



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Teaching and Learning in Nursing

journal homepage: [www.jtln.org](http://www.jtln.org)

## Today's learners and educators: Bridging the generational gaps

Susan Hart, PhD \*

The University of Southern Mississippi, College of Nursing, Collaborative Nursing Care, P.O. Box 5095, Hattiesburg, MS, USA, 39406

## ARTICLE INFO

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Millennial learners

Generational gaps

Interactive learning techniques

Collaborative relationships

## ABSTRACT

In today's nursing education, there are generational differences among students and educators. Many questions arise as educators wrestle with ideas to assist the students to become successful nurses. The article explores characteristics of current learners and strategies for bridging generational gaps. Through a comprehensive literature review, common solutions emerged centering on the acronym ACT: "A" for assessing and appreciating learner characteristics, "C" for committing to relationships and collaboration, and "T" for teaching with interactive learning techniques.

© 2017 Organization for Associate Degree Nursing. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

In today's nursing education and practice arenas, there are multiple generational differences among students, faculty, and nurses. Many questions arise as educators wrestle with ideas and strategies to assist students to become successful nurses "Who are the learners today?" "How do these learners impact education and practice?" "What are the best positive teaching–learning environment for all generations?"

The majority of nursing students currently are considered millennial learners, whereas most of the educators in higher education are from the baby boomer era creating more than a 30-year generational gap. Millennials today are between ages 19 and 35 years and make up the largest living population in the United States (Fry, 2016). Nurse educators' average ages range from 51 to 61 years depending on education level and academic rank (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2015). With this generational gap, multiple priorities emerge for educators and nurses in preparing tomorrow's workforce to appraise and blend generational characteristics, life experiences, values, work habits, technology, and approaches to nursing care (American Nurses Association, 2014; Nelsey & Brownie, 2012).

In this article, the author conducted an extensive review of the literature to explore the characteristics of current learners and educators and identify strategies for bridging generational gaps in preparing nurses to thrive in the current health care environment. Three common strategies emerged for educating today's learners. The author created the acronym ACT to facilitate the discussion: "A" for assessing and appreciating learner characteristics, "C" for committing to relationships

and collaboration, and "T" for teaching with interactive learning techniques.

## Assessing and Appreciating Learner Characteristics

Millennial students in the higher education are very different than the baby boomer educators. Millennials approach education through a different set of lens and energy level. In the book *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, Howe and Strauss (2000) identified positive characteristics and challenges for millennials centering on their upbringing, attitudes, and behavior. Millennials tend to be confident, smart working individuals who prefer working in groups. They respect rules and expect positive affirmation and feedback on how to succeed. While millennials feel great pressure to achieve, their self-esteem and reliance stem from close relationships with parents and peers. Baby boomers are the parents of the millennials who hovered over and sheltered their children making sure that they had everything they wanted and needed. Parents and peers flock to the millennial's side to help them solve problems, which reinforce the sheltered lifestyle (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

The majority of students in college today are the maturing adults from the era of "No Child Left Behind." The "No Child Left Behind" law from 2002 brought many changes to the primary educational system with the main goal of ensuring success for all students. Resources and time spent on elevating performance on standardized testing, which brought about teaching to the test and memorization rather than understanding the content for application. Administrators and teachers were held responsible for performance rather than the student's responsibility. Teachers found that this created less time to motivate learning and practice problem-solving skills (Trolan & Fouts, 2011).

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 601 266 4954.  
E-mail address: [Susan.Hart@usm.edu](mailto:Susan.Hart@usm.edu).

The staff at one university identified three major issues of millennials transitioning to college. Millennials believe that they are exempt from following the rules, approach problem solving passively, and are dependent on others for problemsolving. Millennials are not completely to blame as they have helicopter parents and peers to help meet their needs and make decisions for them. Their life is displayed on social media for all to see, and others offer their opinions readily and provide support through a variety of venues. They are optimists to the extreme of unrealistic expectations many times (Much, Wagener, Breitreutz, & Hellenbrand, 2014).

As educators take steps to assess and appreciate characteristics of the learner, it is important to remember that millennials are a reflection of their culture. Educators need to meet students where they are without compromising standards. Millennials have flourished in the primary and secondary school systems with good grades and were taught using a variety of methods such as group work, use of videos and computers, and short bursts of information reinforced with repetition. In most of the students' education, the information learned occurred in class with little to no homework to encourage critical thinking. Students' study habits, reading textbooks, or learning outside of classroom were not developed until going to college. Therefore, it is important to stress the purpose of an activity and outline the steps for development and evaluation while guiding the student through the process (Twenge, 2013).

Millennials plug into technology continually and have the advantage of being able to learn whatever, whenever, and wherever. On the other hand, baby boomers had to visit the library or buy books to access information. Many baby boomers may still have their favorite books as references and cherish their hard copies of the wonderfully illustrated encyclopedias. With this in mind, it is easy to understand why baby boomer teachers prefer reading and listening to lectures to process information while millennial students prefer self-paced and interactive learning (Baker, Matulich, & Papp, 2007).

Millennials approach learning at the speed of light gathering bits and pieces of information through technology at their fingertips. This generation is also known as the *net generation* because of their ability to multitask with all forms of technology. The educator may become frustrated as they watch millennials with their cell phones and computers accessing information in face-to-face classes while also listening to on-line lectures and music, shopping on-line, surfing the net, or completing homework assignments. Millennials encompass the motto "work smarter not harder" (Reilly, 2012).

Oblinger, Oblinger, and Lippincott (2005) studied learning for several decades and found that millennials prefer experiential learning while interacting with peers. Millennials are visual and kinesthetic learners and learn best by doing. As millennials grew up with computers, they learned to deal with information in very different ways than earlier generations. They prefer to construct information in a network pattern, whereas baby boomers think in a linear fashion.

In assessing the learner's needs, Reilly (2012) advocates for eliciting continuous course evaluation by students and asking for suggestions for improvement. Millennials value and expect constant feedback on their work and benefit from specific guides/grading rubrics. There are multiple strategies for engaging students in active learning, which range from storytelling, role-play, group work, low- and high-fidelity simulation, social media, and learning management systems such as Iclickers. Iclickers have been shown to improve learning by helping the learner assess their strengths and weaknesses while reinforcing the important concepts. Providing real-world examples can assist the learner in transferring knowledge from one event to another or from one semester to the next semester (Broussard, 2012; Kushinka & Bearman, 2011).

Millennials have been given multiple opportunities to master content in elementary and secondary school. Today's learners expect teachers to streamline information and tell them the "who, what,

why" of learning while providing structure and immediate feedback on progress (Broussard, 2012). With varied diversity in the classroom, educators need to appraise their bias and understanding of learners to facilitate the learning process. Educators should seek to understand each generation and find ways to address learning styles of all students. Preparing tomorrow's nurses to meet health care challenges will take a multigenerational approach by using different generational teams to foster appreciation of each other's beliefs, values, learning, communication styles, and thinking processes (Kramer, 2010).

Educators must collaborate with learners to understand one another and make changes in the learning environment. In higher education, learners need to develop both intellectually and personally to become productive citizens. Assessing the learner characteristics, reflecting on the context of which millennials learn rather than only reacting to learners, and becoming interactive with today's students guide a more learner-centered environment (Bauman, Marcha, McLain, O'Connell, & Patterson, 2014).

#### *Committing to Relationships and Collaboration*

Since birth, millennials have been surrounded by parents, teachers, coaches, and peers providing positive encouragement, protecting them, and lifting their self-esteem. They work in teams where everyone wins. With nursing school as a stressful and challenging experience, there is no question that millennials want and need mentors, advisors, and cheerleaders to guide them through this new journey. Committing to developing relationships among educators and learners helps to foster collaborative learning and bridge generational gaps.

Welcoming and nurturing the learner into the role of the nurse takes considerable patience, hard work, and hope for success. Role modeling professional nursing behaviors and communication is a vital aspect of developing collaborative partnerships. Developing strong relationships and collaboration in the teaching–learning process takes the common set of values, goals, and shared commitment by both the learner and teacher. As each generation becomes aware of each other's history, values, hopes, dreams, learning styles, and personalities, common ground can be found, and relationships grow. The core differences can be appreciated, whereas any inappropriate behaviors addressed. Educators have the opportunity to instill new habits and nursing roles in the student. Teaching–Learning partnerships are forged by awareness, appreciation, and communication among all parties (DHed, 2012).

Out-of-class gatherings have proven to be a way to build relationships with students and faculty. As students and faculty feel more comfortable with each other, it helps to foster discussions of learning and development of ownership for self-learning. For example, before- and after-class discussions with students are great opportunities to learn more about the student as a person and experiences they may bring to the table of learning (Knowlton & Hagopian, 2013).

However, getting to know the student may also bring a new set of problems. Some millennials tend to share too much personal information, are very opinionated, see themselves as special, do not take constructive criticism well, and often display unrealistic goals. In professional programs, these attitudes and behaviors can prove challenging and unproductive often leading to failure. At one medical school, faculty decided to change the way they taught and began a mentoring program with students to develop collaborative relationships. The faculty increased efforts and opportunities for communicating clear expectations with explanations, providing orientation, reflecting on work/school/life balance, providing structure, handling negative feedback, incorporating collaborative activities, interactive learning experiences, and praising successes. Faculty had to become flexible and adaptable to impact positive outcomes for the learner and educator (Eckleberry-Hunt & Tucciarone, 2011).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8582017>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8582017>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)