Reaching Generation Y
To Be or Not to Be – Relevant

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Images of technology come to mind almost instantly when thinking about Generation Y and they should. For Generation Y, technology is no mere accessory. It is more accurate to think of technology as being grafted or embodied. Generation Y has have never been without it – *fast, random access and graphics before text please*. Let's get straight into 'chat'.

Generation Ys are commonly described as native speakers of the digital language (in comparison to 'digital immigrants' who adapt to it). Generation Y can be expected to have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading but more than 10,000 hours playing video games (Prensky, 2001). Such imaginings are reinforced as truths by information describing how people are socialising. Ninemsn's 'digital living' site currently identifies MySpace as the most popular online means of social networking used by Australians, accounting for around 61% of activity, with the average visit to MySpace lasting 27 minutes. It is not surprising that it is predicted that Generation Y will experience 30 % fewer face to face encounters (Pooley, 2006) as mobile phones and the internet provide for conversation whenever, wherever and with whomever. This is catching.

The Australian Bureau of Statistic notes that internet users aged between 53 and 54 years account for 40.6 % of MySpace visitors. Clearly, virtual conversations matter – and deeply so. A survey by music site Popjustice.com that found 30% of MySpace users become upset if they are not listed in the 'Top 8 Friends' list of people they *know* on this site. Security shudders and as parents we are we are told that we are at great risk of being frozen out. Alarmed? (Of course). Ready to learn? (Always).

In general, Australians love the internet. Specifically, we love our children.
This paper provides a complementary commentary to a workshop inviting participants to explore the idea that 'complementary accounts' are required to reach Generation Y. There is no doubt that statistics capture our interest and provide an invaluable source of information for signalling what is going on. To be relevant, we need to learn sensitively too. We need to be able to make complementary accounts – those that orientate and those sensitised to detail. The following discussion provides an outline of the key ideas explored during the workshop. Discussion and activities were designed to play respectfully with generalisations, inquire sensitively into conversations to contemplate how we might think about reaching Generation Y.

Let's Play

Instinctively, we wonder where we fit and how well we fit – our individual search (or perhaps quest) for a sense of identity and belonging. Various generations have been identified and their identities summed up. Be prepared – there are quite a few categories that follow. Being curious about *what's next*, the discussion also extends in contemplations regarding 'Generation Next*ers*' – those born after Generation Y.

Are you a Pre-Boomer, a frugal, traditional and silent? Born between 1925-1945, you have seen the stock market crash, a Great Depression and the world go to war/s. Radios were once hi-tech, resources scarce and work a privilege. Or, are you a consequence of soldiers returning from war - an idealist Baby Boomer born between 1946-1964 and with the numbers! As a Baby Boomer you experienced on black and white television, the space race, Vietnam and received the news that several charismatic leaders had been assassinated. You are conservative in your attitudes towards personal relationships, financial and professional commitments – choosing to stay the distance. Due to your large numbers, you are use to competing for jobs and resources, having your voice heard and you go jogging. Perhaps you are a Generation X, born between 1965-1977. If so, you are busy, less conservative in your attitudes, especially those towards marriage and are use to fending for yourself. You value experiences. Willing to take risks and go with flow, change is no problem but unreal things are. You are into getting real in real time - Y2K+ and 24/7. You have had different jobs and participate in sport - extremely. You think laterally and live a freestyle lifestyle.

A recent graduate? Then you are probably a Generation Y and have no meaningful memory of life without a remote control, computers and the internet. You have always been networked and fully get dual WiFi/3G cell phones and web access at no minutes charged. You expect work to be collaborative and creative and have a strong intolerance for bureaucracy. At work, you will get to play 'casual games' that will teach you facts and concepts because you are used to being entertained as well as educated. You will use your mobile phones to prep for sales calls and troubleshoot large machinery (immediately) as you multitask and passionately commit to the environment. Information overload is a chronic condition. That is, unless you live in Africa where telephone density is less that 2 lines per 1,000 inhabitants. You are a global citizen but you do not have to change jobs to be so. If you work at St George bank, you will have the opportunity to acquire up to an additional 6 weeks leave for travel, as well as the opportunity to take career breaks that see you work for four years and take the fifth year off to travel with an income.

Let's Question

Do you fit? How snug? Perhaps you are a Cusper? The following 'blogger' is:

'When I was growing up, Baby Boomers never extended to 1964. Now suddenly the Baby Boom generation has been revised and everyone quotes 1946 to 1964 as an established fact. Before the term "Gen X" was created 1963 and 1964 birthdates were excluded explicitly from the Baby boom definition.'

Cuspers were born between 1943-1947, 1962-1967 and 1978-1982 (Tulgan and Martin, 2002). As a Cusper, you were born either early in a generation and have taken on some of the characteristics of the preceding generation, or you were born late in your generation and have adopted some of the characteristics of the next generation. The young child of older parents or the old child of young parents, there may not be the general gap between you and your parents (one to one and a half generations). Cuspers have 'reach' potential. They are potentially in a very good position to act as translators and ambassadors between generations – to be *generationally bilingual*. We (those who believe in learning deeply), can do much to realise this potential – even if we are categorically not a Cusper. After all, we are all eligible for membership to Generation C!

Generation C are 'prosumers' – simultaneously consuming and producing content in digital space on an ongoing basis (Chang, 2006). Australians are receptive to living a 'Second Life' virtually but the astounding statistics come from South Korea. Cyworld is another life for 10 million South Koreans. More than 25 % of the population have their own cyber-outlet - self made poems, stories, songs, photos, videos viewed by other Generation C members, producers, agents, talent scouts and employers. This activity is acknowledged as having produced a cultural phenomenon. Structurally, Korean society is now supported by free of charge centres for internet addiction (Wyn, 2006). Can we readily conclude that this is bad? Access cannot be banned. Bernard Salt (2007) contemplates a 'brave new world' within which the marginalised of the future are those that have little or no access to technology. Indeed, as educators, this future is already here.

Digital technology is transforming identities – learning, working, social, familial and civic identities. It is easy to see how the individual can get lost. How does an individual find a sense of self in such a sophisticated network with nothing but reach?

Let's Wonder

How is this search for identity actually performed?

'The Spirit of Generation Y', conducted by Monash University, the Australian Catholic University and the Christian Research Association, has spent the three years between 2003-2006 studying youth spirituality in Australia. Youth Facts and Stats (ACYS) reports the key findings of this study, noting that based on the surveying of 1272 young Australians in their teens and 20s, fewer than half of Australia's Generation Y (born 1976–90) was found to identify with a traditional religion and rely on family and friends as sources of beliefs, values and social support. Compared to other generations, Generation Y was found to be more influenced by social forces shaping contemporary religion and spirituality (such as secularisation, the relativism of postmodernity, consumer capitalism and individualism) than those from older generations. So, the 'good news' beliefs, values and a sense of social being are still relevant.

Australia hosted the curtain-raising show for the seven-continent, 24-hour Live Earth concert. While discussing the precedent of carbon neutral concert, Missy Higgins looked

perplexed at a joke made by the reporter interviewing her. He casually laughed and said, "So, I guess you'll be getting rid of your Kelvinator". To which she replied, "What's a Kelvinator?" No one can deny that LiveEarth is relevant (and, one might add, fridges too). The fact that such relevance was mobilised with such speed and coverage is quite astonishing. Attendance at concerts is not the only way this momentum is taking shape. 'Believers' are connected between concerts. An interactive website for LiveEarth invites you to contribute to the measuring and monitoring of everyday commitment. Select your actions from the following:

- *Switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs*
- *Set the thermostat to 13ºC when sleeping*
- *Maintain properly inflated car tyres*
- *Set water heater temperature to 54ºC*
- *Choose seafood wisely*
- *Buy energy efficient appliances and electronics*
- *Wash and rinse in cold water*
- *Buy locally produced food and produce*
- *Drink from reusable glassware*
- *Walk, bike and car share*

These actions are simple but they are also deep in meaning. They provide everyday answers to what it means to be green. I wonder what it means to be an everyday Anglican? I wonder if (as an online Christian blogger questions), 'it's gotten to the point where everything has to go virtual and things are lost in the translation.' Another blogger reflects, 'To me, somebody who talks a pluralist language and then expresses a deep personal belief in a particular path is somebody who has a deep understanding of their own faith, because they understand it in context. This person probably has something valuable to say.' Members of Generation Y are seeking to *define* their own faith but not uniformly or even 'forever' so. It is important that generations interact (1 John 1:12-14). I wonder how we might better connect conversations.

ABC's Behind the News conducted a survey at the end of 2006 to identify what worries our young people (Gen Next*ers*) all across Australia. An opportunity to talk about worries was wanted. More than 2000 children voluntarily responded to the survey (54% of them were aged 10 – 12 years, 35% were 13 years and over, while 11% were nine years or younger). The things that they are worrying about are big things – and one might judge that many are too big occupying too much head space in our young learners. The following worries came in as the top 12 worries: my friends or family dying, the environment, my family, what I look like, losing or keeping friends, homework pressures, the future, doing tests, exams, assignments, pets getting ill or dying, getting a job in the future, not having enough time to do everything and school.

I wonder what responses might have been received if the question asked was, 'What are you *not* worried about?'

I wonder what we might do more of to illuminate the 'good news' headlines. Posting a 'good news' headline at the end of each day is a possibility. In addition to working on acknowledging good news, I wonder how we might see more everyday?

Let's See

Meaningful participation (and not just online) is the key. Children's participation in decision-making is complex - even more complex than ours. If participation is to be more meaningful *to children* it needs to become embedded as an integral part of our relationship with children (Sinclair, 2006) – not a one off reactive or isolated event. Who owns the conversation?

Ladders of participation are not new (1992) but they are more important than ever. Strategically reporting on meaningful participation is newer. As they say, we report on what we value. The idea of structuring for meaningful participation is worth workshopping. It is in detail that meaning is made and identities emerge. A sharp mental and emotional sensitivity is a necessary inclusion in the approach we use to reach and connect with Generation Y – habits of the mind entwined with habits of the heart.

Generation Y has always been networked and ironically it is by structuring strategically for meaningful participation that will open up an opportunity for us to participate, in part, in shaping this network. Cyberspace presents an important spiritual challenge involving the formation of human identities – a sense of connectedness to the rest of mankind. The new edge of technology needs moral and spiritual grounding. We have much to offer as lifelong and life-wide co-learners.

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