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### **THE TEACHER OF THE GENERATION Z**

Carmen Sonia Duse (a)\*, Dan Maniu Duse (a)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, [carmen.duse@ulbsibiu.ro](mailto:carmen.duse@ulbsibiu.ro)

#### **Abstract**

A problem discussed more often nowadays is the one of the characteristics of the generations, given the decreased interest of the student for the school as an institution itself and for formal educational act it brings with itself. This paper aims to bring an answer to the questions why students are preoccupied reading more from a tablet and less from the board, why their attention is very little focused and dissipates in small things compared to us, educators and what we can do as teachers. In the paper there are presented the characteristics of teachers and students from the generations perspectives. This study can help professors to understand the needs of the young generation and how to deal with this new model of students. Teaching the Generation Z will be a big challenge for the future because this will required more competences to the professors, not only related their teaching discipline, but especially to their ability to handle with technology and to use the technology at the expert level.

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## **1. Introduction**

Besides teaching simple information, the job of a teacher is to master, to be able to motivate, to harmonize, to inspire, to encourage and this list goes on. But which of these roles are different to those of professor 5 or 10 years or even 100 years ago?

A future teacher has to go through courses of the psycho-pedagogical module, a complete and compact route, which knows what abilities a teacher has to have at the graduation of it. We are all concerned to train these skills to ensure a good start in the teaching career paths. Yet, sociological studies talk about an abandonment of the teaching profession within the first 5 years of activity. A studio undertaken by the Federation of Trade Unions in Education (FSLI) in Romania showed in 2011 that over

40% of teachers want to leave the education system. And the situation is the same in Europe and even worldwide. The reasons behind these decisions are primarily because of the payment. But then comes a big "uf" from the side of the teachers, namely the difficult "cohabitation" with these young generations of pupils, increasingly volatile and little understood by teachers. Should this reality be without any solution? Who is to blame for this helplessness of the education system to assure harmony between teacher and the educated ones and what should we be careful about, while training the future generations of teachers?

The answer to this questions we can find by analyzing student and teacher in the same way, through the light of the characteristics of the generation. As pointed out by Yolanda Griffiths (2012), is the first time in human history when four different generations interact in classes.

## **2. Theoretical Foundation and Related Literature**

Karie Willyers (2010) presented the future of the labor force by the year of 2020. She talks about five different generations working side by side in the labor market and so, as well in schools.

In order to define the terms clearly, we first have to define the term "generation". According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "generation means a body of living beings constituting a single step in the line of descent from an ancestor, or "a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously" and "a group of individuals having contemporaneously a status (as that of students in a school) which each one holds only for a limited period". Coming to school space, theorists talk about the term "cohort generation". A cohort generation is a group of persons born during a limited span of years, who shared a common and distinct social character, shaped by their shared experiences through time (Mannheim 1952; Marias 1970). The Romanian version of it (Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language) defines the term of a "generation" in a similar way: "all individuals in a community, living together, being about the same age."

The generations theory involves identifying the characteristics of an individual, that makes it representative for a certain group or a certain generation (Strauss, and Howe 1991). It involves identifying common elements, as well as those that differentiate them.

Researchers who talked about the characteristics of the generation cohorts - Ryder 1965, Strauss and Howe, 1991 (as cited in Griffiths 2012) agreed on their classification in 5 generations, namely GI Generation / The Silents / Veterans / traditionalists (1925-1945), The Baby Boomers (1946 - 1964), Generation X / Gen X-ers (1964 - 1979), Generation Y / Millenials / Net Generation (1980 - 1994) and Generation Z (1995 - 2005), starting from the beginning of the twentieth century to our days. The criteria differentiating between them was the historical event that influenced the evolution of the individual.

### **2.1. The Silents Generation/ Veterans / Traditionalists (1925 – 1945)**

It is the generation of survivors of the World War I, World War II, The Great Depression, and those who contributed to the invention of the atomic bomb and effects etc. Their characteristic is thinking in terms of white or black, determination, adherence to rules.

Authority is above any laws, the belief exists, that if you follow the rules, you'll be the winner. Primary values: respect for authority, loyalty, hard work, sacrifice for the common good, "live to work

versus work to live", no pension, we work until we die, or in a more "optimistic" version, the pension is to sit in an armchair to wait for death.

## **2.2. The Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964)**

In some studies it appears as the generation born between 1943-1960, but the strict temporal delimitation is insignificant. Identifying characteristics of this generation is linked to stable families, that provided them with all necessary without feeling threatened, with economic growth specific to the postwar period, a frenetically style of life and the desire to change and rise against social taboos. It values peace, freedom, material well, they think, their generation will change the world. They are strongly influenced by their friends opinions and television.

For the first time in human history it is accepted that you have children outside of marriage and that union of two young does not necessarily mean marriage. Hence the acceptance of divorce as a tolerable reality, as well as the acceptance of homosexuality.

## **2.3. Generation X / Gen X-ers (1964 – 1979)**

Different time slots (1964-1979 and 1965-1980) should be found for this generation as well, but that should make any difference in their characteristics. They are also called the "key around the neck - generation" because the changes in the concept of the family brings to either single parents or families, in which the mother leaves the house for her job, leading to greater autonomy of the child. Receiving more responsibilities, the children have to care for themselves, starting from the daily routine, till the relationships with others and even assuring the social security. All of this effects lead to risk taking, openness to change and even accepting diversity as a norm of life.

Generation X is first self dependent generation (self-reliant), who value free time (they can do whatever they wants) and fun. Its slogan is "work to live and not live to work". Developments in technology help them move to the media space and the virtual world. Therefore they are first to have a personal computer, with which social connection extends to cyberspace.

## **2.4. Generation Y / Millenials / Net Generation/ 9/11 Generation (1980 – 1994)**

This generation has the years 1981-1991 as a possible temporal framing as well. Generation Y represents approximately 30% of the current population of the planet. It is said that they are most educated generation. They grew up in a society driven by technology, which gave them the possibility to have access to information via the Internet and the gadgets are part of the daily routine. Raised in different family types, they tolerate change, they are used to it and they even look for it and challenge it. They always ask themselves questions, they do not accept to take things as they are: why it should be that way, as it might be this way as well?

This conduct reflects exactly how their relationship with authority is - it will be reduced to its annihilation unless they will get the answer to the question "why?", and at times they are forced to carry out an objective, about which they do not understand its use, its significance, the individual is likely to limit itself and wrap everything in nihilism. The specifics of this generation is inconsistent state that

oscillates between the internalized lack of meaning and social expansion with no meaningful goal. This state swings so quickly between the two poles, that it actually becomes two parallel attitudes, that exist in individual, although apparently they disagree.

## **2.5. Generation Z (1995 – 2005)**

It is the generation for which the world "did not exist before technology", therefore everything there is life, be it school, education, be it the professional life, it must be in connection with technology. Northeastern University (USA) conducted a study of young people aged between 16 and 19, who produced one of the most complete pictures of these young people, among other things, on how they see the importance of education in all forms and on all its levels. They are "highly entrepreneurial, pluralistic, and determined to take charge of their own futures," as they are characterized by Joseph E. Aoun, the president of the university.

The Children of this generation were the ones, who threw out the toys in favor of computers and devices and learned intuitively by themselves how to use them. Therefore we will not be surprised that, as highlighted by the current research (Sparks, & Honey, 2014), children of the generation Z spend about 41% of their time outside school on the computer or on other devices, suffering from FOMO (fear of missing out).

Their thinking about the work, that will try to obtain it later, is starting already in high school, but they know that fundamental for the realization of this desire is a university graduation, because the university diploma becomes the guarantor of security. The communication is largely virtual environment on five different types of gadgets: Smart TVs, smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers. These loopholes into the virtual, while augmenting the reality, become guarantors and security - a concept they constantly applies in the everyday life: if millennialii were narcissists and eager to be seen on communication networks (in order to verify their identity by the boomerang method), generation Z subjects are concerned about their privacy.

Through social networking, individuals of the generation Z easily create links with members of other cultures, which they consider integrated into a global culture group, in which all individuals are equal in terms of identity (Daniel Burrus, 2016). Besides of the positive aspects about the omnipresence of technology in their lives, a number of issues that raise concern have been found. Thus, the constant presence of gadgets in the lives of these young people are reflected by mutations in certain mental processes, such as decreased period of attention from 12 seconds in the years 2000 to 8 (Sparks, & Honey, 2014). These changes may be due to the fact that were generated due to completeness of information, their brains should digest and so it was forced to perceive reality in smaller pieces and its significance at a higher speed. But, if there are larger structures of information, the attention of the young people will decrease, precisely because the mind is used to identify as soon as possible the most important and significant parties. That leads to the concentration of their language into symbols, bringing the risk of creating a certain ambiguity by condensing the images (the most effective way to get their attention is by placing images randomly selected as a background for the text, you want to send as a message) and more recently, the so-called comes "vines" - short videos that do not exceed 7 seconds. This language leaves room for interpretation and diversity of viewpoints. The rapidity with which their brain,

works can also be seen in their attitude through superficiality and negligence. 46% of the teachers, who participated in surveys of the US researchers, believe that digital tools are making individuals to write to soon what they think, which generates some mistakes (Sparks, & Honey, 2014).

This effect is not seen as a threat by the subjects of Generation Z, because they see the world as a multitude of possibilities: their conversation stems brief responses, with the formal appearance of stanzas, of monoblocks, being generally a notation of the thought of the moment, because individual knows that there will always be the possibility of repairing any imprecision in the message by adding comments and meta-comments to the original message.

As for sports, it is only considered a tool to be healthy and not as a way to "play" with colleagues and friends (this explains the large number of obese children and adolescents, for whom sport is drudgery).

### **3. The characteristics of teachers belonging to the Baby Boomers or Silent generations**

A comparison between the features of teachers belonging to the Baby Boomers or Silent generations, some of them still being in the field of observation, can be observed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparison between teachers of the Silent Generation and the Baby Boomers

<b>The teachers of the Silents Generation/ Veterans / Traditionalists</b>	<b>The teacher of the The Baby Boomers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rigid, authoritarian, unyielding;</li> <li>- believes that they can do good, even by force, resulting in punitive punishments;</li> <li>- the authority of the teacher / school management is unquestionable;</li> <li>- fix, rigid curricula, has to be followed literally;</li> <li>- interpretations, innovations in teaching and learning are not accepted;</li> <li>- the focus lies on the reproduction of knowledge;</li> <li>- the rules are not to be discussed;</li> <li>- the teacher words and rules shall not be discussed;</li> <li>- discipline is the watchword;</li> <li>- individual performance is encouraged;</li> <li>- very clear standards and directions regarding good-bad, moral and immoral;</li> <li>- religious traditions are clearly accepted and imposed;</li> <li>- lack of tolerance for error;</li> <li>- "bad" students become pariahs, social outcasts, other students are avoiding them and they are encouraged to do so;</li> <li>- respect for the best student;</li> <li>- one students' success is exclusively the merit of the teacher;</li> <li>- the teacher is a Guru and he is the model to follow and praise by the young generation, his opinion is the letter of the law;</li> <li>- the student of this generation teachers will become a copy of the professor hated;</li> <li>- "loyalty" is the keyword</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- becomes more flexible in terms of authority, traditions and hierarchical structure;</li> <li>- begin to accept innovation in teaching;</li> <li>- believes that technology and innovation requires a learning process;</li> <li>- emphasizes teamwork;</li> <li>- believes he has all the rights and still considers himself very important in ensuring the success of students;</li> <li>- there appears a need for the autonomy of the students so that some rights are given to the students, opinions are encouraged, but only those who do not scandalize social norms;</li> <li>- the focus is still on the reproduction of knowledge and the interpretations of the pupils are accepted rarely;</li> <li>- women are encouraged to build their career and their access to higher education increases spectacular;</li> <li>- although the discipline in schools still has authority notes, the views of the students are accepted;</li> <li>- the teacher is still seen as a model for the younger generation;</li> <li>- TV starts to be "part of the life";</li> <li>- the keyword is "optimism"</li> </ul>

If it were to look at the characteristics of the pupils and the teachers of the generations X and Y, the following would strike out (table 2).

#### 4. Image of "the teacher of the Generation Z"

Due to the economic crisis of 2008-2010, children raised at the time see the future in terms of a stable job, which may be given to them only by obtaining a university degree. Therefore a faculty graduation becomes a priority to them and their options are analyzed, thought and rethought ever since high school years (Denise Hawkins, 2015).

**Table 2.** Comparison between students teachers of the Generation X and the Generation Y

<b>The students and teacher of Generation X</b>	<b>The students and the teacher of Generation Y</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students value the culture of colleagues, friends and groups, promoted by the media;</li> <li>- the teacher figure loses from the aura of authority;</li> <li>- appreciates diversity, innovation being rather an opportunity than a challenge;</li> <li>- take into account change, the innovation being the pillars of their existence;</li> <li>- they appreciate activities, which have a clearly personal gain;</li> <li>- there is a calm acceptance of authority without being impressed by it or by socio-professional titles;</li> <li>- they often ask questions like "you we really have to do things this way"?</li> <li>- There is a great technical competence regarding the use of technology in students, which implicitly leads to the idea of its existence for teachers;</li> <li>- the belief, that there must be a balance between work and family life, is often noticed and they often see education as a third option;</li> <li>- they often manifest themselves with skepticism towards important things, even the future;</li> <li>- students are flexible and motivated and they need teachers to take advantage of these features in teaching and assessment;</li> <li>- teachers prefer teaching rather than research (J. Scott, 2006)</li> <li>- the keyword is "skepticism".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students show loyalty to their group of friends and family;</li> <li>- they have a strong relationship with technology as social environment;</li> <li>- there is a great academic pressure on them;</li> <li>- students see their future in optimistic colors and have a great self-confidence;</li> <li>- students manifest sometimes excessively competitive and they compete sometimes for things without having any stake;</li> <li>- they are capable of absorbing a large number of materials and information;</li> <li>- they see school linked to technology and its lack could result in the disappearance of the learning motivation. Hence the need for a very well trained teacher in the coordination of the introduction of technology in teaching-learning and evaluation process (M-learning);</li> <li>- the students ask for a clear structure and presentation, starting from the presentation of objectives, outcomes, expectations and involvement into decision making. This requirement leads to the abandonment of improvisations or superficiality from the teaching activity design;</li> <li>- formality should not exist in the classroom;</li> <li>- the speech of the teacher requires clarity, and the biggest asset it can have, is the quality to create meaning / significance in the eyes of the students or for them to discover</li> <li>- they are characterized by the idea that "if it has not been created , I can do it ";</li> <li>- the keyword is "realism".</li> </ul>

Per se, the teacher should not express judgmental thoughts, if it is a good idea or not for teens to choose in a turbulent period an long shot option, but they have to adapt to their requirements: If these are the interests of generation Z, then the teacher must become one that offers methods to provide the student the best option. What does this mean? It means that the teacher will not try to be the coach of the student (students), he will rather play the role of a mentor. In other words, the teacher does not oblige students to anything, he makes them understand. He shows them their options and teach them to compare them, take a decision and to take responsibility for it.

But in order to do this, the teacher should be always at least one step ahead of the times. He should know what's new in techniques and technology, he should know how to adapt to new technologies in the didactical process, and even know how to use the devices for the introduction / acquisition / evaluation of

learning content, how to use these to meet the needs of students. Let us not forget that students of the generation Z have learned, in the majority of the cases alone how to use all these devices. Therefore, professors of the generation Z needs to have a good knowledge of the devices the students use and their functioning. He must always think how to integrate them into the classroom and how to get students to use them in a constructive way. The picture of a teacher, who is a walking encyclopedia, has been forgotten today. He does not know everything, he cannot know everything and he does not even need to know. He only needs to be the one, who teaches his students how to use technology for learning, regardless of where it occurs, and help them discern the genuine from the fake.

The student of the generation Z is easily distracted by: social media, smartphones, email, Internet offers, all these are challenges which will disrupt his attention. Therefore it is recommended that in teaching that the teacher will only refer to new and the most relevant information. The taught content should be divided into short sequences, only a few minutes long, accompanied by creative and varied activities.

Because the student of the generation Z prefers to communicate through images, icons and symbols, we should try to introduce the taught contents through visual representations, static (drawings, charts, maps, etc.) or dynamic (movies, videos, etc.) that are more easily understood and accepted by pupils than theoretical and descriptive contents.

We must become aware that students of the generation Z do not like presentations, lectures, and because of the distractions and spoilers, understanding things with will be truncated and incoherent for them. Their focus on a subject is very short and tenuous.

Because they are indestructible linked to the Internet, the students of the generation Z love games. These are extremely useful and relaxing and games with didactic purposes are able to increase the motivation in terms of involvement and participation by their educational content.

They are not the declared enemies of books, because they have been reading at an small age, of course with the parent`s help, but what they do now, what they post or share is more important to them in order to get that "like", which brings them the importance and notoriety they want.

## **5. Conclusions**

This chronology of generations and their specific features has the purpose to bring to light the image of the specific teacher for this generation, very precisely in order to understand why current generations do not respond to the same stimuli and challenges as the ones before.

We often hear teachers complain that they cannot keep the class under control, they cannot provide a conducive atmosphere of teaching, that students cannot concentrate, that they are not paying attention, they are not interested etc.

I think it is time to move on to our analysis, as teachers of a particular generation, and we should analyze our own behavior against the requirements of our students. What do they want and what do we want? /how could we make our desires to intersect?

Looking at some of the studies made over the last generation, we can understand their needs and try to meet those needs. Of course, it is hard for teachers to accept that we are no longer the main source

of knowledge in the lives of the children, but we must accept change in role hanging us and we must assume. Otherwise, we will only be two camps that "fight" in different planes, never intersecting.

To conclude, we could say that it is necessary for teachers of the generation Z to move focus on:

- moving from giving advices, instructions, or suggesting them what to do, to standing out for our decisions, sometimes risking even by experimenting in order to find new paths of learning;
- leaving the same routines in order to create new learning situations and to draw concrete tasks, novelty, which require their critical thinking;
- trading role of the teacher as friend, that protects them, for the role of a critical teacher who motivates them causing them to engage and fight.

This finds its answer in the idea that the ability to learn and reproduce social and relational behaviours is no longer the key to success in life, as it was once for baby-boomers for instance. On the other hand, social relationships and forms of changing are steadily dismantled, reassembled, rebuilt. This brings us to the idea that individual learning, alone, in a quiet solitude is unacceptable for generation Z. What they really want is to combine interests within similar communities, which have the capacity to both fragment and to recombine with each other.

As educator, we must more reflect at the words of American historian Jacques Barzun: "teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it is a lost tradition." Maybe it's the time for us, professors to start to reflect more about that.

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