

The Z Generation

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Abstract: The author of this article seeks to define various circumstances that make a generation. The author points out the characteristics of new generations focusing on the so-called Z generation. As a literature teacher, she mentions personal examples to make the article alive. Her aim is to prove that it is important to take the new habits and specifics of teenagers into account in order to teach more efficiently.

Key words: ITC, new generation, new challenges, Z generation, personal traits of a teacher, requirements of the educational system.

1 Introduction

The need for rethinking the diversity and the trend of being different from the next generation (basically since 1968) called youth has been becoming more and more important across Europe. The intense spread (which is not getting slower at all) of the 21st century's information and communication technology (ICT) makes it reasonable to consider answering this question as an international one. This paper is mainly focusing on the Hungarian point of view and then looking up the European horizon. (About the author: besides her research, she is a Hungarian Literature and Grammar teacher at a secondary school in one of the districts outside of the capital. Her personal experiences helped her extend this paper with some added value.)

Bertalan Komenczi (2009) distinguishes different cognitive habits in the history of human development. His research used cultural relevance and was based on the work of Harold Innis (1951) and Marsall McLuhan (1962, 1964), and the results were in this respect as well: the causes of the cognitive changes are due to the outcomes of the radical changes in communication and understanding.

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The society of teachers have heard more and more about the “new generation” and “new challenges” during the last few years in Hungary. In the beginning, the focus was on the key terms, definitions and the characteristics of this generation. However, now it has become clear that an examination of the way that the new generation works and shares “good practice” is essential and necessary.

Based on my educational and teaching experience, it can be established that generational change, the wide spread of ICT and their rapid development are inseparable processes. It is enough to think about the paper-based school grade system, which disappeared within 9 years and the appearance of digital grade system to replace the first one. It can be also easily seen that mobiles have been replaced by smart-phones among students, which have become part of their everyday lives.

2 Generations Research: X, Y, Z

Clearly, it seems to be a two-way mechanism of action; in the world of ICT, young people transform the known society and the digital world is changing them. They feel and live the time, they spend their leisure time differently, have different conceptions about relationships, contacts, conversations and learning. In recent decades, a number of books have been published defining a child belonging to an object/phenomenon. Paul Ariès (2000) called McDonald's as a “fetish” alarmist in his writings: speaking about McDonaldization as a bad mother who became pregnant in the time of globalization and makes the consumer and producer, the two dominant groups of young people, of globalization dishes unified.¹

Whilst Paul Ariès condemns the restaurant chain, a Swedish author Anita Werner (1998) is more optimistic about the TV, “she voters a holistic approach to the phenomena in addition; her research on the relationship of television and children’s attention focuses on examining the cooperation and interaction of various factors” (1999). Werner says that in order to let children’s identity and competence develop and to be able to understand the reality, they need their own experiences, personal communications and impressions, gained from the media, to be interplayed (1998).² However, television has become outdated, when asked, my students answered that they barely watch TV. During the eight years I have spent teaching, the world of internet has supplanted television.

In the following part, I have reviewed the interpretation of the concept of generation.

Károly Mannheim (1938), an influential sociologist, wrote, “The social phenomenon described by the concept of generation is actually the identity

formed by connected groups and embedded in the social-historical process.” In other words, the current generation - according to Mannheim - forms a social group, in which the age does not restrict the human being a group member, but extends to a group of those individuals, who were at their pubescent age or at the early stages of their adulthood necessarily confronted with the pre-existing culture and most probably the intention of its transformation is already in their mind (2007). Mannheim puts the concept of generation parallel to the class concept, meaning that a human is born into it, does not want to leave it, only if their status changes.

The generations research done by Howe and Strauss (2000) sets three criteria, by which we can talk about a generation. The first is “perceived membership” which means that the person feels, perceives himself part of a group, as a member of it. The second criterion is called “shared beliefs and behavioural forms”, so the common beliefs and forms of behaviours, such as family, careers, religion or political view. Thirdly, the “shared history”, containing all the historical events that happened during their childhood and adolescent age, which had a great influence in most group members’ private life. They admit that the history converts generations and vice versa. They state an operation similar to the pendulum: the period of awakenings and exploration comes after crises and development time of the history.

McCrinkle and Wolfinger (2010) emphasize the common experience of people born in the same historical period, which refers to their technological knowledge and historical experiences. Instead of biological determination they want to define the term ‘generation’ sociologically. Why is it important to distinguish generations from each other? These differences among generations are usually the main causes of problems in working and living together, and communicating with each other. After all, there are differences in motivation, decision making, shopping habits and consumer behaviour as well.

Mária Törőcsik (2011) speaks about cohort experiences, about all the generations’ experiences, which make people belonging to these change their approach/outlook. The deeper agenda of the concept is that “the members of each generation are interconnected by the shared experiences of their adolescence, popular culture, economic situation, world events, natural disasters, heroes, public enemies, politics, technology, so by all those experiences that make a cohort, an age group in the sociological sense” (2003).

Baby Boomers (great generation)	X generation (digital immigrants)	Y generation (digital natives)	Z generation (nation of Facebook)	Alfa generation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They were born after the II WW ● Motto: “war never again” ● Several social changes: equality in women’s rights, Vietnam War ● Increasing consumption ● Competitions and idealism ● First time they meet PCs as adults ● PC is not the main way of communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They were born at the end of the 60s, beginning of 70s ● Number of divorces, economic uncertainty are increasing ● age of Disco and hip-hop culture ● Age of TV and videogames ● Start of individualism ● They met PC when they were young ● Witnesses of the development of information technology and then information society ● They use internet more or less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They were born in the 80s and 90s ● Increasing number of conflicts ● The spread of digital technology: e-mail, sms ● Optimism, are not afraid of the technology ● Loyal to brands ● They met internet when they were children ● Dependent on media ● First digital citizens ● Social relationships are doubled: they have virtual and real ones ● They are interested in cultural contents ● They accept their parents’ values ● They like social activities ● They prefer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They were born around the millennium ● They do not know the world without internet ● Use internet and social networks ● “Global connectivity”, flexibility, being smart, tolerant of different cultures ● Social network sites are the main platform for communication ● Information consumers and providers ● Very good device skills ● Thousands of online contacts ● Multitasking (blogging, listening to music, writing emails) ● Quicker decision making ● They are not stuck to a place ● They learn, make friends, have fun differently ● There is no legal sensitivity on downloading, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Growing economics ● New expectations, educational trends, materialism

		visuals and audios instead of texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They want to achieve their aims as soon as possible and often want to fulfill their wishes ● They prefer games to hard work 	changing files <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emotional incompetency 	
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Figure 1. Characteristics of generations. (Based on Nagy & Székely, 2012; Nagy, 2016)

But it varies from year to year: there are already existing papers, which define the aforementioned generational differences in different ways. András Buda (2013) describes the definitions formulated by Prensky 2001 in his paper called ‘Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants — A New Way to Look at Ourselves and Our Kids’, instead of the age and the dichotomous categorising based on the age he wants to consider the qualitative indicators of using digital technologies and recommends to consider the differences among these indicators. So, he sketches a range of possible roles from “digital refugee” and “digital explorer” to “digital innovator” and even “digital addict.” Moreover, the newer, 2013 research uses the term, applications of the generations called “generation apps”.

3 Concept of generation Z and their attributes

Taking a closer look at the generation Z, we can see that there are already several ways to refer to them, “Post millenars”, “Facebook generation”, “Digital Natives”, “Switchers”, “Dotcom children”, “Netgeneration”, “iGeneration”, “C - Connection – generation”, “D - Digital – generation”, “R - Responsibility – generation”. These are today’s 14-25-year-olds.

Around 2000, studies about the new generation appeared, firstly Don Tapscott (1998/2001) then Marc Prensky (2001) wrote about a generation, which was “born into a world full with info communication devices and because of that we need to face several changes regarding the online socialisation, learning and living habits of the new generation” (Tóbi, 2013, p. 111). Tapscott, who defined

the term, said that the members of the net generation better understand and extensively use “gadgets”. Prensky in his study published in 2001, creates the model of digital natives, digital immigrants, in which he talks about an explosive change. “Our students today are all ‘native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet.”³ In Hungary, around 1996-97, the Schoolnet program prepared the conditions for the formation of the net generation, since “all Hungarian secondary schools could join the web’s blood circulation”, says Péter Fehér.

Research carried out in late 2009 and early 2010 by Judit Hornyák and Péter Fehér (2011) would rather recommend to use the term “online generation” instead of “net generation” and “digital natives”. Their research showed the following results: young people aged 10-25 spend a lot of time on a computer, using mostly chat or visiting social network sites. The level of ICT literacy is low and the formation of an own ICT language with its specific grammar can be seen, mainly due to the expansion of online communication.

The properties of the Z generation collected during the Pécs project, called ‘Science Communication for the Z generation’ in 2013 are the following:

The active social media users have many contacts and they mainly live their everyday relations through these channels (personal meetings are also important to them, however, keeping the online contacts have an equally important role). In daily consumer goods they do not really eat fast food and drink sugary soft drinks – even if it also appears among them, indeed, but it is not that typical. The number of smokers and those who drink alcohol regularly is quite high. They have their “beloved brands” (lovetags), which are extremely important - based on the in-depth interviews these are the iPhone as a smartphone, they often referred to. Their content consumption can be easily recognised: they do not like the consumption of high quality culture among young people and they typically prefer pop music, movies. Purchasing movies and music for them means that they usually download (piracy). They prefer contents found on the internet, spend lots of time on surfing on the internet, watching Youtube videos. Generally, their consumer characteristics are very different from the members of the Generation Y, the smartphone is a status symbol, although the functional connotation is also very important to them (based on in-depth interviews), “who was not connected continuously to our group, to be cut off” (Tóbi, 2013).⁴

Let me mention a foreign example, Susan Greenfield (2009), who in her work ‘The Quest for Identity in the 21st Century’ states that children being considered as “natives” in the digital world since the time they were already born have different emotions and brain functions. Using a computer has become an essential part of their home life. Alvin Toffler (2010) has an idea that the

illiterates of the 21st century are not those who can not read and write, but those who have not learned to learn. He saw the problem, which changed the learning habits and objectives of Generation Z thirty years ago. "Without the ability to learn, we will be lost in the world of information, we cannot solve any everyday problem and we cannot prosper in our social relations management" (Molnár, 2010, p. 3).

In the book of Annamária Tari (2011) entitled Z generation, she defines the following:

1. Kids nowadays do not have strong family relationships as it was in the case of the previous generation.⁵
2. They are smart, but their emotional intelligence is significantly underdeveloped, "They process information if they understand it but they are unable to process it emotionally".⁶
3. Due to apps that do multitasking (having, doing several things at the same time), being precise, or being able to concentrate, memorize something has become more difficult in long term.⁷
4. The personality becomes more narcissistic: the main goal is to leave their "digital footprint" for others – using only the global interest.⁸
5. What will be the effect of the rudeness of virtual games with little morality, lack of empathy and valued in TV shows on children psyche?⁹
6. The opinion of peers is overrated and becomes the most important.¹⁰
7. Visual thinking is dominant, so imagination and creativity are on the second place – Avatars, Second Life world are among the typical roles.¹¹
8. Many representatives of the Z generation are suffering from chronic sleep deprivation because they do not want to miss anything (Facebook, etc.).¹²
9. There is the possibility of living a happier life but with less value.¹³
10. Thanks to media, role models, celebrities and stars have a stronger impact on them.¹⁴
11. New ways of partnerships and sexuality appear.¹⁵
12. Last but not least, the tasks of education are as follows: motivation, effective teaching methods, new roles of teachers supporting "independent learning" styles, putting reading on the second place, the importance of physical activity, the pursuit of cooperation (Petry, 2014).

My personal experience confirms the research results. The reading habits of the Z-generation students are as follows: they do not necessarily read less, but they read different things and in different ways. György D. Fenyő (2011) describes the thesis about the altered Hungarian reading habits, in which he compares the characteristics of the "traditional reading" and the "new reading" strategies. I can also confirm these as valid characteristics.

“Traditional reading”		“New reading strategies”
Verbal: based on language elements, words, sentences	Text reception	Simultaneous: many information at the same time
Linear	Direction of reading	By leaps
Global, full understanding	The aim of reading	Focus on unique elements
Structured thinking	Expectation from the reader	Starts with pictures, the text is on the second place
Information elements in structures, finding and understanding the meaning	The process	Focus is on the reader not on the writer
Deeper, slower	Reading speed	quicker

Figure 2. Traditional and new reading strategies. (Fenyő, 2011)

4 The inner world

I have already mentioned the appearance of the TVs’ world, in other words about the real and not real world, which was extended by the virtual world of the 21st century. Timea Antalóczy and Zsuzsanna Pörzsi (2014), in their presentation “Continuous presence” showed that 78% of American adolescents have smart-phones and they called chat sites “drugs” because 3 out of 4 teens are addicted. About the constant presence that is a constraint characteristics of the Z Generation members, the following are listed: general activity, interruptible contact because as they say, if you do not talk to him, you can delete him, parallel existence is applicable, there is no absolute connectivity, no responsibility about the future and there is no risk either. There are simple relationships determined by the mutual satisfaction rate and the possibility of leaving the physical present world. The presence is controlled, “If you are not online, you do not exist”, “if you are available online you exist”, and there is just contact simulation: one created the community and not were born into it. The authors highlight the paradox of the virtual presence meaning that one of the goals is not to be alone, however, people become lonely. This also determines the lack of another person’s physical presence, which means that others are far away. Zygmunt Bauman (2000), who introduced the theory of liquid modernity,

wrote that its characteristics are about the individual, namely the constant changes of situations and the object of focus. It is a kind of chaotic continuation of modernity, where a person can shift from one social position to another in a fluid manner. Nomadism becomes a general trait of the 'liquid modern' human flowing through his/her own life like a tourist, changing places, jobs, spouses, values and sometimes more. That is why everything is unstable, breakable, people need to remain flexible and get more and more new information all the time in order not to have a constant fear of their lives. Last but not least, the consumer patterns are transmitted to human relationships, including disposability and the life without commitment to someone.

5 Conclusion

Freedom becomes a paradoxical concept in this world, as people can always and at any time, be controlled and checked. The high number of connections is not as deep as it could be in reality and causes changeable identity because all the data are kept, it is actually not true.

David Le Breton (2010) writes that during the last two decades the social and cultural transformation ended the classical definition of being an adolescent by extending and expanding its boundaries. Pregnancy, alcohol, anorexia, bulimia, drugs and tattoos are common concepts among today's adolescents. The consumer society dictates what someone should look like, which makes a huge impact on adolescents' relationship to their own body and that issue is very important at this age. After all, this is the age of realising and accepting the physical body itself, and because of this, the influence of the internet, ads and other external influences are very important at this stage. These will establish their identity.

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¹ When I was a child, one of the biggest presents was an ice-cream (“mekis ice-cream”) in the McDonald’s. In the school, at the last English lesson of the year, we always went there as a treat. I no longer partake in this treat. However, I see McDonald’s is still one of the most popular meeting spots amongst my students; a lot of them meet there before their first lesson to buy a coffee or their breakfast and they spend plenty of time there after school. McDonald’s became a symbol of status because even if they know the quality of the food is poor and that it is not cheap they say “it is tasty and it is good to be there”. Quick and simple solution.

² Thanks to the television, a child has to experience various realities, and it just gets more complicated if we think about children nowadays and all the virtual and real world in where they need to stay alive. Out of the real world, there are many virtual ones: the virtual world of Facebook, video games, movies and series, the world of avatars will be one part of their identity, which leads a way to breaking the identity into pieces in where it is completely unsure what is true, constant and stable. We can hear a lot about the crisis of values, but it might be more important to examine the crisis of the identity which we should fight against as teachers day by day. We should help students to find their stable identity in themselves over different worlds. Maybe this is connected to the extended “child being”: till they are living in symbolic and virtual worlds they can be only visitors in adulthood.

³ Although till 2007 students did not use phones during the lessons at all, nowadays it is quite common that students, when changing classrooms, are using their smart-phones/tablets on the corridor, mainly chatting with someone, or even after the bell goes when sitting down in the class, their smart-phone is still in their hands and they are finishing the last messages. Previously, I witnessed students passing written messages on paper, going through other students’ hands. Since the Mozanapló was introduced and is being used, we as teachers have been taking a laptop/tablet with us lesson by lesson. Since that time, I have also started my lessons with registering students being absent on our digital school register system and it became easier and quicker to save grades of verbal tests even in the lesson.

Another positive thing is that while a few years ago the presence of ICT devices, technologies in class was very special and unique, nowadays using devices is dominant. As I am not a fan of forbidding things, I was very concerned about forbidding the usage of mobiles in class, as our school policy says. In the beginning I let my students to use their mobiles. However, I had to realize that the current year 9 and those who are not really interested in literature, like students specialized in sports, are mostly chatting, playing online or checking images even if they have tasks to do. In my opinion, the main reason why students use mobiles in class is that they are not that interested in analysing literature and having conversations. The first solution I found was that I asked their honest opinion about the moment when the lesson became boring for them and told them that I only let them using their mobiles if they are looking for an image, an interesting fact about the topic, which should be posted then on the class Facebook wall with a description of it. This description was supposed to be the personal opinion on why they liked and posted the element, meaning that I could return the situation and make them start to work with our topic without realising it. To stop them chatting during the lesson

is hard and the only solution I have found is asking them whether it is really that important to talk to their friends and then telling them to end the conversation. But three weeks ago something changed and I decided not letting them to use mobiles. I think they are too attached to these technologies and they have to learn to be independent from them. For now, I do not trust the usage of ICT technologies in class that much either. I feel that it is more important to show real conversations, the presence and that is why we need to decrease the usage of technologies in the classroom. Now, we are learning “in blocks”, meaning that besides a kind of study block that they get time to play or if someone is waiting for an important message the person has to let me know about the time he is expecting it and then she or he can check his phone at a certain time. It also happens that a student would like to show a video, we watch it and then start to work. Although I know that I need to be stricter regarding using technologies in the classroom, I think it is more important to work based on a guideline created by us and not on rules formed by me or the school. On the other hand, I have to say that giving punishments is surprisingly still very effective, students are afraid of getting one, but for me it is one of the worst things that can happen during my lesson.

⁴ As mentioned above, the fast-food culture is present among my students. The smoking experience appears in varying proportions since there are stricter controls on smoking in schools. As smoking is not allowed there, it is not that popular. Lately, the school’s neighbours came to speak to the headmaster because students were smoking under the window. I personally know that students often gather together on the weekends to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes. It turned out that during these gatherings they want to relive some other state of being and, of course, besides being together they also want to be cool in the eyes of the others. Music is very important to them, during their free periods in school or on the bus or train when coming to school they often listen to music. It is also a good technique of being hidden in certain situations. The newly purchased smart-phones and tablets are also status symbols and the students are always happy to search any material related to the lesson on their device. It is a frequent problem that the wifi in the school is not good enough. One of my student, who got a few years-old phone with which he could only make calls and send messages after he had left his smart-phone somewhere, was the object of jokes. He made us realize the strangeness of the everyday life, which was very thought-provoking.

⁵ Only one fourth of my students talks to their mothers about their problems, another fourth talks to their fathers and the rest mainly tries to avoid having any conversation with their parents. Of course, there are exceptions. At the last parents evening a mother told me that they, as a family, always sat down at the table for an hour and everybody had to talk about how the person was even if, for example, her daughter would have preferred to be alone. Even if, fortunately, there are several examples of children and their parents being able to talk to each other, sometimes it is not that easy. Another mother told me that sometimes it was incredibly hard to accept that her daughter was like an adult and then suddenly she was a stubborn teenager again.

⁶ In my case, I think this is a particularly important problem, because since I have discovered that only three out of thirty students in my class get any sex education from

their parents and some of the girls have already approached me with different problems related to this topic, I consider that it is very important to provide such information. I understand and accept if a parent says that sexual education is none of his business, but it's a very difficult question, because, as I can see, students find completely irrelevant and distrustful content about the topic and see distorted body images. I usually start to talk about the confusion of the body image in year 9 using my own personal experiences regarding my diets and early bulimia problem, which is completely relevant after seeing a girl eating only salad and a kind of crisp bread (called abonett) at this age. Prevention is very important and I hope that my reliable and true examples will help students to avoid a hard situation. I use the poem *Dosszié* by Krisztina Toth, for talking about sexuality, in which the story of losing virginity can be read. I have heard back that for some of the students it was a bit too early to face this, but on the other hand it is hard to find the proper time for this because I know that others are already beyond everything in year 8. The solution that I can see is that we as adults should be more patient and careful about this topic, but still students need to talk about these things, and even by using contemporary literary or other materials, techniques we should give them the opportunity to develop their emotional intelligence. This is possible in small steps but only if you really, really pay attention to who they are, what kind of texts they understand, how they feel. For example, last week I brought in a Gabor-Lanczkor's poem which was completely hard for the year 9 students and we got stuck. It was a mistake and I did admit it to my students as well, who then became more open and we could have a great, honest conversation about responsibility, making decisions and understanding others.

⁷ It is a challenge for teachers to develop the ability of memorizing things by integrating different concentration exercises even from drama pedagogy. We need to pay attention to the recognition of the time students get tired and when different teaching techniques or self-reflection should be used. When did I get bored? From which part was the learning material not interesting? Why is it not interesting for me? What does the fact that I was thinking about something else say about me? These were our main questions.

⁸ This is related to many things. For example, the fact that everyone is up late and everyone wants to stand out. They search for and test their identity for which Facebook is a great place - How many people like my images or shared music? Receiving more and more likes becomes a living phenomenon among my students as well.

⁹ The most played games are building and skill games. The last one surprised me because even if the game is not that challenging, they can spend hours with this. The game, called 'Zombie' was exciting, the "lovagos" was challenging and they loved to explore different ages to go through them. From this and from being so active in class I feel that students are less mature than a few years ago. Till they play games they do not need to face the real world. Neither having oral or written tests.

¹⁰ I do not think that it has changed. Being accepted by others and belonging to a group have always been very important.

¹¹ This is true, indeed. Even considering personal or educational space, this is the most important element. They like to share and show videos and pictures. When my students had to take photos in order to complete their task, they worked with more enthusiasm and finished the task quicker as well as they put more effort in the project just like in our Nothing project. The outcome of the video project with my Y11s was excellent: their work ethic was amazing just like their final project. They are very happy to take a photo of the lesson notes, put it on class group, however, it does not mean that they study more. That is why I would encourage to use their creativity in this way. For example, they wrote comics for existing photos, and analysed texts and literary works more creatively when they could do it in the way they liked (as a video). The appearance of avatars in these games is probably the first feature, anyone can be a knight, a hero, a zombie, a killer or an honorary citizenship - all without their real personality.

¹² It depends on the student. I can see examples of both. Classes specialized in sports are very consistent as for a good performance they need the right amount of sleep. But with the growing number of all kinds of extra lessons, the learning time is extended and they sleep less. Then, after holidays, they are so happy to tell stories about staying up till late at night and sleeping a lot in the following morning.

¹³ I think many teachers fight for a valuable life, and although I agree that there is a big danger, I believe that we have a huge responsibility towards it. So this is up to us - I would not say that this is a generation's characteristic. Or I would ask, where is the parents', teachers' and adults' point to other examples?

¹⁴ This is typical, although I have never met the dangers arising from it in my school. Watching the celebrity world is perhaps significant, but I cannot give an example which clearly emerged only because of that phenomenon. Previously, we had "Táncdalfesztivál", now we have X-Factor. Even today, like before, they follow people in the spotlight.

¹⁵ In 2012, looking for two Y10 female students, one of them told embarrassed that she was afraid to get pregnant. It was not the biological process of pregnancy. On the other the weight of the body is the thrust of the race, but, of course, the wanton and girls themselves easily assess the tax remained the same.