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Millennial Students and the Social Organization of College Education

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Millennial Students and the Social Organization of College Education

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“Teaching Millennials in the New Millennium”
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Millennials have been characterized as “team-oriented” and skilled in group work (Strauss & Howe, 2000, p.44; Twenge, 2006, pp. 180-211; Wilson & Gerber, 2008).

Are they?

How should college teachers understand and respond to students’ “team-orientation”?

Overview of Arguments

- We should not redesign college-level curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to accommodate presumed characteristics of Millennial students, such as the notion that Millennials are “team-oriented”.
- We should promote effective cooperative learning strategies that are grounded in theory and research. These pedagogical strategies can improve the team-orientation and collaborative skills of all students in college settings.
- We need to differentiate the variety of social contexts in which college education occurs. Variations in the social context of college education present distinct challenges for effective implementation of cooperative learning strategies.

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

1. Millennial effects are cohort effects. In order to separate age (developmental), period (historical), and cohort (age by period interaction) effects, we need research designs that use longitudinal panels of multiple-cohorts (Menard, 1991).

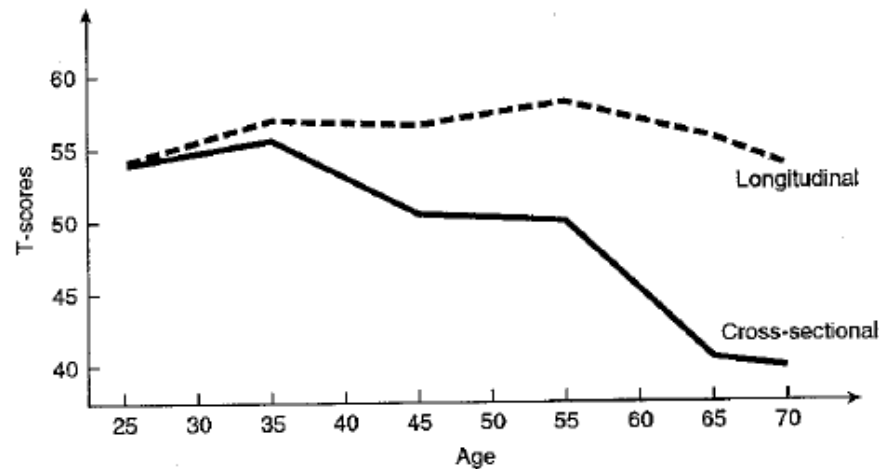
Inferences about characteristics of Millennials are frequently drawn from individual cross-sectional surveys (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2010) or from cross-temporal meta-analyses of cross-sectional surveys (e.g., Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Some significant longitudinal studies of personality do exist (e.g., Terracciano, McCrae, & Costa, 2006).

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

1. (continued)

Cross-sectional designs can be extremely misleading because they confound age, period, and cohort effects.

Example: Does IQ decline with age?



Source: Murphy & Davidshofer (2005), Figure 15-6.

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

2. In order to generalize to the population of Millennials, we need random samples or stratified random samples of the population, not convenience samples.

Some studies are at least based on national probability samples (Pew Research Center, 2010; Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). Meta-analysis of convenience samples does not improve generalizability to a population.

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

3. In national probability samples, effect size estimates of characteristics of Millennials are typically small. Of 31 effect size estimates reported by Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010), the median magnitude was .13.

•	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Cohen's d</u>
•	Individualism	.16
•	Loneliness	-.08
•	Antisocial behavior	.03
•	Self-esteem	-.08
•	Cynical about school	.26
•	Do not want to work hard	.30
•	Expect to graduate college	.64

Source: Trzesniewski & Donnellan (2010), Table 3.

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

4. There is more variability within generational groups than differences across generations.

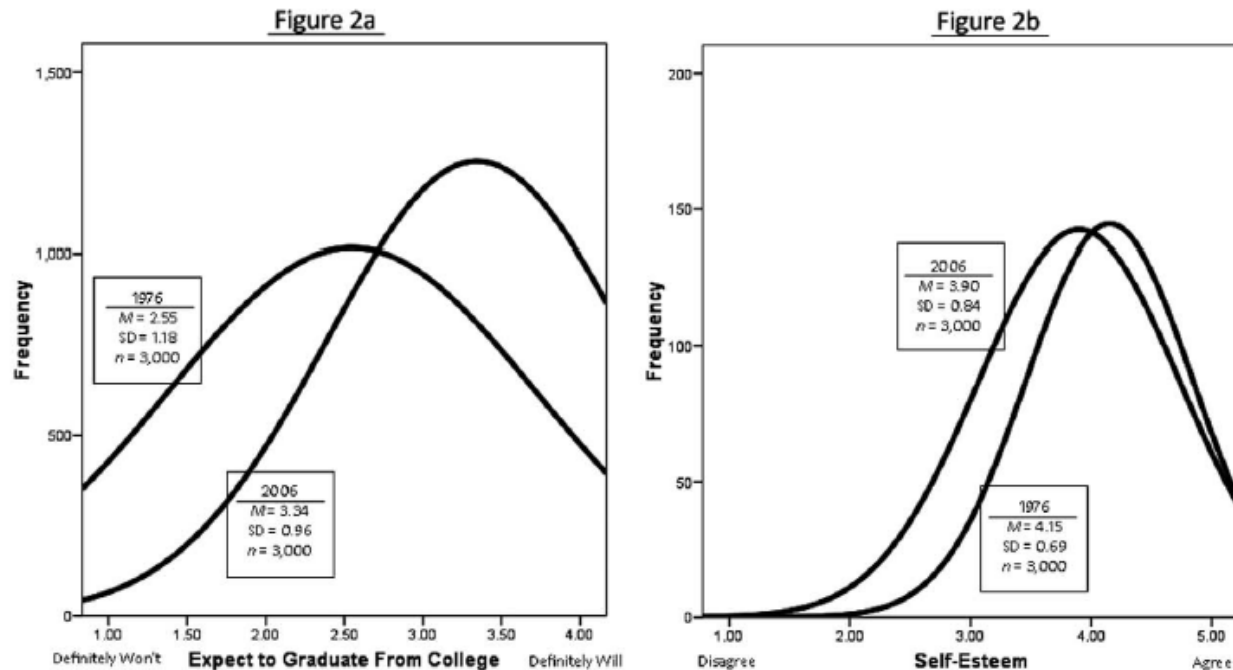


Fig. 2. Graphical representation of the distribution of 1976 and 2006 scores for expectations for graduating from college (a) and self-esteem (b).

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

5. Our current undergraduates are not exclusively Millennials.

At Trinity College, 3 % of students are enrolled in the Individualized Degree Program. Many of these students are Gen X (born 1961 to 1981) and Boomers (born 1943 to 1960).

At Trinity, 6 % of students are international (studying on student visas); another 6 % are permanent residents or dual citizens.

These diversity conditions may be higher at other undergraduate institutions.

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

6. Attitudinal and behavioral differences between Millennials and others, if they do exist, may not be connected to teaching and learning in the college classroom. The connections need to be articulated convincingly.

For example,

How might “prioritizing a high paying job over job security” (Barlow & Reger, 2011) be related to teaching and learning in a college classroom?

Reasons Why Presumed Characteristics of Millennials Should Not Drive the Redesign of College Education

7. The nature of distinctive attitudinal and behavioral features of Millennials may not generalize.

For example, greater use of computer-mediated social communication (such as Facebook use or texting) by Millennials may not generalize to the ability to talk and listen comfortably in person when interacting with out-group peers.

Promote Effective Cooperative Learning Practices

Contact Theory of Inter-group Relations

Equal status contact.

(between majority and minority groups)

Contact must strengthen perceived similarities.

(Common goals / cooperation)

Contact that allows people to learn about each other as individuals.

Contact sanctioned by institutional supports.

(Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)

Promote Effective Cooperative Learning Practices

Student Team Learning

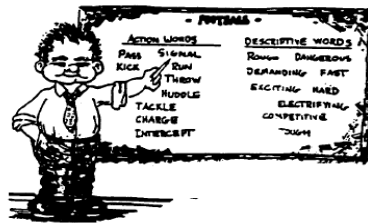
Student Team Learning refers to a set of instructional methods in which students work in small, mixed-ability learning teams.

The students in each team are responsible not only for learning the material being taught in class, but also for helping their teammates learn.

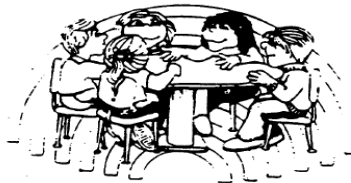
Slavin (1990)

Promote Effective Cooperative Learning Practices

Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD): Four Phases of a Curriculum Unit



Teach



Team Study



Test

Team Recognition



Promote Effective Cooperative Learning Practices

Three Concepts Central to All Student Team Learning Methods

- Team Recognition
- Individual Accountability
- Equal Opportunities for Success

Promote Effective Cooperative Learning Practices

Student Team Learning: Processing Groupwork

- What worked well?
- What did not work well and needs improvement?
- How could your team improve?

Promote Effective Cooperative Learning Practices

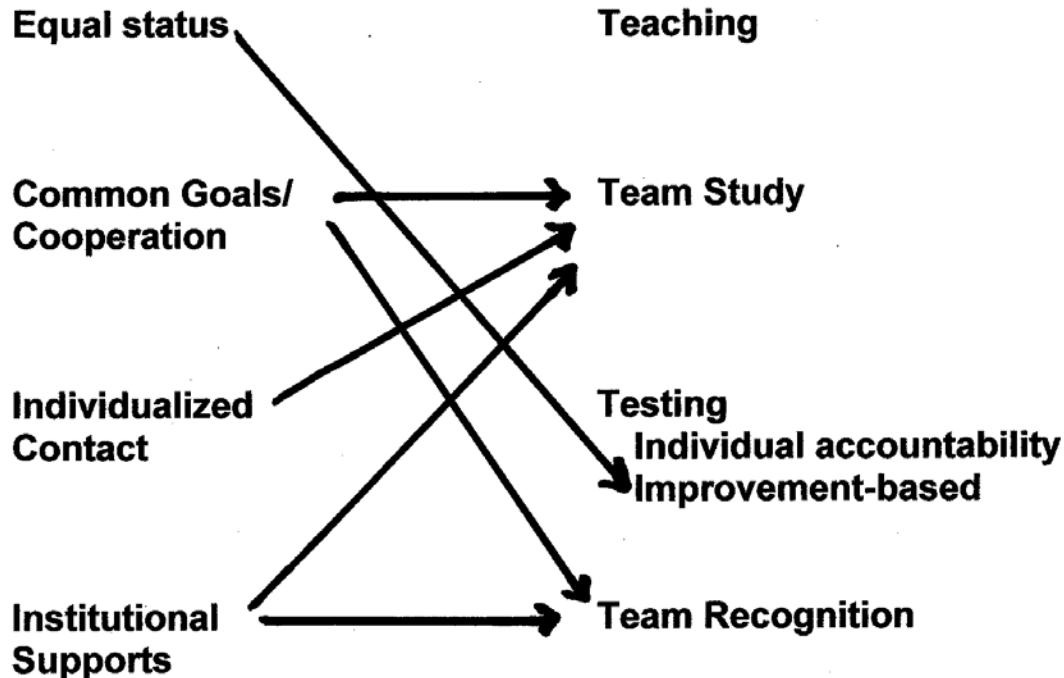
How STAD incorporates principles from Contact Theory

Contact Theory

(conditions required for improved
intergroup relations)

Cooperative Learning

(phases of a curriculum unit
in STAD)



Promote Effective Cooperative Learning Practices

Other important resources on Cooperative Learning:

Aronson & Patnoe (1997)

Cohen (1986)

Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1998)

Variations in the Social Context of College Education

Patterns of faculty-student interaction and student-student interaction depend on social settings:

Seminars (20 or fewer students)

Lecture classes (30 or more students)

Labs

Performance-oriented classes (musical ensembles, theatre, dance)

Classes with a community-learning component

Variations in the Social Context of College Education

Patterns of faculty-student interaction and student-student interaction also depend on the degree of student heterogeneity with the classroom:

First-year seminars

Senior seminars

Required foundation courses within majors

General interest survey courses (with a mixture of majors and non-majors)

Upper-level courses for majors

Variations in the Social Context of College Education

Faculty in small, liberal arts colleges, such as Trinity, have to develop a flexible repertoire of teaching strategies in order to challenge the most students to the greatest extent in the variety of settings we inhabit.

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