



HARRY+KATNISS IN THE CLASSROOM

CONTRASTING MILLENNIALS+GENERATION Z

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Generational theorists suggest that we currently have two generations in today's classrooms; the Millennial Generation and Generation Z. Millennials are also referred to as Generation Y, the demographic cohort following Generation X. Researchers tend to use the early 1980s as starting birth years and the late 1990s as ending birth years to describe Millennials. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2016 the Millennial generation surpassed the Baby Boomer generation in size in the US.¹

Generation Z, sometimes known as Post-Millennials or the iGeneration, is the group of individuals born after the Millennials. They are typically seen as being born around 1999 and later, with little consensus regarding ending birth years.

Today's classrooms are populated by both Millennial and Gen Z students. While these students share many characteristics, their unique skills and life experiences shape them. The heroes they hold in high esteem are also different, which allows us a glimpse into their preferences regarding learning spaces and pedagogies, or teaching methods.

MILLENNIALS+ GENERATION Z

MILLENNIALS 1980-1998

GENERATION Z 1999-2012

MILLENNIAL GENERATION

The Millennial generation grew up in the fantasy world of Harry Potter and his magical friends. As a refresher, Harry Potter is the lead character in a series of wildly-popular Young Adult novels published from 1997 – 2007. The blockbuster movies followed, with release dates spanning 2001 through 2011. The focus of the novels is Harry, a wizard who was orphaned at a young age, and his friends. They attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a type of boarding school for magical folk. The main story arc concerns Harry's struggle against Lord Voldemort, a dark wizard who intends to become immortal, and overthrow the governing body of the wizard world. Harry was orphaned at the age of one, when Voldemort murdered his parents and attempted to kill him also. Protected by the love of his mother, Harry does not die but instead becomes the one who must defeat Voldemort and save the magical world.

Harry Potter faced the evil of Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters, while Millennials grew up in the shadow of 9/11 and its aftermath. Researchers suggest that the themes of loss, grief, and struggle for power in the books resonate with a generation who came of age during the War on America and the economic and societal outfall². However, in spite of the turbulence on the world stage during their childhood, members of the Millennial generation are optimistic³, just as young Potter was throughout the seven book series.

Like Harry, who was characterized as the savior of the Wizardry World, the members of the Millennial generation were raised to be viewed as special⁴. Their omnipresent "helicopter" parents ensured that their opinions were heard, and that they participated in an overwhelming amount of extracurricular activities where every participant received a ribbon. Millennials have been described as the first generation to be overscheduled.

GENERATION Z

Members of the following generation, Generation Z, have embraced the darker, more serious universe of The Hunger Games trilogy of novels. The best-selling books were published between 2008 and 2010, with the movies hitting the big screen from 2012 through 2015. The story focuses on Katniss Everdeen. Katniss lives in a dystopian world where North America has been divided into 12 districts, collectively known as Panem. The districts are controlled by an oppressive government known as The Capitol. The hunger and deprivation rampant in the districts is in sharp contrast to the glittering, opulent Capitol. Each year, The Capitol requires the districts to choose two tributes (a boy and a girl between the ages of 12 and 18) to fight to the death in the Hunger Games. On live television, the teen tributes are released into an arena and expected to kill their peers to survive. When the name of Katniss' younger sister is drawn to serve as tribute, Katniss takes her place. The story encompasses the Hunger Games and the subsequent rebellion which is led by Katniss.

Raised in a post-9/11 world scarred by Global Terrorism, mass school shootings, and the Great Recession, Generation Z has witnessed widespread government revolutions, climate change, and a growing suspicion of authority figures. Researchers and educators have reported members of Gen Z as being more pragmatic than Millennials⁵, possibly more jaded due to the tough economy, terrorism, and growing disparity between socio-economic classes.

In The Hunger Games, Katniss relies on her wits and her knack for fashioning weapons to stay alive. Perhaps inspired by this, the members of Gen Z embrace a culture of "making." Providing spots such as Makerspaces, which are designed to allow students to tinker, design, and invent can resonate with these students. Many are experiential learners, so assignments which allow them to participate in experiences outside of a traditional academic setting can deepen their understanding.

DIGITAL NATIVES

While their life experiences and respective literary heroes may be different, Millennials and Gen Z students share many attributes and preferences. The most apparent may be their affinity for technology⁶. Whether they cut their teeth on a Game Boy® or their parent's smartphone, both generations thrive in classrooms where technology is effectively used. Sometimes referred to as Digital Natives, technology has been a part of their diet since birth.

To reach students who are tech savvy and cannot imagine life without their devices, instructors should consider utilizing videos, social media, and other forms of technology in their curriculum. Learning spaces which support technology include the use of one or more large presentation screens, and appropriate WiFi or network access. Be mindful not to scrimp on electrical outlets. Consider providing them in floors/walls as well as in the furniture, via desktop grommets or outlets in the arms of chairs. The use of a student response system is an excellent method to keep learners engaged. In these types of systems, the instructor poses a question and the students utilize a hand held "clicker" or simply access an app on their mobile device to submit an answer. As the responses are received, a word cloud appears on the screen creating a visual map of the answers.

A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS

For today's students, technology has provided a world without borders. With a few mouse clicks, they connect with people in other countries and cultures. Beyond being borderless, their world also tends to be color-blind and highly diverse. Millennials embraced a Hogwarts world where wizards communed with half-bloods (those with only one wizard parent), muggles (non-wizards), giants, and a trusted Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, who was gay. Generation Z, projected to be America's last generation with a Caucasian majority⁷, grew up with the children of the Hunger Games. The story describes most inhabitants of District 11 and the key characters of Rue and Thresh as African-American, while Cinna, the stylist and confidant to Katniss, is played in the movies by a black actor.

COLLABORATING IS KEY

The students of today have enjoyed a rich extracurricular life. After years of collaborating as a part of sports leagues and enrichment activities, most Millennials and Gen Zs enjoy working in teams and making decisions as part of a group. In a similar way, the community at Hogwarts in the Harry Potter novels centers on the teamwork and camaraderie found in the four residence houses and their Quidditch teams; Harry was a member of Gryffindor. Harry is also inseparable from his friends Ron and Hermione, with his ultimate victory against Voldemort relying on their teamwork. Those of Generation Z grew up reading about Katniss and the group of friends and supporters who help her avoid losing the Hunger Games, and spark a life-changing revolution.

With their penchant for teamwork, both generations thrive in learning spaces that are designed to encourage collaboration. When outfitting these rooms, choose furnishings that are flexible and mobile. Provide seating and tables that include casters or wheels, to allow students to easily move into small groups or pairs for collaborative work. A table designed for collaborating around a screen or monitor will allow learners to harness the power of technology, while sharing the ideas of each team member.

Students in both generations prefer to be self-directed when possible. Unlike earlier generations, their parents routinely ask their opinion and accept their input when selecting vacation spots, dinner plans, and more. With this in mind, consider allowing students to choose their classroom seat when practical. Furnish the space with a variety of ergonomic, interesting worksurfaces and chairs that includes a mix of individual tables, team tables, conventional seating, and softer lounge seating with a residential feel.

MENTORS+FACILITATORS

As today's learning spaces transition to support these tech-savvy, collaborative learners, the role of the instructor is changing as well. Both Millennials and Generation Z members respond well to active learning approaches, in which the instructor plays the role of a facilitator rather than a lecturer. The readers of both the Harry Potter novels and The Hunger Games trilogy grew up imagining teachers in the role of mentor. Harry has Professor Dumbledore, who guides him on his journey and generally makes sure that when trouble rears its ugly head, Harry is ready to take it on. Katniss relies on Haymitch Abernathy, a former tribute and winner of the Hunger Games. When sober, Haymitch serves as an invaluable, albeit gruff, mentor who helps Katniss survive. Both mentors resist the urge to lecture and instead help their protégés to discover things on their own.

It's important that mentors, or facilitators, in 21st Century classrooms are provided with furnishings which support their role of guiding students. No longer the "sage on a stage" who stands at the front of the room lecturing to passive students, today's facilitator is a "guide on the side" who moves amongst the students lending assistance when needed, while encouraging learners to lead themselves and each other. To support these emerging pedagogies, replace the static teachers desk with a mobile, streamlined unit that the instructor can easily move to the most appropriate spot in the room. Similar to flexible student desks or tables, these facilitator stations will allow the room to be set and reset often to support the activities of the moment.

TODAY'S LEARNERS

Certainly, today's learners are very different from previous generations. Regardless if they identify more closely with Harry or Katniss, providing these students with technology-rich learning spaces that are furnished with flexible, mobile, comfortable solutions will ensure a storybook ending for all.

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