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## **Cognizable or yet not discovered Generation Z: viewpoint of comprehensive school teachers (case of Lithuania)**

### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the article is to identify essential features of Generation Z, which are indicated by teachers of Lithuanian comprehensive schools. Research object is features of Generation Z by teachers' approach.

The novelty of this article: features of Generation Z are highlighted by referring to insights of teachers of comprehensive schools in Lithuania.

In practice it is possible to apply the results of this qualitative research for improving education at a school as well as constructing of other research on Generation Z.

*Key words: Generation Z; features of Generation Z; comprehensive school; teachers' insights*

### **Introduction**

The emergence of the new generation is differently dated: A. Ferincz, L. Hortovanyi, R. Szabó, D. Taródy (2011) suppose that the date of birth of Generation Z – 1991; A. Cross – Bystrom (2010) – 1994; Chr. Scholz (2013) – 1995; according to M. McCrindle, E. Wolfinger (2010), Western sociologists, it might be 1995. Such researches have not been performed in Lithuania; thus hypothetically it is possible to state that another generation, which

is not yet cognizable enough for us, came to school namely from 1995.

This generation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century grows so fast that the speed of its growth significantly overtakes the growth of former generations (Tulgan, 2013). Thus it is not simple to research it. However, it has been researched, is being researched and still will be researched as it significantly differs from other generations. According to A. Cross-Bystrom (2010), Generation Z lives in the world related to technologies from the infancy. As J. Palfrey, U.

Gasser (2008) state, the digital generation is constantly connected. Thus already these remarks show that it should be different enough from other generations. Most scientists are interested in Generation Z and it is analysed in various aspects, for example, Chr. Scholz (2013) presents the concept of Four Generations, in which he highlights features of this generation; S. Hinduja, J. Patchin (2013) analyse interpersonal communication and point up its peculiarities; J. Drussell studied the influence of technologies upon communication. Another important point in this issue is the way, in which multilingual speakers use their languages in interaction (Canagarajah, A. S., 2007). This approach is linked to the social and critical tradition. F. Mishna, A. McLuckie, M. Saint (2009), E. Giffords (2009) and others investigated the aspect of internet friendship. We should pay attention to the statement of L. D. Rosen (2012) that most of us balance on derangement edge as ordinary usage of technologies can cause psychological disorders: narcissism, social phobia, troubles in attention shortage, depression. L. D. Rosen (2012) raises an issue what teachers know about young people, who solid hours spend at a computer, spend their time in different social networks. In this article we formulate the question in somehow different way: what features of Generation Z do teachers of comprehensive schools indicate?

**The aim of the article** is to identify essential features of Generation Z, which are indicated by teachers of Lithuanian comprehensive schools.

**Research object** is features of Generation Z by teachers' approach.

**Research methods:** analysis of scientific literature, survey-in-written of informants.

The research refers to the main methodological approach: people construct their personal understanding and this is not the mirror-image of the knowledge or abilities conveyed to them, this is their personal reflection (Kukla, 2000).

**The novelty of this article:** features of Generation Z are highlighted by referring to insights of teachers of comprehensive schools in Lithuania.

In practice it is possible to apply the results of this qualitative research for improving education at a school as well as constructing of other research on Generation Z.

### **The organization of the research**

The research was carried out in the autumn of 2014 – the winter of 2015. The research aim – is to distinguish the features of Generation Z by the viewpoint of teachers of comprehensive schools. The research object – is Generation Z in the aspect of the features relevant didactic viewpoint. The research method: survey-in-written.

The informants – are the participants of the project ‘Development of Effectiveness and Quality of the Help for a Pupil. Stage 2’ (VP1-2.3-ŠMM-04-V-03-002) because they participated in the seminars about Generation Z conducted by V. Targamadžè, one of the authors of the article, in the academic year of 2014/2015; while taking part in the project, they went deep into the problems related to Generation Z. The informants are from 15 comprehensive schools situated in towns (7) and regions (8). In the research 219 informants took part (in every school the number of the seminar’s participants was limited to 15. In total 221 participated in the seminars, two of them did not return the questionnaires). The survey was carried out in written. The informants were asked to estimate three positions – the first one asked to indicate ten main features of the Generation Z, which they observe by working for a school, in the second one – what education methods do not fit them and to explain why, in the third one – what education methods fit and why. The answers of the informants have been analysed, suitable categories and subcategories have been distinguished. In total the features of Generation Z consist of 9 categories and 14 subcategories.

## **The research results**

The analysis of the informants’ answers allowed distinguishing the following categories and subcategories of the Generation Z characteristic: the pupil’s 1. activity (4 subcategories), 2. vocation for technologies (2 subcategories), 3. value orientations (they were not distinguished), 4. communication (2 subcategories), 5. personality assessment (2 subcategories), 6. learning distinctions and teaching peculiarities (they were not distributed), 7. aspirations (they were not distributed), 8. behaviour (2 subcategories), 9. creativity (2 subcategories). The statements of the teachers that define Generation Z and were repeated not less than 10 times in content meaning were chosen. The answers, which mostly reflected the thought, were presented. Each position will be briefly presented.

The activity can be divided into four subcategories: work activeness, activity organization, maintenance of attention and activity results. The informants define the activity character as follows: ‘active because they want that the activity, views would change rapidly’, ‘hyperactive because during lessons, breaks they constantly move, cannot sit in one place’, ‘very mobile, speak loudly and a lot’, ‘at one time can perform a lot of activities – both read and write and work with a computer’; the respondents pay attention to planning (‘are not apt to plan their activity, to obey deadlines’,

‘are not apt to plan the activity, more spontaneous’, ‘Barbie – nine works, often several assignments are performed at one time, cannot plan’, ‘have problems in the activity planning, consistency of the activity because soon deviate from the activity’, ‘especially if something attracts their attention’. The maintenance of attention – means that ‘they are not able to focus their attention because they soon get tired from the activity requiring longer work and pay their attention elsewhere’; ‘they are not able to formulate aims and plan how to pursue for them’. The subcategory ‘Activity Results’ is presupposed by certain statements of the informants, for example, ‘they want fast result by making as few attempts as possible’, ‘curious, but at the same time impatient – they want everything here and now’, ‘they hardly take failures, do not try to achieve necessary result if they face obstacles’, ‘change their activities, perform them superficially; thus there are no good results of the work’. The analysis of the informants’ thoughts shows that Generation Z is very active, perform several activities at one blow, is not organized enough in seeking for the aim and often it is complicated for this generation to concentrate on one activity, they pay their attention elsewhere, therefore not always achieve the desired result. They lack abilities to formulate aims and to plan how to achieve them. Thus teachers have to focus on purposeful focus of pupils for their activity, to help them

concentrate their attention, learn to formulate activity aims and pursue for them.

It is possible to distinguish the vocation to technologies into two subcategories: the sense in technologies and existence in the virtual environment. The first one could be illustrated by the following examples: ‘are not afraid of innovations, technologies as they know them’, ‘a smart generation – is able to use multimedia, receptive for innovations’, ‘have a lot of experience with ICT – they use a lot of different tools’. The second one – ‘willingly play computer games’, ‘all of them are interested in computers and games’, ‘easily use information technologies’, ‘spend a lot of time in social networks’, ‘the virtual environment becomes ‘home from home’’ and so on.

The value orientations (Category 3) were not distinguished into subcategories as statements were similar enough: ‘materialists – listening to conversations of elder pupils it is often possible to hear speaking about money or what they have bought’, ‘consumers – they want to get everything what is the best’, ‘consumer society – the most important values are material’. The informants fix the following tendencies: orientation to material values and consumerism. No one mentions general, inward values. It is unclear why. Perhaps the teachers simply do not fix them, or perhaps they have negative stereotyped image of the new generation. Actually one informant has noticed that they ‘are disoriented in values’. In any case

this information obtained from the informants gives the message about the problem of value development. Thus it is necessary to decide what values and why to encourage developing. The teachers rather distinctively valued pupils' communication. The respondents did not focus on pupils' bilingual or multilingual ability to communicate. Basically their answers focused on two positions: communication expression, reaction. They wrote: 'verbal communication is missing', they unwillingly answer in coherent text', 'little communicate lively, more in networks', 'small expression of the language, communicate in acronyms', - the teachers record different expression of pupils' communication (acronyms, concentration on the virtual environment, the lack of a coherent text and so on). They also indicated pupils' emotional expression covering their communication: 'communicate fiercely, they tear teachers' eyes', 'bravely communicate, express their opinion', 'respective communication of an adult is very important as they respond by aggression to the anger, others - by tears', 'sensitive and exposed in communication, sensitively react to incomprehension, failure'. Some teachers indicate certain problems, for example, 'brave to express own opinion, needs, but not always hear another person - no collaboration', 'for a long time do not know how to communicate with adults, they say 'you' [in singular], interrupt a conversation', 'in communication

the treatment of an adult as servant is observed'. Some of them even clearly stated that communication is mean - 'possess not enough developed communication abilities'. Thus the communication of the new generation is typical. The teachers evidently value it considering their datum-level and the empirical experience. In any case it is necessary to care for pupils' communication by helping them to understand communicative differences, communication destination and its importance. The teachers focused the personality evaluation on two directions - pupil's self-evaluation and reaction to evaluation of others. They indicated the enhanced self-confidence, inadequateness towards own possibilities - 'self-confident, they evaluate themselves well though they do not possess enough knowledge and abilities', 'self-confident - most often they have their opinion and do not agree with others', 'self-confident - whatever you ask they can', 'they inadequately value themselves, most often they overestimate themselves', 'confidence - they depend on their powers, courageously take any activity', 'brave as they show great self-confidence' and so on. They pointed out the reaction to the evaluation of others as follows: 'they claim attention - they wish to be heard and positively evaluated, hardly hear criticism', 'are afraid of negative evaluation' and so on. The attention should be paid to the remark of one informant that pupils 'like and require attention as they wish to be

evaluated'. The teachers' insights send the message that it is necessary to help pupils to learn to evaluate themselves, their abilities adequately, but not by self-deprecating, one has to develop own potential inward, intellectual and physical powers.

Learning distinctions and teaching peculiarities (Category 6). The informants point out different learning distinctions: 'do not show internal motivation to learn', 'often do not want to do the work anew in order it would be better', 'seek for greater attention of a teacher', 'curious, like innovations as they want to know answers to their questions and are not afraid to search for them', 'if mistaken, they do not care, do not finish home works to the utmost', 'particularly requiring motivation: I am a young person, motivate me', 'the lack of motivation', 'they hastily perform assignments, do not go deep, do not check'. They explain that children lack learning motivation, not enough focus on home works though they are inquisitive. In principle this relates to teaching peculiarities, e.g., 'inattentive because make a lot of accidental mistakes', 'hardly focus their attention as often make mistakes not because that they do not know but because they did not hear', 'require individual attention', 'it is more difficult when they have to think, when it is not necessary to find information and to present it but to spill out own opinion', 'constantly requires motivation, impatient'. Also the attention is also paid to the following

peculiarities important for teaching: 'realists: why is necessary to learn this?', 'why it is necessary' (practically, the important things for a child are stressed) and their inquisitiveness is pointed out ('they desire innovations. It is interesting what it is new, undiscovered, unexplored', and 'curious, they are interested in the activity interesting for them, do not like monotony'). It should be pointed out that these children are inquisitive, not possessing motivation and so on. Simply it is necessary to encourage their interest, motivate them to learn by choosing the methods, content, and forms appropriate for them. It is especially necessary to actualize the curriculum and context, not to forget sustainability of virtual and real space, as well as incentive to perform independent assignments.

The seventh category – aspirations – is related to education and self-education. If pupils' aspirations are adequate, so their learning outcomes become better, as the informants notice, because 'some pupils adequately evaluate their knowledge and abilities; thus they understand that it is necessary for them to learn, to pursue for better outcomes; however, most of them inadequately evaluate their knowledge and abilities, they are apt to overestimate their possibilities', 'if they would be able to understand their possibilities, they would achieve better learning outcomes'. But 'aspirations of most children are high enough, they are unreal', 'if the aspirations would be

adequate, they could pursue for better learning outcomes'. It is possible to consider the teachers' insights that pupils' aspirations are high enough, they are not adequate to possibilities of pupils; this interferes with their learning. Thus it is necessary to help them to understand the importance of the aspirations for life career, in no way by not overestimating and insufficiently evaluating them.

The informants distinguished rather relevant category of behaviour. They distinguished two subcategories: compliance of norms, rules, the expression of behaviour – 'disregard of rules because its truth is absolute', 'we are not subject to follow rules, we are apt ourselves to dictate them', 'intolerant towards others' opinion, routine and rules' and another subcategory is defined as follows: 'Emotional. The behaviour reflects many and variable emotions', 'Egocentric as they require a lot and exceptional attention, help and respect for him / her', 'sensitive as excessively react to the environment', 'sensitive as excessively react to the environment', 'subject to the good, creation of the beauty, but they observe own range of their possibilities'. They do not have authorities, often even parents do not make any impact', 'manipulators as they behave selfishly', 'no concentration towards perspective – they look for themselves'. Thus it is evident that the informants expressed clear enough comment about non-observance of standards and rules or even their disregard as

well as very wide spectrum of emotional behaviour painting. They reflect both negative and positive remarks. The definition of new generation behaviour is important enough; these comments have to be analysed and one has to search for possibilities to prevent and correct the behaviour, as well as possibilities to foster positive behaviour.

Creativity as the feature of this generation has also been distinguished – the informants actually indicated two positions – definition of creative thinking ('they think in non-standard way, without stereotypes because they a situation differently than others', 'original thinking, non-standard', 'weak critical thinking, are able to repeat – to find information, but it is harder to repeat it and to present it in own words') and practice of creativity in empirical activity ('have a lot of thoughts, ideas, but they are lazy to implement them', 'they do not apply their creative fantasies in practice'). As it seen, some informants stressed pupils' creativity, and others just indicated that it scantily manifests. It is difficult to analyse their answers because it might be that the informants differently understands creativity. However, application of creativity in practice is negatively enough evaluated by the informants – it is stated that they do not apply their ideas and so on. Perhaps the informants are under such impression because pupils' creativity manifests not during lessons or the teachers simply do not cognize it.

To tell the truth, the following comment was expressed: ‘they avoid critical thinking because these features are hardly developed’. This already is the stress towards insufficient development of creativity. Such evaluation of pupils’ creativity makes one to get restless because development of creativity at school is very stimulated; however, according to the teachers, it is insufficient. Thus teachers should reconsider their pedagogical activity and search for possibilities to foster development of pupils’ creativity.

## Discussion

The results of the performed research show that the new generation distinguishes in the features, which are closely related the virtual environment. Their dipping into the virtual environment influences their reading quality as well. Not linear but loop reading begins to dominate. G. Falschlehner (2014) compared their difference with the walking street of the village – if one goes main street and looks around, it will be linear reading; if one stops by here and there, where it is interesting, this will be loop reading. Thus the loop reading, which has begun to dominate, is related to the fragmented obtaining of information. Bearing in mind that hyperactivity is characteristic for this generation and that this generation can work on multiple tasks at once, their impaired concentration on the essence of the text being

read, no analysis done and insufficient formulation of conclusions are probable. Reading is always related to the relevant context. Thus deixis reading becomes problematic. In general, not going deeper into the text causes problems, for example, often tasks are not understood, one hurries to perform them even by not understanding it properly. The question about teaching and learning of languages arises. Are the methods and strategies chosen properly? Particularly, when one considers bilingualism or multilingualism for education quality in the globalization process. As the new generation representatives browse in the virtual environment, they should know more languages, not only their native language. Thus it might be interesting to explore how multilingual speakers use their languages in the interaction.

The new generation is still not cognizable enough and discovered by us, even not yet understood. Thus it is necessary to search for the strategies of teaching and learning suitable for the generation. This gives possibilities for researchers, teacher trainers, the teachers to assess the process. This is the challenge and at the same to understand the new generation as well as to search for optimal strategies of teaching and learning.

Further researches might consider the analysis of insights of Generation Z representatives how they themselves perceive their abilities, competences and so on. Also it would be



interesting to compare the above-mentioned context with the attitudes of previous generations (not only teachers) towards the new generation.

## Conclusions

In summing up the thoughts of this article, it is possible to state that:

1. According to the teachers, the new generation is unique. Its definition presented by the informants can be divided into nine categories by attributing certain subcategories for some of them:

1. activity (4 subcategories: work activeness, activity organization, maintenance of attention and activity results), 2. vocation for technologies (2: the sense in technologies and existence in the virtual environment), 3. value orientations (subcategories were not distinguished), 4. communication (2: communication expression, and reaction), 5. personality assessment (2: pupil's self-evaluation and reaction to evaluation of others), 6. learning distinctions and teaching peculiarities (not distinguished), 7. aspirations (not distinguished), 8. behaviour (2: compliance of norms, rules, and the expression of behaviour), 9. creativity (2: definition of creative thinking and practice of creativity in empirical activity). Every category

(subcategory as well) was defined by the informants distinctively – from the emphasis of their positive features to the indication negative ones. However, in defining this generation the tendency to highlight more negative nuance is noticed. Referring to the definitions of Generation Z presented by the informants, it is possible to state that this generation is still not cognitive enough for the teachers.

2. The features of this generation's pupils highlighted by the teachers (value orientations, creativity, peculiarities of their teaching and learning and others) give the message about the problem of education (self-education) at a Lithuanian comprehensive school and encourage to search for possibilities to solve it. So one would have: to analyse the problem of education at school in different approaches (didactic, axiological, psychological, managerial and others); to identify problems and reasons of their emergence; to project scenarios for their solution and to discuss them with the school community; having discussed these scenarios, to choose the suitable one (or several), if necessary to correct them and again discuss them with the community or its delegated representatives; to implement this (these) scenario (scenarios) and, referring to the monitoring system, to identify possible interferences, to apply proactive management.

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