



Teaching Generation Y

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Abstract. Before the emergence of network society, perhaps only Gutenberg's invention brought a comparably huge change to his times. The acceleration of communication, the possibility of rapid swap of information, produced an utterly new lifestyle. It has changed our perception of social connections, of media, of information storage, of learning, etc. What kind of effect has all this had on education? The methods used in pedagogy have changed, as well as the relation between teachers and students, the function and forms of collective work. I will attempt to outline the changes that caused the generation gap, to present my experience as a teacher in the Hungarian community from Kolozsvár, and to bring out some tools and methods teachers could use in today's classroom. I will also try to answer the question: why is this sudden development good for the educational system, and why can we consider having internet connection, discovering the world of Web2.0 a potential.

Keywords: education, Generation Y, Web2.0, network society, social learning, connectivism

Introduction: definitions and charactersitics

If we had to describe the society of our days in a few words, I would say: change. We are in a continuous alteration. As we look back on history, before the information society, the biggest change was caused by Gutenberg. The speeding up of communication and information exchange has provided us with a different mood. Our perceptions of media, information and information storage, social behaviour and relation have altered. High school has become the place for continuous change, as well. Developing our knowledge, learning how to interact and solve problems in the fastest way using the internet and different social networks represents one of the highest expectations, not only in education, but in our everyday life, too. In this paper you will find some thoughts related to Generation Y, its characteristics, methods and tools that work in the classroom,

as, for example, ways to use social media for teaching and learning as well as writing and working out different Life Long Learning projects.

First of all, we will have to define what Generation Y is. Persons, who were born after the 1970's and the first half of the 1990's can be included in the group. This generation, also called 'Echo Boomers,' 'Millennium Generation,' 'iGeneration,' 'Einstein Generation,' 'Net Generation' or 'Google Generation,' has grown up in a world with diverse Internet resources, iPods, MySpace and intense multi-tasking – simultaneously chatting on AIM, finishing a problem set, watching television and listening to music. These kids are the kids of the Baby Boomers, heavily immersed in a digital world (Yan 2006). If we would like to place its appearance in the history, we could relate to the fall of the Berlin wall and the 1986 Challenger explosion. That was the moment when Generation Y took the place, or better said, got separated from Generation X (Yan 2006). What are their characteristics, how were they brought up, how can they be taught, how can all this affect their approach to learning, what are their tools for learning and communicating, how and where do they communicate and network? – you could ask. As a high school teacher, I was curious as well, I wanted to find out how they learn, where they try to find information and how I can use the internet, the social media to teach more effectively and organise the classes in a way that they would not be boring for them.

We have to know about this generation, that they are identified with cynicism, skepticism and pessimism (Yan 2006). They arrive at school or university as experienced multitaskers, who already know how to use the mobile phones, the computer meanwhile they are watching television and chatting (Thompson 2007). These youngsters can get bored really fast, because it is hard for them to concentrate only on one issue. Their brain is used to diffuse information collected from several sources, as blogs, other websites, etc. That is why they are ready for multimedia learning to be delivered on a flexible schedule, they don't like to be tied to a set time or place (Thompson 2007). Technology has grown very fast. These children were brought up in an environment where computers, mobile phones, the internet were used on a daily basis. Today's society has become, like Marshall McLuhan predicted, a global village. Information can move instantaneously from every corner of the world to the other at the same time. People can interact easily, physical distance doesn't represent a problem anymore. It's easy to search for online communities, to chat and get to know people, to gather information you need, spread and react to news instantly. This is why they expect immediate answers from us, teachers, as well as to be able to access information quickly and give or find assertive answers (Kennedy et al. 2007). Accessing different sites, they can read about everything, they can connect to whomever they wish, they are becoming more informed, more open minded, racially and culturally more tolerant than other generations. This is why we have

to consider what and how we teach. There is an increasing demand for new educational approaches and pedagogies, as McLoughlin and Lee (2007) state in their article about the Web 2.0 era. But before I write about the new methods of teaching, I would like to emphasise the difference between traditional learning and the school of information generation.

Channels and tools for learning

Our communicational channels have become digitalised and interactive. Different new ways of communication appear, like blogs, vlogs or podcasts. A few years ago none of these existed. It is old-fashioned fun to read a book, to concentrate on only one thing. Even brains have changed, they have grown because they got accustomed to the constant bombardment of change, of television shows', movies' rapid storytelling pace (Yan 2006). The monopoly situations have dissolved, everyone can write newspapers, blogs, run radios or television channels. Schools, can not exist anymore in their conservative way, they could not fill every requirement of the society which is dynamically developing and changing. The aim of the new generation of teachers and Lifelong Learning projects is to change the educational system as well as the teaching methods. An open learning environment has to be formed, the teacher-pupil relationship has to be modified in addition, to guide the students not to transfer knowledge. During traditional teaching, children learnt facts, rules and answers. Today we try to develop skills, ability, attitudes and deftness as well as desire for a lifelong learning. We do not offer a ready-made, closed knowledge anymore. Instructions received from teachers have a small number, it has become more important to persuade the students to work alone in a complex and inspiring environment. We engage them in different project-based activities instead of formal learning. Pupils have to realise, that learning is not some tiring work, but an interesting task. The opened, multi- and hypermedia learning environment should encourage them to innovate and create.

E-learning tools provide a great support for teachers. First, known were the eLearning1.0 and Web1.0, which were used to complement the traditional forms of teaching, like, for example, sites where you can find ebooks, sites where you can read about different authors or solve problems, etc. Web 1.0 was built up from predominantly hierarchised information which were controlled by a small group of content providers, mostly informaticians (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes 2009). But these tools turned out to be less useful, because they are not interactive, we can not revise or modify them, they were read-only mediums, those who were browsing could find ready-made topics, could download, but could not change them. This was an effortless work from the receptor, pretty much a one-way experience (Thompson 2007). This is why internet and eLearning had

to be developed. As Thompson states: “Downes sees the development of Web 2.0 as a shift from being a medium, in which information was transmitted and consumed, into being a platform, in which content was created, shared, remixed, repurposed, and passed along” (Thompson 2007, 1). Today, most of the teachers use eLearning2.0 and Web2.0 in the classroom. Web 2.0 includes social networks as MySpace, Facebook, media sharing as Youtube, Flickr, social bookmarking as Delicious or CiteULike, collaborative knowledge development as the wikis, and it supports creative work with video blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter, Blogger), podcasts, and so on (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes 2009).

As we can see in its characteristics, Web 2.0 is different from the previously mentioned one, because individual users can remix the provided data, add web content, which action was the province of Internet designers a few years ago. This era is the one of the personal media – consumers become creators (Thompson 2007). Internet now is the field of interactivity: people can Like pages, topics, photos, or write a comment about them. Its tools are almost endless, they can be used for information gathering or communication, which makes possible to establish a common knowledge by allowing people to write documents together on real time (e.g. Googledocs or blogs), the corporate information-production/growth changes, newsgroups, video conferences, podcasts are made by PR staff. New Media have become the tool for individual knowledge management. The students work interacting with one another, they can exchange or create topics of their own in groups or individually on the web. Blogs can be used, for example, to “expand course activities beyond the four walls of the classroom, so students are writing for a worldwide audience instead of only for classmates and the instructor” (Thompson 2007, 3).

What can a teacher in this situation do? – you can ask. How can we teach them? How can we engage them? What tools do we or can we use to encourage them to create and innovate? We are definitely lucky, because eLearning has the tools and power to transform teaching and even learning.

The role of teachers

The most beloved learning form is multitasking. As I mentioned before, pupils do not like to get bored, and they cannot concentrate on a single task anymore, their brain is shaped to be able to be attentive to several things at the same time. So, according to this information, teachers can give them skills and tools to work with, but definitely not raw information, as in the past. We can teach them how to find information, how to search for it, make sense of and use all the relevant information they get. They love to work with images, voice and video tools. This generation is a visual one, so we have to try taking this into

account. They spend more time watching television than any other generation. Movies and different shows have a great influence on them. So, in a world where television is one of the main attractions, the ubiquity of images requires teaching them how to interpret images they see, like those of movies and advertising. We have to give them the ability to choose and use information, but with critical discrimination. Helping them understand the power of images and sounds is how they will build knowledge. In my experience, they do not like to learn anything that has even a faint semblance to information, and when they have to learn, they learn in the last minute, so the information will soon fade away. This is why I consider developing skills more important than delivering ready-made knowledge. This generation lives for the moment. They expect prompt affirmation, they claim immediate reward. If a topic is not relevant, useful or entertaining enough, they are not willing to collaborate. Teenagers of today like simultaneous interactions, to set up social connections, networks. Relationships as well as knowledge have become insecure and uncontrollable. Social Media became a utility that helps people understand the world around them, develops technologies – like Facebook, for example – that facilitate the spread of information, allowing people to share their thoughts, photos, information online, like they would do it in the real world. “Internet is no longer a series of isolated silos of information; it has become a platform for users to communicate and interact with one another” (Thompson 2007).

The age of connectivism has arrived. They have to learn in groups and always have the possibility to connect with each-other and the teachers. One of the main principles of connectivism, mentioned by Siemens, is that learning and knowledge have to rest in and be based on diversity of opinions (Siemens 2004). Learning has to be a process in which we are connecting specialised nodes or information sources, and develop the ability to see connections between fields, ideas and concepts (Siemens 2004). Our knowledge has to be always up to date, we cannot learn something anymore and be certain that the information will not change in years. New information arrive all the time in such a big amount that we have to be able to select. Decision-making is an other ability we have to develop, choosing what to learn is extremely important. Teachers always have to guide their students, to nurture and maintain connections to facilitate continuous learning (Siemens 2004). This is why the relationship between students and teachers has changed. It is more open. They can friend each other on social networks, they can follow each other's blogs, tweets, can send text messages, or chat. Pupils get closer to their teachers, they are not afraid to ask questions, to express their opinion. Of course, we have to mention that respect and discipline have changed as well, children sometimes grant their teachers too much confidence. But I would not like to elude this part of education now. Instead, I would like to talk about the role of teachers, which has changed with

the turnout of New Media and Social Networking, and give some examples from my own experience, our projects worked out with my students.

As I mentioned earlier, the role of the teacher today is to brief students into the over-communicated world flooded with information, help them recognise and use their power of creating, to manipulate and transform digital media. We have to create a way of communication that helps personal growth. Teaching has to be activity- or game centered, in order to develop cognitive, personal and social abilities. This way we can form the motivation, skills and abilities for a lifelong learning. Using pictures, paintings or other visuals can be the most effective teaching medium.

The school of today: working together

In 2009, a research was made, which shows that since the mid 1990's, the percentage of schools equipped with computers and Internet connection exploded from 35% to 100% in the United States, and the ratio of students per Internet-connected instructional computer decreased from 12:1 to 3.8:1, outside of schools, more than two thirds of people in the United States have Internet connections at home, more than half of which are broadband (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes 2009). In Romania, we still can not state that we have 100% coverage, but almost each major school is provided with necessary tools for practicing the new ways of teaching. They have computer or multimedia rooms, digital cameras and smart boards. In central high schools in Kolozsvár, there is at least one smart board and there are several multimedia tools. I use them during most of my classes to be able to learn together and network together with the pupils. We got engaged in different projects with my students from which I will present a few as examples of using New Media and Social Networking in the classroom. First of all, I have to appoint what kind of projects these are, and why we like them and engage in them, although they usually require extra (after classes) work.

The Lifelong Learning Project of the European Union has the goal to teach separateness, to develop skills and abilities, to change attitudes towards and interdisciplinary work, to rouse international or inland presence by projects based on interactivity, and, last but not least, to exchange information about each other, to build connections between students of the same age, field of interest, originating from different countries, cultures (see http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm). These programs are grouped by age categories. The Comenius, Youth In Action and E-twinning programs are for school-children, Erasmus is for students at university, Leonardo da Vinci and Comenius are for grown ups and staff of schools.

“We participate, therefore we are”¹

The paraphrase of the well known Cartesian deduction, used by Brown and Adler (2008) shows that development, flow of information and social learning have changed our needs, our expectations as well as our behaviour. Our understanding of content, as they say, is socially constructed through conversation about the content and thorough interactions (Brown and Adler 2008). The interest and motivation of students can be stimulated by school projects. In this open environment, they will try to find on their own information and like-minded people who they can work with (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes 2009). I prepared activities with my colleagues during our work with the students, and provided support in case it was needed. We assisted their work, but never gave exact tasks, trying to be initiators and advisors. Preparing and planning these projects, I expected active participation by stimulating their creativity and providing the possibility to work in an open environment. By working outside of classrooms, using different tools and devices, nurturing relations with students abroad, pertaining to other cultures, having real life experiences, I expected my students to improve their sense of community, to interact more frequently with each other, to engage in different social and multidisciplinary activities.

One of the projects implemented by my team was based on the topic of environmental change. The aim of our work was to point out the negative effects of the presence of CO₂ in the air. We focused on people's knowledge of the side-effects caused by the emission of CO₂, in order to be able to try to change their mentality and attitude (not only of those studying and working at school, but everyone's in the country). We made posters and flyers displaying the before mentioned problems.



Photo 1. Students designing the flyers and posters.

1 Expression used by Brown and Adler (2008).

We also went outside the school and classroom to make our own measurements and surveys. It was a great opportunity to work together with the chemistry and biology teachers. After our research, we could discuss the effects and issues during a Skype meeting with other groups engaged in the project from all over Europe, and enter our results into a database on the internet, made especially for the program. We were also able to organise several presentations in which we tried to convince people to travel more on bikes or to walk. As a good example, colleagues of mine organised an expedition on bikes during the summer holiday (this had already become a tradition of the school before our project), to prove that you can have fun and visit places without a car. People could follow the team during the expedition, because the children created a blog, where they wrote about their day, their experiences, and uploaded photos, short videos. At the end of the program, a book was published containing the results of several high schools, as well as opinions about the program and the experience of working together as a team using multimedia tools.

An other project supporting multiculturalism and requiring work with New Media tools was the Europe +/- 20, organised by the Robert Schuman Foundation. The aim of the program was to invite to Warsaw (Poland) groups of students from different countries, who could talk about their past, the time of communism and the possibilities of avoiding a war by trying to accept each other, to accept multiculturalism and diversity. Before arriving to Poland, students had to compile a presentation in which they show their countries' past and their opinions about war and acceptance, their experience of living in a multicultural environment.² My group made a short video based on information, photos and music found on the internet about the war and communism in general. They emphasised the happenings from Temesvár (Timișoara), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) and Bucharest (București), getting to the conclusion that war and hatred is unnecessary, it only causes pain and suffering, and that we should focus on maintaining peace and solidarity.

After the speech of Ronald Reagan claiming Gorbachev to tear down the walls, and after so many intents to abolish differences and hate between people, the globally envisaged peace still does not exist. So, during the meeting of these schools, children were engaged in different games, conversations and multicultural evenings, dressed up in their national costumes, dancing their national dances, singing, etc., to be able to know and accept each-other's culture and to be able to connect, to find joy in living and working together. One of the most interesting activities was to symbolically tear down the walls between us. We wrote a manifesto together, with the title "No more walls," in which we stated that we would no longer let any symbolical wall to stand between us and our cultures. This was followed by a happening: the students were able to simulate the demolition of the

2 Our presentation can be watched here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRO5piUkk2U>.

Berlin wall, to actually experience in a real life situation what a few years ago they would have just learnt from books between the four walls of a classroom.



Photo 2. Simulating the fall of the Berlin wall.³

The learning and teaching environment has been transformed, the Web is definitely changing the way we think about learners' participatory and creative practices with Web 2.0 tools, like whom with, what about and, most of all, how we should teach.

Management of the projects

It is important during and after our work to disseminate everything we managed to do. This is not only because we want to create a working place for ourselves, but because self-promotion is very important nowadays (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes 2009). People and organisations like to define themselves using Internet tools, like social networks, blogs, etc. The created multiplied selves interact and shape learning (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes 2009). "Tools such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, media sharing applications and social bookmarking utilities are also pedagogical tools that stem from their *affordances* of sharing, communication and information discovery" (McLoughlin and Lee 2007). So, I thought it would be a good idea for us to create a blog and sign up for several Social Media sites where we would be able to write about our experiences, post photos and information needed as well as providing a surface where we could stay in touch. This was easiest way to coordinate the groups and allow people worldwide to get to know our work.

³ A short video of the happening can be seen here: http://warszawa.gazeta.pl/warszawa/10,88291,7237977,Mur_berlinski_upadl_w_Warszawie_.html.



Photo 3. Start page of the blog.

The blog was useful because I could be in touch with the parents, as well, upload documents which we used in creating our presentations, and we could also upload the final “products,” photos made during our trips, research or work.

As you can see, teachers are not only active in the classroom anymore. They have to get out, to take students out from their accustomed environment, they have to be managers of their class, of their work and institution. The media presence has become important, because people need to hear about you, about the school in order to be able to choose where to subscribe their children. It is already a matter of reputation, prestige. On the other hand, this is the best way we can communicate with Generation Y. The traditional talk would not work with them. They want freedom instead of structured topics, they need the possibility of experiencing. Traditional teaching always focused on the individual, now these teenagers are socially driven (McCrindle 2002). They are interested in credible, useful information. Most actions have to be spontaneous, interactive and relevant. But, according to constructivist views, also moderated, because students rarely develop explicit learning strategies on their own (Ullrich et al. 2008). What we are communicating has to be interesting, the style as well as the content, and we have to somehow moderate their work to avoid problematic and offensive content or actions (e.g. plagiarism, disappearing content). They love to be entertained, so the information we would like to give them has to be mixed, multiple learning channels have to be opened. We have to be able to position ourselves as team leaders, because youth still sees most of the teachers and other adults as authorities who can provide them either good or bad information about something, creating ‘good or bad authorities,’ depending on whether they agree or not with their opinion (Ullrich et al. 2008). They will progress from dualism to multiplicity as they encounter more diversity in the world and our work together.

Among the colourful palette of activities that the Internet and smart tools, as phones, Ipads give us, we have to gain the attention of students and their positive attitude to knowledge. Today, we don't speak about information, education and entertainment anymore, but infotainment and edutainment (Kugler 2004).

SWOT analysis

With using the eLearning2.0, Social Media tools in education, we can provide the expectations and fill the requirements of this generation, like openness, vulnerability and genuine interest in those we are trying to teach and above all: understanding – points out McCrindle (McCrindle 2002). Old tools and methods tend to structure learning by strict subjects, but we have to teach in an interdisciplinary way, similarly to their way of living life in a hyperlinked world. They think in hyperlinks, McCrindle says (McCrindle 2006), they multi-task, values speed over accuracy and they absorb information from multiple sources. The more styles you use, the fewer listeners you will loose – mentality is not well suited to traditional logical communication most of us are used to.

As a summing up of all my assertions, deductions and examples, I would like to outline the strenghts, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of this new way of teaching, here in Transylvania. First of all, schools should provide (and most of them do) a multimedia environment, where students use all of the ICT tools, learn ICT and Technology subjects. Students and teachers can mostly use the internet during classes, to provide fast and relevant information. We can tell that students in schools from Transylvania are well informed and entertained. This way teaching and learning is fun, most of the times.

As I have written, schools provide internet connection, but control its usage. This is one of the weaknesses. Why do we need full usage of the Internet and a computer in every classroom as well as in every home? Internet today provides free access to a wide range of courses and educational materials, and we could use them during classes, or the students could use them at home. “The movement began in 2001 when the William and Flora Hewlett and the Andrew W. Mellon foundations jointly funded MIT's OpenCourseWare (OCW) initiative, which today provides open access to undergraduate- and graduate-level materials and modules from more than 1,700 courses” (Brown and Adler 2008, 18). This movement has inspired other universities, other researchers to join and develop similar educational programs, to provide supercomputer simulation models, to invite students to personally engage in researches. In Hungary, for example, Kristóf Nyíri was the one who set the base of a virtual academy. He states that the purpose and role of different spaces have changed, Internet has become the space for learning (Nyíri 1999). The importance of personally being there, at a

campus or in the buildings of a university, has slowly disappeared, we are able to learn from home, being at the office or anywhere else.

An other disadvantage is still represented by the restricted topics which are defined by the Ministry of Education. It is hard to harmonise the formal lessons (which must be delivered by the teacher), the traditionally determined way of teaching with the eLearning2.0 experiential and participative methods (but it is not impossible). There are still problems with the ICT tools. We have computers and internet, but they are sometimes of a poor quality, they do not work at all or as well as we need them to work. We still have to test academic knowledge and memory during exams, but this generation does not need ready information, they are always connected to the internet, so they can check and search for what they need to know just in a few minutes, they live in an open-book world (McCrindle 2002).

The fact that conservative thinking still exists in schools could be considered as a threat: teachers who got used to traditional learning methods would still like to use them, and it is difficult to understand this new generation, the gap between them is deeper, they cannot get used to students controlling their own learning, making connections with peers. In the classroom they rather use the ICT tools along with traditional ones if they ought to use them.

But the positive turn – that represents an opportunity – is that many of the teachers participate in different trainings, eLearning programs where they learn about these tools, how they can compile an informative but network-based material, how they can efficiently use the internet, how they can interact and teach in small groups. They can exercise how to build up activities which are based on learner-centered instructions and are characterised by the three important features that McLoughlin and Lee (2007) point out: 1) support for conversational interaction; 2) support for social feedback; and 3) support for social networks and relationships between people.

Conclusions

The new generation has grown up in a fast moving world, where they have been flooded with information. Digital technologies have greatly impacted their learning styles. The volume of the information that we can access via internet requires skills for scanning and quick evaluating of visuals like graphs, charts, photos, etc. Learning takes place in a social context, therefore we have to be aware that students are able to participate in the learning process from anywhere, using their mobile devices, laptops or other ICT tools. Teachers will have to keep up, learn to use these new media tools, or make their presence be felt in the Social Media, use it to promote their ideas and projects, and this will lead to less artificial situations, situations which take place in the context of real life (Ullrich et al. 2008).

After the implementation of several projects, using the before mentioned ICT tools, Social Media and creating a blog, I can conclude that we are able to work in this new environment, and that my students have probably learnt more than they would have in the classroom or from books. They had the unforgettable opportunity to learn by playing. Why was the blog useful? Creating the blog we expanded our work, we could be active after school, from home or other places, and we not only wrote to ourselves, but to a worldwide audience. As the Greenhow – Robelia – Hughes trio asserts in their work, “a) speech is ephemeral but electronic text can be stored indefinitely; b) searchability: a journal in a drawer is very different from putting thoughts in an environment where people can look for specific names and places; c) replicability: electronic media make it very easy for others to duplicate and change what one or another has created; and d) invisible audiences: one cannot tell who is online reading one’s thoughts, and what is written can be read in a context other than that intended” (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes 2009, 251).

Today, when one can build a career by changing jobs and being able to learn new things, in order to acquire new knowledge, we do not need the information that we have learnt years ago in high school. We mostly base new knowledge on that, but we have to be open to new possibilities. My role as a teacher is not to deliver information anymore, but to coordinate the info-aggregation, and to develop skills, abilities for understanding it, being able to select amongst it in a way that after class they could say: “It was fun.”

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