

GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY: FROM MILLENNIALS TO BABY BOOMERS

What can a millennial and a baby boomer learn from each other?

Quite a bit, as it turns out.

BY LAURA NAVIN AND DIANA DALE

When we hear the word “diversity,” we tend to think of race, religion or sexual orientation. We don’t often think of the great advantages to recognizing and celebrating the diversity of age. At Good Hope Middle School in Mechanicsburg, Pa., we’ve benefited greatly from the 27-year age difference separating the two of us. We recently sat down to put into words just how a millennial (Navin) and a baby boomer (Dale) approach school counseling differently while learning from each other.

Technology

LN: Technology is such an integral factor in the field of school counseling, and we both acknowledge how it affects us differently. As a millennial, I find it easier and more expedient to e-mail parents rather than call. My case notes are entered into a computer program. While home at night or sitting in study hall, students frequently e-mail me to set up appointments rather than wait to schedule in person. I also incorporate different media technologies into my school counseling curriculum classroom lessons and am very comfortable with all the current social media sites our students reference. Due to my comfort with technology, I am often called upon first by our principals to look into potential scheduling glitches. When our district switched scheduling programs, I created a simple how-to book for Diana to help guide her through the process.

DD: As the senior school counselor I prefer phone calls or face-to-face meetings with parents. It requires more time and may be less timely, but in the long run I feel the personal connection helps build bridges for future interactions. My case notes are handwritten, which again requires more time. Students may occasionally e-mail me with a question or concern, but typically they leave a note requesting an appointment if I am not available. My school counseling curriculum classes generally involve individual reflection and group activities, with little media use. As an “immigrant” to the technology world, I find myself relying on Laura’s expertise with different computer programs and social media.

Experience

LN: Experiences we each have had are directly related to our age difference. I rely on learning from Diana’s experiences, which provides a comfort level by being able to share with her my ideas and questions. Although I trust my initial thoughts or instincts, her reassurances in dealing with the tough cases put my mind at ease. I don’t take our roles lightly, and collaborating with and benefiting from her experience and wisdom is one of the greatest areas in which I have relied on her. Unfortunately, my perceived lack of

Without communication and collaboration between the two of us, this could potentially undermine our working relationship.

experience due to my age has led principals to include Diana in cases involving my students, without consulting me. I have felt frustrated that not only am I not consulted but that I’m sometimes not trusted to handle the situation effectively due to my age.

DD: I am aware of sometimes being in a rut with my approaches to students and their situations. I greatly appreciate Laura’s fresh ideas and different perspectives in dealing with what may seem like mundane cases. Conversely, I can offer Laura a sounding board based on my years of experience and am comfortable in that role. Again, unfortunately, this level of experience sometimes causes the administration and teachers to automatically summon me in difficult cases rather than consulting the other school counselors. Without communication and collaboration between the two of us, this could potentially undermine our working relationship. But we don’t allow it.

Parent Contact

LN: Parent contact is another facet of school counseling that requires varied skills. When I first started interacting with parents in difficult situations, I found it very uncomfortable. Diana included me in parent meetings and phone conversations, which showed me different strategies and greatly increased my level of comfort. I learned early in my career that youth, combined with not being a parent, can be a perceived disadvantage as some parents don’t respect my skills. I have relied on Diana’s age and position as a mother to help convey the same message to parents that I tried unsuccessfully to get across. Now, when faced with difficult parent meetings, my approach is to work quickly to address the issues and solve the problems at hand.

DD: At the start of my school counseling career, I couldn’t always rely on my senior school counselors for guidance. They were in the generation of school counselors who entered the education field as teachers first and then later became “guidance counselors.” I found their education, training, philosophies and approaches were quite different and not always congruent with my comfort level as a school counselor. I gradually learned that the best approach to working well with parents is to invest a lot of time communicating with them.

Students

LN: Students are the obvious reason school counselors enter this field. The diversity of age greatly affects the approach I take as a millennial versus how Diana, as a baby boomer, works with students. I find that as a younger professional I can relate well to the students. In individual or group counseling sessions I reference current movies, song lyrics, TV shows and social media. I am appreciative that I had the unique opportunity to observe Diana’s individual and group sessions to help gather varied skills to hone my approach. Another skill I was able to observe and perfect was conducting threat assessments. Fortunately with Diana’s assistance I was able to practice and learn the protocol and am now comfortable stepping into the lead role.

DD: As I reflect on my career when I was younger and a less-experienced school counselor, I focused more on my methods of counseling with the students and as a result was not as focused on them. As I aged and became a parent, my skills and comfort level grew. Also with age, I became less familiar with various social media and the resulting huge impact on my students’ lives. As a result, I learned to rely on Laura to stay up-to-date with that aspect of school counseling.

When we both started working in this district, we were referred to as “guidance counselors.” However, through ASCA, graduate schools now strongly push students entering the profession to ensure we are referred to as school counselors. It wasn’t until this school year that, together with our peers, we lobbied to have the board and all staff accept not



LEARNING THROUGH TEACHING

BY KATHY WELCH

One thing I have learned in 35 years of being a school counselor is that this job can't be done in isolation. My colleagues and administrators have always been a tremendous support; however, it is my mentoring experiences with newer school counselors that keep me passionate about school counseling and remind me I will always be a life-long learner.

Essential to any mentoring connection is a good relationship. With trust as the foundation of every relationship, you can be open and honest in what you do and say. Mutual respect is essential in such a relationship. This shows you value their input and ideas, and they value yours, setting the expectation of learning together. This relationship built upon mutual respect is not competitive. It is cooperative, respectful and empathic.

In 2010, the state of Maine updated Chapter 118. This rule establishes the requirements for local support systems to operate as part of the certification process for teachers and educational specialists. The primary purpose of local certification is to provide candidates for certification with guidance and identify resources, training and support necessary to achieve the required certification within the context of professional learning communities. In 2013, I became a mentor to a school counselor in our district. We met weekly to discuss procedures, improve practice and enrich programs. As a busy school counselor, I was concerned about this added responsibility. Where would I find the time to add this meeting to an already-overscheduled week? In reality, our

meetings soon became the highlight of my week. The time meeting with Amanda became a time to renew and recharge myself and the school counseling program.

Amanda's excitement and energy around Michelle Garcia Winner's concept of social thinking" helped me see how I could add this to classroom work. It was with Amanda's encouragement we attended social thinking training and supported our students becoming "social detectives" with a list of strategies to help them be better listeners, more focused and ready to learn.

This same year our school district changed computer services. We moved to a Google-based system for e-mail, shared documents, presentations, all things technology. I was at a disadvantage. How would I cope with this Google system? Amanda, my mentee, became my mentor. She taught me how to use Google docs, how to share information easily, how to make forms, how to use spreadsheets. Amanda brought my school counseling program into the 21st century.

Another experience I had was as a supervisor to a school counseling intern. I was thirty-five years older than Julie. I wondered if our age difference would hinder our relationship. Again my worry was needless. Julie took an active role in all we did, and I learned from her every day. Julie took a Jenga game and turned it into one of my consistent go-to games for groups. She numbered each Jenga piece, and typed questions to use in divorce and worry groups. The kids loved it.

Again, Julie had technology skills I didn't possess. She showed me how to share Google docs with students so we could work together on projects. She taught me how to analyze testing data to share with staff and parents. She showed me how to use iMovie. I have incorporated this knowledge into my school counseling program, and I now make movies with students, analyze data and bring my computer into classrooms for school counseling core curriculum lessons on Smart Boards or Apple TVs.

It is through these relationships with younger school counselors that I have learned new skills I would never have had. Each time I mentor a new school counselor, I gain a fresh perspective. I learn new things. It gives me a professional relationship with a new person, broadening my base of connections. It is a time for me to give back to the profession. Being a mentor affords me the time to reflect on my own practice, something many of us want to do but never find the time or opportunity to do.

If you ask my young colleagues, I am sure they would tell you they took with them some of my core beliefs that 35 years in this profession have given me.


Although I might have been in the position of mentor in these relationships, I was also fortunate enough to learn – not just teach – in these mentoring relationships as well.

Kathy Welch is a school counselor at Coastal Ridge Elementary School in York, Maine. She can be reached at kwelch@yorkschoos.org.

only the school counselor concept but also the ASCA National Model. What used to be our “guidance class” is now referred to as ACES (Academics, Career exploration, Emotional and Social development).

As we reflect on our similarities and differences as a millennial and a baby

boomer, it becomes apparent that the diversity of age is a true gift, not only to each other as professionals but also to the students and parents we serve. Our rich variety of experiences and philosophies ensures that through any situation we face, our combined commitment to the ASCA National Model and reliance on

each other will lead to the best outcome for all involved. 

.....
Laura Navin and Diana Dale are school counselors at Good Hope Middle School in Mechanicsburg, Pa. They can be reached at Inavin@cvschools.org and ddale@cvschools.org, respectively.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

BY AMY DAUBLE

As I complete my third year as an elementary school counselor, my favorite line is “I’m still learning every day.” My veteran school counselor colleagues usually say, “So am I.” I learned so much from the veteran school counselor I worked with my first year on the job. She was there to give me a background of the community, answer her phone when I had a question and reassure me that it was normal to feel overwhelmed trying to accommodate three school sites. To this day, I still count on her knowledge and experience when I am navigating a challenging situation. In return, she appreciates my knowledge of Google Drive and assistance in creating her LinkedIn and Twitter accounts. Although she may not be best friends with data, she respects my eagerness to incorporate data at the elementary level. There’s an understanding and respect we have for each other’s energy, and that’s how we’re able to collaborate and work effectively.

Navigating the generation gap can present challenges. Learning how to respect each other’s knowledge base, comfort zones and experience takes work from both sides. Effective collaboration begins with the attempt and willingness to understand each other. One of the most common collaboration challenges we millennials have is that we grew up in world where technology was

incorporated into learning, and some veteran school counselors have not. Since technology may come easier for me, I can’t assume they already know how to use Google Drive for everything. For example, I was talking about gathering student data via Google forms at a collaboration meeting. The other school counselor was staring at me with wide eyes like I was speaking a different language. At first I was afraid I was going to be met with resistance. However, this led to a great discussion about when technology can be efficient and when it cannot. We were able to talk about our different opinions on data collection, technology and new and old approaches. This is where I learned communication is key in understanding each other.

I have also learned that finding a balance in each other’s energy is important in collaboration. When we’re able to respect each other’s enthusiasm for different things, we’re able to appreciate what we can learn from each other. There have been times when I think I have a new idea about decreasing the amount of student tardies, and then I find out they tried that strategy a few years ago. There’s a special energy in the collaboration process of discovering what worked, what didn’t and what’s worth trying again.

Whether it’s navigating the history of an idea or concept or utilizing technology in collecting data, we’re all learning from each other. Some veteran school counselors are learning why I cringe at the g-word, and I’m

learning why they cringe at electronic documentation. It creates opportunity for discussion and education. When we’re all listening to each other, we can find the best ways to support our students.

The common denominator we all have as school counselors is that we all possess a student-focused mindset. Younger, newer school counselors are bringing fresh ideas, and veteran school counselors are bringing their experience. When we’re all able to understand and appreciate the strengths and energy each generation brings to the table, I think effective collaboration will follow. In the end, it doesn’t matter if one of us is using a plan book to schedule students or one of us is using Google calendar; we all have something to contribute to our students and to the next generation of school counselors.

I believe it would be valuable to create discussion in graduate classes to learn how to navigate the generational differences younger students will face in their career as a school counselor. It’s definitely an important part in becoming culturally competent.

Amy Dauble is a school counselor at Holly Avenue & Hugo Reid Elementary Schools in Arcadia, Calif. She can be reached at adauble@ausd.net.

