



A review of *Generational Shockwaves and the Implications for Higher Education*

by María Luisa Sierra Huedo

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Introduction

This book, edited by Donald Heller and Madeleine d'Ambrosio, is a volume of the TIAA-CREF Institute Series on higher education and is based on a national conference organized by the TIAA-CREF Institute in November 2007. The participants in this conference were from different higher education institutions ranging from small teaching centered to community colleges and large research universities.

Each chapter is written by a different author, all of whom are experts in the field of higher education and sociology. The authors present research and analysis that provide understanding of generational challenges. They also present facts and opportunities to promote decision-making at the participant's different higher education institutions. In addition they offer scholars new approaches and research to analyze and to improve reporting on higher education.

Finally there are also some chapters that are a summary of discussions that took place during the conference, thus giving participants the opportunity to debate and ask questions to the speakers.

In the introduction, Donald Heller gives an overview of all the issues dealt with in the conference. He also briefly defines key concepts such as Baby Boom Generation, Generation X, and Millennial Generation, and he gives some details about the historical events that have framed those generations.

In chapter 1 Neil Howe, William Strauss and Reena Nadler provide an overview of how different generations

have had an impact in the U.S.A and its higher education institutions over the past two centuries. Chapter 2 examines the impact of Millennial students in colleges and universities. In this chapter Bruce Johnstone describes Millennial students as being more diverse, atomistic, more technologically adept and dependent; according to this author they are different in the way they learn being more practical and less motivated for intellectual or ideological matters, but also Millennial students tend to be more community-minded and giving. Chapter 3 is a summary of a panel moderated by the author, Ronald Ehrenberg. In this chapter he focuses on the importance of Generation X students, who are currently young faculty members, and their important impact at all levels in colleges today. Ronald Ehrenberg defines Generation X students as good leaders who look for balance between work and family responsibilities, and savvy technologically as well as good at team work. In chapter 4 Cathy Trower continues discussing Generation X, focusing more on the changes that this generation has brought to the work environment and the clashes and differences with the previous generation, the Baby Boomers. In chapter 5 and 6 Donald Harward and Kenneth Redd focus mainly on the Millennial Generation, who currently are students in US higher education institutions. The main topics are the use of technology and recruiting and retention processes, a challenge for many universities. Martin Kinkelstein in chapter 7 focuses on retaining Millennials as the new faculty and the



changes in Human Resources Departments. In chapter 8 Carol Cartwright summarizes a conference panel on the Baby Boom Generation and its impact on colleges and universities and the hot and complex issues related to their retirement. Karen Steinberg, Phyllis Snyder and Rebecca Klein-Collins in chapter 9 continue with the Baby Boom Generation retirement process and their effects in higher education institutions in the U.S.A. In chapter 10 Valerie Martin Conley addresses the fiscal and legal issues of the retirement of Baby Boomers. Mark Heckler, Virginia Micheli and Teresa A. Sullivan in chapter 11 summarize different communications held at the conference, showing participant's questions and the debates created from those questions and issues raised. Finally, F. King Alexander in chapter 12 centers on the trouble spots that US universities face at present, like policy and access problems, focusing on segregation and discrimination.

The authors of the book present interesting data about generational issues that US higher education institutions are facing. Although in the introduction Donald Heller says "American colleges and universities as we know them today have been greatly influenced by the Baby Boomers" (p.1), in my opinion, Heller should have been more specific and should have said US American colleges and universities. The same was done by the rest of the different authors throughout the book.

There are historical events that have framed the generations under analysis. However, some of the historical events described are very US specific. As Neil Howe, William Strauss, and Reena Nadler explain in chapter 1 "Public events like Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy and King assassinations, the Challenger explosion, and 9/11 burn so deeply into our consciousness that it is impossible to forget what we were doing at the time" (p.7). I have found that the description of the different generations is extremely accurate and global, at least with European countries, but I think that the years that frame those generations might not coincide with the ones presented in the book.

In my opinion, Spain will be somehow delayed in those age brackets, probably due to different historical events that have shaped those generations, like the Spanish Civil War, Franco's death, the transition to a Monarchic Democracy, the terrorist group ETA, the terrorist attacks on March 11th, etc. And I would think that it is the same for Asian and South American countries. As Howe, Strauss and Nadler note, what constitutes a generation are "historical events (that) shape peer groups, and shape them differently depending on the phase of life they occupy (...) A generation united by memories, language, habits, beliefs, and life lessons" (p.7).

Neither of the authors mentions the multicultural society that the U.S.A has become. It is implied that generations could be generalized across multiple cultures living at the same time in the same country. However, Bell Hooks in *Teaching to transgress, education as the practice of freedom* (1994) states how much she hated her undergraduate

classes where "we were to learn obedience to authority" (p.4). In the book, there are not any explanations about *minorities* in the U.S.A, only one of the final chapters talk about discrimination and access, but it is more focused on policies and decentralization of school systems than really on how *minorities* should or should not be included in the same generation description and even the same age brackets as the rest of the US American population.

In chapter 10 Valerie Martin Conley explains the effects of Baby Boomers retirement. Again, the issues presented are focused exclusively on the U.S.A. On the contrary, most European countries have national Social Security/Health Care, so retirement processes could be seen in a different way.

Summary

Generational shockwaves and the implications for higher education, edited by Heller and d'Ambrosio, compounds great information and important issues for higher education institutions. It is interesting how chapters describe generations and their current situation and impact. The graphics and tables are very useful to understand what is being stated in each chapter, as well-described and explained. The quality of the research and the information presented is excellent. The book lacks a more holistic and international approach, as well as more detailed descriptions of why certain generations were framed the way they were. There is coherence in the concepts and theories presented and the quality of the research overall is good. However, it is mainly focused on US American generations and issues in US higher education institutions. Nevertheless, some similarities can be drawn from the information provided and could be applied to culturally different countries and institutions.

I find *Generational shockwaves and the implications for higher education* to be a great contribution to its field and to many other fields as well, like sociology, psychology, and social work. The contributors and editors structure and develop the concepts in a way that they are easy to understand and to follow, also for non-educators, while maintaining a scholarly approach which makes the book distinctive from other books in the field of economics and education.

Bibliography

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| Cita recomendada de este artículo

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