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## Characteristics of the XXI Century students Challenges of the teachers from the last century

**Número Actual**

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Número 24

If we want to understand the way that the new generation of our students learn, it is necessary to know how the specialist divided the different generation of persons.

Scientists have been classifying some generations of the last century. The first are those persons that were born before 1933 are called *World War II generation*, the second is the *Swing generation* (1933-1945); the third *the boomers* are those persons that were born from 1946 to 1964; the *Generation X'ers* were born from 1965-1976; the Net or Echo Boom Generation people born from 1977 to 1997 is heading for the American workplace and is bringing a lot of new realities with it.

There is another type of generation. We can find it in the USA. The Latin Generation X is currently rediscovering their roots and inventing a new, bicultural identity, Known as Generation ñ (EN-yay), many members of this group feel they have it much better than their parents did in America. All of them have a special way of learning, living and thinking.

The generation of our students can be classified as "Net generation". They are different from any generation before them. They are the first to grow up surrounded by digital media. Computers are everywhere in the home, school, factory, and office. There are digital technologies-cameras, video games, and CD-ROMs at their reach. Today's young people think technology is part of the natural landscape. To them, digital technology is no more intimidating than VCR or a toaster.

What do students do on the Net? They manage their personal finances; organize protest movements; check facts; discuss zits; check the scores of their favorite team and chat online with superstars; organize groups to save the rain forest; cast votes; learn more about the illness of their little sister; go to a virtual birthday party; or get video clips from a soon to be released movie.

In fact, digital kids are learning precisely the social skills required for effective interaction in the digital economy. For example they are learning about peer relationships, teamwork, critical thinking fun, friendship across geographies, self expression and self-confidence.

For all ages now, "E-mail me" has become the parting expression of a generation.

Actually we need to change our way of thinking and behaving. This means all of us parents, educators, lawmakers, and business leaders.

In addition the digital media is causing educators and students alike to shift to new ways of thinking about teaching and learning.

For example education is moving from linear to hypermedia learning, now N-Gen access to information is more interactive and nonsequential.

Another one, is from instruction to construction and discovery. This constructivist approach to teaching and learning means that rather than assimilate knowledge that is broadcast by an instructor, the learner constructs knowledge anew. Constructivists argue that people learn best by doing rather than simply by listening.

In addition the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered education does not suggest that the teacher is suddenly playing a less important role. A teacher is equally and valuable in the learner-centered context, for he or she creates and structures what happens in the classroom.

Another point of view is from absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn. This means learning how to synthesize, not just analyze. N-Geners can assess and analyze facts a formidable challenge in a data galaxy of easily accessible information sources. But more important, they can synthesize, they construct higher-level structures and mental images.

Finally today, many boomers reinvent their knowledge base constantly. Learning has become a continuous, life long process. The N-Gen is entering a world of life long learning from day one, and unlike the schools of the boomers, today's educational system can anticipate how to prepare students for the future learning.

Needless to say, a whole generation of teachers needs to learn new tools, new approaches, and new skills. This will be a challenge, not just because of resistance to change by some teachers, they have to make this inevitable transition, they may best turn to the generation raised on and immersed in new technologies.

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