Chapter 6

Are We Part of the Problem?
Teacher Preparation Programs, Educational Technology, and the Mis-Education of Future Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Do a quick search in Google Scholar and you will find overwhelming evidence that teachers both are and are not using technology in meaningful ways to enhance student learning. Actually, just do a simple Google search and you will find many news and magazine articles revealing the exact same confusing information. Yet despite all of the Internet traffic, are teachers any better at using technology to enhance student learning now than they were when educational technologies first arrived in schools? And are teacher preparation programs hindering or helping pre-service teachers in this endeavor? As Gen Z enters college and becomes practicing teachers, with their own particular characteristics and digital abilities and needs, it is important that we re-examine these questions and find out how to best serve the newest generation of teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

At the time this chapter was written, teachers across the nation are striking for better working conditions and sorely needed pay raises. Tens of thousands of educators in West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Colorado, just to name a few states, all walked off the job and did not return to teaching until their demands for better working conditions and compensation were met. Although the discontent had been brewing for a while – many teachers hadn’t received raises in years – it’s possible that the recent addition of Generation Z to the teaching force could have tipped the balance. Assuming that the oldest Gen Zers were born in the mid-1990’s, some of them could very well be nascent teachers holding their first jobs. And what a way to begin your teaching career – by walking out of your first position!

Most of the older Generation Z are currently in college and presumably, some of them are studying to be teachers. It is no mystery that these young adults (and their younger compatriots) have grown up with various amounts and levels of digital technologies. Technology has always been in their world and so the idea of bringing it into their studies and using technology at the collegiate level is completely natural to them. Not so for the faculty complement who is preparing them to be future teachers.

The professors currently working in colleges and universities are primarily still Baby Boomers (born approximately between 1946-1964), Generation Xers (born approximately between 1965-1984), and the oldest Millennials (born between approximately 1984-mid-1990s). These are generations with very different characteristics from the one currently progressing through college, particularly with respect to technology. They utilize personal technologies, social media, etc. very differently from Gen Z in their personal lives, and markedly different in their teaching practices. It would stand to reason then that teacher technology-use in education preparation programs, and the technological expectations of Generation Z students, would clash.

BACKGROUND

Generation Z, or Gen Z, is the group of individuals born generally between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000’s, although sources rarely agree on a specific timeframe. They are essentially the generation that was born subsequent to the Millennial generation and they hold their own sets of characteristics, wants, needs, fears, hopes, and ideas, different from the generations who have come before them. Gen Z has also been referred to as Generation Wii, iGeneration, Digital Natives, Gen
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