International CHRIE Conference-Refereed Track

2011 ICHRIE Conference

Jul 28th, 4:45 PM - 5:45 PM

Adapting Teaching to the Millennial Generation: A Case Study of a Blended/Hybrid Course

Richard G. McNeill Jr.
Northern Arizona University, Richard.McNeill@nau.edu

ADAPTING TEACHING TO THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION:
A CASE STUDY OF A BLENDED/HYBRID COURSE

Richard G. McNeill, Jr.
Northern Arizona University
Flagstaff, Arizona, USA

Abstract
This is a mini-case study of a traditional Hospitality Sales course modified into a Blended or Hybrid course which adapted traditional teaching methodologies to fit the unique characteristics of the Millennial generation student. First, the concept, generation, is defined. Second, three dominant generational persona are described. Third, 10 core Millennial generation traits are distilled from the literature. Fourth, incorporating many of these 10 core traits, the mini-case study is explicated. Finally, the study concludes that classroom teaching adaptations to address the Millennial student is an iterative process - success should be measured long-term as opposed to expectations of immediate success.

Key Words: generations, cohort, cohort-group, Millennials, blended /hybrid education.

Introduction
Generations, like people, develop distinctive personalities. Over the last two decades *Baby Boomer Generation* teachers were first perplexed, then angered, and finally emotionally exhausted. These teachers had just encountered a wave of *Generation X* students who seemed to be diametrically opposed to their own values. In spring 2000, the Millennial Generation had graduated from high school and that fall they entered college. Today, as most Gen Xs have graduated, the *Millennial Generation* currently dominates the classrooms of American post-secondary educational institutions. The Baby Boomer teachers, now joined by Gen X teachers, have begun to sense that a significant sea change has occurred - It has begun, albeit about 10 years ago.

This most recent generation of college students has distinctive characteristics and a persona unlike those of their teachers. They have unprecedented access to technology and instant online information. They are globally connected to peer-groups spanning international boundaries. They are the first generation to come of age in a truly global society. And, they have an optimistic and clear identity of themselves as a generation whose time is now and who will positively change the world.

Each year all people born in that same year belong to a single *cohort. Cohort-groups* are defined by demographers as groups of people born within a limited span of consecutive years. A popular term for a cohort-group is *generation*. Unfortunately, the literature is littered with varying time span definitions and labeling challenges applied to the extant generations living in the U.S. today. For clarity and consistency, this study blends two generational time span ranges and labels as used by two dominant and frequently cited generational observers: Strauss & Howe (1991 & 1997) and Tapscott (2009).

Today, there are three dominant generations are in the college classroom – Birth years are in ranges to reflect varying authors' classifications: (1) *Baby Boomers* (b. 1943/46 to 1960/64) – as teachers and parents of first wave Millennials; (2) *Generation X* (b. 1961/65 to 1976/81) – as teachers, adult students, and parents of last wave Millennials; and (3) *Millennials* (b. 1977/82 to 1997/2000) – the primary undergraduate and graduate students. Each of these generations exhibit distinctive personalities. These persona differences - Strauss and Howe (1991and 1997) emphasized – are firmly imprinted in late childhood/adolescence as a generation enters *Young Adulthood* years (ages, 22 – 43, a life-phase defined by Strauss and Howe, 1991). The persona or imprinted personality of a specific generation then colors and biases responses to environmental and cultural changes as the generation passes through future life phases: *Midlife* (life-phase, ages 44 to 65) to *Elderhood* (life-phase, ages 66 +) (Strauss and Howe, 1991:57).

A Millennials tsunami continues to inundate American colleges today. Enrollment of 18-24 year-olds has risen from 24% of the U.S. population in 1973 to 39% in 2008 – a 15.6% increase and still rising (Fry, 2009, October, 29). And, this flood still has approximately nine to twelve years remaining flow before the Millennials completely matriculate through U.S.post-secondary educational institutions.

Good communicators are patently instructed to know their audience. Similarly, good teachers must know their students – and today, and years into the future, their students are and will be Millennials. Can today's teachers adjust to this new generation of students?

Problem Statement and Purpose. Today's Baby Boomer - and increasingly Gen X - college teachers are struggling with how to best engage their Millennial students. This is a top-of-the-mind issue for most. The Millennial student audience is vastly different from the Gen X students of a little over one decade ago, but whose generational persona continues to resonate. Just as teachers became comfortable with or resigned to the Gen X student, they recognize that they are, once again, facing a new audience with new and unfamiliar needs and expectations. How can today's college teacher effectively reach and teach today's Millennial student?

This study offers a glimpse of a faintly trodden path to a successful journey toward this destination. At the conclusion of this study, teachers, managers, and others working with this new generation should have a better idea of how to work with the Millennials.

Methodology. In the introduction above , this study first offers, clarifying definitions to the often confounded discussions concerning the concept of *generations*. Second, the dominant generational personality of the Millennials is described and provides context to the student population of today's classrooms. Third, 10 core Millennial generation traits are distilled from the literature. Fourth, incorporating many of these 10 core traits, a mini-case study describes the development of a *blended/hybrid* 400 level undergraduate Hospitality Sales course – a traditional course modified with online features and specific methodologies. Finally, the study concludes with results from the development and four semester implementation of the blended/hybrid course.

Limitations of the Study. Not all scholars subscribe to the concept of generational differences as being a guide when developing classroom instruction. Reeves and Oh (2007) specifically caution, that "…while generational differences are the subject of much popular speculation… [there has been] relatively little substantive research" (Reese and Oh, 2007: 295). Their study examines the evidence in both the research and popular literature that supports (or fails to support) the popular generational speculations.

Salkowitz (2008) maintains that there is both analytic and anecdotal evidence showing the value in trying to explain the attitudes of individuals and groups according to their generational outlook. But, he offers a caveat to guard against overlooking exceptions which are always found with any broad approach – he specifically cautions against committing stereotyping error.

The study is not universal. The generational discussion here is confined to the United States. While similar international findings may exist, this study does not attempt to transcend the boundaries of the U.S.

Finally, while not exhaustive of other potential limitations, this study does not account for specific ethnic diversity found within the Millennial generation or any other generation discussed.

Millennials in the Classroom

Three Generations with distinctive personalities and differing characteristics are found in America's post-secondary classrooms today. They differ in values stressed, learning styles, technological skills, expectations, vision of the future, and so forth. This verity leads to many teaching/communication challenges that we currently have in

our college classrooms. The teachers are Baby Boomers and Generation X first mentioned in the introduction above. For sake of brevity, the following briefly describes the third generation, the Millennials, who comprise today's college undergraduates.

The Millennial Generation was born 1982–2000 – (a Strauss and Howe time span definition). Strauss and Howe (1991 and 1997) report the proliferation of "Babies on Board" signs signaled a major shift from parental neglect experienced by Gen X children. Abortion and divorce rates declined and babies were deemed to be "special" and needed inordinate protection. Child abuse and child safety became hot topics and best-seller books taught virtues and values. Hollywood replaced the dark movies characteristic of Gen X childhood years with lighter menu. Cable TV and the Internet came under pressure to provide lock devices for children to protect them from the dangerous excess of the new Wild West media world. Educators began to speak of "standards" and "cooperative learning" and school uniforms are surged in popularity.

Tapscott (2009), labels this generation, *Net Gen,* to signify that this generation never knew a time without digital technology. He defines this generation's time span as 1977 to 1997 and reports the Millennial generation size to be an estimated 81.1 million births or 21% of the U.S. population – this is a bigger generation than the Baby Boom and has been alternatively labeled the *Baby Echo*. With the oldest Millennials, now ages 28 to 33, they are still swelling their *Young Adulthood* years (life-phase, ages 22 to 43) – graduating from college and moving through the early stages of their careers. The youngest, ages 10 to 13, are five to eight years away from entering college. Strauss & Howe (1991) alternatively labeled this generation, *Heroes*, to reflect their similarity to the G.I or so called – *Greatest Generation* of WWII veterans (born 1901 to 1924). Several authors, Tapscott (2009), Greenberg (2008), Jones, Jo and Martin (2008), and others enthusiastically write about the potential greatness of the Millennials – perhaps this is due to the influence of a dominant generational theory explicated by generational research pioneers, Strauss and Howe (1991 and 1997).

Millennial Generation Core Traits

Every generation contains all kinds of people. But, as theorized by Strauss and Howe (1991 and 1997) each generation has a persona. These can be distilled into core traits. The following traits are derived from authors including: Greenberg (2008); Howe and Strauss (2007:59 –60); Tapscott (2009: 6 -7), Price (n.d), and others. This author has added observations derived over the two years teaching in a Blended format. Each of the 10 traits is discussed in both positive and negative aspects as viewed from this Baby Boomer professor/author.

Technological. <u>Positives:</u> Millennials assimilated technology because they grew up with it. They view technology as just another part of their environment. Speed is normal and .innovation is part of their lives. They want to customize things and make them their own. <u>Negatives:</u> Attention span is very short generally broken in 10 to 15 minute content blocks and supported by multimedia audio and visual components.

Special. <u>Positives:</u> Millennials have collectively come to believe that they are vital to the nation and to the reformation of the world. <u>Negatives:</u> Millennials appear to have a general attitude of entitlement which often manifests itself as rapid embracement and exhibits of enthusiasm vulnerable to disenchantment should high expectations be thwarted.

Team-Oriented. <u>Positives:</u> Immersed in team sports much of their lives and collaborative learning in school, Millennials have developed strong team instincts and tight peer bonds. <u>Negatives:</u> This concerns cheating – Group work seems to be acceptable even when not.

Sheltered. <u>Positives:</u> Millennials have been the focus of the most sweeping youth-protection movement in American history. <u>Negatives:</u> This often leads to continuation of dependency on adults and lack of needed weaning into the adult workplace.

Confident. Positives: Millennials have high levels of trust and optimism and palpable emotional connections to parents which can carry forward to teachers and mentors. Negatives: Over confidence can lead to unrealistic expectations and unrealistic assessments of self.

Tolerant. Positives: Millennials as the first global generation are more tolerant of diversity than their predecessors. Negatives: Tolerance is generally always good, but should not obscure a genuine ability to distinguish.

Pressured. Positives: Millennials feel a "trophy kid" pressure to excel in all things including education. Negatives: Unrealistic self-pressure often leads to performance anxieties as well as to violations of ethics to meet perceived standards.

Civic. Positives: Millennials strongly care about justice and societal problems – they have a propensity to practice their expanding knowledge in the broader society. Negatives: None.

Achieving. Positives: With educational competitiveness having risen to the top of America's political agenda during their childhood, standards of excelling (related to *pressured* above) drives them. Negatives: As mentioned earlier, they are pressured to achieve which drives them but also pressures them to perform often disregarding ethical behavior.

Conventional. Positives: Identified with and comfortable with their parents' values, Millennials have adapted the traditional belief that social rules and standards can make life easier. Negatives: Creativity can be hampered and group think is often found as safe acceptable behavior.

A Mini-Case Study – A Blended/Hybrid Course Adapted For Millennial Students
Blended Learning, sometimes known as *Hybrid Learning*, refers to a mixing of different learning environments. The term *blended* will be used for the remainder of this article. The phrase has many specific meanings based upon the context in which it is used. Blended learning gives learners and teachers a potential environment to learn and teach more effectively and efficiently (Wikipedia, 2011, January). Essentially, a *blended* course is a synthesis of a pure online course and a pure face-to-face traditionally taught classroom experience. Part of the course content is taught face-to-face with other portions delivered electronically and independently by students on their own time.

Mini-Case *Blended* Course Overview. The following mini-case provides an example of the development and evolutionary growth of a blended course in Hospitality Sales over a two-year period. Specifically, to fit a Millennial student audience, this course adopted blended learning methodologies to address the majority of the 10 Millennial core traits discussed above.The goal of this blended course is two-fold: To effectively deliver course content and to provide a *High Tech/High Touch* (Naisbitt, 1982) classroom experience compatible with and receptive to with a Millennial student audience.

In the spring of 2009, a Hospitality Sales course that the author had previously taught for 14 years in a traditional face-to-face format was converted into what can be labeled a *blended* or *hybrid* course. This blended course was respectively taught spring 2009, fall 2009, and spring 2010 and fall 2010. Currently, it is being taught spring 2011.

Course Content. The course covers the most current industry practices of *Consultative Selling* – This is a state-of-the-art form of sales and accurately reflects hospitality industry sales practice. The course assignments and assessments (tests) include: (1) Written assignments - Three mini-projects and two major projects that are interrelated and require student independent research; (2) In-class group discussions that are prepared prior to the class session; and (3) Three assessments are taken online and accessible over a five-day period.

Technological Course Delivery. The course resides on a *BlackBoard/Vista* online platform. Here the student has electronic access to (1) Assigned reading from a course packet that is assessable for no charge; (2) Lecture *PowerPoint* slides and notes posted online to be printed and used as a basis for in-class note taking in class; (3) Course syllabus; (4) E-mail communications with the professor and classmates; (5) A calendar of all assignments and assessments provides clarity of all due dates; (6) Posted study guides for assessments and assessments taken online with instant grading feedback; (7) Posted specifications for all assignments and which can be a submitted online with feedback returned electronically; and (8) A grade book to give students current feedback on each graded activity along with accumulative total numerical points. And, all final grades are electronically posted at the end of a semester giving the student rapid feedback through the Internet.

In addition to the university provided *Vista* platform, other generic products are used in this hybrid course. These include: *YouTube*, *Google Docs* (Groups), *Text the Mob*, an external service to allow smart phones to act as clickers for in-class response, and *Zoomerang*, an online survey service.

Face-to-Face Course Delivery. All classrooms have Wi-Fi connections. Teacher's desktop computers are backed up by a central server that allows a teacher to assess both the Internet and all files located on his/her desktop computer. This is projected to a large front screen. The teacher can assess his/her prepared *PowerPoint* slides which act as the controlling guideline for each class session. The *PowerPoint* presentation, serving as a map to the class session, incorporates a variety of class activities. For example, one slide may have an illustrative two to three minute *YouTube* video clip which introduces the class session topic. Following the clip, a brief discussion of significance takes place. Another slide may simply be a model or bullet points of lecture material, which is then followed by another discussion question slide. Thus, using *PowerPoint,* a unified class session can be prepared in advance - a presentation that orchestrates multiple class activities in small time chunks thereby keeping Millennial student interest alive.

Assess to the Internet from the classroom allows the teacher to link to and display any web site to provide additional support to course content. Additionally, the teacher can link to the *Vista* course platform to assist students with any questions regarding course logistics or navigation.

Results

Spring Semester 2009. This first semester, the author began with more scaled back version of the hybrid course than described above: Simple *PowerPoint* usage*,* a *Vista* platform, and an enthusiasm to relate to the Millennial students. Surprisingly, the author's enthusiasm backfired as he attempted to have the students collaborate and participate. Student evaluations indicated that they wanted the teacher not to use them as "guinea pigs." They wanted him to have more authority and have the new hybrid course detailed and more fully developed before trying it out on them. Regarding the use of technology, the evaluations indicated that this was a winner. But, overall end-of-course evaluations were slightly lower than had been normally received teaching in a traditional format.

Fall Semester 2009. The author increased use of technology – after all, it had proven a winner in the spring. The author added *Text the Mob*, *Zoomerang* surveys, *PowerPoint* slides of all lectures posted online. Regarding enthusiasm and high collaborative efforts to have the Millennials help me, the author sought counsel from other students, not currently in his course. Then he entered the classroom prepared and implemented an improved product. Student evaluations showed a slight improvement from the previous semester. However, the author received more negative remarks about not getting to know their names and relating to them more personally.

Spring Semester 2010. The blended course retained all of the of the previous semester's improvements and added the *Google Docs* (Groups) whereby the professor can more quickly learn student names. Essentially, their names and pictures are posted – voluntarily by the student's themselves. The professor can more readily associate names and faces when calling roll from the Wi-Fi assessed *Google* site. This addressed the Millennial core trait – their need to feel *special*. End of course evaluations indicated that this was effective.

Fall Semester 2010. This semester demonstrated the failure of not maintaining a systematic and full use of the blended learning tools as previously developed. The author only used *PowerPoint* and reverted back to more traditional classroom methodology. Dropped were: Surveys, meaningful discussions following straight lecture, no texting, roll-taking by passing around sign-up sheets, and failure to learn student names. *Death by PowerPoint* boredom was the major written complaint accompanied by lowered end-of-course evaluations.

Spring Semester 2011. Again the course is being taught. Past lessons of success and failure demonstrate that blended courses are a viable methods for addressing Millennial student audiences. Concurrently, old successful methods are being reinstituted and new technologies are being explored that might enhance a future blended course. These include: *Second Life* to provide practical exercises through Avatar participation in practical exercises, *iTunes University* for podcasts and vodcasts and *Wetpaint*, a wiki website for collaborative group work. New results will be in May 2011.

Conclusions

Willingness to risk developing any new course may be dissuading since faculty end-of-course evaluations often suffer with a change from teaching at one's comfort level. But, the risk involved with change should be temporary if one is changing toward a sound strategic goal and incremental improvement – with no backsliding – is maintained. The strategic goal to effectively reach and teach the Millennial student, this author believes, is sound. The Millennial generation will dominate America's classrooms for at least then next nine to twelve years. They are not going away in the near future. There is no winning choice, but for today's teachers – communicators - to effectively adapt to their student audience.

References

Fry, Richard. (2009, October, 29). *College enrollment hits all time high fueled by surge community college surge.* Retrieved 10 November 2010from Http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1391/college-enrollment-all-time-high-community-college.

Greenberg, Eric. (2008). *Generation we: How millennial youth are taking over America and changing our world forever.* Emeryville, CA: Pachatusan.

Howe, Neil & Strauss, William. (2000). *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. New York: Vantage Books.

Howe, Neil & Strauss, William. (2007*). Millennials go to college* (2nd ed). Great Falls, VA: Life Course Associates.

Jones, Vicki, Jo, Jun, & Martin, Philippe. (2008). *Future schools and how technology can be used to support millennial and generation-z students.* Retrieved 15 November 2010 from Http://www.phmartin.info/WebKBtools/doc/papers/icut07/icut07_JonesJoMartin.pdf.

Martin, Carolyn, A. & Tulgan, Bruce (2001). *Managing generation Y: Global citizens born in the late seventies and early eighties*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press, Inc.

Naisbitt, John. (1982). *Megatrends: Ten New Directions transforming our lives.* Australia, Clayton, VIC: Warner Books.

Price, Christy. (n.d.). *Why don't my students think I'm groovy?: The new "Rs" for engaging millennial learners.* Retrieved 20 October 2010 from Http://www.drtomlifvendahl.com/Millennial%20Characturistics.pdf.

Reeves, Thomas, C. & Oh, Eunjung. (2007). *Generational differences.* Retrieved 23 October 2010 from Http://www. uts.ualberta.ca/documents/Reeves_Oh_Gen_Diffs_2007.pdf.

Salkowitz, Rob. (2008). *Generation blend: managing across the technology age gap.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Strauss, William & Howe, Neil. (1991).*Generations: The history of America's future, 1584 to 2069.* New York: William Morrow. New York: Broadway Books.

Strauss, William & Howe, Neil. (1997). *The fourth turning: An American Prophecy.* New York: Broadway Books.

Tapscott. Don. (2009). *Grown up digital: How the net generation is changing your world*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

NCEE. (1983, April). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform.* A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education by The National Commission on Excellence in Education. Retrieved 10 November 2010 from Http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html.

Wikipedia. (2011, January). *Blended learning*. Retrieved 13 January 2011from Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended_learning.