
Special issue: *Social pedagogy and youth and community work*

Book review

Book review: *Generation Z in the virtual environment: Competencies and risks*, by Miriam Niklová, Mário Dulovics and Jana Stehlíková

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Schools play a pivotal role in cultivating a sense of security, care and community belonging to all students. The schools most successful in academic performance and student well-being, emphasise the importance of relationships. By fostering an understanding and nurturing environment, teachers ensure that students feel valued, improving their life prospects and preparing them to build meaningful, compassionate relationships into adulthood.

Generation Z in the virtual environment is based on a research project on the impact of electronic media on the behaviour and development of cross-cutting competencies of Generation Z. The monograph explores the digital lives of this cohort and features both the empowering aspects and the risks posed by digital technology. Despite the valuable insights into Generation Z's engagement with digital environments, I continue to have a questioning attitude towards the commercialisation associated with generational labels. My own observations in educational settings suggest that the wide range

and complexity of individual experiences often go beyond these broad categorisations, highlighting the need for a more subtle comprehension of digital interactions across different age groups.

The collective expertise of the authors – Niklová and Dulovics, with their solid backgrounds in social pedagogy, and Stehlíková, with her crucial psychological insights – greatly enriches the analysis and emphasises the educational system's function in ensuring inclusivity and participation, particularly in protecting vulnerable students from online risks. By addressing the digital challenges faced by students, the study advocates for a social pedagogical approach, suggesting its adaptability from Slovak to global educational and community settings. This study also examines how the digital era's overflow of information, cyber threats and the paradoxical mix of connectivity and isolation impact on critical thinking, attention spans and the identity development of these digital natives. Pointing out the importance of digital literacy and resilience, the book aims to equip young people with the tools needed to navigate their complex digital landscapes effectively.

Using quantitative and mixed methods, the effects of social media on student's well-being are empirically examined. Tools such as measures of social media engagement and cognitive emotion regulation questionnaires reveal both young people's digital challenges and skills. The study has produced various important outcomes, including distinctions in media utilisation tied to gender and age. It also sheds light on gender-specific experiences with cyberbullying, underscoring the urgency for adaptable literacy programmes. Exploration of the FOMO phenomenon – fear of missing out – reveals its psychological effects, calling for integrated socio-emotional curricula within educational initiatives. The examination of university students' digital proficiencies and stress management strategies draws attention to the necessity for holistic educational approaches that equip young people with a blend of technical and emotional coping mechanisms, showcasing social pedagogy's pivotal position in bolstering resilient and digitally adept individuals.

While the study's strategies for protecting young digital users are commendable, some practicality in real-world contexts necessitates further research. The success of educational workshops and the incorporation of media education into curricula depends on the availability of resources such as skilled personnel, which may be limited in financially constrained schools. Encouraging active parental involvement assumes a level of digital literacy among parents, which may be challenging for the varying socio-economic backgrounds and could jeopardise some families' participation. To overcome these difficulties, exploring alternative strategies is essential, such as employing digital platforms for cost-effective teacher training, encouraging community-driven educational initiatives to supplement school resources, and developing accessible online resources to support parents of diverse backgrounds.

The study underscores the critical role of schools in promoting environments where students feel safe, cherished and connected to their community. By integrating digital knowledge with the ability to interact harmoniously, think critically and manage emotions, the aim is to prepare students for their personal and professional lives successfully. Incorporating social pedagogues within schools could greatly amplify these efforts, as their specialised knowledge in holistic education and well-being can customise and elevate strategies to support a comprehensive educational experience. Further research could explore how generational labels influence teaching strategies and student engagement. Investigating the impact of these labels across cultures could enhance our understanding of educational methods, particularly in digital literacy and resilience programmes led by social pedagogues, to better aid young people's well-being and readiness for life's challenges.