Educating the Net Generation


This book of articles on learning in the Net Generation as compiled by the authors is deliberately presented in electronic book format as it is one of the authors’ media of exploration. The purpose of the book is to take a close look at the learning styles of the Net Generation, that is, students who have grown up with the internet, and the change that will be necessary to help these students create knowledge in the higher educational settings. Included are viewpoints of students, professors, administrators, researchers, and organizational leaders from at least 11 different universities and organizations where the article writers’ backgrounds include the arts as well as science and engineering.

The book begins with an introduction and review of the associated literature by the authors and is followed by the student writers’ perspectives of the millennial learners. Provided are the needed definitions of the students as well as their characteristics. While some of the material is redundant, the student writers provide much needed support as to why it is critical an effort is made to reeducate faculty on the needs of Net Gen students. For example, the differences between previous students and the millennial students include:

- They are intuitive visual communicators.
- They are better able to integrate visual spatial skills (possibly because of computer games)
- They learn better by discovery than being told
- They can shift their attention easily from one thing to another
They have a fast response time and demand fast turnaround time as well. These differences as described become important to facilitation as they impact the learning styles of the millennials. Some of the important learning styles presented are:

- They prefer to work in teams
- They are achievement oriented and like structure as opposed ambiguity
- They like interactivity and a rapid pace. They may need to encouraged to stop and reflect
- They are more comfortable with visuals than with text
- They like to be involved in community activities and believe they can make a difference, especially using science and technology

The student writers also point out the Net Generation want professors knowledgeable in their field, that can use technology to communicate, and adapt information to student needs. They even pointed out that this will be challenging for higher education in costs, access skills (such as tests to assure student competency with technical skills), interaction, and relevance. The use of the student writer assessments provided a clear picture of the change in learning styles that must be addressed.

The subsequent writers of articles in this book then look at the needs of these millennial students from many aspects. Based on the learning styles above, the need for professors to use technology as a tool much as they would use a text book is shown to be necessary. Inquiry based labs, classes rich with discussion, lecture with interaction for students to construct knowledge, a change in evaluations of grades and coursework, and team projects are among the many different technique changes shown to be effective for facilitation with these learners. These same findings are also true for heavy technology users regardless of age.
Another aspect considered in the book is that of learning spaces, that is, the classroom of the future with “desk” are to accommodate computers and technology tools, possibly swivel seats which make viewing someone who is speaking from anywhere in the classroom possible. In addition to classroom space, discussion areas outside the classroom proper might be made available for informal student collaboration.

Still other aspects include the new use of libraries, the need for faculty to learn these new ways to facilitate, how universities can adapt and help promote changes on their campuses, and the pedagogies that would accompany these dynamic learning styles of the future. It is only by understanding the Net Generation that colleges can remain successful. For example, in chapter 11 of the articles Virginia Polytechnic Institute’s effort to educate their faculty on learning to use technology in the classroom and the needs of the Net Generation of learners is offered. They have created a program for graduate students who aspire to be future professors. One course they have created is “Pedagogical Practices in Contemporary Contexts” which explores what creates engaging learning for the Net Generation and what pedagogy support their learning styles.

So how successful were the authors with this online book? It is the opinion here, that this book is a well written, and broad based view of the millennial students entering the colleges today. The book would best be recommended for those with an interest in facilitating learning at the higher education institutions, as well as administrators and others who shape the future of our colleges and universities. The articles, penned by approximately twenty different writers, represent a wide range of perspectives on the subject of the Net Generation. The wide array of inputs from the students to the administrative groups and from the pedagogy to the very space
the students learn in encompasses a holistic view of the dynamics on the horizon. For anyone needing a crash course in the millennial students this book is a must read.

As a facilitator, the pedagogy, and the analysis of the learning styles of these students is a valuable asset to preparing materials for these learners. Again, there are some redundancies from writer to writer of the articles, yet these repetitions seem only to strengthen the authors’ message of the need for change with the Net Generation. A broad overview of different facilitation methods of blended learning, inquiry labs, etc provide more techniques than any one instructor could implement.

Even the order that the articles was presented strengthened the impact of the book – overview of the literature, impact from student writers, discussion of many aspects of change needed in higher education, and including the pedagogies of the learners -- stepped the reader through a logical sequence of understanding the millennials and their learning needs and thus, it presents its reader with an understanding of the subject and research that is only beginning to shed light on this Net Generation.