

The first Generation Zs to graduate high school in 2012

Next week marks the start of the final year of high school for the first of Generation Z, as the oldest “digital natives” turn 17 this year. While predicted to be the most educated generation in Australia’s history, Gen Zs (and Generation Ys before them) unique way of communicating has caused debate on whether literacy standards are declining in the classroom as text-talk infiltrates the written word. This research summary looks at who Generation Z are, their experience of education today and the jobs of the future they are being trained for.¹

Who R Generation Z? (Born 1995-2009):

Australia’s 4.6 million Generation Zs are almost exclusively the children of Generation X, and they are truly the 21st Century generation, with the whole of their formative years lived in this century. While they are today’s children and teenagers, within a decade they will comprise 12% of the workforce.

Armed with an education:

Australian youth today are spending more time in education than any other generation, with 71.2% of high school graduates going onto further education and training (45.6% of whom go on to university). Generation Z are projected to become our most formally educated generation to date with 90% expected to complete Year 12 in 2015. The education system they encounter today however is very different to what their parents and grandparents experienced.

Digital natives:

Flexibility is the buzz word in employment today and the workers of the future, Generation Z, are starting young. With online education growing in popularity, the next generation of Year 12 school leavers may complete their HSC online, spending less time in the traditional classroom and more in different learning environments, for instance, in a cafe or working from home. With Gen Y well known for their entrepreneurial tendencies, it is likely Gen Z will follow suit with the flexibility of their high school years allowing them to start up their own enterprises

The evolution of reading & writing teaching methods¹:

1. Oral expression: Correct forms of speech vs. context of speech

1950s: Children were taught the correct sound formation (e.g. ‘th’ instead of ‘f’) and expression (e.g. the use of ‘has’ and ‘have’).

Today: Children are taught about different spoken ‘texts’ (e.g. conversation) and contexts.

2. Reading – the whole word method vs. the balanced approach

1950s: Reading, comprehension and word-building were taught through memorising. Phonics instruction was given, but not as a part of reading lessons and only after the pupil had knowledge of at least 50-100 sight words.

Today: Phonics is addressed within the context of meaningful texts. This has been called the balanced approach because it combines both methods (phonics instruction and whole language).

¹ Mark McCrindle, *Word Up: A Lexicon and Guide to Communication in the 21st Century*, 2011

at a younger age. Smart phones and similar portable technologies are also allowing these young digital natives to craft apps and other money making ventures at a younger age.

The evolution of reading & writing teaching methods continued...

3. Spelling – memory vs. drawing on knowledge of different strategies

1950s: The 'look, cover, write and check' method was taught.

Today: Students spell words by drawing on knowledge of the various blends, letter combinations, long vowel sounds, sight words, letter/sound correspondences and other strategies

4. Grammar – systematic vs. Practical instruction

1950s: Pupils were taught grammar and drilled correct speech forms on a daily basis.

Today: The different features of grammar are taught within the context of reading and writing – not systematically.

5. Reading lists – moral vs. social issues

1950s: Stories dealt with moral issues (e.g. the wicked are punished, the good rewarded).

Today: Stories often deal with social issues such as gender (e.g. stereotyping) and violence (e.g. bullying).

With nearly all young Australians engaging online with their peers, it is a sad reality that a third of students (33%) have been bullied in a context outside of the playground, whether via social networking websites (such as Facebook), instant messaging, text or email. For Generation Z, home is no longer a safe haven from bullies, as cyber bullying can take place anywhere and spread quickly.²

The Transformation of Education: Learning the Gen Z Way

Who? Facilitator

While traditionally students were taught by a teacher who was the source of the content and with a role of imparting this information to the students. Today the need is more for a facilitator who can facilitate the learning, - it's more motivator than instructor and more coach than disciplinarian. In a world where young people carry technology and are only a few clicks away from any piece of information, the need is for a facilitator of learning not a deliverer of content.

What? The 3 R's – From Reading, Writing and Arithmetic to Relevance, Responsiveness and Relationship

In a world where 90% of the data has been created in the last two years alone³ the half life of education has never been shorter. The focus is shifting from content to process, from the information itself to the means of gathering, analysing and applying the information.

² McCrindle Research survey of 1,084 school students aged between Years 7-10 conducted in March 2011. This survey was conducted in partnership with anti-bullying expert Brett Murray.

³ IBM *Big Data* Analyst Report 2011

When? Anytime, Anywhere

With online learning and flexible delivery, student centricity (where the teaching and learning is designed to accommodate the needs of the student) is critical. Schools are responding to the new timetables of families and the complexity of redefined households and roles by moving from a 9am-3pm school day to new alternatives. Increasingly the boundaries separating schools from tertiary providers are being removed and so some of the foundations of traditional schooling such as bells, uniforms and classrooms are being redefined or removed.

Where? Open spaces, flexible places

Traditional classrooms were constructed to keep distractions out, keep the students in and keep them facing the teacher. However 21st Century classrooms are being reconfigured (and rewired!) to accommodate new students, new technologies and new learning styles. It is recognised that rather than classrooms being the place where curriculums are taught, the spaces are an implicit curriculum in themselves and are key to supporting the educational journey.

How? Flipping

Traditionally, the learning took place in the classroom and the practice and application took place through homework. However in the 21st Century the content can be accessed through technology anywhere, and often in very visual, engaging forms. However, getting the content is not enough, discussion around it, application of it and the reason for it need to be gained and this requires an expert facilitator – the teacher. Thus the flipping of education – where the learning can take place outside the classroom but the essential engagement and practice is best done at school.

The author of this research summary:

Mark McCrindle is a social analyst with an international renown for tracking emerging issues, researching social trends and analysing customer segments.

Mark's recently released book, ***Word Up: A Lexicon and Guide to Communication in the 21st Century*** was written for educators, employers, leaders and parents who want to most effectively use technology, and spoken and written communications to effectively engage with the emerging generations.

For more information or to organise an interview with Mark McCrindle, please contact Francesca Dalton on 02 8824 3422 or at francesca@mccrindle.com.au