridge & Hallam (2006) contend that most of the generation Y students have a very low tolerance to boredom and must be constantly engaged just to have their attention. This is further complicated because the same have very low attention spans. This generation has a high degree of exposure to video games that are highly engaging and interesting. Hence this generation is used to being entertained and engaged by high-quality graphics and animation. They expect the same levels of engagement and entertainment in the academic classroom settings, which makes it very challenging for teachers and trainers who usually struggle to keep up with the very high levels of expectations that students have from them
- Generation Y view works as an integral and a central part of their lives and wants a personally meaningful and fulfilling form of life (Meister, & Willyerd, 2010). Hence it becomes very vital for the students belonging to this generation to choose the right kind of education which would involve their interests, their strengths, and what is meaningful/valued them. Hence, they need the right kind of guidance and

mentoring from their teachers to choose courses that would go on to fulfill their requirements for meaning and fulfillment in the future

- Generation Y is very comfortable (not shy) with conversing with elders when it comes even to intellectual topics. Further, their opinions on such matters are much more valued when conversing online when it is difficult to find the age group to which they belong (Tapscott, 1998). Hence institutions must create forums where intellectual topics can be discussed relatively anonymously and opinions can be shared without being discriminated against based on age, sex, race, religion, etc. This is a trend that has been seen to emerge on many online platforms (sometimes involving moderators too). These sorts of interactions hold promise if they are effectively implemented.
- The teachers are increasingly being seen as facilitators of the classroom rather than being seen as pure disseminators of information. (Tapscott, 1998). Hence, teachers need to be very proficient in terms of skills like facilitating, questioning, moderating, guiding, and so on rather than just limiting themselves to disseminating information.
- Generation Y students are much more multicultural, respect diversity, and are tolerant towards differences (Gorman, Nelson, & Glassman, 2004). Hence this generation is more open to learning from each other's cultures and backgrounds rather than being closed and narrow-minded which a characteristic of many of the previous generations was. This helps in them having a multiplicity of perspectives and views and in general more open to ideas and opinions which do not conform to those of their backgrounds.
- Generation Y also tends to associate higher education with further opportunities in life (Wesner, & Miller, 2008). Hence this generation is relatively much more motivated to pursue their education both in terms of formal and informal education. Thus, they actively seek many opportunities presented to educate themselves in many diverse forms and methods
- Tapscott (1998) posits that there has been an increasing shift towards education being moved from teacher-centric to being learner-centric. In this form of education, the learner is the focal point. The same author posits that education is increasingly moving to become a process of construction combined with discovery from being merely being driven by instruction.
- Another drawback of Generation Y students is that a sizable population of them rarely devotes time to read. (This could be possibly due to this generation of students being exposed to highly stimulating activities like computer media, video games, etc.). They are also inclined to not remain seated at the same place for a long time. (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). Thus, teachers of generation Y must somehow generate the reading habits into their students. This can be done through
 - Allowing the students to develop their methodology of reading by giving them the freedom about reading anything and everything
 - Introducing discussion sessions after reading
 - Regularly inviting authors to the universities to interact with the students and to inspire them
 - Teaching reading strategies to students
 - Sharing of their own reading experiences
 - Socialization based on reading habits

- Listening to audiobooks to start off with

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- Lack of sufficient critical thinking: Despite the access to a vast ocean of information on the internet the generation Y students cannot fully benefit from the same as they don't have the critical skills to evaluate which part of the information, they can access is reliable, trustworthy, useful and applicable. Students lack questioning habits while reading and this creates a huge roadblock to effective learning. (Lorenzo, & Dziuban, 2006). Hence schools and colleges need to impart sufficient critical thinking skills to effectively deal with the avalanche of information on the internet. Thus, it becomes vital that information literacy skills must be imparted at a very young age and children must be gently guided about developing the same over time (Lorenzo, & Dziuban, 2006).
- Generation Y lacks sufficient communication skills both in terms of written & verbal communication skills. Most individuals of this generation struggle to put their ideas into clear and concise words and thus fail to communicate their ideas in most cases (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). Thus, teachers must actively make the students come out of their comfort zones of communicating through instant messengers and so on to writing *formally* and communicating verbally in a cogent and compelling manner.

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