



Future Perspective

WHAT
MAKES THEM
DIFFERENT?

Why Gen Z could
be great for
the classroom

November 2021



Finding Nemo is on the big screen,



J.K. Rowling releases the 5th instalment of Harry Potter, Beyoncé launches her solo career, and Myspace is put out into the world. It's 2003 and those born then are now 18. On their first birthday they were gifted Facebook. On their second, YouTube. And by their 4th the first iPhone had taken the world by storm.

The generation born between 1997 and 2012, the eldest now in their early 20s, are known as Gen Z, the generation that comes after the much talked about Millennials. It's a generation that has received a huge amount of attention, especially as they now begin entering the workforce.

This future perspective is an independent trend and insight-driven think-piece that puts a spotlight on this generation and their formative years. It identifies five trends that both reflect and shape Gen Z and considers how these might align to a career in teaching. It isn't a perspective on education but on the individuals who might one day become educators.

This future perspective was commissioned by **Get into Teaching**. However, all content was researched and authored by Leo Sanders, an independent culture, trend, and insight specialist. It's based on analysis of over 40 articles and reports from multiple popular culture, trend, and research-driven sources, as well as a decade of experience.

FORWARD



What sets this generation apart

The formative years are the tell-tale of any generation and, while still finding their place, the context that this generation has been born into already sets them apart. So, what makes them different?

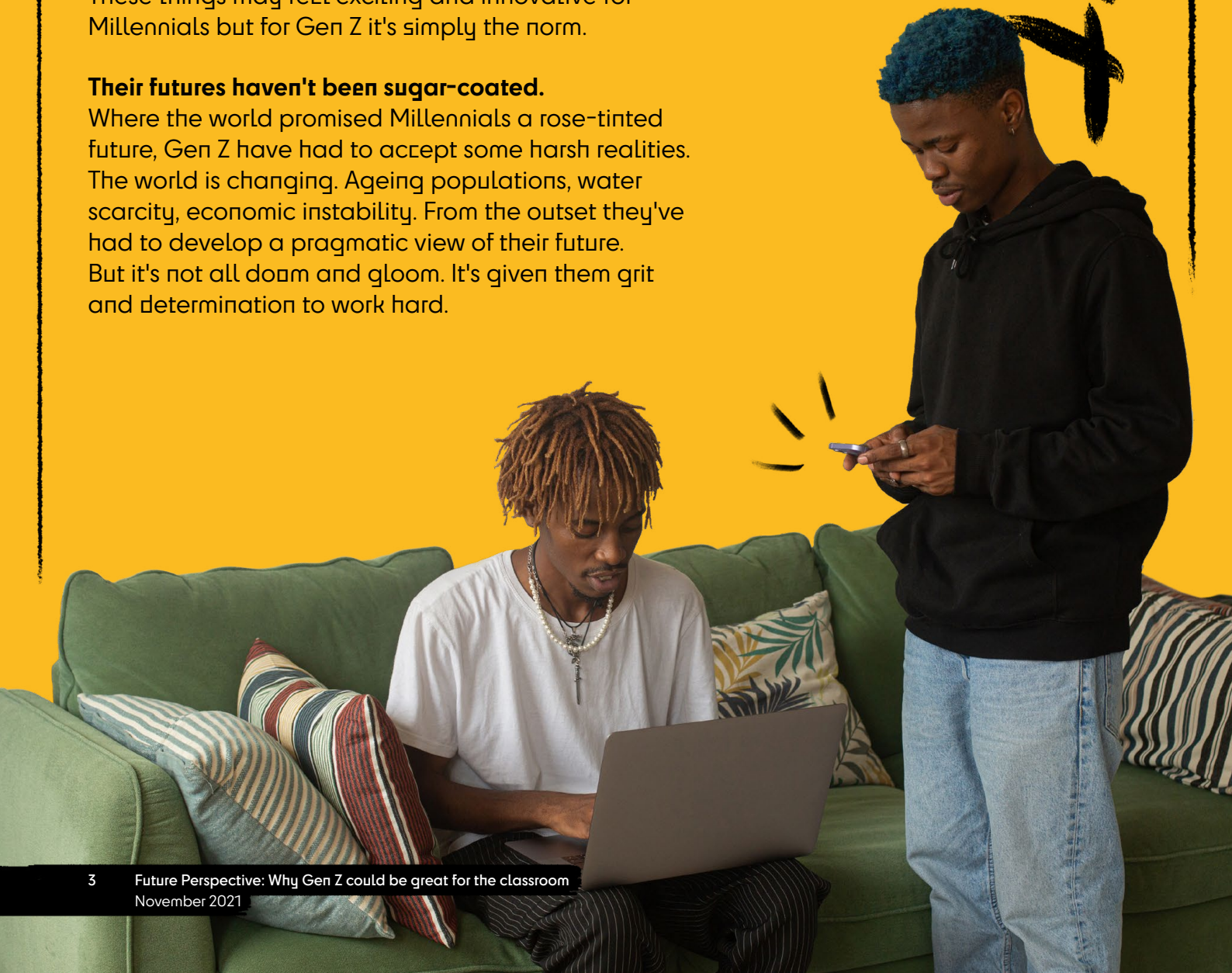
They are the first true digital natives.

This generation has never known a world without the internet and by their early years smartphones and social media had become mainstream. The impact of this can't be understated. On-demand and on-the-go access to information, entertainment, friends, news, food, and shopping has always been a reality for this generation. These things may feel exciting and innovative for Millennials but for Gen Z it's simply the norm.

Their futures haven't been sugar-coated.

Where the world promised Millennials a rose-tinted future, Gen Z have had to accept some harsh realities. The world is changing. Ageing populations, water scarcity, economic instability. From the outset they've had to develop a pragmatic view of their future. But it's not all doom and gloom. It's given them grit and determination to work hard.

CONTEXT



CONTEXT

It's up to them to act for change and create alternatives.

They've come of age at a time when the impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly vivid. They are more conscious in part because they have no other choice. But this goes beyond environmental concerns. This generation, more than any other, sees the opportunity to steer the world into a sustainable, just, and prospering future for all.

Mental health doesn't live in the shadows.

Intensified by always-on, tech-driven lifestyles, this generation has felt an immense amount of pressure and stress, all within their teens. However, in their lifetime there has been a shift in perception towards mental health. There is greater awareness, understanding and acceptance that our minds need the same care and attention as every other part of our bodies. This generation is better versed and more confident to discuss and identify their mental health and wellbeing needs.



CONTEXT

Diversity is their norm.

Gen Z have grown up alongside more open conversations around gender identity, sexuality, race, and disability and this diversity shows up in popular culture in ways that simply didn't exist for previous generations. We've also seen refreshed anger, backlash and action against racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. These are not always new conversations, but a more connected and accountable world has turned moments into movements with a momentum and scale not seen before.

These five societal truths give us clues to better understand and unpick the motivations that drive this generation. However, a more vivid picture of their behaviours and values can be seen when a cultural lens is overlaid. This brings into focus five key trends that help us get to know Gen Z better and consider how these might align them with a career in teaching.

"Change is coming, whether you like it or not."

Greta Thunberg, Gen Z climate activist¹



Viral Content Creators

The average 11-16 year old in UK posts 26 times a day on social media, meaning by 18 they are likely to have posted 70,000 times². TikTok in particular makes it easier than ever to create and disseminate content. Early figures suggested the platform had 55% of users creating content, well above other leading social media platforms³.

"We just have a much easier way to show our **creativity** to the entire world!"

Makenna Kelly,
Teen Vogue 21 Under 21 class of 2018⁴

This generation favours a more real and unfiltered aesthetic and is skilled in switching between the inane and the serious and anywhere in between to tell stories, articulate points of view or simply entertain. And a serious topic doesn't necessarily dictate a serious tone.

They're natural creators, curators and editors of entertaining, engaging and easily consumable audio-visual content. When asked how they spend their free time online, 48% of UK and US Gen Z selected at least one creative activity such as editing photos, creating memes, or creating digital art⁴.

"Their creative arsenal—face swaps, selfies, AR Lenses, lip syncing, and emojis—has become the **expressive** staple of the digital arena, and now this group is using video, sound, animation and more to create **rich new visual landscapes**, lobby for their favorite causes, and create **new income streams**."

Into Z Future, JWT Intelligence in partnership with Snap Inc.⁴


Generation Contradiction

Contradiction is at the heart of this generation: they live online but thrive offline; they're brand lovers and brand sceptics; social media is a place to reflect reality as well as a curated image; fashion is a way to belong but also a space to play and express. Where older generations might see contradiction, Gen Z see possibility.

“This generation has no problem with contradictory performance in different spaces. They're expert curators in how they present **identity** for where and who their audience is.”

Dr. Alex Cho, Digital Media Anthropologist⁵

They're less bound by labels and more free to express and explore their purpose and passion in multiple ways; they're not just one thing, they're many things.



Take Naomi Osaka, the 23-year-old four-time grand slam champion who is vocal about empowering women in sport and fighting for racial equality. "Aside from tennis my most treasured passion is fashion" her website explains. She's collaborated with Nike, Louis Vuitton and was co-host of 2021's Met Gala. She's also the founder of skincare brand Kinlò; providing sunscreen designed specifically to protect melanated skin and reinforce that sun protection is still important for darker skin tones.

“I don't feel like I'm being brave. I just feel like I'm doing what I **should** be doing.”

Naomi Osaka⁶

For this generation purpose is their north star, passion their compass, and their job or vocation simply becomes a mode of transport to get there. It's one that may change, be supplemented, or pause, and allows for contradiction.

Inter-Culturally Connected

As a generation they are more diverse, and they are more exposed to diversity. A 2021 Bain study reports that 75% of UK, US and Australian Gen Z say their race, gender or sexuality cannot be easily categorised, and 60% say their identity spans race, culture or languages⁷. Representation becomes a base expectation and, more than ever, accountability an accessible reality.

Diversity goes deeper than being seen but being heard. It's about giving everyone the opportunity to show and express their full, authentic self and their own lived experiences.

“True feminism has to be intersectional and encompass women that look like you, women who don't look like you, women whose experiences are different than you. That means black women, that means trans women, that means **all women.**”

Zendaya, Gen Z actress and singer⁸

It's a generation that is more accustomed and open to the interconnected, overlapping, and interdependent nature of diversity. A shift away from binary definitions allows them to have greater empathy for the experiences of individuals, depending on who they are, how they identify and what they may have been through. The intersections between race, gender, sexuality, religion, neurodiversity, disability, and socioeconomic background are also the places where creativity feels most fresh, exciting and boundary breaking.

“To have a gay man in hip hop doing his thing, crushing records – that is **huge** for us and for Black excellence. The way he's unafraid to make people uncomfortable is so rock 'n' roll.”

Kid Cudi on Lil Nas X, TIME Magazine's most influential people of 2021

Gamer State of Mind

“I’ve always wanted to make video games. With a **collection**, you can make clothes for people, but with video games you can create a universe.”

Luka Sabbat, Gen Z model and cultural influencer⁹

Gaming is more than play, it's a cultural gateway to entertainment, community, and commerce. We've witnessed major concerts take place in Fortnite, BLM rallies in The Sims, and Think Global School, the world's first traveling high school, gathering its students and teachers on the avatar-based virtual event platform, Teoah.

“**Gaming** is set to emerge as the next dominant technology platform much the way search engines, mobile phones and social networks redefined industries in previous decades”

Michael Wolf, co-founder and CEO of Activate Inc.¹⁰



Gen Z are at the heart of this gaming revolution. We've seen entertainment providers waking up to the seismic shift taking place. Last year in a letter to shareholders, Netflix highlighted Fortnite being a bigger threat and competition to their streaming service than HBO¹¹.

Gaming is increasingly a diverse space where people of different backgrounds, ages, genders, and beliefs can come together. UK data suggests gaming penetration between men and women is 61% and 63% respectively¹². Gaming is a broad term and can be as much about creating and styling an avatar as having to achieve a certain 'goal' – just take the popularity of Animal Crossing. It becomes more about a state of mind, focused on the exploration of the virtual world.

Activist by Nature

Activism isn't a behaviour but a way of being that this generation has been forced into. That's not to say every Gen Z is mobilising on the streets. But they are finding ways to have a more positive impact – be that the food, fashion, careers, or lifestyle they are choosing.

In the UK,

39%
of
Gen Z

have already made choices over the types of work they'd do and the organisations they're willing to work for based on their personal beliefs and ethics.¹³

Activism can be big and bold but what sets apart the activist nature of this generation is the sum of every small choice they are making to shape the world they want to live in. As digital natives they have this unique sense of power, where they can make a difference, all without having to look up from their phone.



What's particularly interesting is that Gen Z's activism isn't just about protesting but about actively re-creating. Over the last year Jaden Smith, the Gen Z actor, rapper, and songwriter, has been working on launching a restaurant in Los Angeles that will give free food to the homeless community. He's also working on ways to solve water shortages in disenfranchised communities through his JUST Water company.

75% of Gen Z Americans believe that their generation will change the world.¹⁴

“We're in a time in which we're no longer settling for reform, but **genuine reimagination.**”

Yara Shahidi, Gen Z actress, model and activist¹⁵

How might these trends align to a career in teaching?

Teaching is a sector that is looking for young people willing to bring their individuality and creativity to help shape every lesson, and these cultural trends speak to the potential and possibilities that this generation could bring to the classroom.

Nurturing the next generation of young people to ensure they reach their full potential could feel particularly compelling to Gen Z, given the trends outlined. However, it can be more than an altruistic career choice. It's also worth considering the personal benefits that this generation could find in the classroom; it could be a workplace that allows them to express their true selves and help them to realise their own potential.

Viral content creators *could* become experts in creating engaging and exciting lessons. Gen Z are natural creators and editors of engaging audio-visual content that feels entertaining and memorable. This hands-on creativity could translate well in the classroom.

Generation contradiction *could* bring their passions to work as a way to inspire and stimulate students. This generation isn't bound by labels and feels freer to express and explore their purpose and passion. They may not always fit the mould, but they will stretch it, improve it, and make it reflect them. This generation will favour workplaces that enable them to continue exploring their passions.

CONCLUSION

This **inter-culturally connected** group *could* broaden definitions and realities of diversity and inclusion beyond anything we've experienced. Gen Z is more diverse, is more comfortable expressing that diversity and understands that everyone's experience is different and valid. The ability to bring this to a workplace and inspire the next generation, could be a very powerful reason to teach.

Their **gamer state of mind** *could* deliver collaborative and creative problem solving skills to the classroom. Working with others, world-building and overcoming obstacles are at the heart of gaming culture, and this generation is at the heart of its evolution. Gen Z has the ability to foster a sense of community, support others and encourage discovery, which are invaluable skills for any classroom.

And an **activist state of mind** *could* see them helping to create a society where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. In a classroom setting, this generation has the opportunity to amplify their impact. Teaching could be a platform to inspire and equip future generations to take on the big challenges that the world and each individual will face.

Teaching *could* be the most impactful and fulfilling work they'll ever do.

CONNECTION

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