Millennial students: Insights from generational theory and learning sciences

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Motivation and Context

• Characterizations of Millennial students frequently focus on:
  – Multi-tasking
  – Technology
• Less attention to:
  – Cultural, parental and educational trends that help shape Millennials
  – How these trends may shape students’ intellectual development, epistemological beliefs and metacognitive skills
Agenda

1. Brainstorm Millennial characteristics
2. Describe Generational theory
3. Seven traits of Millennials
   – Social, economic, parental and educational trends that helped shape the Millennial generation.
4. React to the theory (Q&A)
5. Pose questions about implications for learning and pedagogical strategies
   – More in the afternoon workshop
Disclaimers

• Not here for student-bashing
• Not here to romanticize the students either

• It’s not my theory!
  – Don’t care if you agree or disagree with it 😊
    (Howe & Strauss 1992, 2000, 2003; Strauss & Howe 1997)
Brainstorming

Describe the Millennials...

In Class?                 Out of Class?

One-Word Descriptors.....Quotes
A Little Generational Theory

- **Generation**: a cohort group whose length approximates the span of a phase of a life and whose boundaries are fixed by *peer personality*

- **Peer personality**: a generational persona recognized and determined by common age, location, beliefs and behaviors and perceived membership in a common generation
Generational Theory (cont’d)

• **Generational cycle**: 4 consecutive generations, encompassing 2 *social moments*

• **Social moment**: an era, typically lasting about a decade, when people perceive that historical events are radically altering their social environment
  – *Secular crises* (outer-driven)
  – *Spiritual awakenings* (inner-oriented)
Sequence of Cultural Cohorts (Generations)

- GI Generation (1901 - 1924)
- Silent Generation (1925 - 1942)
- Boomers (1943 - 1960)
- Generation X (1960 - 1981)
- Millennials (Generation Y; 1982 - 2004)
- Homeland? (2005 - ?)
## Generational Theory (cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Dominance</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Era Heralded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Recessive</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Outer-driven</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boomer</td>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Idealist</td>
<td>Awakening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen x</td>
<td>Nomad</td>
<td>Recessive</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Inner-driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>Crisis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The parental connection for Millennials
Generational Theory (cont’d)

In childhood (0 - 20 yrs), when Millennials are being nurtured and acquiring values, here’s where the other generations are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of Life</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Social Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young adulthood</td>
<td>21 - 41</td>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>Serve institutions and test values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlife</td>
<td>42 - 62</td>
<td>Boomers</td>
<td>Manage institutions and apply values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderhood</td>
<td>63 - 83</td>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>Lead institutions and transfer values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Millennials Are the New Hero Generation

The Hero Lifecycle outline:

- As newly born HEROES replace Nomads in childhood (age 0 - 20) during an Unraveling, they are nurtured with increasing protection by pessimistic adults in an insecure environment.
- As teamworking HEROES replace Nomdad in young adulthood (age 21 - 41) during a Crisis, the challenge the political failure of the elder-led crusades, fueling a society-wide secular crisis.
- As powerful HEROES replace Nomads in midlife (age 42 - 62) during a High, they establish an upbeat, constructive ethic of social discipline.
- As expansive HEROES replace Nomads in elderhood (age 63+) during an Awakening, they orchestrate ever-grander secular constructions, setting the stage for the spiritual goals of the young.
Seven Core Traits of Millennials

- Special
- Protected
- Team-oriented
- Trusting Optimists
- Conventional
- Achieving
- Pressured
Millennials are (Viewed as) **Special**

- Compared to caste away Gen-Xers whose parents were more interested in self-discovery.

**Reasons:**
- Family size, income
- Parenting style
- Child centric cultural shifts

*“It takes a village to raise a child”*

--Hillary Clinton
Cultural shifts in how children are viewed
THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO BE A TOYS"R"US KID!

The Walt Disney Company
Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas, Nevada
Millennials are Protected
Millennials are Protected

- Bike helmets
- SIDS guidelines
- Child proof pill bottles
- Toy safety recalls
- Megan’s Law
- Flame retardant PJ
- V-chips
- Child abuse laws
- Child car seats
- School metal detectors
- Poison hotlines
- Sun block
- Amber Alerts
- Child protection products
- Rubber padded playgrounds
- Stranger danger campaigns

“I hardly think it’s appropriate for six-year-olds to be making decisions about which [Pokémon] cards to trade.”
--a mother upset because her son’s school allowed him to trade a valuable Tauros for a mere Dodrio, The Wall Street Journal
Millennials are **Team-Oriented**
Millennials are **Team-Oriented**

- Experience:
  - Organized play groups
  - School uniforms
  - Collaborative learning experiences
Go Team

“Less skilled payers will get more playing time...Parents will cheer for all the kids at a game”
-- Rules of the Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association
Millennials are **Trusting Optimists**

- **Trust**
  - Trusting of parents, the government.
  - Respect authority
  - Strong parental relationships

- **Optimism**
  - Positive about the future
  - Boast about their generation’s power and influence

"We’re superheroes. That’s what we’re supposed to do—save cities, fight monsters."

-Powerpuff Girls
Telling Parents How to Vote

Video at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbhWkxqVkRk
Millennials are Conventional

- More comfortable with parent’s values
- Education that emphasizes basic human value, respect and accountability (aspects of ZT)
- See social rules as necessary (even though they may not like them)
- Represents a corrective response to trends launched in the 60s by boomers and propelled into the 70s and 80s by Xers.

“Hormones racing at the speed of light
But that don’t mean it got to be tonight”
--Christina Aguilera, Genie in a Bottle
Millenials are Achieving

• Achievement
  – Educational experiences focused on standardized achievement
    • Implications for intellectual development
    • Obsessive preoccupation with performance
  – Mediocrity is met with tutoring, coaching, special instruction

“A14-year-old [Natalia Toro] who studied the elusive subatomic particles called neutrinos won the prestigious Intel Science Talent Search...the youngest winner in the history of the 58-year-old event.

--Associated Press
Millennials are Pressured

• Pressured:
  – High expectations from perfectionist parents
  – High stakes consequences from standardized focus
  – Highly scheduled lives
  – Zero tolerance

*Giles:* This is the SATs, Buffy. Not connect the dots. Please pay attention. A low score can seriously harm your chances of getting into college.

*Buffy:* Gee, thanks. That takes the pressure right off.

--Buffy the Vampire Slayer
What About Parents?

"Yes, Mother, I told you, I'm doing fine on my own at college.... Hey, could you log on and find my schedule, order my books and call me when it's time for class?"
Helicopter Parents

• Video at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5lkllhlzqY
Generation Gap 2008

MP3s
- Jamba Juice
- Flaming Lips
- Facebook
- Obama

Vinyl
- Ovaltine
- Rolling Stones
- Phonebook
- Hillary
Other Realities
Additional Characteristics

• Represent the largest cultural cohort
• Are the most racially/ethnically diverse cohort
  – 1 in 5 has at least 1 non-native born parent
• Native technologists
• Close relationships with parents (most admired) and grandparents (most trusted)
  – Consulted and included in important decisions
• Healthier and wealthier as a group, but...
  – New struggles - ADD, ADHD, mental health, asthma, obesity
• Value volunteer work
• 88% have established goals for next five years
• Think hard work is more important in achieving success than a lucky break
Millennial Theory Recap

• Seven Core Traits
  – Special
  – Protected
  – Team-oriented
  – Achievement-oriented
  – Pressured
  – Confident
  – Conventional
Questions: Do you buy their analysis?

• What parts of Millennial theory resonate with your experience of Trinity students?
• What parts sound less supported/overgeneralized?
  – Is it ever warranted to generalize to a whole generation?
  – Are there groups of students who don’t fit the theory in your experience?
  – What about the characterization of parents?
• Is there agreement among the perspectives of faculty, administrators, and students?

• What does this all have to do with learning?
  – Do Millennials learn differently?
  – How does this tie in with the learning sciences?
Implications for learning

- Metacognitive skills
- Intellectual development and epistemological beliefs
- Risk-taking, failure and creativity
- Independence
Thinking about Strategies

What pedagogical strategies does Millennial theory suggest in relation to:

• Intellectual development and epistemological beliefs?
• Metacognitive skills?
• Risk-taking, failure and creativity?
• Independence?
More Information