
COLLOQUIA

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TO LEARN FROM ... different generations: some important issues

Summary

The article presents one of the current directions of development and optimisation of modern education – a features of each of the current generations and the use of such teaching tools that reflect and embody these features. We are talking about both the didactic and technological features of the learning process and the semantic, essential aspects of the learning process that make the learning process itself relevant, meaningful, promising for each of the generations, not formally required. The result of such an approach to optimising the learning process is to increase the effectiveness of both the learning process and the education system as a whole in each specific historical period in the development of society.

Key words: modern education, generations, theories of generations, educational trends

Introduction

Today's education is a field of sharp controversy, revolutionary ideas, transformational modifications, searches and even fantasies that are based both on the generation of new visions and on the reproduction and revival of ideas of the past – ancient and those which are quite close in time. The reason is on the one hand in challenges of the modern moment of the society existence and on the other hand in the needs of educational environment itself, which develops and evolves in accordance with its own laws and intentions.

What kind of education should be today? What kind of teacher should be a modern teacher? What kind of student is a modern student? How should one

teach? What should be avoided in the learning process? What should be emphasised in the learning process? What should be the centre of the educational process? This list of questions is nothing like the whole list of issues that actualise searches in the educational environment of modern European countries today. Among these issues there is also the question “Who should an individuality learn from?”, “Who is the bearer of current knowledge and experience today”, and “Whose knowledge and experience meet the biggest demand among modern generations of pupils and students”?

As, in our opinion, “learning” in the modern world means, first of all, “learning from different generations” in order to have systematic, historically complex, and complete knowledge and experience, which form the basis and grounds for generating qualitatively “new” ones – thinking about it without understanding the nature of the phenomenon of “generation” is impossible. So, what is a “generation”, what is its nature and possibilities for research from the standpoint of everyday life?

Analysis of existing theories and approaches

In recent years, the theory of generations by American scholars William Strauss and Neil Howe has been gaining popularity in educational environment. It explains complexities that occur in the modern educational process – both at a school and at a university: students changed – representatives of the new generation (X, Y or Z), therefore, the process of learning and education in general should change. However, it is not the first “theory of generations”, which appeared in the continuum of scientific theories, and which should be taken into account in both the organisation of the educational process and the development of visions on the reform and development of the educational sphere in general. However, the history of scientific views on the phenomenon of generation is much longer, and the circle of scholars who studied this phenomenon and created their explanatory theories is presented by such bright personalities as Jose Ortega y Gasset (*theory and method of generations*) (Ortega y Gasset 1997), August Comte (*idea of preservation of cultural traditions and experience of previous generations as a basis for sustainable development of society*) (Comte 1996), Margaret Mead (*theory of cultures based on the types of interaction of generations*) (Mead 1998), Carl Mannheim (*idea of the dominant role of the “past” in the actual experience of each generation*) (Mannheim 2008), Emile Litttré (*idea of the four stages of*

generational development) (Littreé 1890–1907), John Stewart Mill (*a system of views on the progress of society through the development and progress of generations*) (Mill 2001), François Mantre (*theory of social generations*) (Mantre 1920), Nikolai Berdyaev (*theory of four qualitative states of the era*) (Berdyaev 1990), etc.

Howe and Strauss (2004), authors of the modern theory of generations X, Y, Z, define a generation as a collection of all people born in a time interval of approximately 20 years or one phase of life: childhood, youth, middle age and old age. Generations can be identified if they meet three criteria:

1. they are representatives of one generation sharing one historical epoch: they are faced with the same key historical events and social trends, being at the same stages of life;
2. they share certain general beliefs and behaviour patterns;
3. having notion of experience and features that they share with their peers, representatives of one generation will also share the feeling of belonging to this generation.

Strauss and Howe built their typology and research of American history and reality by analysing historical and everyday features of American society. However, it is possible to find common features of generations distinguished by the authors in other traditions and cultures, in particular:

- **Generation X** (*born in 1961–1981*). As Howe and Strauss wrote, this is generation of single people who are dedicated to hard work and personal success. These are people who since childhood have been accustomed to self-reliance: they did their lessons on their own, got ready for school, cooked their lunch and performed most of the tasks without any help. Representatives of this generation are characterised by global awareness, technical dignity and independence in virtually everything. Most often, they prefer to work in the same organisation for 30–40 years, gaining experience and rising from the lowest level to heads and directors (Howe & Strauss 2004).
- **Generation Y** (*born in 1982–2000*). Features of this generation led to external environment around them, which was changing incredibly fast, so the millennials do not “resemble” their parents. Prestigious work and career growth are not for them. They are not ready to work for one company for many years, prefer a flexible schedule and an immediate reward for the work done. Generally, these are energetic people who are easy to adapt, able to work in huge volumes, constantly striving for new knowledge and development. They under-

stand that time moves fast, so they do not want to be narrow specialists, but they develop in different fields at the same time (Howe & Strauss 2004).

- **Generation Z** (*born 2000– ..*). Howe and Strauss wrote that these are children who did not just grow up with the Internet, but were born with an account on Instagram and no longer imagine life without digital technology. They are not accustomed to physical labour and are not able to understand how it is organised. They are locked in self-expression and self-development. People from Generation Z have a built-in immunity to advertising because they have got used to it since childhood. They do not worship brands. It is important for them that the product is environmentally friendly and, most importantly, useful, which will develop them as a person. The border between real and virtual lives for the next generation is almost erased. Generation Z already surpasses the speed and mental development of the previous generation. Members of this generation learn more quickly, better interact with technologies and always gain new skills (Howe & Strauss 2004).

We can argue whether this theory is scientifically and statistically proven or it is just a superficial generalisation of the set of facts. However, one cannot ignore the objective differences and peculiarities of pupils and students who represent the constantly changing present. Therefore, it is appropriate to refer to the scientific theories of generations in order to comprehend the statement “To learn from ... different generations” more deeply. After all, education is what is happening “today” for the sake of what will be “tomorrow”.

The theory and method of generation in main components

José Ortega y Gasset noted: “The reality of life is not the way it shows itself for an observer from the outside, it is open only to the one who sees it from the inside, is open to everyone who experiences it, as long as one lives” (Ortega y Gasset 1997). When cognising another life, “one should look at it not from our own, from an external point of view, but from the very life’s angle or from the standpoint of the one who lives it” (Ortega y Gasset 1997). This statement is particularly interesting according to the study of the phenomenon of the generation, because each particular explorer belongs to a certain generation, and

therefore the study of any other generation for him is comprehension of the unknown – *terra incognita*.

According to the opinion of the same author, a generation can be compared with a “caravan”, in which a person is assigned to have the role of a prisoner and, at the same time, a secret volunteer who is content with his destiny. He goes in this caravan, devoted to contemporary poets. Sometimes another caravan passes by, which looks strange to him and does not have the same appearances – it is another generation. Maybe the feast will mix them all but in their daily existence, they, even coming together, are clearly divided into two incompatible groups (Ortega y Gasset 1997).

Each person according to the way of existence is included in a specific social group whose boundaries are determined by certain age parameters of the members of this group. Such a large social group receives the status of a generation when the continuum of all meaningful connections (real and conditional) that unite the members of this group, specifically values, ideals, beliefs, expectations, etc., is taken into account (Ortega y Gasset 1997: 258).

The reason and the rhythm of historical changes are reflected in the fact that human life always continues at a certain age. Life is time, as Wilhelm Dilthey (1912) and Martin Heidegger (1997) noted. “And time is not cosmic, and therefore not infinite. No, it is limited, finite, and therefore timeless and insurmountable. A man at any moment of life is in a certain age phase. Age is a permanent man’s stay in the gap he was given for a short time; he is always either at the beginning of his life or moves to its middle, either half way, or is coming to an end.” (Ortega y Gasset 1997: 260).

You can find different ways to determine the chronological status of generations: 1. the one that is determined by the limit of 20 years. Thus, the main generations are determined by age limits of 20 – 40 – 60 years. These are the so-called socio-historical generations; 2. within each generation, one can distinguish between “sub-generations” or “mini-generations”, with a difference of five years – these are the so-called social-psychological generations. Antagonism between them is practically absent, but it can manifest itself in the conditions of radical changes in society when this difference becomes significant; 3. when it comes to the system of generations of a particular historical period, a period of time, then we can talk about a cultural-historical generation, in the chronological and substantive limits of which there is a certain “averaging” of both socio-psychological and socio-historical generations. This way, the twenty-year-olds and sixty-year-olds will belong to one cultural-historical generation of, say, the Enlightenment or the second half of the twentieth century, and so on.

The basis of the chronology of generations since ancient times has been made of different ideas about the number and content of the main age periods of human life. So there can be distinguished three, four, less often – five, seven, and even ten major age groups. Plutarch distinguished the following major age groups: boys, youngsters, and old people. Aesop thought it necessary to distinguish a young man, a mature man, an elderly man and a shabby elder. Aristotle pointed to the existence of three age periods: young, adult, old.

Characteristics of a generation in a particular historical time, certain “today” involves the introduction of one more meaningful definition: contemporary – peer. Considering the various forms of relations between generations, there are two main ones: *imitation* and *conflict*. Although in reality one can find a fairly large number of transitional forms between the first and the second one, which determines the diversity of forms of life. The conflict of generations has cultural and historical nature. Nobody can accurately say when it arose and why it remains an integral part of the development of any culture, any society. However, ethnographic studies indicate that conflict relations are peculiar to human society, regardless of the level at which the level of cultural development is.

Studying various forms of relations between generations, Mead (1998) distinguishes three types of cultures that determine one or another type of such relationships: – *post-figurative* culture, when children first learn from their predecessors; – *configurative* culture when both children and adults learn from their peers; – *prefigurative* culture, when adults also learn from their children (it can be argued that this type of culture is a sign of modern society).

Post-figurative culture is a culture where “every change occurs so slowly and imperceptibly that grandfathers, holding their newborn grandchildren on their hands, cannot imagine for them any future other than their own past. The past of adults is the future of each new generation; the life they lived is a scheme of the future for their children and grandchildren” (Mead 1998: 322). Post-figurative cultures in which adults could not imagine any changes and therefore passed on to their descendants only a sense of immutability of life, were typical of human communities for millennia or even before the beginning of civilisation.

The main features of post-figurative cultures, which directly determine the appropriate way of interacting generations, are:

- lack of writing, which causes the passing on of experience only in a direct way;
- the absence of any doubt in the younger people concerning understanding of their own personality and destiny, the future as a whole;

- the absence of an idea which is different from the grandfather's idea, the idea of a possible way of life;
- unconditional belief that the older generation serves as a perfect example of life;
- the predominance of a sense of timelessness and an all-powerful habit of organising and fulfilling life (Mead 1998: 323).

Ethnographic studies indicate that relations between generations in a post-figurative society are not necessarily conflict-free. In some societies, every young generation is expected to rebel – an attitude of contempt for the wishes of elders and the seizure of power among older people. However, in general, exemplary life patterns, created and preserved by older generations, are accepted and reproduced by a younger one practically in the unchanged form. Invincibility is maintained in the memory of young generations by squeezing out of all that violates continuity and identity. This is the most effective mechanism for ensuring the sustainability of most post-figurative cultures.

Configurative culture is a culture in which the behaviour of contemporaries, their present life and the “present” experience is acquired by the dominant model of the behaviour of people belonging to this society. It should be noted that in the configurative society there are prescriptions of passing on the culture inherent in the post-figurative society, however there are signs of a configurativeness which are considerably important. In general there are few societies where configuration is the only model of existence. Often, one can contemplate the synthetic form of organisation of societies which combine signs and post-figurative, and cooperative cultures. In all configurative cultures, older people are also dominant in the sense that they determine the style of the configuration, determine the limits of its detection in the behaviour of young people. There are societies in which the approval of elders appears decisive in adopting a new form of behaviour, that is, young people are not trying to be like their peers, and older once as the last resort, whose decision depends on the fate of innovation (Mead 1998).

Modern society is an example of a cooperative system of passing on the experience of generations. Wherever this becomes possible, the elderly and young people are perceived as a natural difference in the behaviour patterns of each next generation in comparison with the previous one. However, quite often you can also find conflicting ways to respond to this difference. Mead notes that in societies where strong conflicts between generations are observed, conflicts that find expression in the quest for secession or in the long struggle for the symbols of power, especially when it moves from one to another, it is

quite possible that this conflict itself is the result of any serious change in the environment (natural, social, spiritual, etc.). Being once included in the culture and adopted as non-hostility, conflicts of this type become an integral part of both post-figurative and cooperative cultures.

Today, in a world united by electronic communicative systems, young people have a common experience, an experience that old people have never had and will never have. Contrary to that the older generation will never see the lives of young people repeating their unprecedented experience of change. This gap between the generations is completely new, it is global and universal. Today's children grow up in a world not known by the elderly people, but some adults predicted that this would be the case. Those who foresaw were the forerunners of a *prefigurative culture*, the future of which is unknown (Mead 1998).

Each generation has and fulfils its historic mission. Therefore, they say that each generation has its vocation and purpose. This statement confirms the recognition for each generation of a certain subject-historical role, which it plays in its specific time of life and in the general time of the history of mankind. "One should not confuse the life destiny, the structure of life of those who belong to the generation of unity times and comprehensiveness, and those who are part of the generation of the era of narrow ties, heterogeneity and scattering. There are generations whose purpose is to destroy isolation, loneliness of their people, to include it in the spiritual community with other nations, in wider human unity, and, after completing a separate "home history," to deduce the latter into the infinite space of world history" (Mead 1998: 261).

Interesting to understand the diversified experiences of different generations is the theory of intercultural management by Fons Trompenaars (2012), in which six cultural dimensions are proposed to actually diversify the types of cultures / generations, and hence the types of their experience:

- *Universalism / specificism* (concreteness) – social obligations against personal responsibilities;
- *Individualism / collectivism* – personal needs in opposition to the goals of the group;
- *Neutral relationships / affective* – emotional orientation in relationships;
- *Specific relationships / diffusions* – the level of engagement in the relationship;
- *Result / observation* – legalisation of power and status.

There are examples by which the author illustrates the meaning and difference of these cultural dimensions, in particular – "universalism / particularism

(concreteness)". According to the degree of readiness to follow the laws or find the basis for their violation, Trompenaars divided traditional (national) cultures into universal and particularistic (concrete). In cultures where universal truths prevail, traditional law-abidingness is traditional. In particular cultures, the search for causes is commonplace and is a moral excuse for breaking rules. Universalism means that basic ideas and traditions can be applied everywhere without modifications. Particularism assumes that circumstances dictate how to use ideas and traditions. As an example of this dimension in business is the role played by contracts in different cultures. Thus, in universalist cultures, contracts are a way of life, and in a particularist process, their signing is based on relations with people who play an important role in the sphere / country. Similarly, characteristics and signs of cultures are different in other "cultural dimensions". It is evident how different cultures / generations can differ from each other – up to the opposites that are quite difficult to overcome in real life and activity.

Development and effective application in cultural-historical, social-psychological and other forms of scientific knowledge of methods of content skills, analysis and forecast of the main characteristics and subject-historical role of one generation or another is one of the most interesting sections of knowledge and research of social phenomena of a macro level, among which is the phenomenon of generation (Foucault 1996; Batay 1994; Manokha 1995).

Recognising that in each "today" coexist interconnections of several generations, it should also be recognised that the relations that are formed between them – depending on different age attributes – form a dynamic system with their forces of attraction and repulsion, compatibility and incompatibility, consent and disagreement, which make up the reality of life for every moment. For studying and analysing this system, Ortega y Gasset proposed a method of generations: "Using the idea of a generation as a method of historical research, we only carry out the projection of this structure into any past. The method of generations allows us to see this or that historical epoch from the inside" (Ortega y Gasset 1997: 263). Since the generation reveals a glorious historical connection between the generations of the past, the present and the future, one must admit that the generational method is of key importance in the knowledge of the history of society and culture. The method of generations is based on a number of initial postulates:

1. The concept of age should be compared not with the mathematical, but with the life reality. Age cannot be reduced to a date. Inside the life path of a man, age is a given way of life. Within the limits of his life, he forms a separate life

with its beginning and end. So, somewhen youth begins and ends, just like life begins and ends. We are young not only for one year, but for a certain number of years. That is why age is not a date, but a “date zone”. In one age coexist not only those who were born in the same year, but also those whose birth dates belong to one “date zone”, which is determined by the time scale of 15–20 years;

2. Each generation represents a certain important, unchanging and irreversible interval of historical time – the life path of mankind. The structure of the life of each generation directly determines the structure of the life of future generations. In this sense, each generation “holds” in itself all the further days, and the present day is a derivative of the past, and this connection is unchanged;

3. The historical reality in its entirety is created by people who are at two different stages of life, each of which lasts for 15 years. First, these are people from thirty to forty-five – the age of the beginning, creativity and polemics; and secondly, these are people from forty-five to sixty – the period of ruling and reign. The latter ones live in the world that they created, the former ones are just beginning to create their own world. We can say that every historical generation has 15 years of formation plus 15 years of rule;

4. The main thing in the coexistence of generations is not that one generation changes the other, but being contemporaries, although not peers, they coexist. The main thing is their interconnection and the result of it;

5. Meaningful analogues of the livelihoods of each generation should be considered: the system of beliefs, value orientations and dominant cultural-historical ideas; the continuum of real-practical achievements obtained during the period of their formation and domination; the hierarchy of meaningful consequences caused by the achievements in the progress of the cultural-historical process in general and in life-styles of the younger generation in particular. It is these content components that are primarily subject to analysis when applying the generational method. Implementation of the generation method takes place according to the established scheme through the application of appropriate analytical matrices.

The method of generations was created primarily to find out the historical retrospective of past times, epochs, periods for the purpose of the content qualification of the historical mission of generations that lived in the studied historical time. However, it can also be used to realise the historical perspective as a predictive means of cognition. In this modification, the generation method has great potential for application in the fields of psychology organisations, political psychology, social psychology and sociology (Manokha 2001).

Some conclusions

One of the bitter lessons of life that everyone learns sooner or later is understanding of the secret that from the very day of birth we are glued to a certain age group to a certain lifestyle, Ortega y Gasset (1997) said. Generation is a holistic life example that invariably imprints on individuals their personal and social life. In this reflection there are both the resulting existence of previous generations, and the potential of creating a fundamentally new generation for the future. In the understanding and wise attitude to these truths, perhaps, is the guarantee of avoiding conflicting cross-sections of different generations, which belong to one majestic reality – the present. This statement includes one of the essential moments of “learning”, and one of the essential features of “education”.

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