

TEACHING MILLENNIALS: PRACTICE, PRACTICE AND ONCE AGAIN PRACTICE

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Abstract The presented paper contains a set of experiences and thoughts of the author in the field of teaching students belonging to Generation Y. The aim of the article is to show their needs and expectations towards the education process and to formulate exemplary activating exercises. Based on conversations with students and own academic experience, the author focuses on practical exercises. The paper also indicates specific proposals for universal exercises that can be used in working with students to simultaneously facilitate the acquisition of didactic material as well as stimulating them to work in classes and at home. This paper is of reflective nature, supported by examples from the classes in management and finance and is addressed to academic teachers and educators who want to enrich their classes with new stimulation methods and exercise, as well as to the students representing Generation Y interested in the subject matter.

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Introduction

Millennials (Generation Y) are the subject of many discussions in the world of science as well as in business. What are they like? What do they expect? What are their needs? What determines and characterizes them? Should we love them or hate them? These are just a few questions that we all try to answer.

Many publications in this regard are particularly concerned with Generation Y as employees. Big companies and their human resources departments are interested in research on generations of employees especially in their capabilities and expectations as to the style of work. Our personal opinion is that a good employee is the one who is involved in the tasks entrusted to him, and each human resources department should pay attention not only to what grades the candidate has obtained, but how did he obtain them.

So why not try to characterize Millennials as a group of students? The period of study is the best time when young people should acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge. The skills they will gain during their studies and what interests they develop will largely determine their professional career. It is believed that Generation Y will revolutionize higher education (Phillips & Trainor, 2014) and we fully agree with this claim.

In this paper, we will characterize Millennials as a group of students and their expectations towards education. In addition, we will show examples of tasks that will diversify the traditional teaching style (based only on lectures) and that will be accepted by students representing Generation Y. These examples will be divided into two parts: (1) tasks related to the assimilation of the theory and (2) tasks requiring earlier preparation based on students' own work.

Characteristics of Generation Y as a group of students – Who are they and what do they expect?

Millennials entered higher education around the year 2000. Almost twenty years have passed since then and some changes in the higher education system are noticeable.

As the first generation that has grown up with mobile digital technology, they expect continuous interaction with their peers in forms that would be unimaginable for other generations of young adults. If we had to describe Millennials generation only in one sentence it would be: *I will send you an email.*

Millennials grew up during the development of social networking sites they use daily. They were the first to experience the possibilities of the Internet and they observed the development of mobile phones from the introduction of the first cameras to smartphones. It is no wonder that technology and fast communication is an important aspect of millennial life also in the area of studying.

Today, students who prepare for classes or exams can be seen in college corridors. This will never change. However, what distinguishes them from students from 20 or 30 years ago is technology. Most of them have electronic notes, which they read on the screens of laptops, iPads or smartphones. The technology also allows them to quickly reach many materials, scientific articles and even books in electronic form. Thus, if they do not have notes, they can try to prepare for the class in a different, electronic way. Alternatively, they ask other students via the Internet for these notes, e.g. on university forums or via instant messenger platforms.

The communication process has also changed both between students and in the student-teacher relationship. In the era of ubiquitous technology, Generation Y prefers contact by phone or e-mail. Since instant messaging has appeared and e-mails can also be read on smartphones, the communication process is much faster. Students no longer have to wait for a teacher's consultation to ask questions and dispel their doubts. This also means that students representing the millennial generation often expect immediate responses not only from peers but also from teachers.

Millennials are often described as smart, ambitious, incredibly busy and as multitaskers. They can listen to music, learn and watch TV at the same time. They also study and work at the same time. They expect accurate information about the study program and how to pass the exam. Members of this generation also often ask questions about the practical application of the content. They also want to have a close relationship with their teacher involving more guidance and extra personal attention (Kotz, 2016). According to Wilson and Gerber (2008), Generation Y

prefers to work in small groups to working alone. Teams of two or three members, especially, were viewed as optimal.

Phillips and Trainor (2014) indicate that “millennial students have a preference for interactive and experiential learning experiences”. Their research also confirmed that students prefer learning by doing and not by listening.

The literature on the subject of teaching and learning lately addresses the ‘flipped classroom’ concept as an increasingly popular approach to meeting the learning needs of Generation Y. In the flipped classroom model, the class lecture or instructional content are assigned as homework in a sense that students are required to prepare for the class in advance, generally by viewing an online lecture. This approach allows more time to be devoted to active learning. Additionally, it provides opportunities for greater relationship-building between the teacher and students as also for a peer-to-peer collaboration among students (Roehl, Reddy & Shannon, 2013). In this model, the class time is spent on problem solving, discussions, creating, criticizing and synthesizing knowledge in a dynamic and engaging environment (Phillips & Trainor, 2014; Towle & Breda, 2014). Fulton (2012) listed at least seven advantages of the flipped classroom, two of them being that students move at their own pace and that the classroom time is used more effectively and creatively.

This is, in short, what the members of Generation Y expect from studying. Millennials know what they want and are not afraid to reach for it.

Millennials as students in teaching practice – own experiences and observations

As a young scientist and academic teacher, also representing Generation Y, we always devote a few minutes of the first classes with students to a discussion about their lives and expectations. First of all, we want to know what their expectations about our classes are, and secondly what tasks and examples should be used to maintain their interest. We ask them the following questions: Why did they choose these studies?; What do they expect from the chosen direction?; How can we help them achieve their goal?; What do they expect from me as the teacher?; What can we do to motivate them to work?. The answer is always the same – the practical

application of knowledge and easy contact. We therefore receive my own confirmation.

During each class, we try to comply with their expectations. Almost all students, both in full-time and part-time studies, work. Therefore, they expect to receive from the teacher full information about the study program and how to pass the exam. They want to know what we will require from them; if there will be a test to pass; and the scope of material that will be required for them to study. They also expect to be contacted by e-mail and that we will send to them the materials from classes or the information on where to look for these materials.

The conditions set by us during the first classes satisfy both sides. We know what we can expect from each other. In addition, the teacher can prepare examples from their professional life, which often leads to many constructive discussions. The characterization of Generation Y presented above works one hundred percent. Millennials as students want to be involved both in the classroom and in their preparation. They like working in small groups, solving case studies and discussing problems. Most of them do not write anything in their notebooks because they receive the material prepared online or in the form of a printout in the classroom. They have full access to the materials during classes and can make their own annotations. They also do not want to waste time for writing down something they can easily find in books.

In the current academic year, we faced problems regarding the preparation of practical tasks for a purely theoretical subject such as the basics of management. This can be a problem for many novice teachers. The challenges were mainly related to how to make the students interested in basic concepts and definitions, and more importantly, to remember them; and how to make them put down their smartphones and get involved in classes. In the next chapter, we will present some examples.

Teaching Millennials in practice – examples of student tasks during classes

In this chapter, the examples of tasks from the classes in management and finance will be presented. They are addressed to academic teachers and educators who want to enrich their classes with new stimulation methods and exercises as well as to the students representing Generation Y interested in the subject matter.

These examples will be divided into two parts, i.e. the tasks related to the assimilation of theory and the tasks requiring earlier preparation and students' own work.

Tasks related to the assimilation of theory

First, we will discuss the tasks related to the assimilation of the theory. Their use is justified when students need to learn many concepts and definitions in a short time. This material should already be known to them or discussed shortly before the task. If it is not necessary, the students can also rely on their own intuition.

Crosswords are one of my favourite tasks as well as of my students. The teacher can prepare them on their own or ask the students to prepare them. Here, it is important that each student has the same source material. Otherwise, they will not be able to solve them properly and instead of learning something, they will be discouraged from further action. All entries should be related to the subject of the classes and should include the study material required for the exam. If the students are requested to prepare the crossword, it will oblige them to read the material in advance and will make them memorize at least some of the concepts from the material. This task is also a nice change from the usual activities students need to do.

Similar effects will be triggered by a task based on the "charades" game. We use them during the basics of management classes in relation to the topic 'communication in the organization'. Here, students are divided into two groups. Each group has 10 minutes to prepare the topic-related concepts for the opposing team. The draw of concepts begins the game. The task of each team is to choose one or more persons who will present the drawn concept in such a way that other the group will be able to guess it. The team that guesses the most concepts is the winning team. The reward can be the ratings from the activity or the grades from the activity, which will additionally motivate Millennials to prepare thoroughly.

The guessed concepts must be associated with communication and management so that students can assimilate their definitions. This task has other advantages, too. It will improve group communication skills of participants and the awareness of nonverbal communication. It will also help people become increasingly more aware of their gestures as a communicative device (Zauner, 1971).

Matching definitions with concepts (i.e. puzzles) is another, similar task associated with the assimilation of theory. This task can be used, for example, as a repetition activity before the exam and even as one of the exam questions.

The tasks presented so far can be applied to all subjects during which students need to acquire many concepts and definitions in a short period of time. They can also be freely changed and improved according to the teacher's needs.

Tasks requiring earlier preparation and students' own work

While it is difficult to attract the attention of students, it is much more difficult to make them want to prepare something for classes by themselves. If for some reason they are not interested in the topic, they will not have the satisfaction of learning and preparing for classes. However, as teachers, we can make them acquire additional, non-standard experiences during classes. An example of such task can be to organize the Oxford debate in class.

The instructions on how to conduct the Oxford debate are available on the Internet in many languages. According to Bailey and Molyneaux (2008), at least twelve students should be involved in the task. Eight of them will take the role of speaker of the proposition and opposition (four people in each team). Each speaker has a different role which is described in detail in the instructions. The remaining participants will perform additional roles, such as: chairperson, who controls the debate, timekeeper, who are responsible for timing each speech and making audible signals at the appropriate times, and adjudicators, who are taking notes on what all the speakers say and award places for teams at the end of the debate.

The teacher should set the topic of the debate in accordance with the subject matter of the classes and divide the roles between the students. For this task to make sense, the teacher should give his/her students time to prepare. The best option is that the students prepare for the next class. The speaker taking part in the debate must have time to familiarize himself/herself with the subject matter and prepare arguments for or against the topic (thesis) according to the assigned role. The other participants in the debate must also have time to read the instructions of the debate and prepare to play their role.

From our experience so far, many students were sincerely involved in the debate. Also, other students who do not take an active part in the debate (i.e. the audience) were satisfied with the participation in the classes. After the debate and the announcement of the results, our students continued to discuss the topic of the debate and specific arguments.

Organizing such a debate is time-consuming and requires a lot of preparation on the part of students. However, it gives them the opportunity to conduct a serious and substantive discussion related to the study program. It also teaches them how to formulate arguments and how to defend their positions.

Case studies and group projects are another type of activities which we often use in our teaching. In our opinion, these are very common teaching methods that do not need to be described. Depending on the syllabus, you can use existing case studies or prepare your own. We are inclined to use examples that are the closest to our students' interests and to current business practice. This makes students more involved and helps find the right answers more easily.

One should also consider how to diversify classes in strictly financial subjects, where the main tasks concern the calculation and the use of mathematical formulas. The question arising here is whether this is possible at all. To answer this question, we should go back to the original observations regarding Generation Y as students. What they expect from their studies is the practical application of the obtained theoretical knowledge. Tasks should, therefore, take into account business practice and be as close as possible to the work performed by students. Therefore, the financial data of real enterprises can be used for calculations. Interpretations of the obtained results will have greater significance for Generation Y students.

Conclusions

In our opinion, Millennials as students are an interesting group. They are full of positive expectations for the future and rightly convinced of their own worth. We often identify their high requirements with the need for personal development and clearly defined life goals. We believe that as teachers, we should not only transmit knowledge but also broaden our students' horizons and allow them as many experiences as possible in many different ways. We should also give them a certain

degree of independence, for example, in selecting companies for a group project. Otherwise they will not be very engaged in the activity.

In our opinion, the best teaching effect can be achieved by combining the tasks related to the assimilation of theory and the tasks requiring earlier preparation and students' own work. The above tasks are some of the examples that can be used in the course of teaching and their selection should be adapted to the content of the subject. The teacher should prepare such tasks that will help students systematize the acquired knowledge and, at the same time, teach them practical application of the obtained knowledge. The existing teaching process which is based largely on students' work only during classes and learning at home with materials acquired in the lectures should be changed. Moreover, as the generation Z enters higher education the need for practical exercises will be even greater than in the case of Millennials as students.

Going back to the question asked in the first part of the article, i.e. "should we love them, or hate them", we hope that everyone interested in the topic will reflect on the answer to this question. First of all, we should try to understand them and not to judge them.

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