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The Australasian Law Teachers Association (ALTA) is a professional body which represents the interests of law teachers in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

Its overall focus is to promote excellence in legal academic teaching and research with particular emphasis on supporting early career academics, throughout Australasia, in the areas of:

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- (b) Curriculum refinements and pedagogical improvements in view of national and international developments, including law reform;
- (c) Government policies and practices that relate to legal education and research;
- (d) Professional development opportunities for legal academics;
- (e) Professional legal education and practices programs.

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**MAKING TRUSTS MORE ACCESSIBLE:  
AN INTERACTIVE LEARNING PROGRAMME**

**TRACEY CARVER\* & TINA COCKBURN\*\***

Studies show that kinaesthetic and visual learning styles are the most prevalent in 'Generation Y' or 'Millennial' students. This pedagogy has been adopted by the Trusts teaching team at the Queensland University of Technology through the development and implementation of an interactive online teaching and learning strategy aimed at increasing the conceptual and physical accessibility of Trusts Law. This paper examines the unique characteristics and learning preferences of Millennials, and outlines the strategy adopted and its impact on student learning experiences. Some practical considerations for the implementation of such initiatives in the future, are also addressed.

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## I INTRODUCTION

In 2004, it was predicted that by 2006 the majority of undergraduate students attending Australian universities would belong to Generation Y.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise known as Millennials, Echo Boomers,<sup>2</sup> Digital Natives<sup>3</sup> or the Net Generation,<sup>4</sup> these students are born between 1980 and 2000, and bring with them a unique outlook, or characteristic set. They exhibit many common denominators which are shaped by the social, political and cultural context of their childhood and teenage years.<sup>5</sup>

Current research<sup>6</sup> shows that this change in outlook, from prior student generations,<sup>7</sup> brings a shift in learning preferences and suggests that, to ensure a more effective learning environment for Generation Y students, learning and teaching strategies must address these preferences. This pedagogy has been adopted by the Trusts teaching team at the Queensland University of Technology ('QUT').

This paper briefly examines the characteristics and learning styles of Generation Y students. It then describes an interactive online learning and teaching strategy developed and implemented in Trusts Law at QUT. By increasing the conceptual and

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Jonas-Dwyer and Romana Pospisil, 'The Millennial Effect: Implications for Academic Development' (Paper presented at the 2004 HERDSA Conference – Transforming Knowledge into Wisdom: Holistic Approaches to Teaching and Learning, Sarawak, 4-7 July 2004) 197.

<sup>2</sup> Claire Raines, *Managing Millennials* (2002) Generations at Work  
<<http://www.generationsatwork.com/articles/millennials.htm>> at 21 February 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Prensky, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* (2001)  
<<http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/default.asp>> at 21 February 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (1998); Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger (eds), *Educating the Net Generation* (2005)  
<[http://www.educause.edu/content.asp?page\\_id=5989&bhcp=1](http://www.educause.edu/content.asp?page_id=5989&bhcp=1)> at 21 February 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Mark McCrindle, *The ABC of XYZ: Generational Diversity at Work* (2005) 1  
<[http://www.quayappointments.com.au/email/040213/images/generational\\_diversity\\_at\\_work.pdf](http://www.quayappointments.com.au/email/040213/images/generational_diversity_at_work.pdf)>  
at 21 February 2007; Mark McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y' (2003) *Principal Matters* 28, 28-9.

<sup>6</sup> Jason Frand, 'The Information Age Mindset: Changes in Students and Implications for Higher Education' (2000) 35(5) *Educause Review* 15, 24; Diana Oblinger, 'Boomers Gen-Xers Millennials, Understanding the New Students' (2003) 38(4) *Educause Review* 37, 38, 45; Barbara Costello, Robert Lenholt and Judson Stryker, 'Using Blackboard in Library Instruction: Addressing the Learning Styles of Generations X and Y' (2004) 30(6) *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 452, 453; Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger, 'Is It Age or IT: First Steps Toward Understanding the Net Generation' in Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger (eds), above n 4, 2.1, 2.6, 2.15.

<sup>7</sup> Such as the Baby Boomers (born 1946 – 1964) and Generation X (born 1965 – 1980).

physical accessibility of the skills and content taught, the strategy sought to improve learning and teaching in Trusts Law by focusing upon the educational attitudes and needs of Generation Y learners. Finally, student perceptions on their learning experience are described and show that students generally considered that the approach adopted was effective in accommodating their preferred learning styles and characteristics. They also considered that there was a positive impact on their learning experience and understanding of the course materials.

## **II 'MILLENNIALS' – THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND LEARNING STYLES**

Generation Y are the first generation of students to have grown up with digital media and information technology in a developed prolific form.<sup>8</sup> Oblinger and Oblinger claim that '[c]hildren age six or younger spend an average of two hours each day using screen media (TV, videos, computers, video games), which ... exceed[s] the amount of reading time (39 minutes)'.<sup>9</sup> Technology forms such a key part of who they are that, for Millennial students, computers and the Internet are regarded as simply part of the environment and not as 'technology' – to them, this term is reserved only for the most recent 'gadgets'.<sup>10</sup> They are also the first generation to have grown up with multi-media 'choices'.

Thus, television, and life in general, has become an interactive, rather than passive, experience.<sup>11</sup> Generation Y is accustomed to multitasking and quickly switching from one activity to another with minimal adjustment time<sup>12</sup> - resulting in a low boredom threshold, a shortened attention span and a preference for processing information

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<sup>8</sup> Raines, above n 2.

<sup>9</sup> Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.2.

<sup>10</sup> That is to say, something is not 'technology' if it was around when you were born: Frand, above n 6, 24. See also Oblinger, above n 6, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela Paul, 'Getting Inside Gen Y' (2001) 23(9) *American Demographics* 42.

<sup>12</sup> John Brown, 'Growing Up Digital: How the Web Changes Work, Education and the Ways People Learn' (2000) 32(2) *Change* 10, 13; Mark McMahon and Romana Pospisil, 'Laptops for a Digital Lifestyle: Millennial Students and Wireless Mobile Technologies' (Paper presented at the 2005 ASCILITE Conference – Balance, Fidelity, Mobility: Maintaining the Momentum, Brisbane, 4-7 December 2005) 421; Frand, above n 6, 18.

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presented in 'bite sized chunks'<sup>13</sup> or a concise easy to use format. Raised in a world of fast food and Internet banking, such students have 'zero tolerance for delays'.<sup>14</sup> They see the world as 'global, connected, and open for business 24/7',<sup>15</sup> and expect information and resources to be available where and when they need it. The Millennial student's desire for convenience or flexibility is enhanced as this generation is 'growing up facing time pressures traditionally reserved for adults'.<sup>16</sup> Many, if not most, students juggle their study life and social activities with part-time, or full-time, work. As such they are also considered to be achievement oriented and, whilst used to multitasking and busy timetables, value structure and feedback.<sup>17</sup>

Friendship and social relationships are also important to Generation Y. They seek a sense of community – to be included – and are more likely to make decisions based upon the collective experience of their peers, rather than their teachers.<sup>18</sup> As a result, in addition to web-based resources, Millennials also desire social interaction and connection, either in person or online.<sup>19</sup>

Known also as the 'Options Generation',<sup>20</sup> Generation Y is one of consumerism and choice. Choice is so prevalent – whether between products, entertainment, life options or Internet sites – that this has led to a new approach to problem solving. Described by Frand as 'Nintendo over logic', this method reflects the trial-and-error approach championed by electronic gaming – where, contrary to the logical rule based or

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Mellow, 'The Media Generation: Maximise Learning by Getting Mobile' (Paper presented at the 2005 ASCILITE Conference – Balance, Fidelity, Mobility: Maintaining the Momentum, Brisbane, 4-7 December 2005) 470. See also Kate Manuel, 'Teaching Information Literacy to Generation Y' (2002) 36(1-2) *Journal of Library Administration* 195, 205; Costello, Lenholt and Stryker, above n 6, 457.

<sup>14</sup> Frand, above n 6, 22. See also McMahon and Pospisil, above n 12.

<sup>15</sup> Raines, above n 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Kathleen Phalen, *Self-Assured, Stressed, and Straight: Millennial Students and How They Got That Way* (2002) Virginia.edu <<http://www.itc.virginia.edu/virginia.edu/fall02/student/home.html>> at 21 February 2007. See also Raines, above n 2.

<sup>18</sup> Anthea Taylor, 'Do We Know Who We Are Teaching? Teacher Education Undergraduates' Views of the World' (Paper presented at the New Zealand/Australian Association for Research in Education Conference – Educational Research, Risks and Dilemmas, Auckland, 29 November 2003); McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y', above n 5, 29; Manuel, above n 13, 208.

<sup>19</sup> Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.6, 2.11.

<sup>20</sup> James Wagner, 'Support Services for the Net Generation' in Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger (eds), above n 4, 10.2-3.

considered approach to decision-making preferred by prior generations,<sup>21</sup> losing is the fastest way to learn.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, today's students not only view themselves as consumers of learning, but expect 'educational offerings to match current entertainment products'.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, whilst Frand opines that it should not be the only approach used, 'trial-and-error learning may provide a more thorough understanding of a number of concepts and their implications'.<sup>24</sup>

Given this unique characteristic set, the learning environment preferred by this student generation differs to that of previous ones. Whereas prior learning experiences were dominated by texts<sup>25</sup> and lectures, 'the lecture tradition of colleges and universities may not meet the expectations of students raised on the Internet and interactive games'.<sup>26</sup> Instead, Oblinger<sup>27</sup> has identified:

- experimental activities;
- use of technology;
- structure; and
- teamwork,

as the learning styles preferred by Millennial students. In terms of learning and teaching approach, these preferences can be elaborated upon as follows:<sup>28</sup>

### *A Experimental Activities*

Research has shown that kinaesthetic leaning styles are most prevalent in Generation Y students.<sup>29</sup> Most Millennials prefer to learn through 'active learning' or learning

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<sup>21</sup> Oblinger, above n 6, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Frand, above n 6, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Manuel, above n 13, 203-4.

<sup>24</sup> Frand, above n 6, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Mellow, above n 13, 469.

<sup>26</sup> Oblinger, above n 6, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 38. See also Raines, above n 2 (who adds 'entertainment and excitement') and Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.7 (who add 'things that matter' – such as community activities, and 'visual and kinaesthetic').

<sup>28</sup> Given that the interactive online strategy developed did not involve teamwork, only the first three learning styles are briefly considered below.

<sup>29</sup> Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.5, 2.7, 2.14; Manuel, above n 13, 195, 207.

experiences which engage the student actively within the learning process<sup>30</sup> or course content, and encourage them to construct their own learning by ‘doing’ rather than simply being told.<sup>31</sup> Such a discovery, or process over content, approach to learning (as apposed to a purely didactic or instructional approach) not only lessens opportunities for boredom by increasing student participation, but increases information retention.<sup>32</sup>

### ***B Technology***

Generation Y students are technology savvy and therefore relate to and appreciate the flexibility and convenience of an online teaching environment. Like all students they engage better with materials that are meaningful or ‘anchored within their own experiences’.<sup>33</sup> This, together with a greater ability to study at their own time, pace and choosing, ‘is recognised as being important to provide an environment for deep learning and understanding’.<sup>34</sup> However more technology is not necessarily better. The only innovations valued are those which enable engagement<sup>35</sup> – by making learning more active, social and student-centred.

### ***C Structure***

Although today’s students want to be entertained, learning has to be ‘high touch’ as well as ‘high tech’.<sup>36</sup> Millennials prefer a supportive learning environment which appropriately scaffolds or structures the teaching and learning process.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, although tasks may be done online, feedback,<sup>38</sup> and monitoring<sup>39</sup> by instructors, still fulfils an important motivational role.

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<sup>30</sup> Teaching and Educational Development Institute, The University of Queensland, *Principles of Effective University Teaching* (2006)  
<<http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/teaching/toolbox/tlprincipals.html>> at 21 February 2007.

<sup>31</sup> McCrindle, ‘The ABC of XYZ: Generational Diversity at Work’, above n 5, 3, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Garry, ‘Training for the Nintendo Generation’ (1996) 75(4) *Progressive Grocer* 87, 88; Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.6, 2.13.

<sup>33</sup> Marlene Le Brun and Richard Johnstone, *The Quiet Revolution: Improving Student Learning in Law* (1994) 253; McCrindle, ‘Understanding Generation Y’, above n 5, 30; Manuel, above n 13, 209.

<sup>34</sup> Le Brun and Johnstone, above n 33, 246; Mellow, above n 13, 469.

<sup>35</sup> Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.10-11, 2.16; Frand, above n 6, 22-3.

<sup>36</sup> Garry, above n 32, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Frand, above n 6, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Costello, Lenholt and Stryker, above n 6, 452-3; Le Brun and Johnstone, above n 33, 246.

<sup>39</sup> Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.3.

### **III TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTED**

Given the preferred learning styles and characteristics of Generation Y students, it was considered appropriate to incorporate an innovative learning and teaching approach meeting these preferences within the Trusts Law course. This was achieved by developing and implementing an online quiz, which was integrated into the tutorial program.

The topics, 'legal and equitable assignments and the requirements of writing and form', are notoriously difficult and complex areas of Trusts Law, which are traditionally performed poorly in exams. Although 'principled' areas of law, student misunderstanding is founded largely in an inability to select the appropriate rule or legislative provision to apply in a given situation. It was therefore considered particularly important, in this area, that students be provided with the ability to test their understanding of the relevant principles, subsequent to lecture but prior to examination and attendance at seminars, by completing practice problems and receiving formative feedback on their attempts. However, Trusts is a core unit, traditionally studied by second year undergraduate law students at QUT, with yearly enrolments averaging between 450 and 550 students (including between 100 and 200 external students). Consequently, it was not possible to provide individual formative feedback, on attempts at practice questions, to all enrolled students.

Given these resource constraints and the importance of these areas to students' overall understanding of Trusts Law, it was decided to utilise currently available 'technology'<sup>40</sup> and create two sequential computer-based tutorials, or quizzes, to assist learning and teaching.

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<sup>40</sup> *Quandary* - developed by Half Baked Software <<http://www.halfbakedsoftware.com>> at 21 February 2007.

These quizzes were developed, integrated into the tutorial program, and implemented, in semester two 2005 to replace one of two face-to-face tutorials on the topics.<sup>41</sup>

Of the two online tutorials developed, Module One focused on the requirements of writing for an effective assignment, whilst Module Two focused on the requirements of form. The modules presented students with a number of legal problem scenarios, and were designed taking into account that Generation Y learners are an options generation. Each problem question was written in such a way that when presented with a scenario, or a legal issue stemming from it, students were required to choose, from a list of alternatives, the most appropriate approach or solution to the problem posed. As they worked through the problem, the consequences of their choice, in some instances, led to new issues to deal with. If students chose an incorrect answer, the reason why they might have thought it correct was explained, together with why their selection was wrong. Students were then required to reconsider their answer and ascertain the correct response before moving forward in the tutorial. A sample question from Module 2, together with feedback on a wrong answer and feedback on a correct answer, is set out below in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Such an approach to learning and teaching is consistent with the kinaesthetic learning style most prevalent in Generation Y students and their preference for active learning. In addition, through the use of life-like scenarios and past examination questions, students were presented with a 'real' or authentic learning experience<sup>42</sup> which was also relevant to their 'achievement driven' nature. Furthermore, this strategy adopted, in part, the 'Nintendo logic' approach referred to by Frand.<sup>43</sup> The modules built upon the choice preference of Generation Y students in that they promoted (as in most electronic games), problem solving, decision-making and the exploring of scenarios in an environment where immediate feedback on both correct and incorrect choices was

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<sup>41</sup> Given the large student numbers in this unit, and the reliance on sessional staff in the tutorial program, there have also been considerable direct and indirect cost savings for the Faculty as a result of this initiative – considering that there are usually 17-20 face-to-face tutorials scheduled across the unit each week.

<sup>42</sup> McCrindle stresses that communications with Generation Y students should 'be real' or something to which they can relate: McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y', above n 5, 30.

<sup>43</sup> See above n 22 and accompanying text.

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provided, and where 'players' might only proceed to the next question (or level) after correctly responding to the previous one. However, 'even though students may prefer one particular learning style, they should be strengthening their skills in other areas as well'.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, rather than just reinforcing the trial-and-error approach to learning preferred by Millennials, which tends to reflect a dualist approach where information is 'tried' and quickly assessed as being either right or wrong, true or false, or good or bad, a student's incorrect selection, in the modules, resulted in the provision of feedback raising questions as to *why* they might be wrong, or in some cases *whether there was a clear answer at all*, rather than just providing *the answer*. Considering the consequences of the answers chosen encourages students to develop a more critical and reflective decision-making approach and hence increases their cognitive development.<sup>45</sup>

Further, Generation Y needs were met as the interactive instructional modules were accessed from the Trust unit's Online Teaching ('*OLT*') Site. Students therefore used 'technology' they were familiar and comfortable with, to enable them to engage in a more experimental or student-centred activity and receive formative feedback, as needed, on their progress that might not otherwise have been provided. In particular, external students could receive tutorials, and timely feedback, in the same manner as internal students.<sup>46</sup>

By stepping the students through the process of developing an understanding of the principles and applying the law relating to the requirements of writing and form to problems, information and feedback was scaffolded and presented in 'bite-sized chunks'. This enabled easier comprehension, yet endeavoured to avoid over

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<sup>44</sup> *Learning Styles* (2005) Center for Support of Teaching and Learning <<http://cstl.syr.edu/cstl2/Home/Teaching%20Support/Student%20Learning%20&%20Development/135000.htm>> at 21 February 2007. See also *Principles of Effective University Teaching*, above n 30; Marc Prensky, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part II: Do They Really Think Differently?* (2001) 5 <<http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/default.asp>> at 21 February 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Angela Weiler, 'Information-Seeking Behaviour in Generation Y Students: Motivation, Critical Thinking, and Learning Theory' (2004) 31(1) *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 46, 48, 51-2.

<sup>46</sup> The usual model to enable external students to participate in the tutorial program is to provide audio streamed outlines, of the issues to be considered in a particular week's tutorial, on the unit's Online Teaching Site. Some seminars are also provided only at the External Attendance School held later in the semester.

simplification and still maintain a holistic<sup>47</sup> or ‘big picture’ approach to learning that allowed students to see the outcome or purpose of the steps taken in the context of the legal problem or scenario as a whole.

The online tutorials were scheduled to take place at a time of a student’s own choosing during week six of the semester. As such they placed particular emphasis on flexibility and facilitated study; the focus was on student self-directed learning and the enabling of students in their own time, and on their own terms, to investigate these challenging areas of law. The following week (or for external students, at the External Attendance School held later in the semester), in a face-to-face academic led tutorial the same principles were reinforced in the context of their application to a different problem, whilst also allowing for the discussion of issues raised by the online activities. This integrated approach took into account the need, recognised by Frand,<sup>48</sup> for a balance to be maintained between didactic and discovery approaches to learning and teaching, and also further fulfilled Generation Y’s desire for structure and learning support. The aim was to create a more effective learning experience, for all students in the unit, which supplemented existing teaching methods and improved the course content’s physical and conceptual accessibility to students.

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<sup>47</sup> Manuel, above n 13, 202.

<sup>48</sup> Frand, above n 6, 18.

Figure 1 – Sample Quiz Problem Question

<= Index =>

**Module Two**

**Assignments: The Requirements of Form**

Bookmark Restart

**McDonald Family Trust**

2. *On the facts*, what requirements of form would Ryan need to comply with to effectively assign his interest in the McDonald Family Trust to Marissa?

Select	Section 199 <i>Property Law Act 1974</i> (Qld)
Select	Section 200 <i>Property Law Act 1974</i> (Qld)
Select	An intention to assign
Select	The payment of consideration
Select	I would like to read the facts of the scenario again

<= Index =>

Figure 2 - Sample 'Wrong Answer' Feedback

<= Index =>

**Module Two**

**Assignments: The Requirements of Form**

Bookmark Restart

**Section 200 *Property Law Act 1974* (Qld)**

Your conclusion may be based on a misclassification of Ryan's interest as beneficiary of the McDonald Family Trust. Section 200 of the *Property Law Act 1974* (Qld) applies only to effect a voluntary assignment in equity of a *legal* interest after the assignor has failed to transfer the interest according to the formalities for assignment at law.

Reconsider the type of property and the nature of the proprietary interest dealt with, and try again.

Select	McDonald Family Trust
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<= Index =>

Figure 3 – Sample ‘Correct Answer’ Feedback

The screenshot shows a web interface for an online quiz. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a blue background and the text '<= Index =>'. Below this, the page is titled 'Module Two' and 'Assignments: The Requirements of Form'. A yellow box contains the question and answer. The question is 'An intention to assign'. The answer is 'Correct. A beneficiary's interest in a trust is present property in the form of an equitable chose in action. Being equitable property it is therefore only assignable in equity. To effectively assign such property without consideration, all that is needed is an intention to assign: *Comptroller of Stamps (Victoria) v Howard-Smith* (1936) 54 CLR 614. Here this is manifested by Ryan's 14 February letter to Sandy, the trustee of the McDonald Family Trust.' Below the answer, there is a 'Continue.' link. At the bottom of the yellow box, there is a 'Select' button and the text 'Present or Future Property'. At the very bottom of the page, there is another navigation bar with a blue background and the text '<= Index =>'.

#### IV STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND EVALUATION

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the online quiz, a method of ‘naturalistic inquiry’ or ‘grounded theory’<sup>49</sup> was employed to qualitatively collect and analyse student perceptions of its nature and impact on their learning environment and experience. After engaging in the online quiz all 460 students enrolled in the unit Trusts in semester two 2005 were required to reflect on their participation and then complete (and submit) a reflection sheet by providing written comments on:

1. What I liked most about the Online Tutorial (Assignments Quiz) was ...
2. What I liked least about the Online Tutorial (Assignments Quiz) was ...
3. One thing I learned from the Online Tutorial (Assignments Quiz) Modules in Trusts was ...
4. Comments or suggestions for improvement in relation to conducting the Online Tutorial (Assignments Quiz) Modules are ...

<sup>49</sup> Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985); Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967); Helen Saenger et al, ‘Evaluation of an Innovative Model for Teaching an LLB Program’ (1998) 9(1) *Legal Education Review* 59, 64.

Given that the evaluation was conducted in tutorials,<sup>50</sup> there was a very high response rate. In addition, the formal general student evaluation of the unit Trusts conducted in semester two 2005 included the following specific open ended question: ‘Does the online tutorial assist your learning in the unit; does it work together with other teaching methods and materials?’ The response rate to this survey was however extremely poor, with only seven of the 460 students enrolled in the unit submitting a response.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, through the use of these open questionnaires, a ‘rich description’ of the phenomenon under investigation was collected which identified the following themes.<sup>52</sup>

In general, student responses indicated that the online quiz accommodated their generational learning styles and characteristics and positively impacted upon their learning experience and understanding of the area of law. Students considered it to be a valuable learning experience which enabled them to engage with the unit material in a meaningful way:

- ...an excellent way ... to gauge my progress and understanding of the unit
- It is sometimes better learning a subject by completing something like this...we often get caught up in the same type of learning
- Found it a really useful learning tool. Would benefit greatly from these in other areas of law as well

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<sup>50</sup> Internal students were required to submit their reflection sheets in the following face-to-face tutorial, while external students submitted their reflection sheets during a tutorial at the External Attendance School.

<sup>51</sup> Low response rates to general student evaluations at universities is commonly experienced, and may, in this instance, be attributable to both: the timing of the evaluation (conducted at the end of the semester when students are subjected to many similar surveys in other units); and the fact that the same students had already been requested to provide feedback on the online quiz via the reflection sheet.

<sup>52</sup> Whilst the seven responses to the student evaluation of unit *alone* are not statistically significant, the responses received in relation to the online quiz modelled those from the reflection sheets. The themes identified below are therefore indicative of both the student evaluation of unit responses and a random sample of 63 students (consisting of 39 internal students and 24 students studying the unit externally) who completed a reflection sheet. The responses illustrated have been grammatically corrected.

Specifically, students valued the opportunity to engage in active learning and to work through a problem in a logical, sequential or step-by-step manner. Students also appreciated the flexibility which the online quiz offered and especially that it was possible to complete the online tutorials in their own time, at their own pace, and on their own terms. This was particularly so for internal students who are otherwise required to attend a face-to-face tutorial every week of the semester. It was also clear that students valued the immediate feedback provided by the quiz. In addition to enhanced feedback, external students particularly valued the opportunity to engage in an equivalent learning experience to that of internal students:

- The opportunity to use some of the knowledge I have gained in this subject so far ... in a different way
- Good to see a structured logical answer ... [adds] perspective
- Clearly given directions as to why something is not right, rather than just right answer
- Being able to do it online at any time, and knowing that we're getting the same teaching experience as the internal students ... regular real-time feedback

Students considered that the online quiz, whilst enabling them to engage in a new or more experimental student-centred learning activity, also supplemented existing didactic learning and teaching methods by 'back[ing] up standard tutorials with alternative teaching methods'. They also appreciated the variety in learning and teaching approaches offered. However responses also highlighted Generation Y's 'high touch' perception that face-to-face contact and learning support from academic instructors continues to remain important; they seek socialisation and a balance between didactic and discovery based approaches. One student commented 'I learn better when I have a teacher – student interaction'. Internal students were used to this level of weekly ongoing support and therefore, in some cases, exhibited a stronger sense of 'missing out' due to not having a seminar in the same week as the quiz – even though the same principles were reinforced in a subsequent tutorial which

allowed for the discussion of issues raised by the online quiz; and even though students could still consult with academic staff during their weekly consultation times.

Students considered that it was valuable to learn to apply existing skills and use technology in a different context – that is, as an additional learning tool. However, internal students also indicated that they might have been more motivated to undertake the online tutorial if it was assessed in some manner. This response, which infers that one's university experience is viewed instrumentally as 'a means to an end', or an accumulation of marks towards a degree, is perhaps reflective of the Millennial student's achievement oriented outlook.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, interestingly, in relation to the 'Nintendo logic' approach implemented through the quiz, some students thought that this approach was too simplistic:

- ...it's too easy to do trial and error and therefore not really consider the answers
- A little superficial ...

They did not recognise that the intention was to encourage them to go beyond such a 'best guess' type mentality by prompting them to consider 'why' their answers were wrong in order to better facilitate their self-directed learning and further cognitive development. However responses such as '[I liked that it] gave feedback about right and wrong choices' also indicated that other students did consider beneficial the quiz's fostering of a more reflective decision-making approach. Also, not all students shared the perception that a complex area of the law had been oversimplified – but rather emphasised the need for information to be presented more concisely, in 'bite-sized chunks', saying: 'The idea is good but the structure is not ... answers are too long and vague ... you can just change your answer without thinking'. Therefore, whilst acknowledging that activities supporting such active engagement, akin to electronic gaming, are educationally valuable and well received, and appreciating the

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<sup>53</sup> See, eg, Irving Saulwick and Denis Muller, *Fearless and Flexible: Views of Gen Y* (2006) 7, 34 <<http://www.dsf.org.au/fearless.html>> at 21 February 2007.

effort involved in implementing such learning and teaching innovations - some students appeared to resist being forced to go beyond such a simplistic trial-and-error approach to decision-making. That is to say, Generation Y's 'Nintendo logic' mentality is, in some instances, so strong that students may exhibit a resistance to thinking beyond simply making choices where that is available – despite their further cognitive development being encouraged (as in the quiz) by enabling students to proceed to the next question only after considering 'why' any previous response was wrong and providing a correct response.

## **V CONCLUSIONS**

The positive reception by Trusts students at QUT of the online quiz may have been because this learning environment addressed, as far as possible, many of the characteristics, and educational attitudes and needs, of Generation Y learners. As such, it positively influenced the students' learning experience by, amongst other things, enabling them to experience the benefits of active learning and an increased flexibility in their learning environment. By increasing, in this manner, the conceptual and physical accessibility of the skills and content taught, students were able to more effectively engage with the unit materials. Furthermore by positively influencing their learning experience, it also enhanced their understanding and learning outcomes. Indeed, general student comments indicated that both internal and external students wanted more online tutorials to be offered, though as a supplement to and not instead of face-to-face tutorials, and that they were appreciative of the flexibility and the active learning and teaching approach implemented.

However, student cohorts are heterogeneous and therefore consist, not only of Generation Y students, but also of other generational groups who may have different learning styles and preferences.<sup>54</sup> Nor can it be assumed that learning preferences

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<sup>54</sup> Oblinger, above n 6, 45.

within generations are homogenous.<sup>55</sup> Indeed one's generational age may be less important in this context than their exposure to technology. Students from other generations who have had significant exposure to information technology may possess some Millennial characteristics,<sup>56</sup> whilst socio-economically disadvantaged Millennials, who have perhaps been underexposed to technology and computers in the home, may not share these characteristics.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, whilst educators should continue to explore ways to more effectively engage Generation Y students, it remains necessary to adopt a blended teaching model which: is informed by pedagogy; is supplemented by traditional teaching and learning approaches; and caters for a broad span of ages and preferential learning styles. Furthermore, whilst student perceptions on the online quiz did not indicate any 'generational difficulty' concerning the accessibility of the technology used,<sup>58</sup> depending upon the complexity of such technology and the pre-existing familiarity with its use presumed by future projects, educators may need to provide particular support to some students so as to facilitate the upgrading of their technological skills to embrace those already presumed to be possessed by their Generation Y colleagues.

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<sup>55</sup> Gene Cole, Richard Smith and Laurie Lucas, 'The Debut Of Generation Y In The American Workforce' (2002) 1(2) *Journal of Business Administration Online* <[http://jbao.atu.edu/Fall2002/cole\\_smith\\_lucas.htm](http://jbao.atu.edu/Fall2002/cole_smith_lucas.htm)> at 21 February 2007; Manuel, above n 13, 196.

<sup>56</sup> Oblinger and Oblinger, above n 6, 2.9-10.

<sup>57</sup> Raines, above n 2.

<sup>58</sup> Indeed one student commented that it taught them to be 'more efficient at using computerised online ways of learning' and to 'learn in an unfamiliar environment.'