Teaching Innovation Projects

Volume 8 | Issue 1 | 2018

Generational Diversity in the Workplace: Challenges and Opportunities for Nursing Education

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Recommended Citation:

McLeod, C. (2018) Generational Diversity in the Workplace: Challenges and Opportunities for Nursing Education. *Teaching Innovation Projects*, 8(1), 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.5206/tips.v8i1.6223>

ABSTRACT

The future of the nursing profession foresees challenges such as downsizing, changing skill mixes, and higher acuity patients (LeDuc & Kotzer, 2009; World Health Organization, 2013). Nursing students must be adequately prepared to handle such challenges by understanding their own values, the values of their colleagues, and the values of the collective nursing profession (Hahn, 2011; Hamlin & Gillespie, 2011; LeDuc & Kotzer, 2009). Yet, given the fact that nursing is now highly diversified by generational cohorts, each of whom have their own unique set of values and understanding, relating to fellow nurses and working collaboratively is more difficult than ever (Mangold, 2007). Recognizing generational differences as a potential barrier to quality nursing care and a cause of workplace conflict, educators in the profession have begun to tailor courses and teaching styles to meet the distinct needs of generationally diverse classes and work settings (Faithfull-Byrne, Thompson, Convey, Cross, & Moss, 2015; Hamlin & Gillespie, 2011; Mangold, 2007). To aid in this process, the professional development workshop proposed here will provide educators with an opportunity to learn more about generational diversity and offer strategies to maximize learning for all generations in the nursing field.

KEYWORDS

nursing education; teaching to generational diversity

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Discuss generational similarities and differences that create gaps in nursing education.
- Demonstrate the use of teaching technologies geared towards the unique learning needs of younger nursing students.
- Identify practical challenges and possibilities for improved work collaboration between generationally diverse nursing teams.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

LeDuc, K., & Kotzer, A. M. (2009). Bridging the gap: A comparison of the professional nursing values of students, new graduates, and seasoned professionals. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 30(5), 279-284.

Using a strength-based approach, this article highlights how each generational cohort makes an important contribution to the nursing profession through their collective experiences and values. To maximize these generational contributions, LeDuc and Kotzer suggest strategies for leaders and team members to help different generations complement and embrace one another. Useful to this workshop's development, the article provides generational awareness strategies distinct to the context of nursing education in hopes of better preparing the next era of nurses to overcome the difficulties encountered while working in generationally diverse healthcare teams.

Shatto, B., & Erwin, K. (2016). Moving on from millennials: Preparing for generation Z. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 47(6), 253-254. <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.3928/00220124-20160518-05>

This editorial includes a summary of Generation Z characteristics and provides descriptions of preferred learning modalities among Generation Z students. The authors offer specific and practical teaching tips, including a strong focus on incorporating technology into teaching. Facilitators can draw on this article during the Teaching with Technology component of the workshop.

Skiba, D., & Barton, A. (2006). Adapting your teaching to accommodate the net generation of learners. *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 11(2).

Challenging traditional and longstanding nursing education methods, this article considers the strong technological impact of net or millennial generation students on post-secondary institutions. The article goes on to explore the learning characteristics of the net generation in depth by focusing on immediacy, digital literacy, experiential learning, and interactivity. For each of these learning preferences, the authors provide examples of how faculty can adapt their current teaching strategies to accommodate the learning needs of the net generation. This article will help facilitators understand and embody the underlying principle of the workshop, “know thy learners and be open to adapting thy teaching methods to thy learners” (p. 4).

Weingarten, R. M., & Weingarten, C. T. (2013). Generational diversity in ED and education settings: A daughter-mother perspective. *Journal of Emergency Nursing*, 39(4), 369-371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jen.2013.05.008>

Before entering the workforce, nursing students are rarely given the opportunity to work with nurses outside of their own generation (with the exception of faculty). In addition, most nursing programs overlook generational education for both faculty and students. Thus, generational bias, stereotyping, and conflict is common in nursing education for both students and faculty. To prevent division and communication break down between these two groups, the authors make a strong argument for generational education within post-secondary institutions, and offer teaching recommendations to create stronger intergenerational relationships on campus. Examining these teaching recommendations is central to this workshop.

Wieck, K. L. (2005). Generational approaches to current nursing issues. How younger and older nurses can coexist. *Colorado Nurse*, 105(1), 10-13.

Striking a balance between welcoming junior nurses into the profession and helping senior nurses feel appreciated is the central focus of this paper. The author attests that both groups can be appeased in the workplace by celebrating one another’s generational differences and similarities. The paper goes on to explore each generational group currently present in the nursing profession in terms of their unique life experiences, values, and common sources of conflict with other generations. Though this article provides excellent background context to a

facilitator, the author also offers six specific practice recommendations to improve generational collaboration that could be included directly into the workshop.

WORKSHOP CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

DURATION (min)	SUBJECT	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE
10	Introduction and Icebreaker	<p>Introduce the workshop purpose, learning outcomes, ground rules, and session outline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explicitly tell participants this workshop is not all-encompassing, but rather an introduction to generational diversity. <p>As part of an icebreaker activity (see Presentation Strategies), ask each participant to introduce themselves and answer a question related to generational diversity.</p>	<p>To establish a relationship between the facilitator and the participants and inform participants about how the workshop will proceed.</p> <p>To allow the facilitator to explore knowledge levels of generational diversity among participants while coordinating introductions between participants to create a comfortable setting.</p>
15	Mini-lecture 1: Generational Groups and Nursing	Drawing on Johnson and Romanello (2005), and Christensen, Wilson, and Edelman (2018), explore generational mindsets identified in the research, the learning needs of different generational groups, and how generational knowledge is portrayed in the nursing profession.	To explicitly connect the learning needs of different generational cohorts to nursing education.
10	Small Group Activity 1: Brainstorm	Using the information from Mini-lecture 1, ask participants to brainstorm similarities and differences among generational groups that might influence their interactions in the classroom and/or workplace settings (see Presentation Strategies).	To provide participants a chance to meaningfully interact with the content and other participants.

10	Mini-lecture-2: Teaching with Technology	Challenge age-old nursing education norms and introduce new modes of technology that meet the unique learning needs of younger students. Draw on Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018; Logan, 2012; and Shatto & Erwin, 2016. See Appendix A.	To provide participants with knowledge of a diverse array of technological modes that are free, easy to use, and adaptable to their teaching styles.
15	Small Group Activity 2: Teaching with Technology	Participants have the opportunity to practice one of the technological teaching modes described above.	To build comfort with using technology enhanced teaching.
15	Mini-lecture 3: Benefits of Generational Diversity	Cover how generational knowledge is beneficial to the practicing nurse who works in generationally diverse teams and with patients of all ages by drawing on Christensen et al., 2018; Hahn, 2011; Hendricks & Cope, 2013; and Wieck, 2005.	To discuss practical challenges and possibilities for improved work collaboration between generationally diverse nurses, and to explore how these concepts are taught to nursing students.
30	Small Group Activity 3: Case Studies	Split the class into two groups and have participants review and discuss the two cases scenarios outlined in Hahn (2011). See discussion questions in Appendix B.	<p>To apply workshop content to nursing workplace scenarios.</p> <p>To allow the facilitator to evaluate the learning of course skills and content among participants.</p>
15	Application Card Reflection and Conclusion	<p>Give participants an opportunity to ask any outstanding questions.</p> <p>Ask participants to individually fill out an application card (Appendix C). This card allows participants to share a prominent learning experience from the workshop and offer feedback for improving future workshops.</p>	To allow learners to evaluate their learning and provide feedback.
Total Time: 120 minutes			

PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

Facilitators are encouraged to call upon their own past experiences, and narratives of generational diversity to enrich the presentation of this workshop. At the same time, all personal perspectives should be supported and upheld with scholarly literature.

Theoretical Framework:

This workshop's content and presentation is guided by the theoretical framework of Kolb's model of experiential learning. Kolb's model, which has been well-validated for use in culturally and generationally diverse nursing education settings, dictates that learning occurs when a person carries out a new skill, reflects on this experience, and then has a chance to repeat the skill (Kolb, 1984). This three-step process solidifies what has been taught through repeated exposure and experience. As such, this workshop has been outlined in a similar manner with opportunities for participants to practice using information related to generational diversity, reflect on the workshop, and then repeat the experience by carrying out Small Group Activity 3, which encompasses content from throughout the workshop. Throughout this process the facilitator acts as both an informant providing information, and as a guide, helping participants experience using and reflecting on the information.

Presentation Styles:

In the introduction, special caution should be taken by the facilitator to explain the purpose of the workshop is to not create or perpetuate generational stereotypes, but rather create an understanding of how each generation is unique (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). Thus, all participants should be encouraged to use a strengths-based approach in describing and discussing generational cohorts. Conversation should always remain professional, respectful, and courteous of others.

Throughout the workshop the facilitator flips between lecture-style teaching and small group activities. This method provides better engagement and facilitates critical thinking among participants, as they will be required to apply the information they have just been taught independently (Rowles, 2012). Care must be taken while instructing this workshop to share information during the lecture-style teaching that is cohesive and flows into the small group activities. Otherwise, confusion may occur surrounding the answers and purpose of activities. The facilitator must also be mindful of time during this workshop and try to keep activities within the space allotted for completion.

Depending on the institution where this workshop is run, there could be additional benefit in bringing forward examples/learning strategies of how onsite faculty currently teach to generational diversity (Rowles, 2012; Skiba & Barton, 2006).

Workshop and Room Preparation:

To prepare for this workshop, the facilitator should have some experience utilizing the technological resources for Small Group Activity 2 and be acquainted with the annotated

literature outlined in this article. The facilitator should also anticipate questions from participants and be prepared to answer or troubleshoot.

Before the workshop the following preparations should be made:

- Participants should be directed to read Wieck (2005) and be provided with the workshop outline. Also, due to Small Group Activity 2 participants should be invited to bring a laptop to the workshop.
- A room with PowerPoint capabilities, a white board, and movable chairs should be booked to facilitate lecture-style teaching and small group activities.

Icebreaker Ball Toss:

Since this icebreaker also serves as a preliminary diagnostic assessment for the facilitator by exploring the groups knowledge of generational diversity in the profession of nursing, questions must be strategically posed.

Example questions (adapted from Hahn, 2011) could include:

- What generational cohort do you identify with?
- What world event(s) from your youth stand out clearly in your memory?
- Can you summarize your education history in the field of nursing?
- What was your first favorite movie or television show?
- What was the available healthcare technology like in your first nursing job?
- How would you rate your comfort level with using new technology?

To carry out the Ball Toss Icebreaker, the facilitator will need any medium-sized ball (preferably an inflatable/plastic ball that is easy to toss). Cut and tape the printed introduction questions securely to the ball. Instructions to participants:

- This ball is covered by a list of questions. Once the ball is thrown to you, state your name, position in the institution, and answer the question that touches or is closest to your dominant hand. After, toss the ball to another participant who had not yet introduced themselves.

Guide to Mini-lecture and Small Group Activity 1:

In these components of the workshop, the facilitator will first explore generational mindsets, the learning needs of different generational groups, and how this generational knowledge is portrayed in the nursing profession. Participants are then asked to brainstorm similarities and differences among generational groups that might influence their interactions in the classroom and/or workplace settings. Before facilitating the mini-lecture and activity, the facilitator should review the literature cited here and consider how these differences and similarities will play out in the nursing classroom and workplace.

Compile a list of characteristics and learning needs for different generational cohorts (see Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018; Christensen et al., 2018; Hendricks & Cope, 2013; Kramer, 2010;

LeDuc & Kotzer, 2009; Lofmark, Smide, & Wikblad, 2006; Mangold, 2007; Skiba & Barton, 2006; Weingarten & Weingarten 2013; Weston, 2006; Wieck, 2005). For example:

- Baby Boomer generation (~1946-1964)
 - Characteristics: team-oriented, hardworking, respect for elders and experience, etc.
 - Learning needs: enjoy lecture, verbal discussion, etc.
- Millennial/Gen Y/Net generation (~1981-2000)
 - Characteristics: confident, technology experts, goal-oriented, etc.
 - Learning needs: enjoy group work, hands-on learning, etc.

Use the same set of references to also compile a list of similarities across the generations. For example:

- Veterans are similar to the Baby Boomers in that both groups have deep loyalty and dedication to their work.
- Baby Boomers are similar to Millennials in that both groups prefer to spend more time learning from faculty (making these two groups ideal to mentor one another).
- Generation X shares an adeptness to technology with the Millennials and Generation Z.
- Much like the Veteran generation, the Millennials have a strong sense of civic duty and morality and strive to be part of a greater good.
- Millennials, like Generation X, want a flexible work schedule and to achieve work-life balance.
- Generation X and Generation Z are both cautious and pragmatic.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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Hahn, J. A. (2011). Managing multiple generations: Scenarios from the workplace. *Nursing forum*, 46(3), 119-127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6198.2011.00223.x>

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APPENDIX A: Technological Resources for Small Group Activity 2

Workshop facilitators may pick several technological resources from this list to review and demonstrate use with workshop participants. Selection of resources should be based on participant capability and familiarity with these resources already.

- After the demonstration, participants can work either individually or in small groups to practice making a learning activity suitable to a current course they are teaching using one of the technological resources. If time allows, the group can share what they have produced with one another.
- Though the time is short, this practice period will help participants feel comfortable using the resource by letting them ask questions, troubleshoot, and show themselves how much time needs to be invested into creating these activities outside of the classroom.
- This list of example resources is not exhaustive, and additional technological teaching modes may be sought out and substituted to suit the learning needs of the group.

Bubble.us. Free online website that may be used to create custom tables, Venn diagrams, and mind maps. <https://bubbl.us/>

Google Docs. A part of any Gmail account, google docs can be used to create an electronic 'white board' that anyone with the link can access to answer questions or fill in tables. <https://docs.google.com/>

Powtoon. A free video or slide show presentation generator, which may be used for group projects, to help students demonstrate understanding of a concept, or by an educator to promote interactive learning. <https://www.powtoon.com/my-powtoons/#/>

Prezi. A free multidimensional presentation generator, which may be used as an alternative to PowerPoint. <https://prezi.com>

Virtual Hospital. With a vast array of free virtual hospitals online, students may easily enter an electronic clinical learning space and begin learning any time of day. Typically, virtual hospitals include department-specific case studies, access to patient charts, and help from experts in the fields. One notable example of a reputable virtual hospital is St. Emlyn. <http://stemlynsblog.org/>

Wikipedia. Creating a class or concept themed 'wiki', which is an internet page that allows user to add content or edit, can construct knowledge and build social community within a class. <https://en.wikipedia.org>

YouTube. As the world's largest video-sharing web site, the educational potential for YouTube is infinite. Videos may be shared to teach skills, provoke class engagement, or offer information to supplement class content. <https://www.youtube.com/>

APPENDIX B: Case Studies for Small Group Activity 3

The case studies for this activity can be found in the following article:

- Hahn, J. A. (2011). Managing multiple generations: Scenarios from the Workplace. *Nursing forum*, 46(3), 119-127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6198.2011.00223.x>

Prepare copies of the two case scenarios for workshop participants and share the questions below to facilitate discussion.

Case Study #1: Social Networking

Discussion Questions

1. Social networking is a communication tool that transcends all generations, but the nurses in this case study appear to view the use of social media differently. Using your knowledge of generational groups, discuss both sides of the conflict.
2. If you were the manager of this Emergency Department, what actions would you take to resolve the conflict?
3. Could this situation have been prevented? If so, explain possible strategies.
4. What approaches could we take in the classroom that would help to better prepare new nurses to navigate this conflict?

Case Study #2: Generational Conflict Among Nursing Directors

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss what generational difference and misunderstandings may be causing conflict among the new Generation X and senior nursing directors.
2. What actions can the Generation X director take to improve communication and teamwork among the other directors?
3. How could this generational conflict impact the frontline nurses at this hospital?
4. What strategies can educators adopt to engage students in this discussion and reflection of generational diversity?

APPENDIX C: Application Card Reflection and Feedback

Consider collecting this feedback from participants in the final moments of the workshop.

What is one important concept you learned today?	
Can you explain the concept?	
How will you apply this concept in your teaching/practice?	
What was a strength of today's workshop?	
How could the workshop be improved in the future?	