

Final Report Attachment

Learning/Teaching Strategies for Gen Y Learners

1. Introduction

The current cohort of students entering higher education is identified as Generation Y (Gen Y), which is also known as Millennial Generation and/or Net Generation (LaBan, 2013). As with all generations, Gen Y possesses a distinctive peer personality and several characteristics that make it distinguishable and immediately recognizable at interactions with other generations (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). Howe and Strauss (2000) indicated that Gen Yers have revitalized several favorable social values, including teamwork, modesty, good ethics, and can-do spirit. As this generation enters school-age and becomes economically active, implications brought with it have been studied extensively in areas of workplace (e.g., Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2011), consumption behavior (e.g., Pokrywczynski & Wolburg, 2001), and education (e.g., Eisner, 2011).

Roughly between the ages of 12 and 32 by Howe and Strauss (2000)'s definition—born from 1982 to 20 years thereafter—this generation is believed to be more educationally ambitious than any of its predecessors (Sax, 2003). On average, the percentage of school-age students enrolled in tertiary education programs grew by 75% from 18.26% in 1999, the year when Gen Yers started to enter university campuses, to 32.15% in 2012. In OECD countries and Hong Kong, the ratio even reached 60% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). The large influx of Gen Yers to university campuses filled with Baby Boomer and Generation X faculty has intensified potential intergenerational divergences and the incompatibility between established instructional strategies and the unique learning preferences of these students (Weiler, 2005). Anecdotal evidence suggests that educators frequently feel perplexed and frustrated as students today seem particularly difficult to teach and motivate. Researchers believe that these educational challenges can be better addressed with generational analysis and that the cultivation of awareness of both generational differences in learning styles and the generational prejudice held against each other will be the first step in solving potential/existent conflicts (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Pardue & Morgan, 2008).

The large number of Gen Y learners, their distinctive characteristics, and the rising conflicts in the multigenerational milieu of university campuses have evidently necessitated a comprehensive understanding of their learning styles and preferences for pedagogical development. Existing literature on Gen Y learning behaviors in higher education either focuses on overall college students (e.g., Eisner, 2011; McGlynn, 2008; Nimon, 2007) or students of majors such as nursing and medicine (e.g., LaBan, 2013; Pardue & Morgan, 2008; Weiler, 2005). Studies of Gen Y students in hospitality related disciplines have mostly examined students' career planning, and work and environmental attitudes (e.g., Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2012; Chen, & Choi, 2008; Richardson, 2008) but rarely their learning behaviors. Moreover, the applicability of such research to students of non-Western cultures remains unknown, as generational traits are shaped by national culture and are in fact considered a type of national subculture (Egri & Ralston, 2004). To advance hospitality education for current students and narrow communication gaps between different generations on campus, it is of paramount importance for administrators, faculty, and student service providers to understand students' learning preferences and what motivate student engagement. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to:

1. understand hospitality management students' learning preferences and behaviors;
2. investigate issues faced by teaching staff when interacting with undergraduate hospitality students; and
3. recommend learning/teaching strategies to promote active learning.

2. Literature Review

Each generation is described with label(s) pertaining to the distinctive characteristics shared among its society-wide peer group. Howe and Strauss (2000) asserted that the common persona is formed by historical trends and events occurred during the generation's formative years. For Gen Yers, the most influential force is probably the evolution of information technology (Oblinger, 2003), followed by the self-esteem movement (LaPorta, 2009) and the "helicopter parents". Corresponding to these environmental influences, relevant learning characteristics and teaching tips are identified from the literature and summarized in Table 1 and further elaborated in the following sections.

Table 1. Generation Y Learning Characteristics and Teaching Tips

Environment al influencers	Learning characteristics	Teaching tips	Sources
<i>Information Technology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative and peer-centered 	Incorporate group activities and promote teamwork	Arhin & Johnson-Mallard, 2003; Borges, Manuel, Elam, & Jones, 2010; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Gardner & Eng, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2007; McGlynn, 2005; McGlynn, 2008; McMahon & Pospisil, 2005; Murphy & Smark, 2006; Nimon, 2007; Oblinger, 2003; Smith & Walters, 2012
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential and interactive 	Include hands-on activities such as online interactive laboratories and simulations	Arhin & Johnson-Mallard, 2003; Carlson, 2005; Kipnis & Childs, 2004; Weiler, 2005
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual 	Use multimedia technology covering visual and auditory stimuli	Arhin & Johnson-Mallard, 2003; Carlson, 2005; McMahon & Pospisil, 2005; Pardue & Morgan, 2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inattentive and multitasking 	Provide guidance on using mobile devices for academic purposes	Kipnis & Childs, 2004; McGlynn, 2008; McMahon & Pospisil, 2005; Nimon, 2007; Oblinger, 2003; Pardue & Morgan, 2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impatient and result-oriented 	Explain relevance of learning and provide timely feedback	Carlson, 2005; Kipnis & Childs, 2004; McGlynn, 2008; Nimon, 2007; Pardue & Morgan, 2008; Stein, 2013
<i>Self-esteem Movement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident (vulnerable to failure) 	Assist students to set realistic goals	Gardener & Eng, 2005;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Consumerism" 	Empower students with	

	attitude	decision making power but also provide guidance	Kipnis & Childs, 2004; McGlynn, 2008; Oblinger, 2003
<i>"Helicopter Parents"</i>	• Dependent on individual attention and support	Provide continued counseling in areas of time management	Borges et al., 2010; Eisner, 2011; Howe & Strauss, 2007; McGlynn, 2005; Oblinger, 2003; Pardue & Morgan, 2008
	• Exhibit academic risk-taking behaviors	strategies and independent decision making	

2.1 Information technology

While the advent of information technology has tremendous impacts on all living generations, Gen Yers were the first among them to have led a digital lifestyle since childhood (Nimon, 2007). Not surprisingly, for this group, computers and mobile phones stop being products of information technology but become an indispensable part of life (Oblinger, 2003) and they feel the urge to stay connected with friends, family, and even strangers on the Internet at all times. Kipnis and Childs (2004) indicated that classroom is viewed by Gen Y students as a platform of both social interactions and educational experiences. This generation is seen to put more emphasis on "we" instead of "me" and tends to be more interactive than the earlier generations (McMahon & Pospisil, 2005). This distinct generational trait is reflected in Gen Yers' learning styles in a number of ways: they gravitate towards teamwork and collaborative learning; and they are typically against being passive recipients of knowledge, but prefer experiential learning and hands-on activities (McGlynn, 2008; McMahon & Pospisil, 2005; Oblinger, 2003).

Another characteristic of Gen Y induced by the notion of connectivity is stronger peer bonds. When it comes to learning, especially about what is important and worth noting, they place more trust in their peers than teachers. They tend to be doubtful about the opinions and evaluations of teachers and refuse to accept what they are told at face value (Manuel, 2002; Nimon, 2007). Educators are advised to promote peer-learning strategies by incorporating group activities into teaching and providing opportunities for collaboration and teamwork inside and outside of classroom (Borges et al., 2010).

With their visual senses trained by televisions and movies, and their writing skills practiced through emails and instant messaging, Gen Yers are considered mainly visual and kinesthetic learners (Arhin & Johnson-Mallard, 2003; Junglas, Johnson, Steel, Abraham, and Loughlin, 2007; Weiler, 2005;). Gen Y students are often bored with reading textbooks and listening to lectures, and feel challenged in processing information conveyed in copious class materials (Papp & Matulich, 2011) because their preferences for visual learning are not met. Pardue and Morgan (2008) noted that some university freshmen have expressed uncertainties about their academic readiness for the demanding workload and coursework. These problems could be partially explained by the clash between the learning styles and habits of Gen Y students and those of their instructors. While university faculty is generally used to processing textual information logically and sequentially, Gen Yers learn best with concept maps and visual cues (Papp & Matulich, 2011). Therefore, instructors have been suggested to prepare visually appealing handouts and employ interactive media that include both images and sound (Kipnis & Childs, 2004; Mestre, 2010).

Information technology presents both opportunities and challenges for higher education. The current inadequacy of the use of technologies in instruction might be relatively easy to solve, especially with educators consciously adopting technological tools such as mobile learning apps

(Smith & Walters, 2012) and online interactive laboratories (Oblinger, 2003). However, a few criticisms and doubts arise with regards to how technology influences the effectiveness of education. Whereas mobile devices allowed in classrooms are intended to facilitate learning, in reality, students use these devices mainly for hedonic purposes and are sometimes distracted from class contents (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). It remains debatable whether Gen Y students have difficulties concentrating due to their constant switching among activities, or that multitasking is a highly developed and undisruptive skill common to this generation (Johnson & Romanello, 2005; McMahon & Pospisil, 2005). A recent study suggests that students are increasingly receptive to the idea of using mobile devices for academic purposes, but at the same time they need encouragement from educators and guidance on how best to use them as facilitating tools (Dahlstrom, Walker, & Dziuban, 2012).

In addition to being inattentive in class, Gen Y students are criticized for being impatient and sometimes overly result-oriented for educators to achieve the teaching goal of engendering deep understanding (Carlson, 2005; Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). Exam results reveal that students perform better on objective questions where they can score by memorizing answers, than on the subjective questions where comprehensive and analytical essays are involved and thus require critical thinking skills (Eisner, 2011). Despite the unexpected outcomes of goal orientation, most researchers see this trait as a strength of this generation or at least a natural result of the environment (McGlynn, 2005; Oblinger, 2003). Born and raised in a 24/7 service culture, Gen Yers have high expectations of instant gratification and expect immediacy in obtaining responses from instructors to email inquiries and receiving graded works and feedback. More profoundly, students only pay selective attention to information that is relevant to their lives and develop skills that are marketable once they graduate from college (Kipnis & Childs, 2004; McGlynn, 2008). Institutions of higher education are more likely to achieve their goal of motivating student learning by emphasizing immediate benefits and relevance of the coursework to real life issues than by stressing long-term outcomes (Nimon, 2007). In addition, to motivate result-oriented students, instructors may outline desired outcomes at the beginning of each course and provide feedback from time to time for students to monitor their learning progress and achievements (Borges et al., 2010).

2.2 Self-esteem movement

The seminal work, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, of psychologist Nathaniel Brandon (1969) marked the onset of the self-esteem movement in which parents were told that the feelings of self-esteem play a crucial role in their children's success. Although the analysis of 15,000 academic articles on this topic published since then revealed that self-esteem does not lead to higher academic achievements (Hymowitz, 2009), results of the movement have started to manifest in Gen Y. The two most often cited side effects associated with this parenting practice are narcissism and entitlement (Stein, 2013). Raised by parents who strive to instill self-esteem in them and tell them that they are "special", Gen Yers appear to be more confident in overcoming challenges (Raines, 2003). However, children who grow up with participation trophies tend to put less effort into their endeavors but still expect to fulfill their ambitions.

In the academic arena, Gen Y students seem reluctant to engage in deep learning and they expect to get a "pass" for any work handed in, regardless of the actual quality (Eisner, 2011; Nimon, 2007). As Gen Yers who have not been subjected to much failure in life do not typically possess the necessary frustration tolerance to deal with it, students are more than likely to give up when their accomplishments fall short of their expectations (LaPorta, 2009). Nimon (2007)

stated that it is essential to specify the required standards of work and expected student input at the early stage and to ensure that the students heed the instructions. Despite the pessimism, some researchers disagree on the notion that Gen Y students perform any less diligently than they could. Conversely, these researchers posit that as academic performances are deemed increasingly important in the job market, Gen Yers are pressured by both their parents and their perfectionist selves to study hard and excel (Borges et al., 2010; Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Due to current students' "consumerism" attitude towards education, it is more of an acquisition than a learning experience (McGlynn, 2008). Accordingly, they require good "customer service" in the school setting and expect to be entertained (Kipnis & Childs, 2004). In Oblinger (2003)'s research, the lack of timely support from the institution indeed constituted a reason for the students to abandon their study. Furthermore, Gen Y students in general believe that they have control over what and how they should learn and that they deserve a say in making class-related decisions (Carlson, 2005). However, many students, as some academics have cautioned, might perform only what is minimally required to obtain the desired grades and allocate more of their resources, including their time, to their jobs, family obligations, and "fun" activities such as playing video games. Therefore, educators today have to adopt a more proactive approach to assisting students with goal setting and providing guidance on managing schedules and resources to realize their potential (McGlynn, 2008).

2.3 *"Helicopter parents"*

Since the 1980s, much emphasis has been placed on youth safety following a series of dreadful incidents involving child abuse and massacre. Growing up with burgeoning child protection systems in their communities, Gen Yers are by far the most protected generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The society-wide child safety movement coincided with the trend towards smaller families. With fewer children to attend to and greater support and resources available from the society, many parents of Gen Yers have resorted to a new child-rearing style named "helicopter parents". These parents incline to hover around, attempt to get involved in every aspect of their children's lives, and come to their children's rescue at the first sign of any hostility from schoolmates, teachers, or any other perceived threats (Glass, 2007). When parents strive to create a perfect, competition- and threat-free environment for the children, they overlook the chance to prepare this generation for the real life imperfections (Cline & Fay, 2006). Accustomed to the attention and dedication from parents, Gen Yers expect the same level of attention and support at school whenever they encounter difficulties (McGlynn, 2008).

Howe and Strauss (2000) also noted that students who have been living highly-structured lives and under tight oversight from parents attach less importance to creativity and imagination; rather, they have been well adapted to the structures imposed and are comfortable with the way their parents organize their time and activities (McGlynn, 2008). Consequently, Gen Y students may appear to have time management issues and lack self-planning capabilities. Indeed, universities have witnessed their students' struggle with the overwhelming transition from high school to a lifestyle with suddenly enlarged personal freedom (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). Arnett (2000) proposes the concept of "emerging adulthood" to denote a period of personal development from ages 18 to 25, typically the years spent at universities for college-goers. For students, this is a period of intense self exploration and reevaluation of values and beliefs previously cultivated in a family environment and they might exhibit problematic behaviors such as repeatedly changing majors, being absentminded in classes, absenteeism, handing in sloppy assignments, course failure, or even dropping out of programs. Considering the great academic

risks, it is of utmost importance for institutions to provide continuing counseling and ongoing communication to support Gen Y learners going through their “emerging adulthood” and nurture a sense of self-sufficiency that enables students to study independently and make responsible decisions (Pardue & Morgan, 2008).

3. Methodology

Due to the lack of empirical research on hospitality Gen Y students’ learning preferences, the current study used a qualitative approach to explore this subject among both teachers and students. To accomplish the research objectives, primary data were gathered from focus group discussions. Given the exploratory and phenomenological nature of the subject under investigation, focus group interviews were considered appropriate in generating rich insights through dynamic interactions among group members (Kloosterman & Giebel, 2007).

Researchers generally agree that the optimal number of focus groups depends on the nature and complexity of each study (Litosseliti, 2003; Powell & Single, 1996) and some of them suggests continuing focus group discussions until theoretical saturation is reached (e.g., Kreuger, 2000). Nevertheless, Kreuger (2000) and several other scholars (e.g., Nyamathi & Shuler, 1990) propose that three or four focus groups should be sufficient for simple research questions in general. Following the principle of theoretical saturation and the general rule-of-thumb, four focus groups were conducted: one group with faculty and three groups with students. After a preliminary review of literature, two focus group discussion guides (one for the faculty and one for the student groups) were formulated to keep the discussion on track, each centering on three lines of enquiry: a) learning behaviors/preferences, b) communication with students/teaching staff, and c) teaching strategies/time management.

A focus group with faculty members at a public university in Hong Kong was conducted to examine their experience of interacting with undergraduate hospitality management students inside and outside of classrooms. Their frustrations and ways to solve any challenges faced are solicited. All faculty members who taught at least one subject in the undergraduate hospitality management program at the time of the data collection were invited to participate. Of the 12 invited faculty members, only eight were available at the scheduled time. The eight-member focus group was conducted in English by a professor who is a colleague of the participants (See Table 2). The discussion was audio-recorded and lasted about 90 minutes. Sample questions asked, with follow up probing questions raised as necessary, are:

- From your experience, do you find any distinctive learning behaviors of Gen Y students if you compare them with generations before them?
- How do you feel about your communication with Gen Y students?
- Have you adjusted your teaching strategies based on your observation of Gen Y learning behaviors and preferences? Any examples?
- Have you discovered any teaching techniques that work especially well for Gen Y students? Any examples?
- Have you encountered any challenges or frustrations in teaching Gen Y students? Any examples?

Table 2. Profile of Faculty Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Position
T1	Male	Assistant Professor
T2	Female	Instructor
T3	Female	Instructor
T4	Female	Assistant Professor
T5	Male	Instructor
T6	Female	Instructor
T7	Male	Assistant Professor
T8	Male	Instructor

Three student focus groups were conducted to understand their learning preferences and behaviors and explore ways to motivate them to engage in active learning. After the completion of the second student focus group, some clear patterns of expressions had emerged and the subsequent session generated mostly repetitive information. Relevant issues identified in the focus group with teaching staff were also discussed to seek insight from students as to their reasons for certain behaviors or requests. A convenience sampling was used to identify potential participants. Attempts were made to invite students of various characteristics based on their academic performance (accumulative Grade Point Average [GPA]), year of study, place of origin, and gender (See Table 3). The goal is to have a participant profile that is as close to the general student population profile as possible and to explore the topics from different perspectives (Litosseliti, 2003).

Table 3. Profile of Student Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Year of Study	Place of Origin	GPA Range based on a 4-point scale
S1-1	Female	4	Mainland China	3.30-3.69
S1-2	Male	4	Hong Kong	3.30-3.69
S1-3	Male	3	Hong Kong	Below 2.80
S1-4	Female	3	Hong Kong	Below 2.80
S1-5	Female	2	Hong Kong	3.30-3.69
S1-6	Female	1	Hong Kong	2.80-3.29
S2-1	Female	4	Hong Kong	Above 3.70
S2-2	Male	4	Hong Kong	2.80-3.29
S2-3	Male	1	Hong Kong	Above 3.70
S2-4	Male	1	Hong Kong	3.30-3.69
S2-5	Female	1	Hong Kong	2.80-3.29
S3-1	Male	4	Mainland China	2.80-3.29
S3-2	Female	3	Hong Kong	3.30-3.69
S3-3	Male	3	Mainland China	2.80-3.29
S3-4	Male	3	Hong Kong	2.80-3.29
S3-5	Female	3	Hong Kong	Below 2.80
S3-6	Female	2	Hong Kong	Below 2.80
S3-7	Female	2	Hong Kong	Below 2.80

The focus groups were moderated by a research assistant who is also a Gen Yer and observed how the focus group with faculty members was conducted. Each of the focus group sessions

consisted of five to seven student participants and was conducted in Cantonese and Mandarin, the native languages spoken by the vast majority of the student population at the university. The focus groups were audio-recorded with discussion periods ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. The discussion guide includes the following questions, along with probing suggestions.

- Do you actively (as opposed to being an observer) participate in classroom discussions? Why?
- Do you use electronic devices (mobile phones, laptops, tablets) during class? If yes, for what purposes (% of time)?
- What are the most effective learning tools and assignment formats for you?
- What motivate you to learn?
- Do you make learning plans and schedules for yourself? Why or why not?
- When you encounter an academic problem, how do you usually solve it? And why?
- What are your preferred communication channels (Blackboard / Telephone / Face-to-face / e-mails / social media [Facebook/ Twitter / Whatsapp]) with the teaching staff?
- Do you feel you have learning needs that have not been addressed by the school/ teaching staff? Please elaborate.

All focus groups were conducted in a friendly environment with refreshment provided. Each participant was presented with a HK\$100 (approx. US\$13) supermarket gift certificate at the conclusion of the discussion as a token of appreciation. The discussion recordings were transcribed into English text for data analysis.

3.1 *Data analysis*

All transcripts were independently analyzed by two researchers using NVivo 10.0. Firstly, the text was broken down into analyzable units ranging from phrases to sentences, each assigned one or multiple codes that capture both the manifest and latent meanings. Secondly, constant comparative method was practiced to identify common properties among codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and organize them based on a priori (as in literature and focus group discussion guides) and emergent themes. Regular discussions were held between the two coders to resolve disagreements on code assignment and categorization. Associations among categories were analyzed and consensus was reached on a final coding structure. In the end, the main categories were condensed into three broader themes: 1) general learning characteristics, 2) in-class behavior and participation, and 3) faculty-student communication.

4. **Results and Discussion**

4.1 *General learning characteristics*

4.1.1 *Result- and short-term oriented*

The most prominent learning characteristic of Gen Y agreed by all faculty participants was that students are becoming increasingly practical and result-oriented, and they care less about the process that leads to the desired outcomes. The same was reported by students themselves. For them, education is merely a means to an end. As a result, their attitudes towards learning are

largely determined by the specific outcomes they want to achieve, which range from good grades, scholarships, to decent jobs after graduation.

The students' result orientation seems to be closely associated with another trait of theirs—short-term orientation. Upon closer examination, the desired outcomes are mostly short-term and can vary from semester to semester, as demonstrated by the quotes below:

"Last year I was in the Higher Diploma program. In order to get into the degree program, I had to work hard. This year I aim to get some scholarships." (S2-4)

"I also feel that it depends on what I want to achieve each semester... I began to work really hard a few semesters back as I realized that I might have the potential to achieve higher scores... Now everybody around me wants to apply for Management Trainee positions, I suddenly feel that GPA is not that important." (S2-5)

Students' pursuit of instant gratification is also reflected in several notable educational requests. According to faculty participants, students demand detailed guidelines on assignments and feedback on their draft work before final submission to save time and ensure good grades. Not all faculty believed that these traits are necessarily problematic, as stated in the following:

"... they have learned from experience that there is a model answer... so [they ask us] 'tell me... how to get to those answers'... we respond by... giving them all the hints, the guidelines... I'm not blaming them. I think they are much smarter." (T7)

However, as indicated by Roehl et al. (2013), these characteristics could create some problems for educators. The faculty representatives were concerned that students "lack real motivation" to study as they are primarily driven by short-term benefits. For example, some students skip classes that do not take attendance and review lecture notes only before exams. Similar to the observations made by Kipnis and Child (2004), student participants pointed out that they prefer course contents that are "practical and close to the world (S1-3)". For students who see no immediate merits of college education, attending university is not a means of acquiring knowledge but a responsibility imposed on them by their parents, as one student articulated:

"... grades are not that important. Sometimes, interview performance is more important ... Therefore, I think it's meaningless and useless. All I want is to graduate soon." (S1-3)

Furthermore, as students learn to be more practical and resort to shortcuts to achieve their goals, they spend less time reading and developing critical thinking skills, as illustrated by the comment of a faculty member:

"...they tend to do surface learning and skip part of this and part of that... still they think they will be able to get the whole story." (T1)

Mirroring Eisner's (2011) findings, Gen Y learners were found to be good at memorizing theories but less so at applying knowledge to analyze and interpret real-world data. Academic writing is another area of weakness. Having access to an overwhelming amount of information online, students demonstrate difficulty in evaluating potential reference sources for their reliability and suitability. Some of them would use whatever comes out "at top of the Google

search (T5)". Apart from locating and selecting reference sources, students seem to also have a hard time paraphrasing and integrating materials into their own arguments.

4.1.2 In/dependent

McGlynn (2008) asserted that Gen Yers, being raised by "helicopter parents", usually expect extra attention and support at school. The focus groups generated mixed results in this respect. One of the faculty members believed that Gen Y students are more independent and more comfortable doing assignments on their own than students in the previous generations. Others felt the contrary, as students constantly demand detailed guidelines and sometimes even templates and sample works to help them complete the assignments. As indicated by both students and teaching staff, this tendency could be accounted for by Gen Y's result orientation and the shortcut culture.

"We come to classes expecting them [teachers] to explain everything we need to learn clearly so that we don't have to refer to textbooks later." (S1-2)

"The reason for me to consult them [teachers] is not so they will tell me what to do, but rather check if I am on the right track." (S1-3)

"... so they [students] understand everything and they don't waste time too much and get lost in what the teacher want from them." (T4)

Rather than not having the capability to complete assignments by themselves, students require "additional help" to ensure that they do not waste time and effort that do not entail immediate tangible benefits. In fact, the advance of technology has enabled students to be much more independent. When encountered academic problems, the majority of students try to solve the problems by searching for information online. Others would turn to their classmates, who speak the same language in both literal and metaphorical sense. As instantaneity really matters to them, response time was another reason why all student participants placed "consulting lecturers" as their last resort.

Missing deadlines and course failure are two consequences associated with the lack of self-planning skill (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). However, as explained by the students, poor academic performances are more the result of a personal choice than an inability to manage time effectively:

"... it has something to do with priorities... just want to get a "pass", you will allocate more time to do part-time jobs and go out with friends." (S1-4)

"I think once you decide what your goals are you will know what you should do." (S2-2)

"Some friends of mine will always wait until the last day to start working on their assignments... The assignments are just not as important as the other things in their lives..." (S3-6)

4.1.3 Entitled

The focus group results suggested that Gen Yers have a strong sense of entitlement. Several faculty members described the students as more challenging to satisfy than previous generations. In keeping with Nimmon's (2007) findings, students are reluctant to accept what they are told at

face value but determined to know the reasons behind every decision and requirement. The student accounts below also support what McGlynn (2008) coined as students' "consumerism" attitude towards education:

"The school should print out lecture notes for us... If we are required to read textbooks, why didn't the school buy more copies?" (S1-3)

"... they should think about the end users when designing PowerPoint slides." (S3-2)

"I don't feel that I need to attend the lectures... I think you have to show us the value, the reasons why we should attend your lectures." (S3-5)

4.1.4 Vulnerable to failure

On the positive side of the self-esteem movement, Gen Yers are supposed to be more confident in overcoming challenges (Raines, 2003); however, no evidence was found to support this assumption. The discussions revealed that students suffered from low frustration tolerance and exhibited a tendency to give up when disappointed by unmet expectations (LaPorla, 2009). A faculty member noted that students get frustrated if they give incorrect answers to her questions, even if she tried to encourage them with positive reinforcement. The vulnerability to failure is also noticeable in students' comments:

"I feel quite depressed when I get unsatisfactory results after all the hard work... It surely demotivates me if the results I get do not reflect the amount of effort I put into studying." (S3-7)

"...if I know I can get higher than a 3.2 [GPA required for 2nd Class (Division 1) Honours] but can never make it to 3.7 [minimum for 1st Class Honours], then why should I make the effort to try?" (S3-2)

4.2 In-class behavior

Unlike Gen Yers born in the Western culture, Hong Kong students are inactive in class: they seldom put up their hands to answer teachers' questions or voluntarily participate in classroom discussions. This behavioral characteristic has been attributed to cultural influence by faculty and students alike. Most of the students said they would never raise their hands during class because they did not want to be the center of attention; instead, they would choose to approach lecturers during lecture breaks.

4.2.1 Motivators and demotivators

Lecturers were concerned about their ever-growing struggle to retain students' attention and enthusiasm in class. They felt that they had to constantly compete for students' attention as mobile devices became commonplace in the classroom.

"... if they lose their attention, then they have absolutely no difficulty reverting to their tablets or laptops, their smart phone, and then dragging all the people into it as well." (T5)

The single most frequently mentioned motivating factor by students was "interest", which could refer to both the way the lecture is delivered and the subject itself, with much discussion focused on the former. Many students felt that there was no point in attending classes if they

could achieve the same results by reading lecture notes at home. Presentation skills of the lecturer, in particular whether he/she can articulate the concepts and theories in simple and understandable terms, serve as a facilitator of student learning. Other factors related to instructional style, including classroom atmosphere, English language skill of the lecturer, intonation of voice, personality of the lecturer, and the amount of effort put into the preparation, were also suggested by students as motivators to learn:

"Some lecturers can create a great classroom atmosphere." (S2-1)

"Sometimes the lecturer uses a monotone throughout the lecture, it feels really boring." (S2-5)

"... if the lecturer is a nice person, I will answer his/her question." (S3-3)

"Whether I go to class or not really depends on whether I feel the lecturer puts an effort in teaching." (S2-4)

Some faculty members opined that interactive teaching, such as posing questions and creating opportunities for discussions, is the solution to students' ever shorter attention spans. However, according to the students, the type of questions and the way they are asked can make a difference. Students conveyed a preference for nonfactual questions so that they could express their ideas freely without worrying about getting the correct answer, and for lecturers not directing follow-up questions to the same student as this resembles too much of an interrogation.

To take advantage of the result orientation of Gen Y students, lecturers can effectively motivate students to come to class and take a more active role in learning by using the right type of positive reinforcement. Both faculty and students reported that candies, stickers, and bonus points are effective incentives. Some lecturers have also tried to motivate students by explaining the negative consequences of undesired behaviors. While negative reinforcement could be useful in some circumstances, it may fuel resentment among students if used too much and too often. In addition, since students perform their best with the presence of immediate tangible results, exams and grades could also motivate learning, as suggested by some students:

"If there're no exams, we won't be motivated to review course materials... If you really want us to study hard, you should adjust the degree classification and divide it into smaller ranges, like Second Low, Second Middle, Second Upper, etc." (S3-4)

4.2.2 Effective instructional techniques

The majority of the student participants preferred lecturers who use examples, personal experience, case studies, videos, and simulation programs, in addition to PowerPoint presentations. In line with findings of previous research (Oblinger, 2003; Weiler, 2005), these students appear to be experiential and visual learners. Students also made extensive suggestions on PowerPoint presentation. Instead of copious text; they hope that lecturers can extract the essence from textbooks and show only what needs to be memorized:

"The lecturers may think that the more they put into the presentation, the more students will learn. This is not true. The reality is that nobody will read the extra information..." (S1-3)

Although some lecturers deliberately leave out detailed information hoping that students will pay attention in class, students indicated that they could not pay attention while worrying about

whether they jotted down everything. Most student participants did not articulate any particular expectations on the visual effects of PowerPoint presentations, except one student who stressed the importance of color combination and the use of animation (S2-3). Most of them agreed that as long as they can see each word clearly from the projector screen, the slide design does not have to be beautiful. In contrast to Papp and Matulich's (2011) observation that Gen Yers learn best with concept maps and visual cues, the students in this study did not care much about charts and graphs as long as the information is relevant.

Faculty participants in general assumed that students prefer group assignments because collaborative learning received much discussion in the literature (Borges et al., 2010). However, for most group projects, students reported the need to spend extra time getting to know team members assigned, and they have to do extra work if they have free riders or poor performers in the group. Thus, the risks involved in group projects outweigh the benefits of making new friends. Some students also reported that each member of the team would only focus on the part of the project allocated to him/her and therefore miss the big picture. That said, a few students did recognize the values of group assignments and made some suggestions to make group assignments more enjoyable:

"I suggest that the lecturers arrange more group projects for Year One students to help them know more people and also because the workload is not so heavy in Year One." (S1-6)

"Group projects are acceptable and beneficial to you if you can choose your own team members... Now I'd rather they divide a group project to two or three individual parts which will be graded individually." (S3-6)

4.2.3 Use of mobile devices

With mobile devices becoming commonplace in practically every aspect of modern life, students are more and more comfortable using their mobile devices for personal and entertainment purposes in class, as some participants in the faculty group reported. With the "if you cannot beat them, you join them (T7)" spirit, the faculty has also become more open-minded about this phenomenon over the years and some members shared their experience of successfully incorporating mobile technology into teaching. Nonetheless, much debate has been centered on whether or what kind of mobile devices should be allowed in class.

When students were asked about their use of mobile devices in class, some claimed that they used their mobile devices mainly for academic purposes. For instance, they would check online dictionaries or other informative sites when they felt that the lecturers did not explain a concept well enough. However, students admitted that they would use these devices for entertainment especially when they found the lectures boring. They would browse social media sites, do online shopping, reply emails, or do anything that does not require their full attention.

Faculty members in general were concerned that students had great difficulty staying focused on one thing and this concern is evidently not unwarranted. Only one of the students (S2-2) was very confident that he could manage the "switch" from one activity to another quite well, the rest all agreed that mobile devices could be both a facilitating tool and a distraction. Due to the need for instantaneity, whenever one student sends out a message to a group, all members in the group will feel compelled to reach out for their phones and are distracted at least during the few minutes when they check and reply the message.

4.3 Faculty-student communication

All participants agreed that faculty-student interactions outside of classroom had been minimal, reflecting Howe and Strauss's (2000) observation of Gen Yers' diminished need to establish close relationships with the older generations. Faculty participants found not only the communication with students less frequent than before, but also that the topics of such communication were largely confined to the subjects they were teaching:

"A lot of that closeness is just not present any more." (T5)

"Now the students will only come to my office for the subject." (T6)

Acknowledging that the Chinese culture has always been a factor that creates power distance between university faculties—especially members of higher ranks—and students, several other possible explanations pertinent to the unique characteristics of Gen Y have been proposed by faculty participants, including the assumption that Gen Yers are much busier with their social calendars and not interested in sparing time for faculty-student communication. However, students in all focus groups reported the need for instantaneity as the main underlying reason for not communicating with faculty members. Compared to finding a quick answer online, consulting a faculty member obviously entails additional work, such as sending an email and researching the topic beforehand just in case they got challenged, and is therefore avoided to the greatest extent possible. On the other hand, four students expressed their willingness to develop closer relationships with the faculty, saying that they would be more motivated to learn if they have close relationships with teachers.

In terms of communication channels, most students still preferred face-to-face interactions which provide instant feedback for their questions. However, as a common practice, emails remained the first contact point as students often encountered problems during evening study time. Instant messaging apps may also be used if the two parties knew each other on a more personal level. For students, how quickly the faculty members respond to their enquiries seems to be more critical than the type of communication channel used. On the other hand, faculty participants reported frustration in students' lack of response:

"They're very selective [about technology]. I will send students reminders or guidelines through [school] email and Blackboard email. But I doubt whether they really read my emails." (T3)

5. Conclusions and Implications

This research sought to provide insights into Gen Y hospitality students' learning behaviors from the perspectives of both the students themselves and university faculty. Through a series of focus group discussions with faculty representatives from a hospitality management program in Hong Kong and students in the same program, the study discussed issues encountered by the teaching staff when dealing with Gen Y students and preferences of these students in their learning process. Many findings on Gen Y learning characteristics correspond with those found in Western studies, demonstrating that the generational culture could actually transcend ethnic/national culture.

By and large, the findings reveal a strong emphasis by students on relevance and immediacy, same as described in the literature (Carlson, 2005; Kipnis & Childs, 2004; McGlynn, 2008).

Students lose their interest in learning as soon as they find the lecture content unrelated to or different from what they aim to achieve at the moment. They seek instant gratification for the effort put into learning and avoid spending time in deep learning which does not guarantee any immediate, tangible benefits. From the teachers' perspective, these students appear to be unmotivated and oftentimes resort to shortcuts (e.g., asking for sample work and model answers) that prevent them from developing critical thinking skills.

The findings that students wish to know what is expected of them and what they have to do to achieve their goal support the use of outcome-based education. Educators are more likely to achieve their desired teaching goals by articulating intended learning outcomes in writing (in subject syllabus) as well as verbally at the beginning of each course (Borges et al., 2010). It will also be useful to indicate clearly the criteria against which students' work will be evaluated. For instance, when critical thinking is a key area that teachers look for, it should be stated in the assessment marking rubrics as an evaluation criterion so that students will know what are expected of the work submitted. More importantly, how the learning outcomes relate to real life issues needs to be communicated to attract and retain students' attention (Nimon, 2007).

The notion that Gen Yers are visual and experiential learners has been confirmed in the current research (Arhin & Johnson-Mallard, 2003; Papp & Matulich, 2011; Weiler, 2005). Multimedia materials (e.g., videos) or programs (e.g., simulation) that incorporate both images and sound and allow hands-on operations are popular among students. The findings with regards to collaborative learning (Borges et al., 2010; McGlynn, 2008) somewhat deviated from previous observations. Many students expressed discontent towards common arrangements of group learning projects, maintaining that the cons could outweigh the pros. Students felt that the current peer evaluation mechanism does not deter free riders or non-cooperators in a teamwork assignment. Instructors are suggested to use peer evaluation, clearly articulate the importance of honest peer assessment, and implement the mechanism as planned so that students will see the consequences of not contributing to group projects.

The myth that Gen Yers can effectively multitask was also debunked in the student focus groups. Mobile devices could not only distract students, but also reach a large number of students in the same class instantly and simultaneously. As suggested by Dahlstrom et al. (2012), students need encouragement and guidelines from lecturers on how to use these devices for learning purposes and prevent them from dividing students' attention in class. For example, guiding principles on the use of mobile devices in class can be formulated at the institutional or departmental level specifying the types of devices and activities allowed in the classroom.

The students rejected the assumption that missing deadlines and course failure reflect a lack of self-planning skills on their part (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). They argued that these academic risk-taking behaviors were personal choices that indicate a lack of interest in studying. To motivate students to engage in active learning, it makes all the difference if lecturers can make the effort to remember students' names, encourage/initiate exchanges between teachers and students, and provide timely feedback to students' inquiries. Both positive (e.g., bonus points) and negative (e.g., point deductions) reinforcements can be useful when applied properly. Students appeared to be more participatory when the classroom atmosphere is friendly and they don't feel intimidated to speak up. The lecturers may need to praise the students from time to time to increase their confidence level, and encourage them when they fail to reduce their level of frustration. At the institutional level, it helps if administrators and program leaders can involve students in making class-related decisions (Carlson, 2005) and welcome continuous inputs from students to improve teaching and learning.

6. Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of the study is associated with the small sample size and potential sampling bias as it included eight faculty members and 18 students from a single hospitality program in Hong Kong. Findings of this research would not be conclusive or generalizable to all hospitality institutions. Demographic variables such as gender and country of origin or other study related variables such as academic performance (measured by GPA in the study) and year of study may also have an impact on learning behaviors of students. However, to achieve the objectives of this study, the students were treated as a homogeneous group and the potential differences were not examined. Future research on this topic could address these limitations by including a larger sample from different institutions and examine differences in opinions across different participant characteristics. Furthermore, a longitudinal study that explores the effects of various teaching adaptations and collects timely feedback from students and faculty by means of both observations and self-report methods will enable a deeper and more accurate understanding of the topic and assist in devising effective learning and teaching strategies.

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