

THE ROMANIAN GENERATION Y: PREPARING TODAY'S STUDENTS FOR TOMORROW'S JOB MARKET

Ruxandra VASILESCU, Assoc. Prof. Ph.D.
Faculty of Letters, Department of Specialized Languages
Spiru Haret University

Abstract

Who are they, what do they want, but most of all, where are they? Teaching for the generation Y is a total challenge for today's teachers. But become acquainted with the habits and expectations of the Generation Next might help us to bring them back into the classroom and train them properly for the job market. It is imperative to understand the new directions set by Generation Y itself, on their terms, to develop a methodology that might ensure their future success. This paper is a comparison of the members of the so-called Generation Y in the USA, Europe and Romania, their different environment and expectations, with a particular focus on the Romanian GenY and the students of Spiru Haret University.

Key-words: *Generation Y, Generation Next, the Millennial generation, technosavvy, attention span, multitaskers, networking, multimedia entertainment*

JEL Classification: L14, L82

Defining and understanding Generation Y

'Every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it and wiser than the one that comes after it' (George Orwell).

They have been given varied names: Generation Y, GenY, Generation Y Not, the Millennials, the Net Generation, the Digital Natives, the Echo Boomers, Generation Next, the Facebook Generation, in an attempt to enter and decode their world to the benefit of the whole society. They are the generation born approximately between 1978-1995, although this time interval varies from one country to another, from the USA, to Europe and Romania. This is the digital generation, no doubt, who has grown along with the computer and the other technology developments they are so keen of and experts in. But, while the computer was a common item in the early '90s in the USA, in Romania only the children born after 1990 have had the opportunity of benefiting from the modern technology in their first life decade. The generation gap may not be so long between the USA and the rest of Europe, but the US generation has definitely been ahead. In spite of the few years of delay, all the detailed reports and studies on the GenY show there are common characteristics defining them worldwide, with few historical differences. These characteristics have been approached from two points of view: 1) the intrinsic features of the members of the technology-conditioned generation and 2) from the point of view of their values and attitude towards work.

1. Agreed common intrinsic features:

- *Familiar with and reliant on communication technologies* (technosavvy) – use and integrate technology in all forms into their lives.
- *Short attention spans* – the instant click of a mouse is the info rate they are ready to accept, every topic should be short and to the point.
- *Multitaskers* – while listening to a topic, they may send an e-mail or an SMS or look up something on the mobile net at the same time, which does not mean they are not interested in the topic under discussion; but time is too precious not to make the best of it.
- *Filter and consume info quickly* – easily select information and are able to process it immediately and apparently, effortless.
- *Information must apply directly and be relevant for them* – Skype, ICQ, MySpace, Facebook are **the** channel of communication for them, where they select the information they need at a high-speed rate, any background or general information is irrelevant, therefore, useless and left aside.

It is a generation whose thinking patterns are fundamentally different from the previous generations, mostly due to the different way of processing and thinking information in a time of technology boom. Their learning preferences, their motivation and expectations from education are different and while they are seen as ‘growing without values’, they have something new to offer: directness, pragmatic goals, high expectations, fast achievements. How do we, the education providers, cope with this?

Teaching Generation Y

Of particular interest for the teachers, the above-mentioned features, when acknowledged, should provide the key to successful teaching. Patience and obedience in the classroom (or anywhere else, for that matter), key-words for generation X (born between 1961-1979) are no longer a virtue, but a waste of time. Universities in many countries have already taken steps in meeting the needs of the new generation by developing projects, policies, strategies to facilitate teaching and learning of the GenY (e.g. University of Melbourne, *Educating the Net Generation: A Handbook of Findings for Practice and Policy*, 2008). A new approach to adult teaching has been a constant concern for quite some time now. In the second half of the 20th century the studies of Malcolm Knowles (1984) were a breakthrough in the learning theory; he proposed new directions in adult education with a shift of focus from teaching to learning, a more flexible and meaningful approach. Knowles pointed out that as a person matures, his readiness to learn increasingly becomes oriented to developmental tasks of his social roles. Therefore, teaching should become more related to real-life, to the interests of the student. The ‘learner-centered’ teaching which involves:

- providing choices for learners about where, when and how they learn;
- focusing on learning rather than teaching;

- encouraging learner responsibility and activity rather than teacher control and content delivery;
- developing learning and assessment activities that require students to construct knowledge by engaging with authentic problems based on ‘real world’ experiences;
- using feedback and formal evaluation to implement improvements to teaching and learning approaches;

seems to be closer to the needs of the Net Generation. Yet, the new learning theory has too long remained just a new concept, while traditional education is still in action. The digital culture has developed in the Generation Next certain skills in key areas related to education. In order to find out to what extent our university is ready to meet the needs and expectations of these new cohorts of students and to find out whether university education is still relevant for them, we administered the following questionnaire:

1. Is academic education still important? If so, why?
2. Do you take a certain amount of time to study to achieve your academic goals?
3. Do you rely on the Internet to get your info for your academic projects?
4. Is the relation teacher-student still important to attain academic performance?
5. Should academic instruction move from the classroom to online education?
6. What would be the benefits of online education for you?
7. How long should a class last to be efficient and not boring?
8. Do you think that academic curriculum is relevant for your education?

The respondents were a sample group of 30, 3rd Year students in Marketing. The overall results were very encouraging: all the students think that academic education is still very important, for the background of information provided and for the good prospects for a well-paid job. All the students confirm their reliance on the Internet information for their assignments. All the students still believe in the teacher-student face-to-face relationship as very important in the academic development and achievements of a student. Online education is not an alternative to classroom education in their opinion; there were opinions in favour of a 1h. class, but most of the students think that a 1h½ class is able to cover all the information and practice needed for university education. So, the question is: if the duration of the class is not the actual problem for the lack of attention or the absence of the students from the class, what is the cause of the empty classrooms in all universities? The students’ answers show an unchanged trust in the benefits of academic education, a non-denial of traditional teaching, the importance of networking both with the academic staff and among them. The kind of benefits provided by the Internet seem not to cover all the needs, societal and developmental, of the students. A few respondents pointed out that besides the academic disciplines they deem to be of good use for their future career, they would like to be involved in extra-curricular activities. This questionnaire revealed a propensity for social networking and interest in whatever happens around them

which contradict certain commentaries: ‘they are not as socially adept as generations that came before them (social networking doesn’t count!), which can lead to potential misunderstandings in classrooms and workplaces’ (Morgan Brickley, 2009, *Communicating with Generation Y*) or: ‘The colossal World Values Survey shows that only one-third of young people across Europe are interested in politics, and three-quarters said they did not think politics was important for their lives. Only a minority of young people were shown to have actually engaged in politics – 28 percent had signed a petition, 22 percent had attended a demonstration, and nine percent had joined boycotts. Only six percent belonged either to a political party, a trade union, an environmental organization, or a professional association’ (Kaila Krayewski, *Generation Y and why they matter*, 2009). There has been widespread fear that they are disengaging from politics, instead tending to focus on their own immediate surroundings, while blocking out seemingly distant problems. But it seems that this generation, born during the economic boom, but struggling to make a way during the economic crisis, is eager to be involved in the community life, because they have something to offer. As compared to their predecessors, they may not just listen and execute, but force a change in the contents of things. They seek new responsibilities because they believe in their worth and efficiency.

As we design curricula, it is important to consider the framework of these learners. They have been exposed to multimedia entertainment but they still cherish the values of traditional education. They expect to be entertained as they learn. To hold their attention, we may need to consider having traditional lectures comprise a smaller part of the overall curriculum. Active-learning experiences, such as role playing, may be well embraced by these learners and may help them improve their communication skills in negotiation, mediation, counseling.

Generation Y and the job market

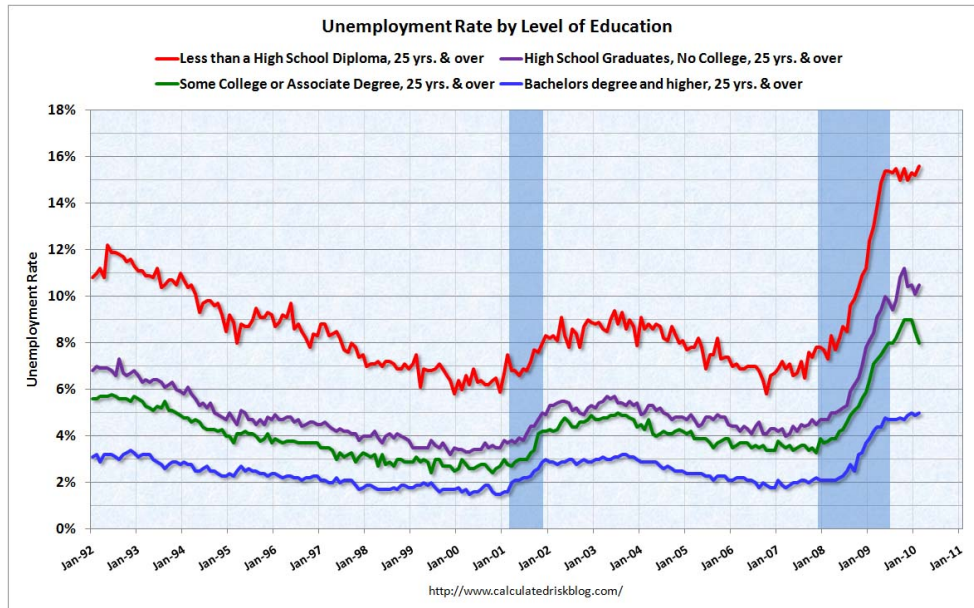
“Generation Y is much less likely to respond to the traditional command-and-control type of management still popular in much of today’s workforce,” says Jordan Kaplan, an associate managerial science professor at Long Island University-Brooklyn in New York. “They’ve grown up questioning their parents, and now they’re questioning their employers. They don’t know how to shut up, which is great, but that’s aggravating to the 50-year-old manager who says, ‘Do it and do it now.’ ”

They are both high-performance and high-maintenance, say the employers. They want to work but they do not work to be their life. They taking their place in an increasingly multigenerational workplace. Is that speak-your-mind philosophy uncomfortable for today’s employers?

Unlike boomers who tend to put a high priority on career, today’s youngest workers are more interested in making their jobs accommodate their family and personal lives. They want jobs with flexibility, telecommuting options and the ability to go part time or leave the workforce temporarily when children are in the picture.

They walk in with high expectations for themselves, their employer, their boss, the employers say. If this may be the case of the US GenY or the young generation of the developed countries of Europe, in Romania, the members of the new generation have lowered their expectations to adapt to the scarce job market, and yet it seems that it is not enough! The economic crisis has reshaped their work style and exigencies.

While the statistics in a few developed European countries show the following, in point of the unemployment rate per education level:



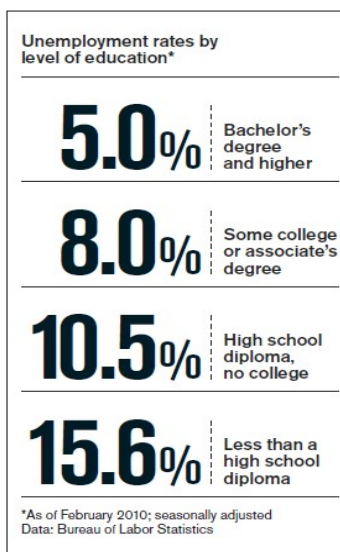
I find it interesting to see that the typical unemployment rate for someone with a college degree is only about 2-3%.

And in the USA:

The unemployment rate in the United States was last reported at 9.40 percent in December of 2010. From 1948 until 2010 the United States' Unemployment Rate averaged 5.70 percent reaching an historical high of 10.80 percent in November of 1982 and a record low of 2.50 percent in May of 1953. The labour force is defined as the number of people employed plus the number unemployed but seeking work. The nonlabour force includes those who are not looking for work, those who are institutionalised and those serving in the military. This page includes: United States Unemployment Rate chart, historical data and news.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2010	9.70	9.70	9.70	9.90	9.70	9.50	9.50	9.60	9.60	9.60	9.80	9.40
2009	7.70	8.20	8.60	8.90	9.40	9.50	9.40	9.70	9.80	10.10	10.00	10.00

Employability: The more educated you are, the less likely you are to be out of work.



In Romania, Generation Y is 15% of the total population and almost 40% of the employed population. The unemployment rate is over 14% (in October 2010) with the young college generation (double as compared to the rest of Europe). It seems that the above slogan, valid for the USA, 'the more educated you are, the less likely you are to be out of work' does not work in Romania!

Conclusion

Generation Y prefer learning that provides interaction with their colleagues and that is relevant and directly applicable to them, to their future career. They want to know upfront what is expected from them and what criteria are used to evaluate their performance. In spite of their 'addiction' to technology, they are in some ways traditional. Their interest in learning is strictly related to a future better paid job and to increase their marketability. Education is a means to this goal. Their view on education is: traditional setting, traditional information, but new entertaining, active and interactive methods. In the current context, when opportunities are so scarce for the GenY group, it is time for the teachers to be all the more supportive, encouraging and resourceful for the education of the young adults and their prospects on this unfriendly job market.

REFERENCES

- Blass E., *Generation Y*. (2005), *They've arrived at work with a new attitude. USA Today*. Available at http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2005-11-06-gen-y_x.htm. Accessed June 2.
- Generation Y College Students: All about the technology savvy demographic born between 1977-1997 <http://www.suite101.com/content/generation-y-a7763#ixzz17QFIpyhu>
- Howe, Neil and Strauss, William (2000), *Millennials Rising*, Vintage Books.
- Knowles, M.S. et al. (1984), *Andragogy in Action. Applying modern principles of adult education*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Zemke R., Raines C. (2000), Filipczak B., *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace*. New York: American Management Association; pp. 127–50.
- *** WP07-15 IE Business School Working Paper, 2007.
- <http://www.businessmagazin.ro/opinii/cum-arata-generatia-y-2507667>.
- <http://www.myjob.ro/articole/ghid-cariera/226/12882/generatia-x-vs-generatia-y-tu-cum-esti-la-job.html>.
- http://www.flu.ro/articole/Cultura_urbana/Generatia_Y_schimba_regulile_piete_i_muncii.html.
- <http://phobos.ramapo.edu/~seisner/Teaching.htm>.
- <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/GenY.htm>.

