

about students and learners is never a bad idea, and if even a portion of the generalizations about millennials are accurate, then distance educators have a lot to learn.

Certainly, there is ample evidence that generations are different. We know of the silent generation, also called the greatest generation, the baby boomer generation, generation X, and now the millennial generation—all different in obvious ways, and similar in others. What may be important to the distance educator is the need to establish a level of understanding about millennial learners so distance delivered instruction can capitalize on the capabilities of “tech-savvy” millennials and build learning environments that challenge them in relevant ways.

For example, millennials are considered to be multitasking experts—they use their smart phones to text, talk, search, and post. Some from older generations would consider this multitasking as “not paying attention,” but perhaps there is a maximization of attentiveness that makes multitasking effective—and, probably not just for younger learners.

Millennials are thought to be addicted to social networking services—they post to

their friends, they tweet to their twibes, and they pretend in their profiles. Are social networking activities educationally relevant? And, if they are, does social networking have a role to play in the delivery of online instruction? The research is still anecdotal; multitasking and social networking are only two obvious activities of millennial learners that need investigation—at least investigation is needed if you are a baby boomer teacher or Gen X trainer.

And finally, innovative tools such as the iPad, iPhone, and Kindle seem to be coming in almost tidal wave proportions (a Gen Xer would say tsunami). The day of the overhead projector is over, but is the day of the digital book upon us? We need to know.

REFERENCES

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A MILLENNIAL IS THOUGHT TO BE A PERSON BORN BETWEEN THE YEARS 1982 AND 2005.... THEY ARE “SHELTERED, CONFIDENT, TEAM-ORIENTED, CONVENTIONAL, PRESSURED, AND ACHIEVING.”

Millennials—Oh Really?

Michael Simonson

If a millennium is 1,000 years, is a millennial one in a thousand? Or are millennials here for a thousand years, or what? There is so much talk about the “millennials.”

Actually, a definition of millennials is generally agreed upon—a millennial is thought to be a person born between the years 1982 and 2005—the latest generation of learners to enter schools and attend college.

In 2000, Neal Howe and William Strauss published *Millennials Rising: The Next Great*

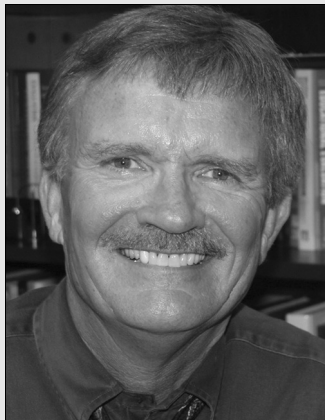
Generation and a new stereotypic phrase was coined, and a new consulting industry was begun.

Certainly, the popularity of the stereotype of the millennial makes it almost mandatory that distance educators know something about this group.

Millennials are the current learners in virtual K-12 schools and online college courses, and they will be the employees trained in businesses' e-learning courses. According to Howe and Strauss, millennials are typecast as rule followers who are engaged, optimistic, and pleasant. Howe and Strauss assigned millennials core characteristics using the words sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. Millennials have been prophesized as builders of new institutions that actually work, and as a generation that does not worry about tearing down old institutions. In other words, this latest generation has been characterized as being “almost too good to be real.”

Eric Hoover, in a recent article titled “The Millennial Muddle” (2009) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reviewed the “hype” about the concept of the millennial learner and concluded that if millennial students are a maze, there are specialists that sell maze maps. Consultants that talk about millennial learners offer many insights—many accurate and some fanciful (Hoover, 2009). With that said, learning

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