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Online Skill Development For Generation Y Students: A case study of an online negotiation model for external law students

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Abstract

The majority of undergraduate students attending Australian universities now belong to Generation Y, and bring with them a unique outlook shaped by the social, political and cultural context of their childhood years. This change in outlook brings with it a shift in learning preferences, so to ensure a more effective learning environment for Generation Y students, learning and teaching strategies must adapt to address these preferences. In particular, research has shown that Generation Y learners favour experimental activities, the use of technology, structure and teamwork. This pedagogy has been adopted in the development of an interactive online model which adapts chat room technology to increase flexibility for external law students engaged in the development of negotiation skills in the undergraduate law unit, Trusts, at the Queensland University of Technology.

Keywords: Generation Y, Skill Development, Chat Room Technology, Active Learning, Collaboration

Stream: Pedagogies and Teaching Practices

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2004, it was predicted[1] that by 2006 most undergraduate students attending Australian universities would belong to Generation Y (those born between 1980 and 2000).[2] These students bring with them a unique

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[1] Diana Jonas-Dwyer and Romana Pospisil, 'The Millennial Effect: Implications for Academic Development' (Paper presented at the 2004 HERDSA Conference – Transforming Knowledge into Wisdom: Holistic Approaches to Teaching and Learning, Sarawak, 4-7 July 2004) 197.

[2] Generation Y students are otherwise known as: Millennials; Echo Boomers (Claire Raines, *Managing Millennials* (2002) <http://www.generationsatwork.com/articles/millenials.htm> at 23 May 2006); Digital Natives (Marc Prensky, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* (2001) <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/default.asp> at 26 May 2006); or the Net Generation (Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (1998); Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger (eds), *Educating the Net Generation* (2005) Educause <http://www.educause.edu/content.asp?page_id= 5989&bhcp=1> at 23 May 2006).

outlook, or characteristic set, shaped by the social, political and cultural context of their childhood and teenage years.[3]

This change in outlook, compared with prior student generations,[4] brings a shift in learning preferences and suggests that, to ensure a more effective learning environment for Generation Y students, teaching and learning strategies must adapt to address these preferences.[5] Indeed, it has been found that there is a correlation between changing the style of presentation of teaching materials to better accommodate Generation Y learners and improved assessment performance.[6] Therefore, by understanding what today's students most value, we may design and implement more student-centred teaching methods so as to more effectively engage them, and positively influence their learning experience and outcomes.

This paper begins by examining the characteristics and learning styles of Generation Y students. It then describes an interactive online teaching and learning strategy implemented in Trusts Law at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) which was developed to accommodate these preferences, and integrated into a blended model which aims to develop an appropriate mix between a range of teaching and learning delivery approaches such as didactic, face to face, discovery based and online. Student perceptions on their learning experience are described, and show that students generally considered that the strategy was effective.

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[3] Mark McCrindle, *The ABC of XYZ: Generational Diversity at Work* (2005) Quay Appointments <http://www.quayappointments.com.au/email/040213/images/generational_diversity_at_work. pdf > at 29 March 2005, 1. See also Mark McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y' (2003) *Principal Matters* 28, 28-9.

[4] Such as the Baby Boomers (born 1946 – 1964) and Generation X (born 1965 – 1980).

[5] Jason Frand, 'The Information Age Mindset: Changes in Students and Implications for Higher Education' (2000) 35(5) *Educause Review* 15, 24; Diana Oblinger, 'Boomers Gen-Xers Millennials, Understanding the New Students' (2003) 38(4) *Educause Review* 37, 38, 45; Barbara Costello, Robert Lenholt and Judson Stryker, 'Using Blackboard in Library Instruction: Addressing the Learning Styles of Generations X and Y' (2004) 30(6) *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 452, 453; Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger, 'Is It Age or IT: First Steps Toward Understanding the Net Generation' in Oblinger and Oblinger (eds), above n 2, 2.1, 2.6, 2.15; McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y', above n 3, 29, 31; Jonas-Dwyer and Pospisil, above n 1, 194, 200, 203.

[6] Kate Manuel, 'Teaching Information Literacy to Generation Y' (2002) 36 (1-2) *Journal of Library Administration* 195, 209-10; Angela Weiler, 'Information-Seeking Behaviour in Generation Y Students: Motivation, Critical Thinking, and Learning Theory' (2004) 31(1) *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 46, 49.

2. GENERATION Y CHARACTERISTICS AND LEARNING STYLES

Advances in information and communication technologies have meant that Generation Y are the first generation of students to have grown up with digital media and information technology in a developed prolific form[7] and to have multi-media "choices.[8] Oblinger and Oblinger claim that '[c]hildren age six or younger spend an average of two hours each day using screen media (TV, videos, computers, video games), which … exceed[s] the amount of reading time (39 minutes).'[9] Technology forms such a key part of who they are, that, for Generation Y students, computers and the Internet are regarded as simply part of the environment and not as "technology" – to them, this term is reserved for the most recent "gadgets."[10]

Generation Y is accustomed to multitasking and quickly switching from one activity to another with minimal adjustment time.[11] Accordingly these students have a low boredom threshold, a shortened attention span and a preference for processing information presented in "bite sized chunks"[12] or a concise easy to use format. Raised in a world of fast food and Internet banking, such students have 'zero tolerance for delays.'[13] They see the world as 'global, connected, and open for business 24/7,'[14] and expect information and resources to be available where and when they need it. Also known as the "Options Generation,"[15] this generation is one of consumerism and choice - today's students not only view themselves as

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[7] Raines, above n 2.

[8] Pamela Paul, 'Getting Inside Gen Y' (2001) 23(9) *American Demographics* 42.

[9] Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.2.

[10] That is to say, something is not "technology" if it was around when you were born: Frand, above n 5, 16. See also Oblinger, above n 5, 38.

[11] John Brown, 'Growing Up Digital: How the Web Changes Work, Education and the Ways People Learn' (2000) 32(2) *Change* 10, 13; Mark McMahon and Romana Pospisil, 'Laptops for a Digital Lifestyle: Millennial Students and Wireless Mobile Technologies' (Paper presented at the 2005 ASCILITE Conference – Balance, Fidelity, Mobility: Maintaining the Momentum, Brisbane, 4-7 December 2005) 421; Frand, above n 5, 18.

[12] Peter Mellow, 'The Media Generation: Maximise Learning by Getting Mobile' (Paper presented at the 2005 ASCILITE Conference – Balance, Fidelity, Mobility: Maintaining the Momentum, Brisbane, 4-7 December 2005) 470. See also Manuel, above n 6, 205; Costello, Lenholt and Stryker, above n 5, 457.

[13] Frand, above n 5, 22. See also McMahon and Pospisil, above n 11.

[14] Raines, above n 2.

[15] Martin Plüss, *Beyond the Generation Gap and Learning Technologies* (2004) Charles Sturt University <http://hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/gtansw/publications/itupdate/Digital%20Divide_files/gtaboo m.pdf> at 29 May 2006. See also James Wagner, 'Support Services for the Net Generation' in Oblinger and Oblinger (eds), above n 2, 10.2-3.

consumers of learning, but expect 'educational offerings to match current entertainment products.'[16]

Generation Y's desire for convenience or flexibility is enhanced because they are 'growing up facing time pressures traditionally reserved for adults.'[17] Many, if not most, students juggle their study life and social activities with part-time, or full-time, work. They are therefore also considered to be achievement oriented and, whilst used to multitasking and busy timetables, value structure and feedback.[18]

Furthermore, friendship and social relationships are important to Generation Y. They seek a sense of community – to be included – and are more likely to make decisions based on the collective experience of their peers, rather than their teachers.[19] As a result, in addition to web-based resources, Generation Y students also desire social interaction and connection, either in person or online.[20] Indeed their level of socialisation is such that they are almost constantly connected, for example by computers (email, blogs, and synchronous or asynchronous discussion forums), PDAs[21] or mobile phones. However, the level of connectedness provided by such "technologies" means that, according to Frand, 'the half-life of information is [now] measured in months and years.'[22] Consequently, the development of lifelong skills may be more important to a student's workplace transition than mere knowledge accumulation.

Oblinger[23] identifies the preferred learning styles of Generation Y students as follows:

- experimental activities;

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[16] Manuel, above n 6, 203-4.

[17] Raines, above n 2.

[18] Ibid. See also Kathleen Phalen, *Self-Assured, Stressed, and Straight: Millennial Students and How They Got That Way* (2002) Virginia.edu <http://www.itc.virginia.edu/virginia.edu/fall02/student/home.html> at 30 May 2006.

[19] Anthea Taylor, 'Do We Know Who We Are Teaching? Teacher Education Undergraduates' Views of the World' (Paper presented at the New Zealand/Australian Association for Research in Education Conference – Educational Research, Risks and Dilemmas, Auckland, 29 November 2003); McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y', above n 3, 29; Manuel, above n 6, 208.

[20] Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.6, 2.11.

[21] Meaning a Personal Digital Assistant or 'handheld device that combines computing, telephone/fax, Internet and networking features': *PDA* (2006) ISP Glossary <http://isp.webopedia.com/TERM/P/PDA.html> at 14 June 2006.

[22] Frand, above n 5, 17. See also 24.

[23] Oblinger, above n 5, 38. See also Raines, above n 2 (who adds "entertainment and excitement") and Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.7 (who add "things that matter" – such as community activities, and "visual and kinaesthetic").

- use of technology;
- structure; and
- teamwork.

2.1. Experimental Activities

Kinaesthetic[24] and visual learning styles are the most prevalent in Generation Y students.[25] Rather than learning by the traditional transmission or auditory lectorial learning model, which treats students as passive receptacles of information, Generation Y students prefer "active learning". They favour learning experiences which actively engage them within the learning process[26] or course content, and encourage them to construct their own learning by "doing" rather than simply being told.[27] They also prefer multi-sensory media such as diagrams, graphics, video and flow charts, rather than text.

Such an approach to learning is effective - students retain five percent of materials presented in lectures, ten percent of what they read, 20-30 percent of what they see, and 75 percent of what they do.[28] Consequently, a discovery, or process over content, approach to learning increases information retention by lessening opportunities for boredom and increasing student participation.[29] However, as stated by Frand, a balance needs to be maintained between didactic and discovery approaches – 'the goal must be to match the *appropriate use* of technology with the content … and the students' learning style.'[30]

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[24] In this paper, the focus is on both internal kinaesthetic learning (which focuses primarily on emotions and metacognition) and external kinaesthetic learning (which focuses on physical movement). That is learning through experiencing (or relating to something emotionally), or through being involved in an activity (or problem solving).

[25] Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.5, 2.7, 2.14; Manuel, above n 6, 195, 207.

[26] *Principles of Effective University Teaching* (2006) Teaching and Educational Development Institute, The University of Queensland <http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/teaching/toolbox/tlprincipals. html> at 19 May 2006.

[27] McCrindle, 'The ABC of XYZ: Generational Diversity at Work', above n 3, 5. See also 3.

[28] Manuel, above n 6, 200, 207.

[29] Michael Garry, 'Training for the Nintendo Generation' (1996) 75(4) *Progressive Grocer* 87, 88; Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.6, 2.13; Weiler, above n 6, 51.

[30] Frand, above n 5, 24 (emphasis added). See also 18.

2.2. Technology

Generation Y students are technology savvy[31] and therefore relate to and appreciate the flexibility and convenience of an online teaching environment. Like all students, they engage better with materials that are meaningful or 'anchored within their own experiences.'[32] This, together with a greater ability to study at their own time, pace and choosing, 'is recognised as being important to provide an environment for deep learning and understanding.'[33] However, more technology is not necessarily better. 'It isn't technology per se that makes learning engaging ... it is the learning activity.'[34] Therefore, as indicated by phrases such as web "surfing" and "texting" the only innovations valued are those which enable engagement – by making learning more active, social and student-centred.

2.3. Structure

Although today's students want to be entertained, learning has to be "high touch" as well as "high tech."[35] They prefer a supportive learning environment which appropriately scaffolds or structures the teaching and learning process.[36] Consequently, presenting materials in "bite sized chunks," or via a step by step approach, makes large bodies of text more manageable and readily processed.[37] Additionally, although tasks may be done online, feedback,[38] and monitoring[39] by instructors still fulfils an important motivational role.

2.4. Teamwork

Generation Y students gravitate towards activities that promote peer or social interaction. They therefore often prefer group-based approaches to

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[31] Gregor Kennedy et al, *First Year Students' Experiences with Technology: Are They Really Digital Natives?* (2006) The University of Melbourne 8 <http://www.bmu.unimelb.edu.au/research/munatives/index.html> at 30 November 2006.

[32] Marlene Le Brun and Richard Johnstone, *The Quiet Revolution: Improving Student Learning in Law* (1994) 253; McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y', above n 3, 30; Manuel, above n 6, 209.

[33] Le Brun and Johnstone, above n 32, 246; Mellow, above n 12, 469.

[34] Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.16. See also 2.10-11; Frand, above n 5, 22-3.

[35] Garry, above n 29, 90.

[36] Frand, above n 5, 24.

[37] Le Brun and Johnstone, above n 32, 246.

[38] Costello, Lenholt and Stryker, above n 5, 452-3; Le Brun and Johnstone, above n 32, 246.

[39] Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.3.

study[40] and activities that encourage cooperative learning.[41] Indeed the prevalence of online gaming 'encourage[s] collaboration among players and thus provide[s] a context for … the emergence of learning communities.'[42] Such collaborative activities improve student relationships and social development.[43] They also: increase academic learning and retention, cognitive development, and active engagement;[44] and provide an authentic learning experience which develops marketable skills, such as communication and teamwork.[45]

3. TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY DEVELOPED

QUT's *Teaching and Learning Plan 2002-2006* provides that:

> Enhancing the flexibility of QUT's teaching and learning programs in ways which are both educationally effective and cost effective, and which, where appropriate, are more convenient for students, will remain a priority over the lifetime of this plan.

> While remaining a predominantly campus-based university which emphasises the benefits of interaction and feedback between staff and students, QUT will adopt a variety of strategies which extend its reach, using the latest technology where appropriate.[46]

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[40] Ibid, 2.6-7.

[41] Paul Shield, Bill Atweh and Parlo Singh, 'Utilising Synchronous Web-mediated Communications as a Booster to Sense of Community in a Hybrid On-Campus/Off-Campus Teaching and Learning Environment' (Paper presented at the 2005 ASCILITE Conference – Balance, Fidelity, Mobility: Maintaining the Momentum, Brisbane, 4-7 December 2005) 608.

[42] Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins, *Harnessing the Power of Games in Education* (2003) Insight <http://www.iaete.org/insight/articles.cfm?&id=26> at 25 July 2006.

[43] David Johnson and Roger Johnson, 'Learning Groups' in Susan Wheelan (ed), *The Handbook of Group Research and Practice* (2005) 441, 442-3; David Johnson and Roger Johnson, 'Making Cooperative Learning Work' (1999) 38(2) *Theory Into Practice* 67, 72-3.

[44] Ibid.

[45] 'Today's economy values and rewards the ability to work in teams': Donald Hanna, 'Building A Leadership Vision: Eleven Strategic Challenges for Higher Education' (2003) 38(4) *Educause Review* 25, 27.

[46] Queensland University of Technology (QUT), *Teaching and Learning Plan 2002-2006* (2002) Context Statement. Objective 1 of the Plan provides that: 'QUT will continuously improve its teaching environment to optimise students' learning experiences,' and includes the following strategy: '[to] provide greater flexibility in time and place of teaching and learning' (Strategy 1.1). Strategy 1.2 of the University of Technology (QUT), *Learning and Teaching Plan 2005-2009* (2005) further prioritises the facilitation of 'optimal student learning outcomes by seeking out and capitalising on emerging technologies and integrating information and communications technology into our teaching.'

The Faculty of Law's *Strategic Plan 2003-2007* reflects this objective by providing for the 'integration of information technology [and] teaching,'[47] and outlines the following targets:[48] the development of 'an appropriate mix of physical and virtual learning [including] … the quality and pedagogy of online teaching and … the delivery of programs to external students;' and the '[i]mprovement of feedback strategies and flexible delivery.' The Faculty also seeks to provide 'high quality learning environments and experiences to foster and support effective student learning.'[49]

The online negotiation model developed and implemented in Trusts Law at QUT, in seeking to accommodate the preferred learning styles and characteristics of Generation Y students, also aimed to meet these objectives. In particular, it endeavoured to use technology to increase the effectiveness, and flexibility in delivery, of the academic program by providing external students with the option of electing to complete the unit's negotiation skills module online, rather than being required to attend an external attendance school for this purpose.

3.1. The Online Negotiation Model

QUT policy requires courses to develop employment-related skills appropriate to the particular discipline.[50] Therefore teamwork and negotiation skills theory and practice is incorporated at various stages in Trust Law's lecture and tutorial program.[51] This module builds upon the principled negotiation theory[52] studied in first year and takes the negotiation skills, of these second year undergraduate students, to a higher level. In particular, students learn how to identify which conflicts are

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[47] Queensland University of Technology, Faculty of Law, *Strategic Plan 2003-2007* (2003) Objective 6.

[48] Ibid, Target 1.1a, 1.1b.

[49] Queensland University of Technology, Faculty of Law, *Strategic Plan 2005-2007* (2005) Learning and Teaching Plan, Objective 1.

[50] *Manual of Policies and Procedures* (2005) Queensland University of Technology <http://www.mopp.qut.edu. au/C/C_01_04.html> at 17 May 2006.

[51] The skills module in Trusts was originally designed by Melinda Shirley, Associate Dean Teaching and Learning. Since 2004 this module has been reviewed and revised by Tracey Carver with assistance from Tina Cockburn. For a general discussion of the integration of skills into the undergraduate law curriculum at QUT see: Sharon Christensen and Sally Kift, 'Graduate Attributes and Skills' (1997) 11 *Legal Education Review* 207.

[52] The theory of principled negotiation studied is that formulated in: Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, *Getting To Yes: Negotiating An Agreement Without Giving In* (2nd ed, 1991). The authors advocate a method of negotiation founded upon four principles: separating the people from the problem; focusing on interests, not positions; generating a variety of possibilities before deciding what to do; and insisting that the result be based upon some objective criteria or standard (at 11).

best suited to resolution by negotiation and how to prepare a negotiation plan in order to implement a principled approach to negotiation.

As part of the module, students are required to complete, and submit for assessment,[53] a "Life Problem" assignment. This requires them to apply negotiation theory in the context of a trust dispute concerning the distribution of family property amongst four siblings following the death of their parents. Students are required to identify the conflicts which arise, evaluate the extent to which negotiation is an appropriate dispute resolution process, and develop a negotiation plan. Assignments are submitted in semester week 5 and then in week 8 internal students engage in a negotiation role-play (in teams of four) during tutorials with a view to resolving the conflict scenario studied. This enables them to further develop their oral communication skills and reflect on the effectiveness of their negotiation plans. To preserve the integrity of the skills program, and ensure like learning experiences for internal and external students, external students have traditionally been required to attend an attendance school to engage in the negotiation role-play. However, given that it is not always possible for all external students to attend, and to increase flexibility, it became necessary to develop an optional online alternative to participating in a face-to-face negotiation at the Attendance School that, as best as possible, would simulate the learning and teaching experience of internal students.

Accordingly, a model for an online negotiation[54] was developed, using synchronous chat room technology. This initiative was aimed not only at increasing the physical accessibility to external students of the skills and content taught, but also at allowing them to receive timely feedback[55] on the efficacy of their negotiation plans. Consistent with the Generation Y philosophy that the use of technology is valued only if it makes learning more student-centred, kinaesthetic or engaging,[56] chat room "technology," which students were likely to be familiar with, was applied in this new context[57] to enable external students to participate in an authentic learning activity that, had they not been able to attend the Attendance School, would not have otherwise occurred. Consequently, the aim was also to

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[53] The Life Problem assignment accounts for 20 percent of the assessment in the unit.

[54] For an overview of issues relating to online negotiation generally and some useful references see: Melissa Conley Tyler and Naomi Cukier, 'Nine Lessons for Teaching Negotiation Skills' (2005) 15(1-2) *Legal Education Review* 61, 82-4, 85.

[55] Particularly if unable to attend the External Attendance School.

[56] See above n 31-34 and accompanying text.

[57] Being not merely for social interaction, but also to undertake the legal negotiation of a trusts dispute.

create an effective and enjoyable learning environment to enable greater learning.[58]

After electing to engage in an online negotiation via the unit's Online Learning and Teaching (OLT) Site, students then allocated themselves to a negotiation team of their preference – choosing from among a list of pre-scheduled one hour negotiations spanning a range of days and times. Each team had four members and its own online negotiation website, or group work area that housed the team's chat room. Within each team, students were randomly assigned the role of one of the characters or siblings in the Life Problem fact scenario. The allocation of characters occurred randomly as, in their negotiation plan, students were expected to have considered the problem from the perspective of all parties. After reading and considering their character's confidential fact sheet – which provided further background information as to their character's underlying positions, needs, values and other conflict motivators, and which was posted to the online negotiation website and accessible only by that person or character – students then worked online under their nickname (their character's name) to attempt to negotiate a resolution to the dispute by using principled negotiation skills. Given that those negotiating online did not have the benefit of the other parties' body-language, in order to gauge their emotional responses to the conflict, the students were encouraged to use emoticons to convey their characters' feelings. An illustrative extract of an online negotiation taken from the log files on the Trust unit's OLT Site follows in Figure 1.

Instructions for accessing the chat rooms, technical tips and frequently asked questions were posted, and a test chat room was available on the OLT Site to encourage students to resolve, in advance of their team's negotiation, any technological issues associated with obtaining remote access to their chat room from their own personal computers. The posting of such information, which contemplated in advance of the negotiation the technical issues likely to arise, also attempted to address another Generation Y need – namely their 24/7 mentality, or expectation that required resources will be available when and where they need them.[59] Furthermore, all online negotiations were monitored and moderated by staff members as they occurred. This enabled the ongoing provision of

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[58] 'The more students enjoy their work, the more learning occurs': Patricia Breivik, *Student Learning in the Information Age* (1998) 39. In addition to the anticipated improved learning and teaching outcomes, an additional benefit of the online negotiation model was the direct and indirect cost savings to the Faculty in relation to staffing the External Attendance School – given that due to the high external student enrolments in Trusts it has always been necessary to employ sessional academics to staff the tutorial program at the Attendance School.

[59] See above n 13-14 and accompanying text.

online technical assistance and feedback as necessary,[60] thus further fulfilling Generation Y's "high touch" desire for structure and learning support.

As the online negotiation was undertaken at a time and place more of a student's own choosing than the Attendance School, student self-directed and responsible learning was encouraged. Given that external students are even more likely to be juggling their study life and social activities with part-time, or full-time employment, this increased flexibility, whilst valued by Generation Y students generally, is of particular benefit to external students.

Another important feature of the online negotiation was its facilitation (both actual and potential) of the formulation of peer groups and study teams amongst external students, to enable collaborative learning, both within and outside the parameters of the negotiation exercise per se. This is particularly important for external students as although Generation Y students generally prefer group-based approaches to study,[61] external students are often isolated in their learning. By participating in the online negotiation, external students are given an opportunity to experience a sense of community and engagement, not only with their online peers participating in the activity, but also with the Faculty, and wider unit cohort (in the sense that identical learning experiences as between internal and external students are assured). This is especially beneficial for those students who could not otherwise have attended the Attendance School, given that Generation Y value friendships, social interaction and connection, either in person or online.[62] Participation in teamwork, negotiation, and the use of chat room technology for the purpose of "business"[63] (as apposed to purely social) communication, also assists in the development of lifelong skills transferable to the workplace. Indeed, Poole and Zhang have stated that in the future the ability to effectively use such technology to work in virtual teams will be a 'taken-for-granted skill.'[64]

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[60] Academic staff members and IT support monitoring the negotiations were contactable by students via email and had access rights to the chat rooms of all teams.

[61] See above n 40-45 and accompanying text.

[62] See above n 20 and accompanying text.

[63] In the sense that the technology is being utilised both to enable the legal negotiation of a trusts dispute and as an educational aid.

[64] Marshall Poole and Huiyan Zhang, 'Virtual Teams' in Susan Wheelan (ed), *The Handbook of Group Research and Practice* (2005) 363, 380.

Figure 1 – Example Online Negotiation[65]

Edward: El, Nancy, I would like Darlington to stay in Family(21:33:36.)

Elsie: So would I .... and I see it as a way that we can all achieve this(21:36:38.)

Nancy: Do you guys really want to be involved in the dramas of runni[ng] a farm like Darlington?(21:36:34.)

Elsie: Nope, that's why we'd pay you a managing fee and leave the daily running to you.... just for a slight interest in the land and profits left over after expenses. Plus that way we would always have some place to come home to if we wanted(21:37:55.)

Nancy: OK - if you do, then, if you like I would be happy to manage your interests for a standard management fee if that suits(21:37:44.)

Edward: Nancy, Not really, you could run day to day, but the group could be responsible if want to seel(21:35:51.)

Edward: Sorry sell(21:36:2.)

Elsie: We could get an independent advisor to advise of the current market managing fee.(21:38:49.)

Nancy: I would like first option if you chose to sell your interests.(21:38:36.)

Edward: El Sounds good, ☺ (21:36:54.)

Nancy: Yes - please do get ind[e]pendent advice re a manageme[n]t fee.(21:39:7.)

Elsie: I don't want to rip you off Nancy, just retain some interest in the farm in recognition of our true inheritance. Yes, I'd be prepared to give you first option in the farm if we wanted to sell(21:39:46.)

Edward: Yes to both (21:37:27.)

Elsie: In return if you wanted to sell Nancy could you give [u]s a first option? Eg: should David want to return home he could then buy you out.(21:40:54.)

Nancy: Great. I don't want to see either of you lose out either. I must admit [t]hat I am concerned about whether we can maintain Darlington at its current level. Like I said, we have been lucky. I don't want it [to]

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[65] Student typographical errors amended.

change and go bad, but life on the land can be harsh. However, if you are hap[p]y for me to manage you're inter[e]st, I will agree to do that and hope the good times keep rolling in.(21:41:4.)

Elsie: Does everyone agree then that we are pretty much sorted?(21:41:34.)

4. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND EVALUATION

To ascertain the effectiveness of the online teaching and learning strategy developed and implemented, an evaluation was conducted, which adopted a qualitative approach using survey method, to collect and analyse participating students' perceptions of the nature and impact of the innovations on their learning environment and experience[66]. After engaging in the activity, those external students who elected to participate in the online negotiation, rather than attend the Attendance School, were asked to reflect on their participation and then complete (and submit online) a reflection sheet by providing written comments in relation to the following four matters:

1. What I liked most about the Life Problem was …
2. What I liked least about the Life Problem was …
3. One thing I learned from the Negotiation module in Trusts was …
4. Comments or suggestions for improvement in relation to conducting the Life Problem Negotiation Online are …

Of the 105 external students enrolled in the unit in semester two 2005, 51 elected to engage in the online negotiation. This response may have been due, in part, to a necessity to attend the Attendance School for other units or purposes. Reflections were completed by 26 of the students who participated.[67] Through the use of this open questionnaire a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation was collected, from which several emergent themes were identified.

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[66] As participation in the negotiation role-play is not assessed , it was not appropriate to conduct a controlled experiment which compared the performance of those engaging in the online alternative with those who participated in the traditional face to face model.

[67] An assumption was made that the student profile of survey respondents mirrored the projected Generation Y participation in higher education (see above n 1 and accompanying text), and therefore, to that extent reflected the views of Generation Y students. Given that while the majority of the cohort is comprised of generation Y students, the student cohort is heterogeneous, in subsequent student reflection surveys students will be asked to state their year of birth so that a more careful analysis of the views of Generation Y students can be made.

Responses to "*what I liked most about the Life Problem was …*" indicated that students perceived that such a kinaesthetic or authentic learning environment was a particularly appropriate way of developing their knowledge and understanding of negotiation theory and practise. Students also appeared to appreciate the ability to practice and engage in the development of lifelong skills in the context of a dispute with which, at least on some level, they could all relate – a family conflict. Comments included:

- It gave me a sense of the practical side of negotiation. Instead of just learning what is done, in a sense we actually did it which is the best way to learn, I think.
- The Life Problem made me critically think about how to resolve a problem - rather than doing the research and 'finding' the answer.
- ... It's a "hands on" approach which is a nice change from theory based modules.
- It was good to be able to put the negotiation theory into practice … I thought the topic and issues in the life problem were relevant as this would be a very common problem to deal with in everyday life.
- … it is easier to see the benefits of good negotiation skills when you can relate back to a situation you may one day be involved in.
- It was easy to relate to. The situation seemed realistic, and something that could happen to you personally. The chat room was great ... it gave the problem a life of its own.

However, not all students shared the view expressed in the last response, and perhaps by Poole and Zhang,[68] concerning the chat room's "real-world" authenticity. For example:

- From an external point of view, although we were actually negotiating we were still detached from reality.

Flowing on from this recognition of the benefits of active learning, student responses indicated that they found the exercise enjoyable and interesting. Furthermore, the online environment was a familiar one in which they were able to maximise learning opportunities:

- I found it a really non-confrontational form of discussing issues. We were all pretty light hearted about it all but at the same time were each able to express our own desires and views and were also able to acknowledge each others. I liked how there was multiple property to discuss, all with various options - it made it interesting.
- … it was an interesting exercise in being able to apply negotiation principles and also was quite entertaining :-) Thank you.

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[68] See above n 64 and accompanying text.

These responses are also consistent with studies[69] which have shown that online discussion increases students' skills in communicating with each other and assists more introverted learners.

Student comments as to "*one thing I learned from the Negotiation module in Trusts was …* " also indicate that they valued the ability, via the online negotiation, to reflect and receive feedback upon the efficacy of their negotiation plans submitted previously for assessment:

- In the exercise I referred back to the issues I had discussed in my assignment and found this very useful. For example, I had previously considered the common interests of the parties, and used this as a starting point for discussion in the 'real' negotiation.
- Not to make assumptions. When I was writing my answer to the problem, I now realise on reflection that I may have made too many assumptions about the motivations of the characters. I did refer to the information provided on the facts, however I think that I may have inferred details which were not known …

In particular, students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have more flexibility in their study and increased physical accessibility – in that the online negotiation provided an alternative to "actual" presence at the Attendance School in order to participate in a negotiation:

- … given that I work fulltime and live in Canberra I would have had great difficulties, and great expense if I had to attend a face to face session in Brisbane.

Despite this, and although they had elected to engage in the online alternative, some students noted that they would have preferred to have had the opportunity to engage in the exercise in a face-to–face environment. For example, the question "*what I liked least about the Life Problem was …* " met with the following responses:

- Prefer face to face.
- … Wish I could have done it face to face but such is the life of an external student.

Students recognised the advantages of applying existing technology to enable them to participate in an experimental learning activity that not only made learning more meaningful, but also enabled an activity that, had the

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[69] See, eg, Kathleen Carico, Donna Logan and Linda Labbo, 'A Generation in Cyberspace: Engaging Readers Through Online Discussions' (2004) 81(4) *Language Arts* 293, 294, 301.

student not been able to attend the Attendance School, would not otherwise have occurred. However, students also reflected on the technical and physical limitations of such "technology." Responses to the question "*comments or suggestions for improvement in relation to conducting the Life Problem Negotiation Online are ...* " therefore included:

- Unfortunately a member of our team was not able to make it to the negotiation, which made the whole exercise a bit difficult. However [on] a whole the technology was easy to use and I thought it was a great use of resources.
- I found it frustrating to do online as I couldn't type quick enough and often others would say what I was typing and I would be behind ...
- I had technical difficulties ... when the internet connection drops out or is busy, you have to exit and re-enter the chatroom, as the chatroom freezes. This was frustrating and time consuming to the others in my group. We also had a person absent, so improvised. I believe that with fine tuning, the online work is fantastic. It gives us a chance to practice the theory we learn.
- That's a toughie! I guess everyone needs to make sure they can access the chat room prior to the allocated time so that we aren't wasting each other's time.
- The lack of ability to express emotion. It was difficult to be realistic online, so your wording had to be sarcastic or cruel to invoke feelings expressed by the children.

Such comments are interesting, as whilst Generation Y has been recognised as being particularly unreceptive to other generations' criticism of technology,[70] they seem more willing to question its utility and accept its limitations when experienced for themselves. The responses also stress the need for "point of need" technical assistance and information, which although anticipated and addressed in the model's design, did not always ensure the ability to resolve all difficulties in advance of the negotiation, or its timely utilisation by students.

In general however, student reflections overwhelmingly indicated that they had a positive learning experience when they engaged in the online negotiation. In particular it was perceived not only as improving the physical and conceptual accessibility of the skills and content taught, but as also enabling cooperative learning:[71]

- Personally I did not experience any problems in relation to conducting the Life Problem on line, which is a relief considering I had never

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[70] See, eg, Manuel, above n 6, 198-200.
[71] See above n 40-45 and accompanying text.

participated in a chat room before. I also thought it was an excellent alternative for external students and more such exercises should be developed for external students who have difficulty attending the external attendance school. Perhaps it may also be a way of further developing networks for students who study via distance education and therefore do not have the opportunity to bounce ideas off other students. Perhaps chat rooms should be encouraged more for external students for each unit.

- … I learnt a lot from what others had to say …
- It provided an opportunity to interact with other students.

This is reflective of Generation Y's desire for, and the benefits of, teamwork and learning approaches that promote peer or social interaction and connection.

5. CONCLUSION

The student perceptions of their learning experience described above indicate that the positive reception by Trusts students at QUT of the online negotiation model may have been because this learning environment addressed, as far as possible, many of the characteristics, and educational attitudes and needs, of Generation Y learners, who comprise the largest cohort of contemporary university students. As such, the implementation of this innovative student-centred online learning and teaching approach positively influenced the students' learning experience by, amongst other things, enabling them to experience the benefits of active learning and an increased flexibility in their learning environment which was not available to them under the teaching model previously adopted. The online innovations have increased physical accessibility to the skills component of the unit and now enable external students to more effectively engage with the unit materials, and by positively influencing their learning experience, enhance their understanding and learning outcomes.

However, whilst the success of the initiative is arguably reflective of the benefits of teaching strategies that address Generation Y learning styles and preferences, it must be recognised that any student cohort is heterogeneous and therefore consists, not only of Generation Y students, but also of other generational groups who may have different learning styles and preferences.[72] It remains necessary, therefore, for educators to adopt a blended teaching model which caters for a broad span of ages and preferential learning styles. Indeed, student references to 'the

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[72] Jonas-Dwyer and Pospisil, above n 1, 194-5; Oblinger, above n 5, 45.

negotiation chat room's lack of "real world" authenticity, may evidence this divergence in student learning styles and characteristics. Further, such a one-size-fits-all approach may be inappropriate within Generation Y itself. Commentators have opined that it cannot be simply assumed that generational learning preferences are homogenous.[73] Thus there will not be a correlation between the adoption of Generation Y approaches and educational benefits in all circumstances, as there still may be differences and fluctuations in learning approaches – both between student cohorts within the same generational group and between individual students. For example, Generation Y students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may not have had access, especially at home, to the computers and technology which have played a major part in shaping this generation's preferences.[74] Therefore, one's generational age may be less important in this context than their exposure to technology, and students from other generations who have had significant exposure to information technology may still possess some Generation Y characteristics.[75]

In any event, as the majority of today's undergraduate students belong to Generation Y, it seems clear that educators should continue to explore ways to more effectively engage them. Nevertheless, whilst Generation Y students perceive that active learning is beneficial and appreciate the opportunity to engage in self-directed learning at a time, pace and place of their own choosing, where possible, they require a balance between: didactic and discovery approaches; and support and instruction in person and online.[76]

Therefore, in terms of practical considerations for the development of similar initiatives in the future, from the educator's perspective, it is important to note that the use of technology by itself is not sufficient – simply posting lecture notes online,[77] akin to a textbook, or leaving students alone "to get on with it," is not enough. Rather the use of technology should be: academically monitored; supplemented by traditional teaching and learning approaches; informed by pedagogy; and used to actively engage Generation Y learners.[78] Teachers must also

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[92] Gene Cole, Richard Smith and Laurie Lucas, *The Debut Of Generation Y In The American Workforce* (2002) 1(2) Journal of Business Administration Online <http://jbao.atu.edu/Fall2002/cole_smith_lucas.htm> at 22 May 2005; Paul, above n 8; Manuel, above n 6, 196; Kennedy et al, above n 31, 8, 13-4.

[74] Raines, above n 2.

[75] Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 5, 2.9-10.

[76] Ibid, 2.11. See also 2.15 and above n 30 and accompanying text.

[77] Ibid, 2.16; John Biggs, *Teaching For Quality Learning at University* (2nd ed, 2003) 214-5.

[78] See, eg, Diana Laurillard, 'Multimedia and The Changing Experience of the Learner' (1995) 26(3) *British Journal of Educational Technology* 179, 179-80, 185-6.

adopt a process of regular reflection and review of their learning and teaching methods. Of course, given the differences in the technological skills possessed by students (and dare we say it, by academic staff), practical information technology support from one's Faculty also remains fundamental to the successful implementation of any online innovations.