WHAT IS GEN. Z TORTURE?


Have you noticed today’s generation is extremely different from the teenagers you taught in the past? Maybe you noticed the teens in your classroom (or on screen) were changing faster than ever. Welcome to Generation Z (Gen. Z), a generation that seems to have mini generations inside their generation. Why the sudden changes? How should we engage this new generation in our classroom? Will technology help or hurt us in reaching Gen. Z? Is our teaching style in our driver education classrooms “torture” to Gen. Z? This article will answer who Gen Z is and how we can better teach them in our classrooms.

Some of the Characteristics of Gen Z

Financially focused. The older Generation Z’ers saw their parents go through the Great Recession. With the housing bubble bursting in 2007 Z’ers saw the struggle and stress associated with debt and the effects debt had on a person and a family (Stout, 2019). These personal and family experiences impacted Gen. Z’s financial mindset. An example of how Gen. Z’s financial mindset may have changed is their view of the use of student loans for higher education. While higher education is still viewed as necessary, student loans are looked at as unneeded (Loveland, 2017). Because of this, many startup online colleges are thriving due to lower cost and ease of part-time study (Wellemeier, 2019). In fact, college enrollment had gone down; even before the pandemic. The National Center of Education Statistics (May 2020) reported college enrollment from 2010 to 2018 was down 8%. As college tuition increases, Gen. Z’ers and their parents’ question whether a degree is worth the price tag (Jenkins, 2018). It is true that people with degrees earn more than those who do not, but that gap is no longer growing (Bahney, 2019, para 4). Experience is gaining more importance in the workforce and a lot of Gen. Z are valuing experience over a degree (Jenkins, 2018).

Gen. Z’ers open bank accounts at an earlier age than any other generation (Crosman, 2018). My son asked me about opening a Roth IRA account when he was 14. I4!!! When I was 14, I was asking my parents for money to rent a video game for $3. Do you remember when you could go to a store and rent a video game? Ah, the good ole days. The point is, times have changed and with all the technology and access they have, they grow up more quickly and see the benefits of financial preparation.
**It’s all about technology.** This seems obvious, but I think we as instructors, teachers, coaches, or parents forget this: Gen. Z is the first generation to have access to computers, smart phones, internet, access to a plethora of audio and video services, and search engines almost from the time they were born. It seems like they don’t know how to live without all this technology. I grew up in a house without internet and yet have become dependent on my smart phone.

We take away phones so students are not distracted and so they can focus on learning. But in reality, many of these phoneless Gen. Z students are thinking about is their phone which simply creates another type of distraction called fear of missing out on something. This phobia is called FOMO (fear of missing out). The phones and all the software can be a benefit, but this will be discussed more later.

**Enjoy other people.** Yes, they love their technology, but they also enjoy being with people. Gen. Z wants to connect with everybody using social media in addition to connecting in person. Millennials wanted to connect online more than in person, but Gen. Z wants to be around people physically. This Gen. Z seems to understand the importance of inter-personal interaction (Miller, 2018).

**Competitive.** Gen. Z is extremely competitive. They live in a competitive world and the technology they love so much has made their world smaller. It used to be that people in America were fighting for scholarships and the precious spots at the best universities and now they compete with people from all over the world. Youth sports have become intense. You may have seen may YouTube videos of little league parents yelling, screaming, and sometimes physically fighting with coaches, umpires, and other parents (Miller, 2018). When I was growing up, each sport had a season and then you moved on to the next sport. Now, with specialized leagues, you can play a sport year-round.

**Change is Welcome.** The “if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it” mantra seems less important to Gen. Z. The in mantra now is, “How can we make it better?” With the ever-changing technology has come a new mantra of wanting, loving, and thriving on change. Gen. Z wants and loves change. They think they can make everything better. They want to change the world and be a part of that change (Miller, 2018).

**Diversity is not an Issue.** Gen. Z does not see diversity as an issue. They are very welcoming of everybody and they don’t see that they need to be diverse. They are already diverse. With adults talking about diversity and trying to be diverse in the workplace, in the home, and outside the home, this generation doesn’t really understand how this can be an issue (Miller, 2018).

**Independent.** Fifty-eight percent of Generation Z want to own a business one day and 14% already do according to XYZ University. Think about how young this generation is and 14% already own their own business. Shows like “Shark Tank”
have inspired this generation to look at entrepreneurship as exciting, fun, but also a lot of work (Sladek, 2018). Not to generalize from my households limited sample of Gen. Z, I offer my two children as an example.

My 17-year-old son is extremely independent. Has been this way his whole life. This could be due to his personality, but some of it comes from being in Gen. Z. He is hard working and wants to survive on his own. He wants to move out when he is 18 and be his own man. He also does repairs for people on the side in addition to working two jobs. My 16-year-old daughter is already making plans with her friends on where they will live when they are 18 and how they will afford these plans. They are independent and want to make it on their own. They are hardworking and want to show that they can do it.

**Want to be heard.** Gen. Z has a lot to say. They believe what they have to say is important and of value, and they are right (Miller, 2018). With the technology in their hands, the world is at their fingertips. They understand the world so much better than we did when we were their age. They see what is happening all over the world. With all of the protests happening all over our country, there are a lot of Gen Z at these protests voicing the change they want to see. I have had many students in attendance at these peaceful protests.

**A lot like their parents.** My kids probably do not want to hear that, but they are. This does not mean they have personality traits like their parents, because all kids have that. The generation as a whole is more like their parent’s generation (Clark, 2019). Most, not all, of Gen. Z’s parents are Generation X. Millennials have children that are Generation Z, but they tend to be the younger of the Gen. Z. Generation X is hard working, loyal, and independent (Jacobsen, 2019). A lot like Generation Z. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

Before looking at how to respond to Gen Z’s characteristics in the classroom we need to spend a moment on classroom theory. Teachers like to use two big words when talking classroom practices. The two words are “pedagogy” and “andragogy.” Pedagogy is teaching with children in mind and andragogy is teaching with adults in mind. I was once told by Bill Warner, one of my mentors and a driver education legend that pedagogy is like a pitcher of water. We the teachers are like pitchers of water (wisdom), and we pour our knowledge out to the children as they hold their cups and look to the teachers for that knowledge. Andragogy is where we offer the information heterodoxically (without obligation) and let the students do self-discovery filling their pitcher themselves and we, as teachers, offer insights to fill in what is missing.

Using Bill Warner’s analogy of pedagogy as water pouring many teachers teach driver education with a pedagogical teaching style with students who are not children. Teens are more like adults than a child teaching approach and thus an andragogic approach is more appropriate. Should teachers be using andragogy, with teenagers, yes? Well, not exactly. Teens are not grown adults, so we cannot rely on just andragogy. We need to use “heutagogy,” which is the hybrid of both peda and andragogy. The best of pedagogy and andragogy, means heutagogy is optimal. Understandably, the word heutagogy sounds
strange, in fact my 16-year-old and 12-year-old told me heutagogy sounds like a character from Mario Kart.

Now that we understand Gen. Z better and recognize that a heutagogic approach to instruction is best for teen learners, let’s see how to exploit Gen. Z’s characteristics to engage them in the classroom driver education. As a reminder, here is a short summary of the characteristics of Gen. Z: Financially focused; It’s all about technology; Enjoy other people; Competitive; Change is Welcome; Diversity is not an Issue; Independent; Want to be heard.

An example from a driver education teacher prep class might help to define what not to do. The student teacher told his class that they were going to get a chance to listen to him talk and then answer his questions. Doesn’t that seem like fun? How could you not get excited for that learning opportunity? But many driver educators do just that in the classroom. They talk and the students listen.

What can we do as teachers to teach using heutagogy and Gen. Z characteristics? Kakhurst (2018) may say it best: “Sitting in a hall or classroom listening to a lecture is Gen Z Torture.” Let us get away from lecture and use the five actions that follow to help us engage Gen. Z students.

**Avoid lengthy Presentation Software Supported Shows.**

There is no way to avoid making some presentations, but you should avoid lengthy, “death by Computer Generated Image” slideshows presentations go on and on and all the words are on the screen, and you are thinking, “everything is on the screen, why do I need this person talking to me, I can read.” Talk about a way to disengage your students.

Presentation Software are good tools to use to get a lot of information organized in one place and to give us hints on what to talk about next, but when we use this software, let’s do some things to make it even better. First, keep them short. Don’t have 60 slides. If you need that many slides, create multiple presentations. Don’t put all the information on the screen. Just give a headline or a cue of what to talk about. Build breaks into your presentation. I am not saying that you build 5-minute breaks in the presentation but breaks as in breaks in what you are doing on the screen. Build in quizzes, videos, activities, and hands-on demonstrations.

**Use multiple teaching modalities.** Visual, reading, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities are the four supercharged methods for teaching. We think students learn in at least one or two ways. So, when we teach, we need to hit all four modalities to ensure all of our students will learn. In reality, we do not learn in just one or two ways, but in all of them. We learn better by being taught in all four modalities. We might enjoy one modality more than the other, but we still learn. So, instead of hitting all four modalities to reach all students, it is using all four modalities to make the learning more effective and engaging to each and every student.
Create an active learning environment by using innovative learning tools. Use their phones, social media, and small groups to engage them. There are quiz sites out there that students love. “Kahoot” is a popular one that my students love. They get to use their phones (technology) and they get to be competitive and have fun. It also shows us how well we are teaching the class without the pressure of a graded quiz or test. I have a “Discord” group chat for my class, which is a social media messaging app. I have discussions outside of class with my students about driver education, and I can answer student questions. It also creates engagement amongst the students where they even teach each other.

Use discussion/messaging software to bring in more interaction in class and outside of class. Use hashtags and get classes throughout the state to use the same hashtags to bring unity throughout the state in driver education. Let the students’ record and take pictures of class or presentations. Have the students break into small groups and let them work together on a project in class. Remember they enjoy other people. Create a video playback channel for the class and have them create videos on driver education and post it on the channel for extra credit. Get creative and think about how to use the technology that we and the students have.

Remember the why is as important as the what. Sometimes we forget that students want to know the “why question” because we get so wrapped into the “what question”. If we don’t give the why, then the students will lose interest and check out. Give the why. Why do we hold the steering at 8 and 4? “Because it is safer” is not an answer. Give the why… “The reason we hold the steering wheel there is because it allows better body balance, you can hold that position longer, it is more natural hand position for the body, and it allows the airbag to come out and hit the chest first instead of the arms.” How much better is that answer? It is safer, but here is why. Don’t forget the why!

Incorporate physical equivalent practice (PEP) whenever possible. Let them practice. Get them out of the chair and doing activities. Pass out “steering wheels”, or frisbees, and have them practice steering. Get them out of the classroom and discover following distancing by having them walk in a line close together and then spread out. Let them discover for themselves why following distance is important. Whenever you can get them doing something “hands on”, do it.

So, with this next question, be honest with yourself, truly honest. How do you teach? Is your teaching style more like Gen. Z torture? If so, break away from that. Take all this information and improve your teaching. Create a class that the students want to attend and engage in. If you are already doing some of this, then I commend you for adapting to the generation that we are teaching. Gen. Z is fun and amazing, but soon we will have a new generation. Our responsibility is to prepare ourselves to address that generation’s needs.
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Infusing Technology into Driver Education

By: Molly Kleiber, Driver Education Teacher, Liberty High School-Wentzville, Missouri

Driver Education is one of the few high school courses students take that applies to their daily life and is a skill they will use for the rest of their life. Driver Education teachers have the responsibility of teaching students the skills and knowledge to be a safe driver. Preventing a crash that potentially alters students’ lives and those around them is a noble goal. Driving is a huge responsibility and helping students to understand the responsibilities involved in driving is a key element in driver education training. As a former science teacher my experience has taught me that a skills-based learning and hands on experiences for my students yields the best outcomes. Students do better and retain more information when they interact and have hands on experiences.

In my presentation at the July 2020 virtual ADTSEA conference the “Cool Tech Tools” are used to enhance my students learning experience. Liberty High School has one computer assigned to each student and most of these students have a mobile device with a camera. My students create virtual posters, videos, and infographics using Piktochart. Students are able to research and apply the knowledge learned to their projects with the goal of sharing knowledge with the school’s student body. Infographics are used to share data and information related to teen driving. This information is broadcasted across the school via our building’s television network.

Creating videos is an effective and fun way to approach driving topics. Students create Public Service Announcements (PSA) to inform and educate the community about safe driving. There are a variety of video platforms such as WeVideo, iMovie, and AdobeSpark just to name a few. Students have entered their videos into a variety of contests and have won awards for their videos.

Learning should be fun and hands on. When a lecture is needed the students need to interact and participate in the learning experience during the lecture. Google add-ons such as Pear Deck can be used to keep the students involved and provide immediate feedback to the teacher. Immediate feedback helps the teacher assess teaching method and student comprehension.

Please get out of your comfort and try using technology to enhance your teaching.

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If you ask driver education instructors what the most important part of their job is, most of them will answer, “Behind-the-Wheel (BTW).” Not that classroom is unimportant, because it is. You need classroom to talk about techniques, safe practices, and what to do in in certain situations, but BTW is where you put all of this to practice. The goal of a driver education instructor is to mentor a safe and independent driver. So, how do we best accomplish this? Is there some formula to be able to attain this goal? I believe there is and I want to share that information with you and this information comes from the curriculum I use to train new BTW instructors from Western Oregon University (2018). There are three main objectives to be covered; driver error (symptoms), underlying causes (diagnoses), and correct instructive response (prescriptions). Think about the objectives as they relate to three dimensions for vision, motion, and steering. Even the order of how these are presented is important to the learning process. For example; first you see your path, then you put the car in motion, and finally you steer to get or stay on target.

Novice drivers have both habits to be acquired and habits that need to be unlearned (charging a closed front zone) and replaced with a habit reflecting best practice. We, like physicians see the underlying causes (factors) that inform a diagnosis and prescription actions to fix each problem. Before discussing each of these, we need to review how a BTW lesson should be conducted.

There are two words that are crucial while conducting BTW drives; coaching and cueing. Coaching is talking the student through every part of the behavior or maneuver. Cueing is giving a hint or a clue as to what the student driver should do. For example, if a student is driving 30 mph in a 25-mph zone, a coach would say, “Slow your speed to 25 mph.” A cue would be to ask, “What is the speed of the road” or “How is your speed?” You are hinting as to what the driver needs to do, but the driver is making the decision. A significant number of instructors get stuck in coaching but they must move on to cueing and then on to independence. If you cannot progress your student to drive by themselves with you in the car, how can they drive by themselves when you are not in the car?

Now let’s talk about how a BTW lesson should be conducted. First, the instructor selects an emergent behavior to evaluate. After selecting the behavior, the instructor needs to evaluate the driver’s performance. Performance can be evaluated in three ways: observe performance, ask questions, or a combination of both. If the performance was good, give positive feedback and repeat. If the performance was not good then repeat the behavior and cue the student through the behavior. If after cueing the performance was good, give positive feedback and repeat. If after
cueing the performance was not good, coach through the behavior and give positive feedback and repeat. Notice a common theme? Give positive feedback...instructors usually fall short in being positive with their feedback. We, as instructors, have a tendency to be critical of everyone’s driving. Do not focus just on the errors. Find a way to give positive feedback, even with the student who just can’t drive, no matter how hard they try.

Now it is time to dive into the common errors of a novice driver. Symptoms of an underlying problem are the errors that the driver commits. The common errors that student drivers make again and again that come to mind are: blind spot checks; speed (too fast or to slow) approaching turns; correcting steering too late or too early in turns; and losing speed during lane changes. But the reality is almost every licensed driver can see those common errors. What makes instructors special, and we are special (you can take that more than one way), is we know how to teach and coach to correct those problems. I had a trainer tell me that when he was learning to drive with his Dad, he performed an incorrect turn at an intersection. His Dad told him, “That was not a good turn.” My trainer looked at his dad and said, “How can I do better?” His Dad’s response was, “Just turn better.” Wow, thanks Dad for the great advice. We as instructors can teach drivers how to “turn better” through effective cueing and coaching. That is what sets us apart from those who cannot teach.

Instructors need to see not only the common errors, but they have to also see what the underlying causes are, or as I like to say the “problems lying in wait.” Rich Hanson, one of my mentors in driver education and life, opened my eyes one day about “problems lying in wait.” We were working together training trainers for Oregon Department of Transportation and he talked about discovering what is happening that is helping create the problems down the road…or “problems lying in wait.” It hit me at that moment that is what we need to do as instructors, discovering what is happening, that was ultimately leading to the common error.

For me, mind blown. For Rich, mic drop moment. For example, a student is performing a turn and the student turns wide. I would tell the driver the moment we start to turn the wheel and at what point to correct the steering wheel and so we will not turn wide. Problem fixed, but is it? The wide turn is the common error, but what are the underlying causes for it? Too fast going into the turn could be one, not managing the roll forces of the curve could be another, where is the student looking during the turn, what is their target, or how are they steering the wheel.

All of these issues are deeper than just you turned wide so turn at this point and correct at this point. Also read the student’s body language. Are they understanding what needs to be done? Are they confused about what is happening on the roadway? Are they frozen and scared? Is there a confidence about them when it comes to the maneuver they are about to perform? Read the car
language. Car language? Yes, read what the car is doing. What is the speed? Is the car on target? What lane position is the car in? What the car is doing and how the student is responding to the situation can help instructors find those underlying causes. Effective instructors should do all of this to truly diagnose the problem.

Once we see the common error, see the underlying causes for the common error, which is our diagnosis, instructors must give effective prescriptions. Effective prescriptions sound easy enough, but it is more difficult than we think. First, it has to be easily understood by the student. Sometimes instructors talk too much and complicate the problem. Be concise with what you are saying. Do not ramble. Short and simple is the way to go. If there are numerous underlying causes don’t try and fix them all at once. Work on them one at a time starting with the most important underlying issue. Second, an effective prescription has to obviously fix the problem. Instructors like to show their knowledge of driving and can, at times, talk about errors that they frequently see and inform the students how to fix those, but it is not the problem that needs fixing at the moment. Fix the problem at hand and deal with the frequent errors when they come up. Lastly, and importantly, it will not be effective if the student and parent cannot work on it at home during the students guided practice with their parents. Give the parents and the students feasible goals to work on, something that the parents will understand and will be able to help their student in their driving. Sometimes this requires breaking it down more for the parents since they are not in your class and not familiar with the vocabulary like your student is. That is prescribing an effective solution.

While the above presents us with much to do, there is still more to our job. Our ultimate job is to keep the car and everybody in the car safe, teach the student, and then involve the observing student. How can we do all of that effectively and safely? Situational awareness is the answer. Situational awareness is defined as, “the perception of environmental elements and events with respect to time and/or space, the comprehension of these events and elements meaning, and the projection of their future status.” I love the projection of the future status. We are predicting what our student will do and what the cars around us will do to keep ourselves, our students, and our car safe and those around us safe. For an instructor, situational awareness includes observing students during in-car instruction, being familiar with behavioral patterns and the route, effectively coaching and cueing, prescribing solutions, and managing risk. That is a huge responsibility.

To effectively manage all of these variables be sure to ask questions of your students. Use questions to evaluate the student’s perceptual awareness, prompt other zone searches, and inspire early correct responses. Observe your student’s vehicle control. Are they slow, late, incorrect or absent responses? Use cueing or commands to manage risks and remember to correct the symptoms of novice drivers and to see the problems lying in wait that cause the errors. Then
give effective solutions to correct the errors using situational awareness, coaching, and cueing. Doing this will lead us down the road to creating a healthier highway for your students and for us, now and in the future.

Reference