



In this edition, we feature two articles^{1,2} which focus on the ‘new-age’ digital environment within which our education of students is based. The questions raised are: are we prepared for this, and more importantly, are we prepared to adapt the way we teach (both in the classroom and in the clinical field) in order to meet the learning demands of this generation?

Every single area of our lives has been changed (and for some us, been disrupted) by technology, and yet, members of the new generation are very aware of this fact and are ‘at home’ in this fast-changing world³.

Whilst some of us had just started to ‘come to terms’ with and trying to keep up with the millennial generation (the Y generation), the new generation Z (also referred to as ‘GenZ’ or the ‘igeneration’)³ arrives. Having grown up in an era where limitless information is available 24 hours/7 days a week, the GenZ’s don’t consider having access to information without delay as a privilege, but an *expectation*. They want it and they *want it now*⁴.

So what are the demands of the GenZ’s? Among the 5 educational demands of this generation identified by Prof. Erik P.M. Vermeulen³ are:

- ❖ **‘Challenge me... and I’ll challenge you’:** According to Vermeulen³, students are all hooked to their screens and instantly check out and verify topics that are discussed in class. Instead of passively accepting and memorising facts, they want to independently confirm what it is they are being told. Healthy scepticism is their default response.
- ❖ **‘Don’t teach me... augment my experience’:** Students no longer have the need to become textbook smart, they don’t want to hear the facts as these can instantly be found online. What they expect from us is to augment their learning by weaving the facts into a larger, more experiential and practical narrative.
- ❖ **‘Inspire me... and give me freedom and responsibility’:** Having access to technology is enormously empowering, and students want to be given the freedom and responsibility to find the solutions to meaningful and challenging assignments – they have the tendency to ‘switch off’ if not properly engaged in their own learning.

Students today don’t want to sit through long lectures, taking notes that they will later memorise for examination purposes. They want to be actively engaged, they actually thrive when given the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in their education and enjoy the challenge of being part of it⁵. Their daily lives virtually evolve around technology, and they don’t expect education to be any different. As one student said: “Make my classes more interactive, relate them to the world around me and help me find a way to do something good for our world and ... let’s develop an educational system that motivates, engages and challenges us, yet demands we interact with and impact our world”⁶.

Teachers must consider themselves educators who mentor students by helping them sift through and manage information to synthesize new knowledge (Beyers⁴). Courses will be much more appealing if technology is woven into the structure of these courses rather than retrofitting technology into older educational models⁵.

Gen Z-ers tend to embrace environments where they can be hands-on and directly involved in the learning process, but in order for them to do so, they expect on-demand services “that are avail-

able at any time and with low barriers to access”⁴. Creating such environments for our students, where they can actively take part in and contribute to their education, generates life-long learners.

And herein lies the problem: all the above depend on the accessibility and affordability of this technology which, as is stated by the two articles in this edition^{1,2}, unfortunately this still remains a problem in developing countries such as ours: the inequality of the distribution of services (including access to technology) which still exists today.

The research challenges therefore, are numerous: How do we level the playing field? How can we augment and involve them in their learning experiences both on and off campus? Can we tailor their virtual learning environment to meet the demands of all field-work placements? As pointed out by Barnard-Ashton et.al², such endeavours would warrant an analysis of cost benefits to determine if the expenses are justified. I believe that such an investment would yield many benefits not only for our students, but especially for our profession’s future.

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