

“Grandpa, Wake Up! It’s the 21st Century!”

An Opportunity for Gen Zs to Educate the Baby Boomers

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ABSTRACT: Baby Boomer teachers are now beginning to teach Generation Z students, many of whom were born in the 21st century. These students have grown up with state-of-the-art technology and social media, which is a much different environment than many of their Baby Boomer teachers. The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the viewpoints of both the Baby Boomer teachers and the Generation Z students. Initially, the study focused on the characteristics of the various generations from the Silent Generation to Generation Z. This knowledge formed the basis of an empirical survey to further understand characteristics, beliefs, skills, and practices of Baby Boomers and Generation Zs and how they can better communicate with each other and coexist in an educational environment. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the real-time application of a new teaching model, using much greater technology at all levels of education, became an instant reality. The Generation Z authors were able to provide a firsthand experience in this paper on the impact of these new teaching methods on their educational experience. This paper can serve as a guide going forward on how educational institutions can effectively adapt to real-world situations in consideration of the different generations of individuals being involved.

KEYWORDS: Baby Boomers, Generation Z, teaching with technology, teaching remotely

INTRODUCTION

As the biblical Peter well stated:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I am also a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serv-

ing as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3 New King James)

Speaking of myself, as a mature, but aging, “Baby Boomer,” I both marvel and shudder at the thought that I

am actually now teaching a fourth generation of students. This is definitely an exercise of faith in the “business of teaching.” The new Generation Z students were mostly born after 2000. Furthermore, these students have grown up technologically advanced and skilled and are totally in tune with social media. These students are my grandchildren! I should not be surprised by this revelation as I frequently must ask my grandchildren to explain some of the latest social media terminology and networks.

Since I rely on my grandchildren to help educate me, it only made sense that I include them in any research paper addressing the dilemma of how Baby Boomers can best teach and learn from the new Generation Z students. I presented this idea of a co-authored paper to four of my granddaughters, and they were immediately “all in” on working together to help their grandpa better understand Generation Z students and how to best teach Gen Zs in the new technological environment.

My granddaughters all take their education very seriously and have definite educational and professional goals and ideas. The thought of participating in a college-level research paper, with the potential of making a joint presentation at an academic national conference, was “exciting and cool.” They were all willing to do the research and work to help with the paper.

GENERATIONS

Our first task was to do the research and learn more about generations, including how they are defined and what may determine when a specific generation is established. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines generation as follows: “Generation means a body of living beings constituting a single step in the line of descent from an ancestor,” or “a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously.”

Another way to consider generations is through generational cohorts, which are identified as “groups of people who were born about the same time, or during a specific time period, have similar characteristics and behaviors, and are different from members of other age groups.” There is even generational cohort theory which proposes that several generations can be identified by the specific time periods into which people were born and the time periods they grew up in. Generation and cohort are sometimes considered synonymously in social science as each represents people in a population who experience the same significant events within a specific period of time.

In the last approximately 100 years, there have been five identified distinct generations or generation cohorts named as: Silent, Baby Boomers, X, Y and Z. While the

Table 1: Generations

Generation	Years	Primary Characteristics	Challenges
Silent – Veterans Greatest	1925 - 1945	Respect for authority, follow the rules, hard work, live to work, sacrifice for the common good, duty to country	Especially vulnerable to illness and diseases like coronavirus, end of life
Baby Boomers	1946 – 1964	Stable families, strong post WW II economic growth, first counter-culture ventures, value work, influenced by television and friends	Insufficient savings for retirement, forced to work longer, lack many technical skills
Generation X Baby Busters MTV	1965 – 1980	Single parent homes, or homes where frequently both parents worked, independent, value autonomy and freedom, work to live, not as work-centric, more liberal	Often at or near top of organizations, don't have skill sets that apply in current job market
Generation Y Millennials Nexters	1981 – 1995	Most educated, grew up with Internet, expect quick advancement, not tied to an organization for a long period, tolerate change, entitled	Difficulty finding jobs, high student debt
Generation Z iGen Centennials	1996 – 2010	Raised on Internet and social media, entrepreneurial, greater use of virtual communication, most ethnically diverse, excessive time on smartphone	Growing up in a coronavirus era

focus of this paper and research was on Baby Boomers and Generation Z, the study could not be complete without at least some understanding about the Silent Generation along with Generations X and Y. Table 1 summarizes key facts and features of each of these generations and helps to illustrate how our culture, environment, and technology have helped to form these generations.

Over the last century, there have been distinct trends as highlighted in the table. One feature is the transition from a respect for authority to a degree of thinking involving greater independence and self-centeredness. There seems to be an increased tolerance now for diversity and desire for change. The attitude toward work has changed from strict devotion and long-term employment to more of work primarily as a means-to-an-end for personal enhancement. Of course, probably the greatest influence on the generations is the rapid advancement of technology and methods of communication.

The development of these various cohort generations has not come without challenges and conflict. Generation Y millennials have come up with the term “OK Boomer!” in a sarcastic reaction to the Boomer’s claim that millennials are “snowflakes” or have a “Peter Pan” syndrome for their failure to grow up. Baby Boomers have lived in excess, personally and nationally, leaving large levels of debt which will fall to subsequent generations. This trend seems to be persistent as the fiscal responsibility continues to get passed along to the next generations. The technology gap makes it increasingly difficult for generations to effectively communicate and interact. As older generations reach the pinnacle of influence and authority, their lack of technology skills can, conversely, frustrate younger generations.

Ideally, these differences can lead to a productive cooperation between the cohort generations. Just as I seek technological wisdom from my granddaughters, Baby Boomers should look to Generation Zs for their expertise and recognized skills. At the same time, Baby Boomers can serve as mentors for younger generations. For example, as a grandparent, I look for opportunities to share values and life experiences with my granddaughters whenever possible.

In the workplace, it is critical and valuable for members of different generations to have positive interaction. With older people working longer and well past typical retirement age and younger people bringing unique skills and a desire to get established, it is conceivable that a work environment can employ up to four generations of employees at once. Ideally, senior or tenured employees can mentor younger generations in knowledge about the organization, including its goals, leadership insights, and expertise. At the same time, younger generations can mentor senior employees

in adapting to new technology (Flinchbaugh, et al., 2018; Ohmer, et al., 2018).

As the reality that global pandemics (e.g., COVID-19) can cripple workplaces and societies almost instantaneously, there is a concerted effort to significantly change the way people interact. There is now greater acceptance for working from home as well as providing online classes for students, both as a measure of safety and matter of convenience. There has also been an astronomical increase in telecommunication/virtual meetings, and society is going to have to adapt to these new realities.

A teaching environment presents unique challenges. As older generations teach longer into their career and well past retirement age, while the age of their students remains relatively constant, that difference can become problematic. Teachers are going to have to adapt their teaching methods to better reach and relate to their younger audience. These new methods, many of them virtual, are now almost being forced onto all generations, whether they are prepared or not.

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

It is well documented that conditions are changing in the higher education environment. These changes provide new challenges and opportunities, which can lead to positive experiences. To begin with, the number of students enrolled in higher education in the last 30 years has doubled from 10 to 20 million. However, only 40% of these students earn their degree after six years (Holzer & Baum, 2017). Furthermore, the average student is older, relies more on student loans, and needs to work while going to school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). While about 25% of all students were taking some or all of their courses online (pre-COVID-19), that number has recently jumped to almost 100% as universities across the country were forced to suspend their on campus classes in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

There is also evidence that Generation Y, the millennials, have been raised in a more protective environment. Concurrently, there was a concerted effort by society to increase children’s self-esteem, i.e., by raising children who should feel good about themselves (Twenge, 2006). Apparently, this has led to “trophy kids” who spent their childhood receiving gold stars and shiny medals just for showing up (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). These expectations affect the higher education learning experience where inflated grades are presumed. The resulting disconnect between grades earned and grades demanded results in frustration for the teacher/professor and is devastating to academia (Firestone, et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, this conflict in objectives between students and teachers can lead to a dysfunctional situation. A National Education Association report projects that one-third of new teachers will quit after three years, and 46% will leave the profession within five years (Lahey, 2015). At the same time, the need for student services has increased, including counseling, therapy, mental-health appointments, and workshops to deal with anxiety (Field, 2016). We have taught our kids to fear failure, and in doing so, we have blocked the surest and clearest path to their success. The setbacks, mistakes, miscalculations, and failures, which we have shoved out of our children's way, are the very experiences that teach them how to be resourceful, persistent, innovative, and resilient citizens of the world (Lahey, 2015).

CHARACTERISTICS OF BABY BOOMER TEACHERS

Baby Boomer teachers learned under the tutelage of the Silent Generation and older Baby Boomers. A more rigid and authoritarian environment was commonplace. The authority of the teacher and administration was unquestioned. Discipline, rules, and loyalty was expected. At the same time, moral values and religious traditions were accepted and expected (Duse & Duse, 2016).

Personally speaking, having taught for over 40 years, I would list the following characteristics, beliefs, skills, and practices of Baby Boomer teachers:

- Discipline is still important, and the teacher is the ultimate authority; however, there is a greater acceptance for student views and opinions, provided they are socially acceptable.
- There is still a recognition and acceptance of the traditional hierarchical and authority structure along with long-held traditions, but some flexibility is encouraged.
- The teaching profession is a calling, and most teachers are extremely loyal to the profession.
- Values, morals, and ethical standards remain paramount within the profession and in the student teacher relationship.
- There is a greater emphasis on teamwork and collegiality.
- The teacher considers him/herself very important in ensuring the success of the student.
- Teachers still serve as a role model for students.
- Teachers are more sensitive to the rights of students, the need for autonomy for students, nondiscrimination, and legal issues.
- There is an increased acceptance and utilization of technology and innovation; however, this sometimes involves a considerable learning procedure.

- The availability of real-time information and knowledge impacts the teaching and learning process.

In many situations, the Baby Boomer teachers have retained principles and practices ingrained in them since childhood. These beliefs have withstood the test of time and are more foundational than generational issues and possible fads. Simultaneously, Baby Boomers have recognized and accepted changes in culture and technology. While possibly not at the forefront of these changes, Baby Boomers have, none-the-less, adapted as necessary, especially as it enhances the teaching profession.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS

With the help of my granddaughters, we developed this section of the paper. I was continuously amazed that my granddaughters always appeared to know and understand how to use the latest technology, even at a very young age. They seemed to spend hours on nameless games from car races to alien battles to bouncing along a trail to building cities. They also could find out just about anything from anywhere. They developed educational and family videos, established Facebook accounts, and even enrolled subscribers to YouTube. Of course, there also appeared to be considerable technological communication with unknown and unseen "friends."

To one who grew up building forts, riding a bike, ice skating, and watching Mickey Mouse on a new device called a television, the idea of my grandchildren joined at the fingers with keyboards and smartphones and other modern devices has been a totally foreign concept. I also remember my grandparents who, in their 60s and 70s, seemed really old.

Based upon both my granddaughters and my own collective wisdom and personal experiences, we identified specific characteristics, beliefs, skills, and practices of Generation Z students:

- Generally loyal to friends and peer relationships
- Having a strong relationship with technology
- Using technology as a foundation of their social environment
- Capable of absorbing large amounts of information from many different sources
- Under lots of pressure to exceed in a rapidly changing environment
- Competitive
- Self-confident with practical oriented goals
- Recognizing that a formal educational environment is just one of many sources of knowledge
- Preferring short soundbites of information and knowledge

- Lacking an attention span with less stimulating presentations and deliveries
- Questioning traditional methods of structure and supervision
- Preferring less formality
- Expecting that the latest forms of technology should be incorporated into any educational experience
- Loving video games and other interactive technology-based experiences, often to the point of excessiveness

The distinct variances between characteristics, beliefs, skills, and practices of different generations makes pursued communication between these groups even more critical. Intentional efforts need to be made to understand where each generation is coming from and what piques interest. It is also important to be aware of strengths and weaknesses of each other, and how everyone reacts to positive and negative situations. The COVID-19 pandemic, with stay-at-home and social distancing policies, has only reinforced the need for effective communication and adaptation, sometimes instantaneously.

THE CHALLENGE TO BABY BOOMER TEACHERS IN BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL GAP

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6 New King James)

This study has identified specific challenges facing teachers in new learning environments:

- Baby Boomer teachers must become knowledgeable of the latest technology so they can better relate to students.
- Teachers need to stay informationally ahead of the students and be able to anticipate and adapt to various situations.
- Teaching focus has changed from the teacher being the single source of knowledge to the teacher being able to assist students in identifying many different sources of knowledge.
- Teachers will have to be able to integrate the social and technical devices into the educational environment.
- Teachers will need to present information in condensed segments using a variety of activities.
- Student attention span is relatively short.
- Many more visual aids will be needed to enhance learning.
- The long-established teaching methods, like lectures, may be losing effectiveness.

To give more credibility to this study, there needed to be some links between the theoretical and practical. To

enhance and support the ideas and concepts gained through review of literature and general study, some personal and practical experiences and examples would be beneficial. My granddaughters thought some surveys of colleagues, peers, and special groups, along with personal experiences, would be a great way for them to contribute to the paper. The unprecedented events of the past few months, i.e. COVID-19, gave ample opportunity to identify and share how various generations are dealing with their personal and educational experiences in ways not thought possible not that long ago.

SURVEYS

Once my granddaughters and I gained some understanding of the different generations, we discussed how the research should proceed to get some feedback from key stakeholders. We agreed that it would be beneficial to interact with Generation Zs, teachers, and Baby Boomers. Three questionnaire surveys were developed to interact with each group.

Realizing the short attention span of Generation Zs, a one-page questionnaire, which could be completed in under 10 minutes, was the objective. The questionnaire focused on methods which, in the opinion of Generation Zs, teachers should use to best reach and relate to the students. Included also were identified issues, causes, and ideas which were important to Generation Zs. Finally, there were three short-answer questions addressing how to best interact and communicate with teachers and grandparents.

The questionnaire for teachers was also one page and similar to the student’s survey. We were also cognizant of teacher’s time and wanted something that could be easily completed in a short period of time. Teaching methods were addressed in the first question in a tabular format. The second question, also in a tabular format, identified important causes and ideas for teachers. Also, there were three short open-ended questions that focused on communication.

The third questionnaire would be distributed to Baby Boomers. The information would have to be more of an anecdotal study since it was difficult to determine a specific testing group which would be needed to promote a random type sample. Nevertheless, it was felt that the questionnaire could still be distributed to a diverse grouping of individuals. Feedback from the group of senior adults addressed a variety of issues. The first question focused on teaching methods that were predominant when they were students—in order to help distinguish how much situations have changed over the years. Two questions on technology skills

and competencies were presented. Finally, there were a few short-answer questions addressing how to interact and communicate with grandchildren or Generation Zs.

My granddaughters were willing to administer the questionnaires in their various classes to other Generation Z students and their teachers. They all felt they could have better success interacting with students of their own age and were excited to be completing this part of the research project. A cover letter was developed to be given to teachers explaining the research and purpose of the questionnaire. Everyone was ready to administer the questionnaire in March, right after Spring break.

CORONAVIRUS

And then there was the coronavirus pandemic!

Given that schools were shutting down across the country and every student, including my granddaughters, seemed to be going to a form of distance education, we realized that the research project as originally envisioned would not be feasible. It was not possible for my granddaughters to interact with fellow students and teachers in such a way that would promote the completion of a questionnaire survey. We felt that to place an additional burden of completing a survey, when new methods of instruction were being developed by various schools, was an unreasonable request. We had to reformulate the study in an effort to accomplish our objectives.

We did agree that we could still do an anecdotal study with Baby Boomers in the same format as originally envisioned. We all reached out to interact, in a social-distance format, with different groups of Baby Boomers. The survey questions we had developed served as the basis of our analysis as we learned of their beliefs and positions in this area of the study.

ANECDOTAL FEEDBACK FROM BABY BOOMERS

Efforts were made to gather questionnaire responses from a wide selection of Baby Boomers. Because of COVID-19, we were limited in our sampling process and could only complete an anecdotal study. We had to rely on friends, family, neighbors, acquaintances, and colleagues from different geographical locations to obtain a diversity of opinions and responses. Any observations and conclusions from this activity cannot be generalized to the entire population and only represent a summary of the specific replies.

When asked about what learning methods were available when Baby Boomers went to school, respondents gave

answers that were expected. The wide use of computers and any related technology did not exist until the very youngest Baby Boomers reached early adulthood. Lectures, notes on the black board, textbook readings, and some supplementary handouts were the standard means of learning. These methods of learning have probably existed in a pretty similar format for hundreds of years.

Two questions addressed technology skills that were desired by Baby Boomers or opportunities for Generation Zs to teach Baby Boomers. The most notable observation was that Baby Boomers were generally not interested in participating in or learning about video games or social skills from Generation Zs. Not one Baby Boomer indicated either strongly agree or agree when it came to video games or social skills. Snapchat, Podcasts, and Facebook were also not popular options with Baby Boomers.

A much more informative part of the survey were Baby Boomer answers to open-ended questions. Baby Boomers were not shy about expressing their opinions, suggestions, and recommendations to several ideas for Generation Z. The following lists, with responses arranged alphabetically, can best summarize the highlights of these inquiries.

Activities the Baby Boomers like to do with Generation Z:

- Communicate with each other
- Cook
- Spend time with family
- Play games and cards
- Eat meals together
- Watch movies
- Participate in outdoor activities
- Read
- Share life experiences
- Shop

Of these activities, doing things outdoors, sharing life experiences, eating meals/cooking, and communicating were the most popular responses. While it would be premature to draw any conclusions from this information, Baby Boomers today appear to have a greater awareness of being physically fit and practicing healthy nutrition. It seems these would be obvious activities, along with general life experiences, that Baby Boomers would want to share with their grandchildren.

Activities Generation Z like to do with the Baby Boomers:

- Cook
- Play computer games
- Discuss current events
- Attend family celebrations
- Facetime and text
- Watch movies

- Participate in outdoor activities
- Try new adventure experiences
- Read
- Shop
- Participate in sporting activities
- Travel
- Watch videos

As expected, there are similarities in the two lists. Essentially, there are activities that would be of greater interest to Generation Zs, such as computer games, Facetime and text, sports, and videos. These differences reflect what is more important to a younger generation and what they enjoy sharing.

Advice Baby Boomers would give to Generation Z:

- Be on time
- Be polite and courteous
- Be yourself
- Develop social skills
- Do your best
- Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty
- Don't worry about others
- Drive slower
- Embrace life
- Plan financially
- Finish your work
- Follow through
- Get physically active
- Have a plan
- Be honest
- Have humor
- Know the Constitution
- Learn about history
- Learn about life
- Spend less time on the computer
- Spend less time on the phone
- Spend less time on video games
- Love your neighbors
- Have a positive attitude
- Prioritize quality versus quantity when it comes to friends
- Read
- Relax
- Set goals
- Stick with a job you like
- Stop complaining
- Stop saying you can't
- Trust God
- Work hard

One participant included a couple excellent quotes: “Being positive won't guarantee you'll succeed. But being

negative will guarantee you won't” (Gordon, 2014). Also: “Knowing something doesn't change your life; doing something does” (Forleo, 2018).

This was a partial list as Baby Boomers had plenty of suggestions to share with the younger generations. There were both positive ideas and recommendations and negative admonishments. Some of the most common replies included spending less time on the computer and phone, learning about life and experiences, having a positive attitude, and working hard. Most of the suggestions are common sense. Many could have been the same suggestions and advice the Baby Boomers received from their grandparents. One can only speculate on what advice the Generation Zs will pass on to their grandchildren.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATION

Since my granddaughters were instantaneously introduced to new methods of education, (i.e., following a distance or online format involving new methods of technology, communication and social networking), a report on their personal experiences could become a very timely feature of this study. They each developed a detailed report on their educational experiences during this coronavirus era. Each report, presented in the paper, will identify what worked and did not work, what they liked and did not like, and how efficient the process has become.

Mayah's Reply

Since our grandpa had a lot of lists in this paper, my sister and I developed some questions that could best assist in explaining our school experience during the pandemic and shut down. We included our answers to the questions in bullet points.

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, you've been expected to change the way you learn. What are the biggest changes?
 - Having to work without the guidance of the teachers
 - Experiencing fewer people-based distractions
 - Working in an enclosed space (usually in the bedroom or closet)
2. What have you found to be most challenging?
 - The schedule of the work
 - The inability to get everything done in one day
 - The assignments meant to be done online
3. What change has been welcomed?
 - Having fewer annoying people to distract from the learning/lesson
 - Not having to wake up so early in the morning
 - Scheduling what to do and when (usually)

- Having more breaks
 - Worrying less about due dates
4. How has technology impacted your learning?
 - I personally really don't like using tech because while useful, if something doesn't work or if you don't have internet access, you are at a big disadvantage.
 5. Do you feel this new teaching method has hindered your learning experience?
 - Well yes because instructions aren't as clear online as they are on paper, and teachers won't always bother to have an online conference to help their students, leaving the students lost and confused.
 6. How have teachers helped you during this time?
 - Some have been having scheduled Facetime for those students who are lost, others have been leaving emails.
 7. What would you like to be different? (How do you feel teachers can meet your needs better)
 - Um, well due dates being pushed back a bit would be helpful and a lot less stress-inducing.

Miriam's Reply

My sister and I both had a great time thinking through the questions and our responses. We were surprised at the similarities and differences in our answers and believe we have given a good overview of how our lives and school have changed these last few weeks.

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, you've been expected to change the way you learn. What are the biggest changes?
 - Schools have shut down, likely for the rest of the year.
 - Packets of schoolwork have been sent home to work on while school's out.
 - Our state has a curfew of 5:00, meaning we can't go out past 5:00, except for emergencies.
 - Technology has been something to go on regularly.
 - Most schools now have online programs.
 - All school field trips and events have been canceled, and refunded
2. What have you found to be most challenging?
 - Not following a block schedule
 - Not having face-to-face teacher communication
 - No feedback on work
 - Knowing that I can't see other people
 - Getting along with siblings
 - Staying focused on one thing.
3. What change has been welcomed?
 - More freedom of what schoolwork to do when
 - More outside time
 - More time to sleep in

- Breaks
 - Flexible due dates
4. How has technology impacted your learning?
 - It's the majority of what my schoolwork is on now
 - You can't ask teachers for help
 - It's normal to be on it ALL of the time now
 5. Do you feel this new teaching method has hindered your learning experience?
 - There is no social interaction with other people
 - You don't get feedback/ help from teacher
 6. How have teachers helped you during this time?
 - They leave letters that have the directions
 - They can contact parents to make things clear
 - They have worked hard to make sure you understand the basics
 7. What would you like to be different? (How do you feel teachers can meet your needs better)
 - NO QUARANTINE!!! (I'm an extrovert)
 - Teachers can Facetime
 - Clearer instructions

Working on this paper with our grandpa has been a great experience. We have learned a lot about the different generations and appreciated our interactions with all our grandparents doing the survey even more. The shutdown of the school system right in the middle of writing this paper was a challenge. Fortunately, it helped us to realize how important technology has become, and we have discovered new ways to interact with our teachers. We realized that both students and teachers have a lot to learn, not only about technology, but how to communicate and interact with each other even with social distancing.

Kaylee's Reply

In online school, my school has been using a main online program called Schoology, where we have our classes organized. In Schoology, all our teachers can message students individually or the entire class. There is a calendar where all our work for the week is organized and due dates are written out. We complete assignments that are on Schoology, like a multiple-choice quiz or a homework assignment that is free response. Some of the assignments are graded automatically while some must be graded manually by the teacher. For grades, we use the same online gradebook we have used for the whole school year. In my district, we use Home Access Center, or HAC, for teachers to put in grades, and for students to view them.

We do conferences through the Schoology app and most conferences are optional. In the conference, teachers explain topics or go over the schedule for the week. There are also live help sessions available where the teachers can

go one on one with students. Most of the work we have been doing has been short assignments and notes. In my art class we do projects, but we haven't done any projects in other classes.

Online schooling is not what I expected because it is much easier than I thought it would be. There are good and bad features about it, but I feel like the good rules over the bad. Some good features about online schooling are being able to stay home, spending more time with family, and having a more organized week. I love being able to stay at home and get comfy while I do work. I can go in the pantry and pick out my favorite snack while I do work, and there are no students around using bad language or making inappropriate comments. I also get to spend more time with my family by going outside with them any time or just being able to talk all throughout the day. My week is also much more organized. All the work for the week is laid out online, and I can look through and organize my week, so I get everything done on time, including projects that take more time.

One of my favorite projects I've done so far during online schooling has been in art. I had to make a sculpture out of cardboard and since I was home, I had plenty of cardboard to use, and I also had paint to use since I like to paint. Being at home allowed me to use my phone and look up different ideas that could inspire me on my project. The project turned out great.

A downside to online schooling is that most students are not learning as well. This is new for most students, so adjusting to learning from videos and text can be hard. Also, students are not able to be face-to-face with friends and teachers. Some students are also just cheating on their work by using technology to their advantage and looking answers up. Students have also been asking others for answers and finishing schoolwork without even understanding what the questions on the paper are asking. There is going to be a big gap in the knowledge of students where they had to do online school because many students are cutting corners to complete assignments or not completing them at all.

Teachers seem to be having a hard time adjusting, but they are learning quickly. Most of my teachers already know how to use the technology, but teachers that didn't know technical processes had training courses and help from other teachers as they learned how to teach online. One thing for sure is that grading is easier for the teachers. Most of the work is done through apps that automatically grade the assignment after the student is done, so teachers can access that and directly put grades into the online gradebook instead of reading through and grading papers manually.

Teachers are interacting with students quite frequently through online conferences and online messaging. Most teachers have weekly conferences to discuss what the class is learning and answer any of the students' questions. Almost all teachers agree that they miss seeing their students and going to school each day. Many say they wouldn't want to be a teacher if this is how school always was.

This form of learning could be improved by offering a wider variety of assignments to make learning more interesting instead of the same multiple choice and free write assignments we get every week. It could also be improved by making a way for students to not be able to cheat so easily.

I would continue this form of learning because I like being able to stay at home and complete work on my own time. Instead of spending six hours at school, I could complete all the work for the week in a few hours versus running around to different classes all throughout the day. I could complete large amounts of schoolwork in one sitting. It is important to be disciplined and self-motivated to be successful in this learning environment.

Working on this paper with Poppy turned out to be perfect timing. I learned a lot about the different generations, and it helped me to understand what my teachers might be going through when we switched to virtual learning. The experience also introduced to my teachers and me some new technology at the same time and we all are learning together. It has been fun but challenging to communicate and interact in new ways with my teachers and other students.

Alyssa's Reply

Thanks to COVID-19, many things that we never had a second thought about have been taken away from us for who knows how long. By far, one of the biggest changes has been the transition to homeschooling for all students.

Every individual student has had a different experience with this particular transition. I, for one, though, have had quite the negative experience. My teachers didn't provide any kind of instruction as to how we would be doing things. It's as if they either expected the other teachers to do that task, or they just didn't care and couldn't be bothered. As a result, I not only had to struggle to learn how to do things and take time to get used to this new learning method, but I also had to deal with overwhelming amounts of work right from the beginning.

It was literally as if my teachers were bored being in quarantine and wanted to give loads of busy work because they had nothing else to do. The majority of teachers I've had somehow have this mindset where they think they're our only class and don't take into consideration that we have

six other classes that we have to complete assignments for. This issue was only more noticeable during my time doing home schooling. Just because we're all stuck at home, that doesn't mean we should be forced to do assignments every waking minute. I have been flooded with more schoolwork than ever in my entire life, yet the school counselors claimed that school was "going to be easier during these confusing and difficult times."

I had to spend the entire day doing assignments every day, including weekends, with hardly even enough time for breaks to eat, just to get everything turned in on time. Even then, I struggled to get things turned in on time. No amount of time management could work in this situation. It didn't help that some of my friends with better teachers or easier classes were able to relax and have a good experience with this new situation as it only made me feel worse about my experience. Also, seeing my siblings having an easy time and effortlessly getting good grades and getting to do whatever they want for most of the day didn't help either.

While I was still able to get good grades in some of my classes, I had some teachers who were by no means understanding. My algebra teacher, for example, made tests be an instant zero if not completed on time. Schoology, the website used for our schoolwork, glitched on multiple occasions for me. One of these times, I completely missed seeing that I had a test due, and by the time it finally showed up for me, I already had a zero. My teacher was completely unforgiving, so I didn't even bother telling her what happened as I have enough on my plate and didn't want to have to deal with her snappy, snarky remarks on top of everything else.

Other times, I'd be so busy completing work that I wouldn't even have time to see when I had other work due until it was too late. As a result, for the first time ever, I received an F because of my situation with algebra. This was not a fair measure of my performance, especially considering I had good grades in my other classes. Algebra has been my most time-consuming and stressful class, but my teacher couldn't care less about my effort to get a good grade.

All in all, I had a downright horrible experience doing school from home, and there were no positives. In many situations, I didn't even bother trying to learn the material because I had absolutely no time for that. I hardly had enough time just to complete everything that needed to be done. It was extremely stressful and has absolutely taken a noticeable toll on my mental, physical, and emotional health. I've always enjoyed school and was sad when every year ended, but thanks to doing school at home, I have never anticipated school ending as much as I do now.

Grandpa's Summary

The new distance learning structure obviously had a different experience on each of my granddaughters. Some situations and opportunities were very positive, and some did not work out well at all. What seemed to be a key factor in about every situation was the student-teacher relationship and how the teachers were able to relate to the students and encourage them through this new and challenging method of learning. My granddaughters are all excellent and conscientious students, and school is important to them. They take their studies seriously, and it is paramount to see how critical the role of the teacher can be in the success or failure of their students.

CONCLUSION

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. (Proverbs 9:9 – 11 New King James)

Regardless of the times, circumstances, generations, or technology, it still boils down to effective communication and trusting relationships. Over the years, we Baby Boomer teachers have gained much wisdom and have the capability of learning even more. We have the responsibility to convey this wisdom to others by "shepherding the flock" and leading by example willingly. To do anything less would be an abdication of our responsibility and a lost opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of many young people.

"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:48b, New King James).

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