Socratic Teaching & The Millennials: Has Socrates’ Care of the Self Become the Millennials’ Care of the Selfie?

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SOCRATIC TEACHING & THE MILLENNIALS

1. Abstract

A growing body of literature indicates rising levels of narcissism in the generation know as the Millennials (those born after 1980). Studies have noted that this rise correlates with the increasing popularity and usage of social networking sites within this group. Literature also increasingly focuses on how to educate Millennials. Many of it advocates stepping away from emphasis on teaching to emphasis on learning. Socratic teaching appears out of step with this ideology, by which a variety of strategies are encouraged to accommodate Millennials’ differing talents and learning styles. Yet, at its core, Socratic teaching is about learning, but one must be receptive to the idea of questioning one’s own knowledge. It is an examination of the individual. Today’s young people also are all about the individual. But, rather than Socrates’ notion of care of the self, this generation — buoyed by attention garnered from social networking sites — appears more interested in care of the selfie.

2. Introduction

It is apparent that each generation is critical of those that come after them. Older generations question subsequent generations’ values and morals. They rebuff contemporary styles. Yet, at its core, Socratic teaching is about learning, but one must be receptive to the idea of questioning one’s own knowledge. It is an examination of the individual. Today’s young people also are all about the individual. But, rather than Socrates’ notion of care of the self, this generation — buoyed by attention garnered from social networking sites — appears more interested in care of the selfie.

3. Aims and Hypotheses

Is Socratic teaching still an effective method of learning amid the rising narcissism of the Millennials? Socrates’ notion of care of the self essentially was the attainment of wisdom through a process of questioning one’s knowledge. Is this relevant to today’s young people? It was hypothesised that Millennials would engage with content better when using computer-based applications rather than traditional paper-based resources. It was also hypothesised that Millennials undertaking assessment tasks that involved computer-generated individual creative expression would enjoy the experience equally as much as Millennials undertaking class activities that drew upon Socratic teaching.

4. Methods and Results

Methods

The data for this study fell into two lots. The first came from eTEVAL statistics, and the second from iLearn statistics and previous student surveys.

- eTEVAL data was used from two journalism subjects that ran concurrently in one September semester: The Australian Media, and Digital Publishing and Design. Feedback questions were compared to assess student satisfaction with the instructor’s methods.
- iLearn statistics were used from a third journalism subject. Writing for the News Media, in a following semester. iLearn statistics tracked student usage of electronic resources. Handwritten surveys from four previous semesters were compared with an electronic version accessed via iLearn.
- Digital Publishing encouraged creative self-expression.
- Australian Media tutorials utilised Socratic teaching whenever possible.

Results

Student satisfaction with subject/instructor was slightly higher for Digital Publishing and Design. However, the margins were minimal and the sample too small. Further research is warranted. The following is worth noting:

- Students preferred paper-based quizzes over electronic ‘Socrative’ quizzes, citing increased anxiety with the electronic version.
- Electronic ‘Quizlet’ flash-cards students could access via iLearn were introduced in Week 5 and not referred to again by the instructor. iLearn statistics show the entire cohort used them, most frequently in the hour after the lecture. Students observed to be displaying heightened anxiety traits used the flash-cards most frequently, as did English as a Second Language students.
- Online feedback forms had a return rate of 55.5%. This compared to return rates of 96%, 94.4%, 81.8% and 64.5% for paper feedback forms of four prior semesters.

5. Discussion questions

Socrates, through his dialogic examinations, convinces young nobleman Alcibiades that his quest for power and glory is not without him. Looking through a modern lens, could it be that technology and social networking sites have metaphorically supplanted Socrates? Alcibiades needed Socrates to elevate his status among Athenians, just as Millennials need social networking sites to elevate their status among their peers. It is reasonable to assume Generation Me has acquisitive narcissists do on social networking sites and why. Personality and Individual Differences (50).

REFERENCES


Schaffner, F. J. (Director). (1968). Planet of the Apes [Motion Picture].


Have you noticed any changes in the way you interact with technology and social networking sites over time? Do you think these changes have influenced your learning style? How can educators best accommodate these changes in the classroom?