

Understanding the students of today



To effectively teach, educate and lead the next generation of students, it is important to understand who they are, and the world they have been shaped in.

The students of today are different to those from a generation ago. Today's students are comprised of Generation Z (born 1995-2009) and Generation Alpha (born 2010-2024). Much research has been conducted to understand Generation Z. As a generation they are defined by digital, visual, mobile, social, and global characteristics. They have been shaped in a time where online engagement supersedes time spent face-to-face, when the digital is increasingly replacing the physical, and where global influences are often more potent than local ones. But who is Generation Alpha?

Generation Alpha

The youngest of our students today are Generation Alpha and describes those born since

2010. They populate our schools, with the oldest now entering their tween years. There are 2.8 million Gen Alphas born globally each week, and with an expected final number of 2.2 billion, this generation will be the largest in history. In Australia, within four years they will outnumber the Baby Boomers, and most will live to see the 22nd century.

With the first iPad released the same year they began being born (2010), Generation Alpha have only ever lived in a world where glass is linked to interaction and connection. Technology and customisation have shaped their childhood. Where Generation Z experienced the rise of customisation, Generation Alpha have seen personalisation – where everything from Nutella jars to story books can be ordered featuring their name. It is interesting to explore the rise of individualised education in conjunction with a generation of students who have experienced individualisation in many facets of their life prior to walking into a classroom.

The desire for individualised education

More than nine in ten educators (96%) and parents (94%), believe schools should, at least to some extent, provide individualised education. More than a third of parents (35%) and a quarter of educators (27%) believe schools should provide individualised education for all students. The largest proportion of educators (38%), however, believe schools should provide individualised education to some students (cf. 26% parents).

While the desire for individualised education is strong for both educators and parents, they differ on how realistic they believe it is to achieve it. Seven in ten parents (71%) believe it is realistic for schools to provide individualised education to all students, compared to half of educators (55%). Expectation gaps such as this can become areas of conflict if not addressed. It is important for schools to communicate effectively about their ability to provide individualised education.

Upaging of Generation Alpha

In a world that has come to prioritise the digital, parents and educators feel the tension of this generation upaging (growing up faster than they need to). Educators see the pressure to grow up faster (58%) as one of the top challenges for today's primary school students. Second only to online bullying through social networks (60%). Parents are similar with two in five (42%) seeing the pressure to grow up faster as a key challenge for primary school students today. Almost half of educators (48%), and one in five parents (20%), believe upaging is a barrier for this generation to thrive. Consistent with this, almost nine in ten parents (87%) and educators (90%) are concerned that children are losing their innocence

too soon. At the same time, however, parents (79%) and educators (84%) struggle with the tension between protecting a child's innocence and educating them for their safety.

The growth mindset of Gen Alpha

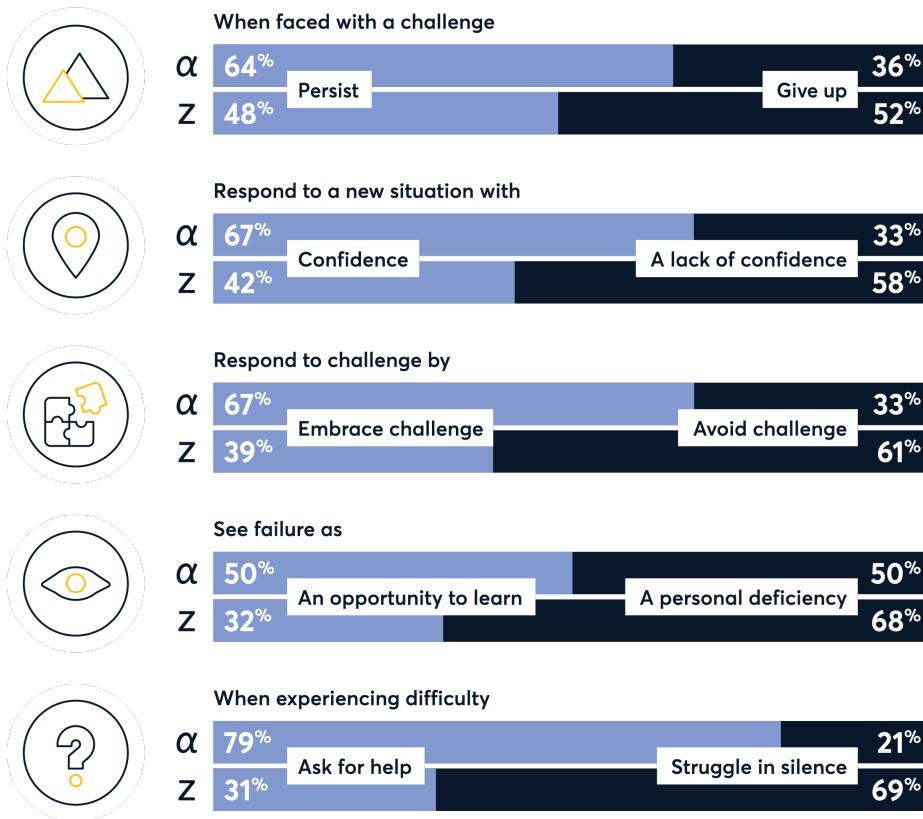
Educators believe the mindset of Generation Alpha is different to Generation Z. When faced with a challenge, educators believe Gen Alpha is more likely to persist (64%), while Gen Z is more likely to give up (52%). Educators think Gen Alpha is more likely to ask for help (79%) while Gen Z will struggle in silence (69%). When failure occurs, educators believe Gen Z is more likely to see it as a personal deficiency (68%) while Gen Alpha is equally likely to see it as a personal deficiency (50%) or an opportunity to learn (50%). As Generation Alpha grows up it will be interesting to see how this mindset shapes their experience and approach to life.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES CHILDREN OF TODAY?

α Gen Alpha

Z Gen Z

Educators n=401



The unique characteristics of Gen Z and Gen Alpha reflect the changing world we are living in. Just as the world around us is changing, it is likely that education will continue to adapt and innovate to engage, educate, and prepare students for the future.

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