

Generation Z hits Higher Education

Dr. Sarah Naylor D Prof SFHEA, Sarah Booth MSC FHEA, Richard Tucker BSc (Hons) MSc FHEA
email s.naylor@derby.ac.uk

The rationale for the project

Generation Z are hitting universities. This generation, born 1995-2012 are said to be the only generation to be raised with technology and accustomed to interacting in a digital world (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018). It is also suggested they have underdeveloped social and relationship skills, at increased risk of isolation, anxiety and mental health issues (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018). Research undertaken in America has shown Generation Z want practical, relevant information; learning that is individualised (Seemiller and Grace, 2016). They want fast delivery of content, kinesthetic, experiential learning (Rothman, 2014).

This will impact on Universities who will need to reflect on their current delivery methods. Are they meeting the requirements of Generation Z students within this consumerist environment?

The aim of the project

The purpose of this project is to explore the learning experiences of Generation Z students, born after 1994 on the BSc (Hons) Diagnostic Radiography. The project aims to gain insight into the perspectives of current students. This may influence the delivery of the course in the future.

Method

Initial data collection involved students completing a Kolb learning styles questionnaire, which will be reported here. In the second stage focus groups will be undertaken to gain deeper insight into their learning preferences.

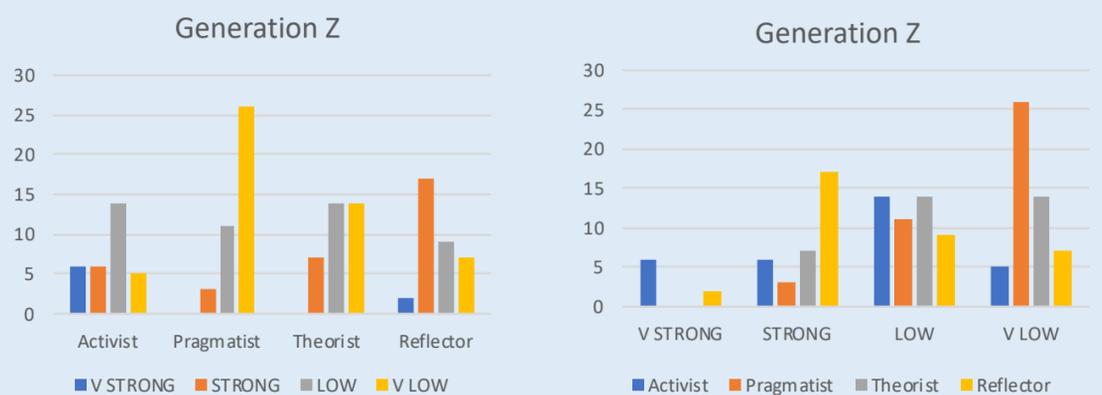
56 students completed the questionnaire with the year of birth ranging from 1995 to 2001

Conclusion

Strategies are required for providing an effective learning environment for today's students who are technologically savvy, have information at their finger tips and are accustomed to instant feedback. One recommendation is that the course material should encompass all 4 learning styles, this can be as a result of a blended approach to the work. The user can then choose their preferred style of learning.

Results

One tentative indication is that those classed as Generation Z displayed very strong preference for either the activist or reflector characteristics. Generation Z also are very low in the pragmatist style. There is a hint that Generation Z learn by challenges/interaction/stimulation rather than step by step learning. However, over all there is a mix of learning styles within the cohort.



Discussion

Generation Z want to learn in a style aligned to their social and technological viewpoint. Instant availability of "exciting/interactive" course material, viewed across a platform of devices coupled with on-the-spot feedback is becoming vital for learning (Shatto, B. and Erwin, K., 2016). The affinity to google in acquiring instant information is often at the expense of deep and critical learning. (Hampton, D *et al*, 2020). Thus the development of critical learning has to be incorporated by adjusting the pedagogy. Learning in the clinical environment lends itself to the activist/reflector learning style. However, the challenge remains with delivery of the theoretical components of the degree. Stillman and Stillman (2017) identify that Generation Z students prefer not to spend large amounts of time sitting in lectures, therefore a mismatch between learning preferences and the traditional pedagogic delivery could present. The impact of Covid-19 has forced radiography delivery into an online environment which may lend itself to the learning preferences of these students and may benefit from further research.

