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Educationally Speaking
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Generation Y: “Get a Clue”

I was sifting through some news articles the other day and came across an interesting article in the Wall Street Journal titled “Can U Read Kant – The Dumbest Generation”. Author Mark Bauerlein cites a handful of reasons why he thinks Generation Y is “empty-headed” and argues, “cultural and technological forces...have conspired to create a level of public ignorance so high as to threaten our democracy.” Well, I happen to be part of Generation Y and I’m not real sure I agree with Mr. Bauerlein’s points. Mostly because he’s wrong on most of them.

In a nutshell, he goes on to say that “kids are using their technological advantage to immerse themselves in a trivial, solipsistic, distracting online world and the expense of more enriching activities – like opening a book or writing complete sentences.” I’ve heard this argument before – that my generation is filled to the brims with illiterate and lazy bums that do nothing but chat online and tinker around on Facebook (a popular social networking website) all day. Well, he might be right about Facebook, but I’ve never met an illiterate 20-something.

Stories about the ineptitudes of my generation keep cropping up in newspapers and newscasts at an increasing rate as Generation Y enters the workforce, complete with flip flops, mobile phones and a desire to think everything is about them. I can’t help but think that the guy that complains about his new 20 year old co-worker’s desire to send a text message rather than dial a phone number is just making himself look silly.

If anything, Gen Y is more geared for multi-tasking, effective verbal communication and financial planning than any other generation before us. Think of someone you know that can watch TV, listen to an iPod, type a paper, chat with friends online and browse five different websites at one time. Now, ask yourself: how old is that person? Your answer is likely less than 25.

I’ve heard adults groan at the thought of a generation of students seemingly incapable of communicating effectively. I’ll be honest in saying that I hate hearing people use the phrase “Like...” and “Like, you know...” before every sentence. But, if a group of people can plan an entire evening in just a few short words on a screen just an inch wide, why do they need to call, talk or write a letter? If anything, Gen Y is efficient at getting what needs to be done over with.

And, after witnessing the financial insecurity that toppled earlier generations such as watching our parents get stung by layoffs, the dot-com bust, Enron and Arthur Andersen, Gen Y doesn’t really trust anyone. I get the impression that most people in

my generation understand the importance of a retirement fund, know that they should be saving money even if they really can't afford to and don't feel like their careers should shape their lives. According to an article in the November 2005 issue of USA today, "Generation Yers don't expect to stay in a job, or even a career, for too long." Probably because we're scared to death someone from Generation X is going to screw it all up. It seems safer to me to keep jumping ship every few years to keep things fresh and always have a sense that there's something more I can do rather than putting all my trust into one organization.

And, if you haven't discovered why Gen Y overwhelmingly supports Barack Obama, it's because we don't like to see things go stale. We believe in our own self-worth and value ourselves enough to know that a company, government or institution isn't more important than me. We have high expectations for ourselves and for everyone else. Gen Y doesn't seem to have much room for anyone that can't keep up. Change is a buzzword Obama has ridden to success and it's working.

Older folks that fight tooth and nail to grind younger adults into doing things their way is the name of the game - and it always has been. Fifty years from now some new generation is going to come along and make me feel worthless. However, I think a disproportioned gap has developed this time around because older adults don't always know what to do with the technology available to Gen Y. This tech-gap has left Gen X without a clue on how to teach or reach a generation surrounded by constant stimulation. In short, the generation following us will reap bigger rewards as Gen Y works to incorporate more technology in ways that are more meaningful for later generations.