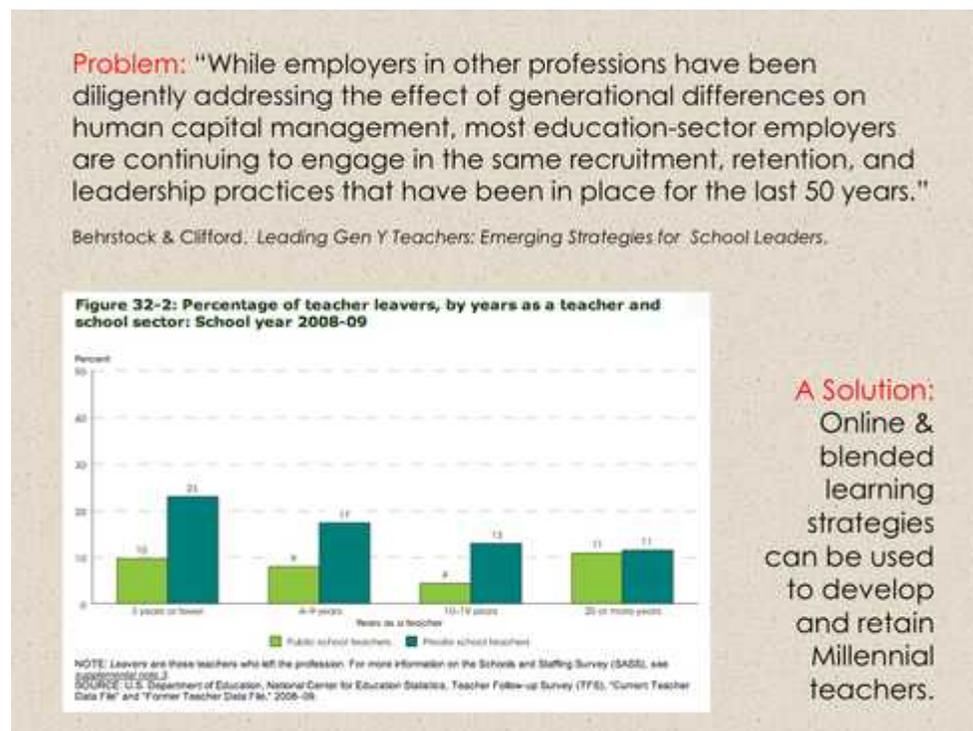


Millennial Teachers

<http://chimeraeducation.weebly.com/1/post/2013/02/millennial-teachers.html>

CHIMERA BLOG by **KELSEY VROOMAN**

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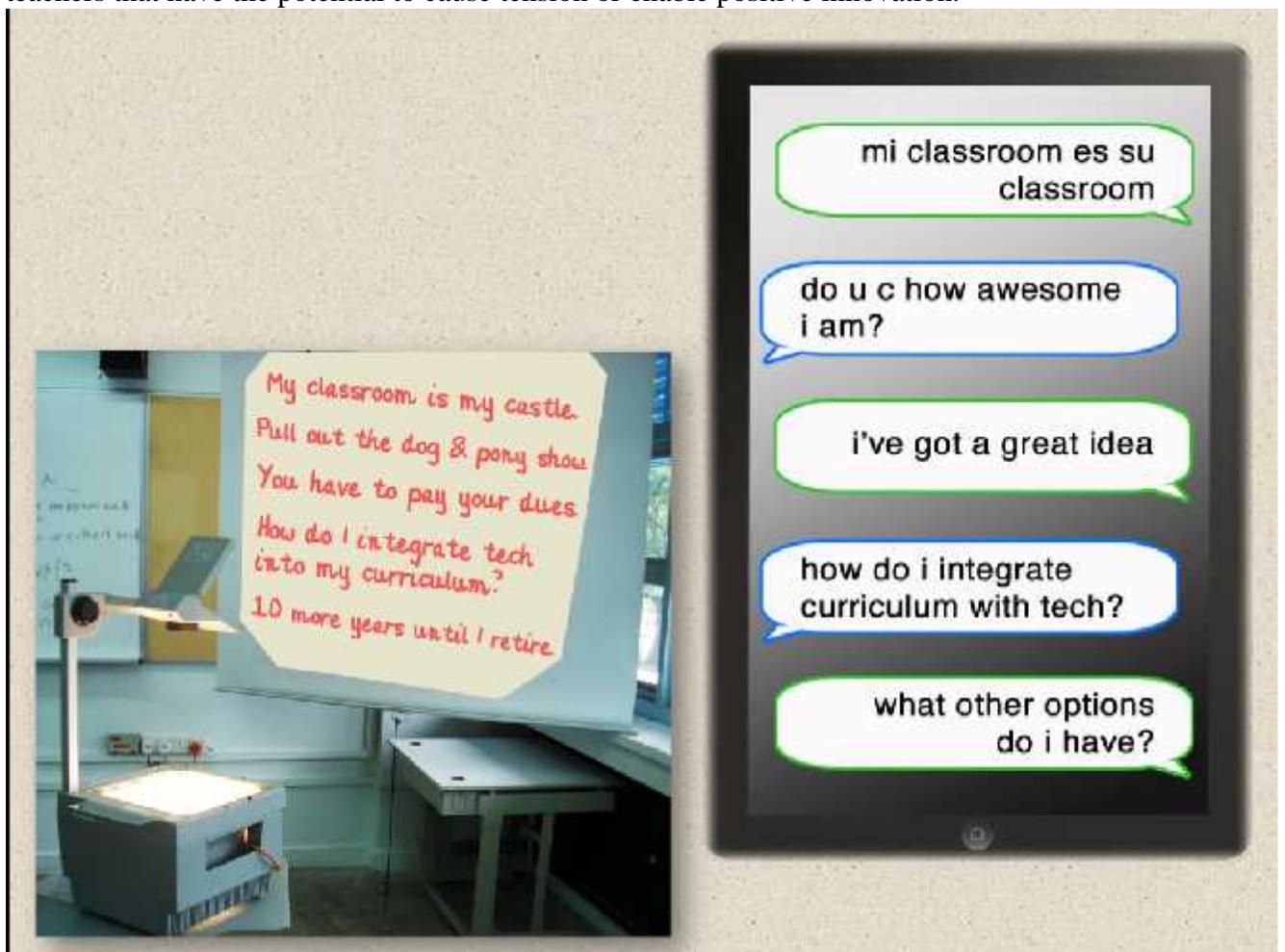


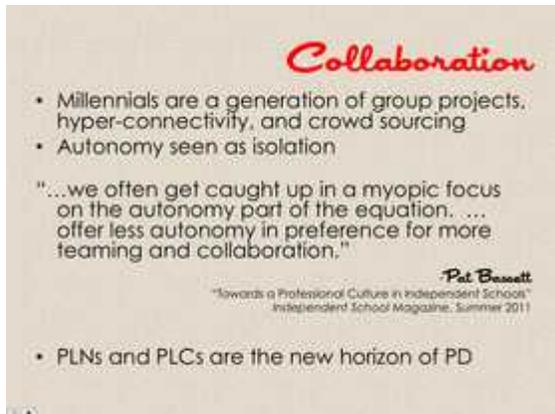
I was recently perusing the NAIS 2013 Annual Conference program, and I was excited to see a featured presentation on Thursday by Nadira Hira entitled "Crossing the Generational Line". Only two weeks ago, at the Online Educational Symposium for Independent Schools in California, I gave a very similar presentation entitled "Leveraging your Millennials". So to foreshadow this presentation, I've posted a few of my slides and revisited the main points of my argument. In sum, no matter if this new generation of teachers entering the classroom is referred to as Gen Yers or Millennials, they pose retention and management challenges as well as offer unique opportunities to independent schools across the country.

Before dismissing my focus on Millennials as irrelevant or even ageist, consider the shocking independent school teacher retention statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Education. Far outpacing their public school colleagues, a whopping 23 % of new teachers with under three years of experience and 17% of teachers with 4-9 years of experience left the profession during the 2008-2009 school year. The vanguard of the millennials, or my teaching cohort, would have been teaching for 5 years or less in 2008-2009. Although assuredly there are individuals from other generations included among these new teachers, one cannot ignore the large proportion of Millennials that comprise these two groups. Thus, on today's independent school campus, the teacher retention problem is in large part a Millennial problem to which we need to craft Millennial solutions.

Within faculties where three generations coexist and often collide, a simple fact must be acknowledged: we interact with the world and with each other not only through a cultural lens, or a gendered lens, but also through a generational lens.

Independent schools must scrutinize their communities, professional development programs, and management strategies to not only attract the best talent this new generation has to offer, but also retain them. To help in this endeavor, I've identified 5 mindset shifts taking place in Millennial teachers that have the potential to cause tension or enable positive innovation.



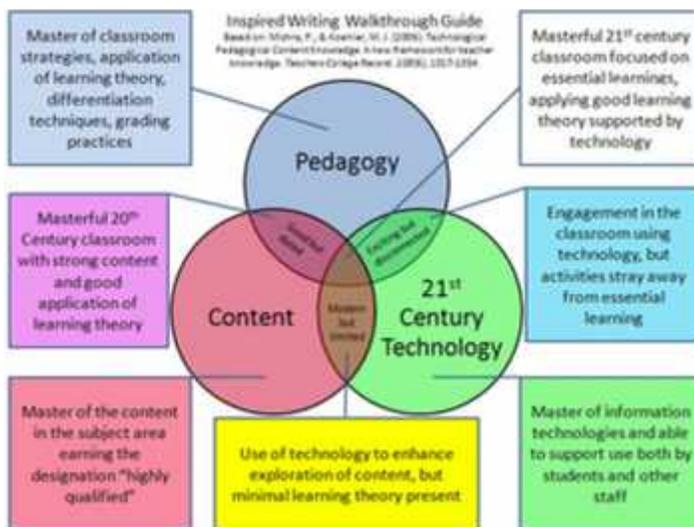


To begin, a traditional attitude among teachers is to think "My classroom is my castle and I am master of it. I control everything that goes on within these four walls, and I won't tolerate challenges to my authority". Autonomy is one of the most cherished values in independent schools, where teachers are intellectual powerhouses and authorities in their field. For example, when I was hired at St. Mary's Academy, I was specifically told that I would be in charge of making my own curriculum and that I would have no interference. Instead of being energized by this autonomy, I was terrified. The reason? I come from a generation that has suffered from a severe lack of autonomy. Millennials' parents were ever present, group work was stressed in school, and our generation crowdsources advice from friends and strangers to make decisions. Autonomy to many Millennials is not liberating, it's isolating, especially as a new teacher. NAIS President Pat Bassett echoed this sentiment when he called for independent schools to distance themselves from "a myopic focus on the autonomy part of the equation" and adopt more collaborative strategies. Creating time in the day's schedule for collaborative work and mentoring relationships, as well as encouraging Millennials to plug into online professional learning networks that are rooted in the social media tools we already feel comfortable with, such as blogs, forums, or twitter, are great ways to break through the wall of autonomy.

A corollary to this shift is the oft-discussed Millennial desire for increased feedback. Millennials have grown up in a world of status updates, where friends from around the world comment within hours on our random thoughts and experiences. Where no news was considered good news for previous generations, no news to a Millennial is a sign of neglect. Silence from our superiors makes us suspect that we're not coming up in the administration's metaphorical news feed or even worse, we've been defriended! Better systems of feedback and observation are critical for Millennial teachers to feel valued, challenged, and appreciated. But let's be honest, even the most industrious administrator wouldn't be able to fulfill many Millennials' demand for feedback! In fact, according to a 2006 Hudson intergenerational survey, 25% of Millennials claimed they wanted weekly feedback from their superiors! There are some interesting tech-enabled models, however, that could provide frequent and quality feedback while preserving administrators' sanity, such as the English Companion Ning, which has members upload webcam footage of their teaching for the larger community to comment upon. Creating online communities of practice for new and/or young teachers in independent schools across the nation that take advantage of webcams and other synchronous communication methods would be an interesting and exciting experiment.

Third, a mindset shift that is at the root of most intergenerational friction among faculty is the Millennial rejection of the established notion that one has to first pay their dues in order for their ideas to have weight. Take my biography for example. Despite only 8 years in the classroom, I have taken on leadership roles not only in my school, but also in organizations such as NAIS and ISTE, and from time to time I have experienced some push back for my "ambition". In a 2011 MTV survey entitled "No Collar Workers", a full 76% of Millennials claimed their boss could learn a lot from them, and 65% insisted that they should be mentoring older coworkers. The 2006 Hudson survey reported that 81% of Millennials said that it was important to have direct access to senior management, while only 44% of the Baby Boomer generation agreed.

This might reek of arrogance, but before you condemn Millennials, you need to acknowledge the role society, and yes, even the education system has played in creating this entitled monster. Millennial kids are told constantly that we are special by our hovering parents, that we can do anything we set our minds to by our encouraging teachers, and that we can change the world by well-meaning schools that fly us around the nation to attend leadership conferences. Furthermore, in a world where you can be famous overnight with a creative viral video, the idea of slowly work up the ranks is unappealing. We have internalized Lady Gaga's lyrics "We are all born superstars", and superstars are not intimidated by people in positions of power or hierarchies. They transcend them. For better or worse, organizational structures are seen by Millennials as flat, with everyone from the head of school to the board of trustees as accessible. If independent schools continue to mandate rigid verticality based on seniority, Millennials will view your school as inauthentic and archaic.



Next, our average established independent school teacher is well versed in content knowledge, or what to teach, and pedagogical knowledge, or how to teach, be it UBD, PBL, or any other series of three letter acronyms. The piece they were missing and to which edtech directors have devoted countless hours is how to achieve the T in TPACK, or how to integrate technology into their skill set. Millennial teachers, on the other hand, are not asking for help on how to use tech. With few exceptions, figuring out technology is a more intuitive process for the chronically tech-dependent. But what lots of us don't have is the pedagogical knowledge that comes from years of experience, and the ability to apply our tech skills to the improvement of student learning. This mutual need is a perfect opportunity to create cross-generational

reciprocal mentoring relationships, pairing tech savvy Millennials with pedagogically experienced veteran teachers. Reciprocal mentorships could address Millennials' need for collaboration, and our desire to be part of the solution, not just a passive recipient of a mentor's imparted wisdom.

Finally, the last shift is perhaps the most troubling to administrators. Previous generations of teachers were lifers, who remained in the classroom for decades. There is no longer the case. Millennials are constantly scanning their options, and if we are to reverse the troubling retainment trends, new strategies need to be devised.

As a generation, Millennials have little to no brand loyalty. We switched our Nintendo for a Sega, Sega for Playstation, Playstation for Xbox, Xbox for Playstation2. Society has taught us that there will always be a better version just around the corner, so we don't get too attached to our iPhone 5 or job, because Version 6.0 probably has some cool new feature that we've been waiting for. Couple this with a short attention span, and you have disaster for human resources. Millennials are bored if we're not evolving, and if we're bored we're looking for a new job. Living through the Great Recession has gotten us used to the prospect of being unemployed, because after all it was our generation who was either the first to be let go or stuck living at our parents' house in unemployment.

So what are Millennials looking for in a job? Not salary, but flexibility and meaningful work. A Mercer human resources study found that 83% of Millennials indicated that they were motivated by flexibility, while for 73% salary was a motivating factor. And according to the MTV "No Collar Workers" survey, millennials want three things from their workplace: flexibility, respect, and free food.

So is there hope? I think so. As independent schools develop blended and online strategies, the flexibility that comes from these platforms is inherently attractive to Millennial teachers. The chance to grow our skill set and move fully or partially online speaks to our need for growth, and the work anywhere anytime format blends perfectly with our desire to have an integrated work-life balance. Add to this that many Millennials have experience with online or blended courses as students in university, and you have the perfect candidate.