

Chapter 36

New Learning for New Students

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ABSTRACT

When the post-world war two ‘baby boomer’ generation reached school age, education changed. Massive increases in student numbers required changes to teacher education, enormous investment in new schools and changes in pedagogy. Each succeeding generation has been different, and of necessity, education has changed to reflect the needs and aspirations of the new generation. Generation Y students are now in higher education, the first Generation Z students will soon be entering higher education. Both groups are showing signs of being different to their seniors. This difference implies changes to higher education learning. Compounding the need for Generation Y and Generation Z instigated changes to higher education has been the rapid onset of new forms of technologically infused learning, some generated by an industry desperate to maintain its influence on education as the market for paper-based books and journals declines, others generated by the ubiquitous nature of everyday life technological innovations such as social media, and more recently, the widespread availability of tuition fee-free MOOCS. This chapter will chart the generational and technological changes that are likely to increasingly demand changes to learning in schooling and higher education. Possible future change scenarios are also suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Projections into the future of schooling and higher education have often over-promised and then under-delivered over time, particularly those that signalled the impending application of new technologies that would change the face of education. There are many examples that could be quoted such as the prediction that educational television would replace teachers (Cuban, 2001). When that prediction was proved incorrect, predictions that computers would replace teachers in school class-

rooms began to appear in popular media. Now in 2015 we still have teachers in school classrooms, but the teachers have computers as well. A more recent example is the statement “Over the next 10 years, e-learning is projected to grow fifteen-fold, accounting for 30% of all *higher* educational provision” (European Commission, 2014, p. 4). It is clear that this statement is more authoritative, but even so, any future oriented statements are still subjective, as will be much of the future orientation of this chapter. Wildly speculative statements such as the earlier demise of teachers

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should not be seriously considered, but predictions of the future based on a more substantial data base should rank consideration by those who have a responsibility to plan for the future.

Current trends would suggest that the rapid increase in e-learning prediction is likely to be correct, but history has demonstrated that many of the claims of technology enhanced change have been grossly exaggerated. The point here is that the important feature of almost all of these claims has been a focus on the technology. This future oriented chapter takes a different approach, its central focus is not technology change, but changes to the consumers of education, the students.

When the soldiers, nurses and support personnel who survived World War Two returned home in 1945, many of the countries involved provided incentives and support, such as cheap loans for house and farm purchases, to assist returnees to find jobs and establish a family. The inevitable consequence was a rapid increase in births, termed the 'baby boom' generation. Not only were the 'baby boom' generation larger in number than their predecessors, they were different. They had not lived through a depression as their parents had, they had not experienced the horrors of a world war as their parents and grandparents had, but they inherited attitudes from their parents that had been moulded by the experience of the 1930's depression and the world wars. Pertinent to this chapter is that at least half of most current faculty professors and many teachers are baby boomers, but most are at retirement age, or will be at retirement age within the next decade.

A generation later, the 'baby boomers' became parents and brought children into an even more rapidly changing world, with those in Western and some Asian countries entering a more prosperous developed world epitomized by changing social mores and a world increasingly dominated by rapid technological change. Five years later elementary school rolls exploded again as the baby boomer offspring entered education, and consequently elementary school, secondary school and then

tertiary student rolls increased markedly. Labelled Generation X (Gen X), this generation makes up another significant proportion of faculty staff in universities and teachers in schools.

Precise labelling of generations is a fraught endeavour dependent on the reference source, but there is general agreement that the 'baby boomer' generation was born more or less between 1946 and 1964 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Examples of baby boomers who have achieved at a high level utilising the affordances of technology development include Bill Gates of Microsoft who is the richest man in the world according to Forbes, Steve Jobs of Apple, and Carlos Slim of Telecom fame. Notable for a variety of reasons other than money are baby boomers Bill Clinton, Prince Charles and Osama bin Laden.

Baby boomer children were born between the mid 1960's and the early 1980's. Gen X is the largest consumer group in the United States, comprising 25% of the United States population (Fromm, Lindell, & Decker, 2011) and 20% of the total world population. They are "generally characterised as hard working, independent and sceptical." (p. 3). Some of this group were called 'latchkey' children because Gen X was the first 20th century generation where both western society parents worked. As a consumer group they fuelled the dot-com boom that has been such a defining feature of the world during their life and also had an enormous impact on education. It can be difficult to define what success in life means, but one common indicator is the annual Forbes Rich List. In the 2015 list just released, the vast majority of Gen X people listed are those who have used their life experience in the computer age to advantage. Top 200 billionaire Gen X examples include Americans Larry Page and Sergei Brin of Google fame who are the 19th and 20th richest person in the world according to Forbes despite being only 41 years old, Jack Ma known for e-commerce in China, Ma Huateng founder of internet media in China, Robin Li of Chinese internet search engines, Lei Jun of Chinese

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