

Why Do Generational Differences Pose a Challenge to Educators?

John Mahoney, MD, MS
University of Pittsburgh
School of Medicine



Overview

- What are the differences?
- Why do they pose a challenge?
- What can we do to help faculty and students succeed?

Being an Effective Educator

- Acknowledge the generational differences
- Appreciate why the differences exist
- Flex to accommodate
- Leverage strengths

Generations

Baby Boomers
Born 1946–1964

Generation X
Born 1965–1980

Millennial
Born 1981–1994

Gen Z
Born 1995–2012

Age – 25–38

Age – 7–24

Millennial vs Gen Z

- Gen Z is not just a younger Millennial
- Different values
- Different learning preferences

Different Life Experiences

- Technology
- Connectivity & information flow
- Finance
- World events
- Prior generations

Values

Boomers

Optimism
Team
orientation
Personal
gratification
Involvement
Personal
growth
Workaholic

Gen X

Diversity
Techno-literacy
Fun
Informality
Self-reliance
Autonomy
Pragmatism

Millennial

Optimistic
Civic duty
Confident
Achievement
oriented
Respect for
diversity
Social
Work that has
meaning
Peer loyalty

Gen Z

Individual
responsibility
Loyalty
Compassion
Thoughtfulness
Socially
conscious
Self-reliant

Professional Priorities

- Medicine is a calling. Live to work.
Work until the work is done.
- Medicine is a profession (yesterday?)
 - Medicine is a great career, but it
is time to go home (today?)

Communication

Boomers

In person

Gen X

Direct
Immediate

Millennial

Text message
Facebook
E-mail
No Voice Mail
Cell phone
Twitter, Blogs
Staying
connected, in
touch

Gen Z

Text message
Group texts
Fear Of
Missing Out
FOMO

Information Management

Older
generations

Personal
information is
private &
protected

Younger
generations

Continuous &
real-time
broadcasting
Social
networking

Interaction Style

Boomers

Team player
Love to have
meetings

Gen X

Entrepreneur

Millennial

Participative,
but not
necessarily
face-to-face

Gen Z

Continuously
connected
Values in-
person contact
for the most
important
communications

Technology

Boomers

Helpful but not
always first
instinct to
reach for
technology

Gen X

Depend
heavily on
technology

Millennial

Essential to
every aspect of
life

Gen Z

Assumed

Connectivity is
a necessity

Internet is a
right

Interactions

- Prefer text messaging over face-to-face
- What's lost?
- Richer communications in person
- Change to refine listening & negotiation skills
- Strengthen personal connections
- Read body language & facial expressions

Anatomy Blog

Hi Dr.

Thanks very much for answering questions over the weekend.

Does the ACL (or PCL) actually do anything different in the extended versus flexed state? The displacements you describe (p 382) seem to be the same relative movements of the bones: "posterior displacement of femur on tibia" versus "anterior displacement of tibia." Or am I missing something?

Thanks again,

Response *(by Jack Schumann on 10/10/2009 23:49)*

Hello

I'm happy to answer questions.

It is safe to say that the ACL and PCL are working on whichever bone is not fixed. When we are standing, the tibia is fixed and the ACL prevents posterior displacement of the femur and PCL prevents anterior displacement of the femur. When sitting or lying down with the knee flexed, the femur is fixed and the ligaments are working to prevent movement of the tibia. The ACL then prevents anterior displacement of the tibia and the PCL prevents posterior displacement of the tibia.

Heart question

on 10/10/2009 20:55)

Hello Dr. :

Is the Anatomy of Heart included in the thoracic questions for the test (I know the heart, but do I need to study it in depth)? Thx!

Response *(by Jack Schumann on 10/10/2009 23:20)*

Hello

Yes, the anatomy of the heart is included in the thorax questions.

Feedback

Boomers

Often giving feedback to others, but seldom receiving it
Money talks

Gen X

Need positive feedback to let them know they are on the right track

Millennial

Accustomed to praise
May mistake silence for disapproval
Need to know what they are doing right and doing wrong
Not always receptive to negative fdbk

Gen Z

Needs frequent feedback
More receptive to negative feedback

Feedback Style

- Styles that appear informative, helpful to one generation may seem formal and “preachy”
 - Some older generations told there is a time and place for feedback
 - Younger generations may not have been taught this “rule”

Millennial Characteristics

Confident,
achievement
oriented

Internet generation

Don't assume adult
roles readily

Are informal

Not interested in
paying their dues

Can be happy
without having it all

Willing to give
earned respect

Will choose lifestyle
over specialty or
income

Gen Z Characteristics

Dependable

Determined - Driven

DIY is best

Connected - FOMO

Realistic - Shaped by
turbulent world

High concern for
others

Seek financial
stability

Desire to work
toward something
they care about

Gen Z Characteristics

Multi-tasking

More open minded

Short attention span

Hypercustom

Live in phigital world



Learning Characteristics of Today's Students

Demand just-in-time,
just-enough learning

Good at computer-
based learning

Need to perceive
relevance

Multi-taskers that
learn in sound bites

Prefer learner-
centered learning

What do Younger Generations Want?

Supportive
environment

Frequent
feedback

Great
responsibility

Freedom to get
the job done their
way

Work-life balance

Continuous
connectivity to
peers

How Are Older Generations Viewed?

Slow moving
creatures that
should get out of
the way

Technologically
limited

Wedded to
seniority

Workaholics that
cannot balance
work and life

How Are Younger Generations Viewed?

Entitled

Poorly
motivated,
self-centered

Unrealistic
expectations

Continuously
connected via
technology

Why Do These Differences Pose a Challenge?

Values

Not aiming at
same place as
faculty

Leadership
Clashes

Interactions

Both sides could
perceive
disconnection

Feedback

System not built
for frequent
feedback

What Can We Do to Help
Faculty and Students Succeed?

Change

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

Charles Darwin

What Can We Do to Help?

- Recalibrate
- Adjust metric of appropriate professional behavior
- Cannot equate professionalism with hours worked
- Reward excellence, not endurance
- Prepare both sides of the divide

What Can We Do to Help?

- Create a positive hidden curriculum

Expectations

- Learners value clear understanding of fair, well-justified rules
- Set expectations
- Explain why – rules
- Draw a line on negotiations

Feedback

- Want constant feedback about progress
- Consistently give constructive feedback (and gentle negative feedback)
- Reward accomplishments with increased responsibility

Assessments

- Account for the fogginess of the generational lenses when weighing subjective assessments

Learning

- Different learning & communication styles
- Multi-tasking is the norm
- Teamwork? Maybe...
- Factor in students' learning preferences
- Bring technology to the forefront whenever possible

Key Learning Difference

- Millennials are less confident in independent work
- Gen Z prefers more independent work
- Many of our current curricular approaches – TBL, PBL – are optimized for Millennial preferences

Connectivity

- Expect instant information access
- Always connected vs. always working
- Develop communication practices
- Competent use of technology

How to Communicate

- Send a text message to coordinate or address an immediate concern
- Use email only if you must send a document (and don't expect a response)
- Share general information, updates and photos on social media
- Never leave a phone message, unless it is for someone's parent

Compliance

- Will accept rules to achieve fairness
- May weigh compliance vs. consequences
- Explain rules, requirements, consequences – rationale and relevance
- Engage students in development of rules and environment

Strategy Considerations

- Millennials and Gen Z are active users, not passive consumers
- Expect more complaints: grades to services

Being an Effective Educator and Leader

- Acknowledge the generational differences
- Appreciate why the differences exist
- Flex to accommodate
- Leverage strengths

Things We Didn't See Coming

- Art, literature, and business electives in medical school
- World Events: Bioterrorism, Disasters, Pandemics

Two More Things We Didn't See Coming...

- The Millennial Generation
- Gen Z

So, In The End

Knowledge
evolves

Generations
evolve

Society &
Environment
evolve

Education must
evolve



Suggested Readings

- Sticking Points, Haydn Shaw, 2013
- The Next 20 Years: How Customer and Workforce Attitudes Will Evolve, Howe N, Strauss W, Harvard Business Review, July-August 2007