

## Chapter 2

# Educational Technologies for the Neomillennial Generation

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to provide educators, researchers, and policy-makers with an overview on how modern technology has been influencing the learning styles of the “neomillennial” generation. The authors begin by describing the demographic and cultural characteristics of the neomillennial generation and how they differ from preceding generations. They follow with a discussion of how neomillennial learning styles have changed as a result of new technology. The authors then take a detailed look at two examples of how modern technology can be used to design novel learning approaches: digital game-based learning and learning in virtual worlds. Disadvantages, difficulties, and barriers to acceptance of these approaches are then examined. They conclude by summarizing the characteristics of the neomillennial generation and why technological changes are likely to influence educational practices for them, as well as how these changes fit in the broader context of educational theory.*

### INTRODUCTION

Today’s youth represent a diverse group of individuals with profound differences in background, race, ethnicity, social status, and access to technology. Nevertheless, there exist common trends among this group that distinguish them from

prior generations. The very recognition of such diversity, as well as unprecedented acceptance of it, is one of the most widespread characteristics of this group (Kohut, Parker, Keeter, Doherty, and Dimock, 2007). While within-group differences abound, and perhaps are even stronger for many variables for this group than for previous generations, the synthesis of modern technology with popular culture provides a degree of novel

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social transformation which very few members of this generation are untouched by. We provide a generalized description of several of these current socio-technological influences on youth behavior and how these factors have the potential to transform selected educational practices.

Any study which endeavors to describe “young people” or “youth culture” suffers from the problems inherent with generalizations, and this chapter is no exception. However, in order to provide our readers with information relevant to understanding a wide pool of students, we have attempted to present an analysis of broad trends that have relevance across individuals, with the caveat that individuals will always exhibit their own idiosyncratic departures from broad generalizations. We do not provide a strict definition of who is included in our description of the “neomillennial generation” because some aspects of our discussion are more generalizable than others, and therefore encompass different groupings of individuals. Therefore, the analysis of educational practices discussed in our chapter potentially applies for any students whose lives and experiences are shaped by the socio-technological trends discussed below. These trends are most widespread for members of the neomillennial generation and we therefore frame our analysis in that context.

The most important feature of modern youth culture for our purposes is the extended exposure to multimedia interactive technology. American teens display this characteristic, with the majority of them (age 12-17) using the Internet on a daily basis (Lenhart, Madden, and Hitlin, 2005). While this feature is most common for students born roughly between the 1980’s and the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, other researchers have used a variety of slightly different age-based definitions for this group, depending on their resources and goals. The generation of students we consider has also been tagged with many different names. Labels focusing on the cultural aspects of this group include “millennials” (Wilson and Gerber, 2008),

“neomillennials” (Oblinger, 2003), “Generation Y” (Strauss and Howe, 2000), “Generation Next” (Lenhart, Kahne, Middaugh, Macgill, Evans, and Vitak, 2008), “the Net Generation” (Tapscott, 1998), and “Generation M” (Cvetkovic and Lackie, 2009). These cultural labels generally stress the importance of interactive technology, such as the Internet, on these individuals. Demographers and marketers often use terms such as “Echo Boomers” (Zolli, 2007) to highlight that this generation is large compared to the “Generation X” that precedes it. We follow Oblinger (2003) and refer to our subjects of interest as the “neomillennial” generation. We use the term “neomillennial” in order to draw attention to our focus on the younger members of this generation who are still in school, as the leading members of this group have already reached graduate school and are themselves entering society as educators.

This chapter is primarily written from the perspective of classroom-based educators in the United States. This is especially true with regard to the discussion of demographic trends and their potential impact on educational practices. However, the spread of interactive multimedia technology is a phenomenon common to all economically-developed countries, often to a greater degree than in the USA. Our examination of interactive multimedia technologies on youth learning is therefore extended to consider the experiences of other countries where this technology is available on a suitable scale. We have also noted, where appropriate, how these technological advances can potentially be used by students in developing countries to increase access to educational materials and practices that may otherwise not be available. The ability of developing countries to modify and apply modern technology in their own unique settings represents one of the most important potential future benefits offered by the combination of technology and education.

Across all countries with sufficient access to modern technology, numerous studies maintain

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