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Generations in Dialogue. Teachers, Parents, Children – Generational Differences and Potential Difficulties in Mutual Understanding

Pokolenia w dialogu. Nauczyciele, rodzice, dzieci – różnice międzypokoleniowe i możliwości porozumienia

Abstract: The aim of the article is to analyze the issues related to differences between generations and potential areas of difficulties and their overcoming in the educational dialogue between teachers, parents and students. The first part of the text establishes terminology and presents the method of distinguishing subsequent generations along with their brief characteristics based on a review of literature and Twenge's research. The further part of the text indicates possible configurations of intergenerational relations and areas of potential difficulties in mutual understanding. Finally, opportunities for using the potential of each generation were identified.

Keywords: generation; generational differences; potential difficulties in mutual understanding

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest analiza różnic między pokoleniami oraz możliwych obszarów trudności i ich pokonywania w dialogu edukacyjnym między nauczycielami, rodzicami i uczniami. W pierwszej części tekstu dokonano ustaleń terminologicznych oraz zaprezentowano sposób wyodrębniania kolejnych pokoleń wraz z ich krótką charakterystyką na podstawie przeglądu literatury oraz badań Twenge. W dalszej części tekstu wskazano możliwe konfiguracje relacji międzypokoleniowych oraz obszary potencjalnych trudności we wzajemnym zrozumieniu. Na zakończenie wskazano możliwości wykorzystania potencjału każdego pokolenia.

Słowa kluczowe: pokolenie; różnice pokoleniowe; potencjalne trudności we wzajemnym rozumieniu

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to desk research the issues concerning the generational differences, the potential difficulties and their overcoming in the educational dialogue between teachers, parents and pupils. The starting point for the identification of differences between the selected generations in the presented article is the long-term research conducted in the USA by Jean M. Twenge.

Each of the generations presented has its own characteristics. Their experiences make the values, attitudes, behaviour or the language used different. However, living alongside each other, teachers, educators or parents undertake shared actions determined by the child's well-being, and therefore need to understand each other. Becoming aware of the differences affecting generations of teachers, parents and children can be the first step towards an effective educational dialogue.

The initial part of the text provides terminological findings and a brief characterisation of the generations. This is followed by an analysis of intergenerational relations and areas of potential difficulties in mutual understanding and proposals for tapping the potential of each generation.

THE TERM "GENERATION"

In encyclopaedic terms, the term "generation" is "a part of the population distinguished by age: older or younger than others by approximately the time that elapses from the birth of parents to the birth of children" (encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/pokolenie;3959194). In the literature the term has either biological and genetic or cultural, socio-political connotations. The biological sciences also use the term generation (Latin: *generatio*, "giving birth, creating"). In the social sciences, several possibilities of defining *generation* are indicated, which may be oriented, e.g. towards kinship patterns, social roles, average age of difference between subsequent generations, ahistorical orientation referring to persons in a given life phase/period of development (children, adults, etc.) or historical, in which case it refers to a community values, attitudes and experiences. Research and analyses concerning various aspects of the functioning of representatives of subsequent generations, their values, choices, decisions and actions were conducted by many authors both in Poland and around the world (Brzozowska, 2005; Garewicz, 1983, p. 76; Mannheim, 1992/1993, p. 57; Ossowska, 1963, p. 48; Szafraniec, 2022; Świda-Ziemba, 1995, 2005).

Already at the beginning of the 20th century, Dilthey formulated a concept that still provides a framework for identifying generations. He said that a generation is formed by people who, during their youth, were subject to the same external influences (Jaeger, 1977, p. 432). In the words of Sztopka (2002),

a generation is a collective of people who experienced the same important historical events, lived through the same situations, reacted to the same events. (...) This similarity of biographies, this parallelism of experiences, even though they were experienced in different places, at different times and with different intensity, is equally important because it permanently shapes the mentality, attitudes and hierarchies of values of the participants. (p. 154)

In Polish culture, we therefore speak, for example, of the “Generation of Colum-buses” as a term used to refer to writers and poets who were prematurely mature, confronted with a brutal reality, whose work was shaped by the events and experiences of the Second World War. We also speak of the JP2 generation, whose values, attitudes, and perception of reality and of themselves were shaped by the pontificate of John Paul II (e-civitas.pl/pl/kosciol/pokolenie-jp2-czyli-kto-2).

The core of the thesis positing a momentous event as a shaping factor for a generation is the condition of experiencing them at the time of identity formation (childhood and youth). Among momentous events, both positive and negative ones are designated, such as a meaningful idea/value, exceptional discoveries, war, acts of terrorism, catastrophes, pandemic, or crisis. These are the events that influence the worldview of a given generation.

Strauss and Howe’s theory was of similar importance in explaining generational differences in the 1990s. The authors believe that the history of Western civilisation repeats itself in cycles of 80 years on average, divided into 4 turnings. Subsequent generations raised in a particular turning have specific, unifying characteristics. The turnings recur in the same order: the **High** phase with its characteristic conformism and sterility, the **Awakening** phase, in which the generation is characterised by romantic rebellion against institutions and the proclamation of eccentric ideas, the **Unraveling** phase and its characteristic flowering of individualism, triggered by disillusionment with the ideas of previous generations and the **Crisis** phase, in which the generation is dominated by a growing sense of threat. According to the authors, four types of generation occurring in the cycle are indicated in this connection: the idealistic generation, the reactive generation, the civic generation and the adaptive generation (Folta, 2020, p. 27; Howe & Strauss, 1999, p. 84).

Twenge, on the other hand, points out that in determining subsequent generations, another variable must be taken into account. She stresses that the root cause of the differences between generations stems not necessarily from the events, but from the evolving technology. It is technology that mediates the amplification of generational differences: individualism and the slowing pace of life (Twenge, 2024, p. 10).

The following are among the most significant inventions that have proved to be crucial in terms of generational shifts: telephone, television (provided instant communication, and immediate experience of events, but also led to a gradual decline in reading), white goods (changed the structure of the labour market, offered more leisure time, and increased individual independence), contraception (led to a gradual

decline in the birth rate), computer technologies (contributed to an increase in productivity, but also transformed the labor market structure), social media (there was a decline in social interaction, children's physical activity, a change in the way people spent their time, and polarisation of social and political views) (Twenge, 2024, p. 16). And these are just some examples of inventions and their implications. Most of them are interconnected, even setting off a chain reaction of changes in people's behaviour and attitudes, and leading to events that have become significant.

Every change concerning the development of technology changes the way we think, feel and behave. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for the development of individualism. Just as agriculture changed the lifestyle of our ancestors, liberation from the drudgery of work directs attention to one's own needs, desires or goals. It also changes the perception of happiness and the attitude towards mental health (Harari, 2019, p. 56) and the feeling of security (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2023, p. 44 et seq.).

The next section of the text provides a brief characterisation of the generations.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GENERATIONS

The terminology indicated below to define subsequent generations is used by sociologists and cultural researchers, including Twenge. It is accompanied by the delineation of birth year boundaries. As Twenge (2024) says, "it is clear that people have different experiences depending on the year they were born" (p. 35). She is convinced that the time of our birth has a stronger influence on our personality and attitudes than the family that raised us (Twenge, 2024, p. 10). Citing the words of Landon Jones, she pinpoints: "You don't get to opt out of your generation" (Twenge, 2024, p. 35). She also emphasises that not everyone is a typical representative of his or her generation, because not everyone in a generation is the same, and differentiating factors can be, for example, gender, race or religion. Generational change takes place not only at the individual level, but also in the field of cultural norms.

Generations distinguished by the delineation of birth year boundaries:

- Silent Generation – born 1925–1945
- Baby Boomers – born 1946–1964
- Generation X – born 1965–1979
- Generation Y or Millennials – born 1980–1994
- Generation Z (iGen or zoomers, snowflakes, the void generation, Yummies, HENRYs) – born 1995–2012
- Generation Alpha or the Polar Generation – born after 2013.

In the characterisation of the generations presented further on, the silent generation and baby boomers are omitted as they do not directly concern the objectives of the text.

Generation X – born 1965–1979

They are the 45–60-year-olds of today. A generation shaped by the rapid development of new technologies, despite the fact that their occurrence in everyday life was only possible in early adolescence, already beyond the time of school education, the members of this generation are comfortable with technology. This is the first internet-smartphone generation and also the last to experience an analogue childhood. Generation X played in playgrounds, went out on their own to play with their peers in the backyard, used the natural environment to organise outdoor play, solved conflicts with playmates on their own, and acquired other social skills including communication without parental interference. The time of their childhood and youth was played out in the shadow of the rise of terrorism, an aftermath of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Terrorism was a phenomenon permanently present in political life on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as an element of information warfare that affected public emotions. According to Sterling, the main aim of terrorism brewing at the time was to cause destabilisation and panic in Western societies (Sterling, 1990, pp. 313–325). The atmosphere of tension and fear has had a significant impact on the shaping of Generation X's attitudes and values. A second important factor characterising the time of their early adolescence was the developing individualism including acceptance of diversity and tolerance.

Generation X are hard-working, loyal and responsible, and value stability and high social status at work. They value being able to work in one place until retirement and being appreciated by employers for their experience. They accept hierarchy. They associate their work with duties performed during set hours, e.g. from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and they are also able to engage in ancillary tasks because of their loyalty and identification with their workplace, as well as the financial factor that motivates them. Their free time is that after 3 p.m. Their actions are characterised by resourcefulness and pragmatism. They have high expectations of themselves, which also makes their expectations of others significant. They appreciate everything that is of high value, good quality and lasts a long time, so the objects around them are likely to be repaired rather than replaced. They are also hardy, independent and self-sufficient. They treat the internet mainly as a source of information and social media, although they use it, is not the axis of their relationships. They prefer face-to-face meetings and have no problem with being offline. When it comes to values and norms, tradition is important to them, but they are also accepting of diversity, as they are members of a generation of evolving individuality (Twenge, 2024, p. 179).

Generation Y/Millennials – born 1980–1994

They are the current 30–45 year olds. Also referred to as the millennial generation. They no longer remember the times of the so-called Cold War and the Poland of the communist state. They grew up in a time of economic expansion, the computer

revolution and post-Cold War optimism. They are the first generation to actively use technology and digital media in every area of their lives and to recognise the potential of the Internet. They have a high opinion of themselves and are self-confident, which also leads to exaggerated expectations. The atmosphere of their childhood was full of a focus on the self, giving them confidence. They experienced upbringing by parents focused on conscious parenting, heavily involved in organising developmental activities for the children. This type of parenting is referred to as “helicopter parenting” (Twenge, 2024, p. 277). The emphasis on building positive self-esteem as a result of parental overprotection and strict developmental supervision has led to inflated expectations and entitlement. Millennials do not seek authority and are convinced that everything is in their own hands and that no one can impose anything on them. They take criticism badly, including feedback, and are averse to hierarchy.

At work, they are interested in their own development, which makes them not bound to one company/place and employer. They change their place of employment relatively often and without difficulty. They are not so much interested in stability as in new experiences. They like changes and are flexible. They also prefer a rather task-oriented job and find it better to work in projects. They expect their employer to set goals and tasks, but have trouble accepting responsibility. They are good at solving standard problems, but are worse at dealing with non-standard ones. They expect to organise their work in such a way that they have more flexibility to manage their time according to the principle that work must not be restrictive. They want to take their rest when they decide or need it, not when it is imposed on them. They value leisure time as much as quality of life, which is more important to them than possessions, so they will be motivated by meaningful, developmental goals rather than financial incentive solutions. Because of their social media prowess, they are open to meeting new people through media. They also often strongly defer transition into adulthood and are late in deciding to start a family and parenthood.

Generation Z (iGen) – born 1995–2012

The current 17–30-year-olds. They are the most “patchwork” generation, as demonstrated by the variety of names used to describe this generation. They are most often referred to as Generation Z or zoomers. The term “iGen” (introduced by Twenge, 2019) is also known in the literature. They are sometimes referred to as “snowflakes” (MBridge, 2021), and the unusual name was taken from the book *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk. The prevailing view among members of this generation is that everyone should have the same rights and the same opportunities. The iGen generation has given a new flavour to the concept of individualisation. They believe that everyone has the right to choose their gender identity, because it is a matter of personal choice. Above that, everyone must be treated as a unique individual. Generation Z is very much self-centred, so any criticism – including constructive criticism – can be taken

the wrong way. They can hardly take any criticism of their own. Convinced of their own uniqueness, they may at times overestimate their competencies and expect excessively high evaluations.

The iGen members are overly emotional, have a high anxiety level and have problems taking responsibility for their own actions (www.mbridge.pl/blog/pokolenie-platkow-sniegu/). Imposed responsibilities often frighten them. They are unhappy, depressed and prone to self-destructive behaviour. As a result, one may also encounter the term “void generation” due to profound mental problems, depressiveness and the need for therapeutic help.

Their lives reside to a large extent online, which means that they have few social skills needed in the real world, but they are very comfortable in the social world created virtually. The Internet holds no secrets from them, it is their natural environment and source of knowledge, and they find information there quickly and efficiently. They have a good grasp of new technologies and learn quickly.

They also have high expectations (car, computer, phone, high salary) and are demanding. For this reason, they are also referred to as the HENRY generation (High Earner Not Rich Yet), because they value a lavish life-style and take out loans for this purpose. They are happy to spend their parents' money, which is why they are sometimes referred to as Yummies (Young Urban Men). This fact is also due to and closely linked with another characteristic of theirs – prolonged adolescence. Generation Z is extending not only their adolescence, but also their childhood. In many ways, today's 18-year-olds resemble the 14-year-olds of previous generations.

They have a strong need for both physical and psychological safety. It is largely due to their influence that restrictions on freedom of speech have emerged, as both they and their parents advocated for the recognition that speech can constitute a form of violence (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2023, p. 53, 79 ff.; Twenge, 2024, p. 448). Given Generation Z's prevailing attitudes toward the right to individual self-expression, they possess a strong drive to change the world. They are activists who engage in efforts against all forms of discrimination and inequality. As a generation raised by overprotective parents, they struggle with following instructions, sustaining attention, and coping with adversity.

In German studies from 2015, the generation born around the turn of the century was labeled Generation R (Relaxed), a term reflecting their declared values such as tolerance and openness, a willingness to act for the common good, and a readiness to embrace novelty and broaden horizons (Rabiega, 2015).

Generation Alpha (the Polar Generation), born after 2013

Generation Alpha (the Polar Generation) is only beginning to be understood. It is the first generation to be born into a fully digital world (Twenge, 2024, p. 533). They have ubiquitous access to technology practically from birth. One can confidently say

that this is a generation of digital natives (Prensky, 2001). Their parents are members of Generation Y/Millennials or Generation Z/iGen, who, following the example of their own parents, practice helicopter parenting, supervising every minute of their children's lives.

This is also the generation that experienced the COVID-19 pandemic during their time in educational institutions (e.g. preschool and the early years of schooling). The use of media and the accelerated development and implementation of technologies related to remote education have led members of Generation Alpha to perceive digital educational interaction as natural. Interactive tools, educational games, online platforms, and apps constitute their natural learning environment. However, their way of functioning is markedly different from that of Generation X or even the Millennials. While previous generations – due to cultural tools such as reading linear texts – tend to process information sequentially and prioritize text over image, the youngest generation prefers hypertextual and hypermedia formats, free access to information, and parallel information processing. Visual and auditory stimuli are more important to them than written text. Having had access from the earliest months of life to devices constantly connected to the internet, and being bombarded with iconic (visual) stimuli while lacking opportunities to engage in enactive representation (Bruner, 1978, p. 531), they exhibit shortened attention spans and require a wide variety of stimuli to sustain interest. Learning must be dynamic, interactive, and exceptionally engaging. The fast pace of life, the ability to change things with a single click, and the instant availability of vast amounts of information mean that Generation Alpha uses technology extensively, but also struggles to focus on a single, priority task. The multitude of stimuli and the pace of life lead children from Generation Alpha to require immediate gratification in order to stay focused.

Due to a reduced number of real-world social interactions, their emotional well-being and mental health may be at risk.

COMPARISON OF GENERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

A comparison of the most important characteristics of subsequent generations is presented in the table below (Table 1). The criteria selected differentiate behavioral patterns in everyday situations.

Understanding differences in how each generation perceives reality, themselves, and others is primarily intended to promote mutual understanding. Gaining insight into another person's perspective – especially in contexts requiring cooperation, collaboration, or effective communication – can significantly facilitate these interactions.

Table 1. Summary of compared characteristics

Compared characteristics	Generation X (1965–1979)	Generation Y (1980–1994)	Generation Z (1995–2012)	Generation Alpha (born after 2013)
Approach to work or learning	Live to work.	Work to live. Seek personal growth. Task-oriented. Tasks must be meaningful.	Want to explore and change the world. Share knowledge online.	Multitasking, speed, constant change, difficulty maintaining attention.
Leisure time	Important but externally regulated.	Very important; they seek work–life balance and make their own choices.	Consumed by the internet or activism.	Less physical activity; more time spent using cutting-edge technologies.
New technologies	A work tool.	A part of life and a work tool.	Taken for granted. Very well mastered.	Ubiquitous. They know no other world.
Social media	Prefer personal contact and face-to-face meetings.	Important tool for social relations. Checking it even during work is natural.	Digital natives. Essential to life. Life happens there.	Fully digital natives.
Self-perception	See themselves as part of a community.	Feel unique and exceptional. Do not accept criticism.	Fluid identity, self-defined. Over-sensitive, depressive tendencies, at risk of self-destructive behavior.	At risk of self-destructiveness and depressive tendencies.
Preferred work system	Fixed work hours. Clear separation between work and personal life.	Task-oriented. Perform well on standard tasks, prefer being guided.	Nihilistic; believe effort is not worthwhile.	Require constant stimulation.
Attitude toward change	Reluctant.	Open and flexible	Break norms and rules. Oriented toward change. Prolong the process of growing up.	Constant change.
Attitude toward hierarchy	Hierarchy is natural.	Difficulty with subordination; prefer partnership.	Disregard hierarchy. Support limiting freedom of speech for extreme views. Uncompromising.	Still largely unknown.
Preferred motivation	Primarily financial, external.	Personal development, meaningfulness of actions.	Avoidance of anything perceived as threatening to their safety.	Curiosity, activity, dynamism, multiplicity of stimuli.

Source: Author's own study based on literature.

GENERATIONS IN COMMUNICATION: THE ISSUE OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In this part of the article, based on the previously outlined generational characteristics, an attempt is made to identify specific areas of potential communication differences between teachers, parents, and students from different generations. Three possible generational constellations are considered:

- teachers belong to Generation X, parents to Generation Y, and children to Generation Z or Alpha;
- both teachers and parents belong to Generation Y, and students to Generation Alpha;
- teachers are from Generation X or Y, parents already belong to Generation Z, and children to Generation Alpha.

The first comparison (Table 2) refers to a situation where teachers are from Generation X, parents from Generation Y, and students from Generation Z or Alpha. The greatest discrepancies in communication may stem from differing approaches to tradition.

Table 2. Generation of teachers X, parents Y, students Z or Alpha

Teachers Generation X (1965–1979)	Parents Generation Y (1980–1994)	Students Generation Z (1995–2012) or Alpha (born after 2013)
• value tradition, including in learning; respect the work ethic • accept hierarchy • have a strong sense of responsibility • expect diligence from others • prefer face-to-face meetings • oriented toward scheduled work hours and prefer set meeting times • characterized by pragmatism, independence, resourcefulness, loyalty, conscientiousness • resistant to change • use only essential technology	• expect clear, factual communication and specific task assignments • focused on monitoring both their child and the teacher's actions, but may also be demanding • require assurance of safety • scheduled meetings are not always acceptable; they think in terms of time flexibility • hold a high opinion of themselves, see themselves as exceptional, and reject criticism • dislike being told what to do, "know better", act independently, do not listen, reject authority and hierarchy • value their free time and are not always willing to engage • use media as a communication tool • practice "helicopter parenting"	Generation Z: • oversensitive, pessimistic, depressive • believe "language must not hurt feelings" • seek identity, focused on individuality, expect individualized approaches • demand recognition and protection of diversity; sensitive to discrimination • smartphone use can become a source of conflict in class • learn online Generation Alpha (post-2013): • difficulty maintaining attention • non-linear information processing • low levels of physical activity • few social contacts, weak social skills • heightened competitiveness and sensitivity

Source: Author's own study.

While Generation X teachers value traditional methods of working, established and reinforced ways of functioning, the importance of authority, and recognize hierarchy, they also tend to maintain a more formal style in relationships. Generation Y parents, on the other hand, are more likely to appreciate partnership-based relationships, a less formal communication style, and flexibility in approaching tasks. Generation X teachers often operate from a position of authority and are more inclined to use a directive style, whereas Generation Y parents want to feel they have an influence on the situation and the direction of actions, and they want to understand the purpose behind them. They are more likely to act effectively within a well-integrated, mutually understanding group that shares the same values. They willingly engage in activities that are close to their interests and that they prefer. Therefore, the teacher would be better off initiating opportunities for parents to get to know each other better and, when it comes to setting the direction of the work, ensuring that they feel they are co-creating the action plan. In problematic situations, it is a good idea to seek their input. It is also worth noting that Generation Y parents are proficient in communication using digital technologies, and scheduled face-to-face meetings – preferred by Generation X teachers – do not always appeal to them.

As for Generation Z students, the most significant communication challenges for Generation X teachers include the students' expectation of highly individualized approaches, their demand for recognition of diversity, and their sensitivity to how they are addressed and the language used. It may also be difficult for more traditionally minded teachers to understand the learning styles of Generation Z, for whom technology is second nature, while linear text processing is less familiar. Additionally, Generation Z does not treat smartphones merely as objects but as extensions of themselves. With regard to Generation Alpha, all traits observed in Generation Z are further intensified. The need for constant stimulation to maintain attention is becoming even more pronounced. The situation shifts slightly when both teachers and parents belong to Generation Y, and students to Generation Alpha (Table 3).

Table 3. Generation of teachers Y, parents Y, students Alpha

Teachers Generation Y (1980–1994)	Parents Generation Y (1980–1994)	Students Generation Alpha (born after 2013)
• tend to reject hierarchy and authority, prefer to do things their own way, dislike criticism, and perceive themselves as exceptional; • task-oriented, especially when tasks are clear and standardized;	• high self-regard, a sense of uniqueness, aversion to being told what to do, dislike criticism; • aversion to being told what to do, task-focused mindset – if the task is clear, meaningful, and understandable; • they “know better”, dislike hierarchy, act independently, and often disregard authority;	• have difficulty maintaining attention; • process information non-linearly; • engage in little physical activity and have few social interactions; • display intense competitiveness and weak social skills;

Teachers Generation Y (1980–1994)	Parents Generation Y (1980–1994)	Students Generation Alpha (born after 2013)
• value their free time and are not always willing to get involved; • view media as a communication tool; • often have high expectations and can be demanding of others; • use a “helicopter parenting” style that often results in oversimplified tasks and a lack of expectation for student independence	• value their free time and do not always want to get involved; • demanding, focused on monitoring the child and the teacher’s actions; • expect strict safety oversight; • view fixed-time meetings as inconvenient due to their flexible approach to time; • communicate through digital media and apply the same “helicopter” approach in parenting – overprotective, limiting autonomy and real social interaction	• are often overly sensitive – an effect of overprotective parenting;

Source: Author’s own study.

One might assume that when teachers and parents belong to the same generation, communication would be easy. However, this is not always the case due to the very traits they share. In some areas – like the use of media and technology as communication tools or the emphasis on monitoring children’s activity and ensuring their safety – common ground can be found relatively easily. But in other aspects, it may prove more difficult. Both sides can be overly demanding, which may result in shifting responsibility onto one another and frequent complaints. A shared belief in their own uniqueness, combined with high self-esteem and difficulty accepting criticism, can make communication harder – since each party insists on doing things their own way.

In relation to students, paradoxically, teachers and parents from Generation Y may unintentionally reinforce undesirable outcomes due to the “helicopter parenting” strategy and the way the presence of technology and media are understood in a child’s life. They may lack the determination needed to foster children’s independence, ability to focus, or readiness to face challenges. This might result in intensified competition, acceptance of minimal face-to-face interaction, a lack of peer collaboration, reduced physical activity, and poor development of skills necessary to cope with failure or adversity – all in the name of the student’s comfort and safety.

The third possibility of contact between teachers, parents and students concerns the situation where Generation Z is already becoming parents. In this final scenario, no table was used to avoid repeating earlier content.

When Generation Z enters the role of parent, their heightened sensitivity – even oversensitivity – especially in response to communication about problems or mistakes, can become a major source of relational conflict. Generation Z tends to view the world pessimistically, is acutely aware of inequality and discrimination, and emphasizes

the importance of recognizing individuality. As such, they require communication in a “language that does not hurt feelings”. They pay close attention to the choice of words and tone of voice, aiming to avoid negative emotions. For them, safety is also about emotional comfort – meaning they may interpret spoken words and gestures as offensive, even when such interpretations are (from the perspective of, for example, a Generation X teacher) exaggerated or unfounded. As parents, Generation Z are also highly protective, focused on control, and closely monitor all aspects of their child’s functioning. Introducing a smartphone at a very young age is entirely normal to them, which may clash with the expectations of teachers from Generations X or Y – especially regarding the importance of play and activities that support cognitive development not enhanced by screens or computers. Because of their constant online presence, they quickly and easily form groups and can react quickly to information or actions of the teacher. Sometimes their online comments can become a source of serious communication problems. The intensified sensitivity of Generation Z parents teaches a lot about this new form of individualism.

CONCLUSION

Generational differences are not a new concept. Differences between the generations of parents and children have always been a part of human experience and have long been the subject of social science research. However, with today’s rapid technological advancement, we view these differences from a new perspective. The goal of analyzing generational differences is not to stigmatize but to recognize the potential of each generation, encourage mutual exchange, and foster learning from one another – a point emphasized as early as the 1960s and 1970s by Mead (2000, p. 23). It is about achieving understanding as a path to communication. The notion of *generation* and the search for *generational* archetypes continue to spark interest, but the explanations often provoke discussion and doubts. Nevertheless, unless generational differences are identified and understood, meaningful communication between generations will remain difficult – and educational dialogue will not always be effective.

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