Teaching Across Generations

Beth A. Longenecker, DO, FACOEP, FACEP, CS
Associate Dean, Clinical Education
Disclosures

• I am a “cusper”
  – Transition between BabyBoomer and Generation X
Goals of this Discussion

• Identify characteristics of each generation
• Discuss the potential impact of these traits on the teacher/learner relationship
• Use knowledge of generational traits to structure experiences in order to facilitate learning
• Create bridges across generations to enhance the communication and learning
Today’s Medical Student
Generation

• Group of people born in same timeframe
  – Typically about 20 years

• Share a common context of experiences
  – Shape beliefs, values and preferences
The Generation Gap

• Mean age at matriculation is 23
  – Born in 1992
    • “Millennial” or “Generation Y”

• Physicians in practice: average age 52
  – 70% are 40 – 69 years old
  – 20% are 30 – 39 years old
    • “Generation X” and “Baby Boomer”
  – 10% are > 69 years old
    • “Traditional”
Traditionals (1920–1945)

**Defining Events**
- Great Depression
- The New Deal
- World War I
- World War II
- Penicillin and Polio Vaccine
- Parents: Immigrants

**Characteristics**
- Loyalty
- Duty
- Patriotism
- Delayed gratification
  - No social safety net
- Save for a rainy day
- Personal sacrifice
Baby Boomers (1946–1964)

Defining Events
- End of World War II
- Vietnam War begins
- First human in space
- Assassination of JFK
- Women’s Right’s Movement
- Television
- Traditional parents
  - Mom stays home
  - Financially secure

Characteristics
- Optimism
- Idealism
- Devotion
- Competitive
  - People to job ratio
- “Me” generation
- Want to leave their mark
Generation X (1965–1980)

Defining Events

- End of Vietnam War
- Watergate Scandal
- Religious scandals
  - Jim Baker, Catholic priests
- AIDS
- Technology explosion
- Latchkey kids
  - Many with divorced parents

Characteristics

- Skepticism
- Disillusionment
- Self-reliant and competent
- Demand work/life balance
As a Student......

Boomers
• On time
• Motivated to succeed
• Prepared
• Concerned about grades
• Prefer lectures

X-ers
• Keep it efficient and straightforward
  – Teach to the test
• Education is a means to an end
• Prefer self-directed opportunities

Defining Events

- End of Cold War
- Space Shuttle Challenger
- Cloning Dolly the Sheep
- Columbine
- Oklahoma City
- 911
- “Surfing the Net”
Millennials (1981–2001)

Baby Boomer Parents

- Pressured to excel
  - School, sports, activities
  - If you don’t will get coach!
- Told that they are special
  - Told they can achieve anything
  - Sheltered from failure
- Rules exist but few limits
  - Involved in decision making at all levels
Characteristics of Generation “Y”

• Digital natives
  – Explorative, experiential, hands-on learners
  – Multi-taskers
  – Highly developed ability to sort through data
  – Ability to move easily between real and virtual
• Most connected/most isolated
Characteristics of Generation “Y”

• Collaborators: crave interactivity
  – Gravitate toward social interaction
    • This desire can lead to overextension
  – Expect and embrace diversity
  – Often more comfortable in group activities than flying solo

• Respectful of, but not awed by, authority
Characteristics of Generation “Y”

• Achievement oriented
  – Want clearly defined objectives
  – Focused on reward (grades)
  – Want constant feedback

• Consumerist Attitude
  – Expect accountability from institutions
Characteristics of Generation “Y”

• Mindset is NOT work/life balance it is one that only things that are interesting or worthwhile fit into my life
Does this really apply in med school???

- Borge et al. 2 studies in one school
  - Compared Gen X and Gen Y students
  - Personality traits
    - Millennials higher in rule consciousness and perfectionism
    - Gen X higher in self reliance
  - Motivation
    - Millennials higher in achievement and affiliation
    - Gen X higher in power
Implications for Educators
The Digital Mind

- Not linear learners—seek input from multiple sources
- Shorter attention span
  - “hypertext” mindset
- Prefer visual over textual or graphic
  - Not readers as a whole!
- Informatically illiterate
  - Can sort info but poor judge of quality
Strategies to Try

• Multimedia assignments more effective
  – Keep lecture time short
  – Stimulate problem solving
  – Application of knowledge/hands on trial and error

• Assign clinical question to answer
  – Keep it specific
  – Discuss what sources are NOT reliable and why
Multitasking

- Tendency to do this in classroom setting, on rounds, in hospital
  - Perceived as disrespectful

- Can negatively impact long term recall
Digital Communication

- Expect instant responses and constant feedback

- Blogs, etc.:
  - Everyone’s opinion is equally valid
  - I have the right to critique anyone on anything
Digital Communication

- Communication without barriers
  - Can carry over to professors and preceptors

- Difficulty with verbal and written communication
Best Strategy: Set Expectations

- When/how to communicate

- Rules for cellphone/computer use

- What you expect in a formal email

- If you wish to offer an opinion on a discussion or point, validate it
Collaborative Mindset

• Group learning activities preferred
  – May be unwilling to commit when asked an opinion

• View everyone on the team as a peer
  – May select opinions of peer group(real and virtual) over that of their teachers
  – May appear “casual”
  – May struggle in teams with a rigid hierarchy
Strategies to Try

• More small group discussion in person or online
  – Monitor participation

• Establish expectations—explain YOUR idea of the hierarchy/respect

• Explain discrepancies of opinion
Other Ideas

• Find ways for meaningful inclusion
  – Assign specific tasks/duties
  – Provide feedback on work
  – Simulation with the team

• Reach out on a personal level
  – Explain why you chose your career path
  – Discuss where you use skills you are helping the learner develop
The “Parent Trap”

• Special and sheltered
  – Do not always self-assess abilities well
  – Reward focused
    • They should always have an “A”
  – Do not take negative feedback easily
    • Emotional meltdown
    • Your opinion does not matter

• Highly active but structured schedule
  – Often can’t self-structure study/travel
Implications for Educators

• Provide clear cut goals and offer rewards
  – Praise, with specificity

• Provide feedback—gently

• Struggling learners
  – Explore time management/organizational skill
  – Give specific and focused instruction
Final thoughts on Bridging the Generational Gap

• Be aware generational context and think outside your “box”

• Work to create a culture of mutual respect

• Provide clear direction in all expectations
Final thoughts on Bridging the Generational Gap

• Don’t let generational values define professionalism

• Explain the “why”

• Show your passion
  – If you can inspire a millennial you will channel their energy
Questions?
References


References


References
