Life’s journey for today’s generation is all about less structured pathways; about the need for youth to forge their own journeys into adulthood. For the current generation of students a word they may imply, but rarely articulate, is portability. Portability means accruing the skills, attributes, opportunities and experiences which will enable them to travel between different careers, between different jobs and between different places.

This is how global connectivity becomes applied. Their academic results will of course open many doors … initially. But with a worldwide surplus of graduates competing for employment, academic results alone will not suffice. Employers are no longer restricting their focus to local, but global. So employers will not only expect, they will demand something extra, that something which makes students stand-alone as globally networked global ambassadors, who are all global citizens.

So where does civic engagement stand, is it local or global? Two universities where I spent a day last year were Oxford and the London School of Economics. Both universities provide major initiatives for students to obtain appropriate experience. For example, at Oxford, they have a resource centre called the Shed where students can participate in courses ranging from Building a Business course through to an entrepreneurship first initiative designed to encourage students to develop high-growth, start-up organisations.
Oxford University has even drilled down by market segment. For example, they provide free programs for female undergraduates who aspire to be entrepreneurs.

These types of initiatives are commonplace in the UK. As here, it is in the interests of universities to equip their graduates with the type of skills, competencies and capabilities that will open doors and enable graduates to hit the ground running – to lay the foundations for global citizenship.

Across Australia and the UK, there are countless ways to augment a student’s core academic qualification. Of course, nothing beats work experience, particularly experience which enables students to be customer facing. In a recent discussion with employers of law graduates in Sydney and Melbourne, almost every participant observed that they would sooner recruit a graduate who has worked at a café or Brumby’s, places where they have dealt with miserable and grumpy customers, than students who have sat at a volunteer's desk in a community para-legal service.

Not that this should dissuade students from participating in voluntary work. Participation rates in voluntary programs by university students have never been higher, not least among international students who view these kinds of programs as a vehicle for becoming engaged in the local community. Voluntary programs are just one means of augmenting a student’s personal portfolio, in helping them build that kitbag on their back which they accrue as an aggregation of skills, competencies and capabilities.

These competencies extend to languages and cultures. And extra-curricular activities, including sports, music, competitions, debating and leadership programs. Every activity students participate in, whether at university or at home, contributes to a more diverse individual portfolio. And it this individual portfolio that enables them to become differentiated within the employment market.

At the start of many focus groups with today’s generation of students, I often ask participants to tell me something interesting about themselves. Twenty years ago, it may have been a sports, music or performing arts interest, a place they had been or somewhere they had seen.

Over recent times, this question about personal interests has provoked numerous responses. And the responses of student participants are as wide and varied as a love of elephants through to a collection of water bottles. I have met athletes, gifted musicians, people who love to sew and people who love to cook.

I have heard stories that one can only associate with bravery and a sense of unbridled adventure, opportunities that are no longer restricted to the privileged few. I could re-gale you of stories of a VU student who has just returned from volunteering in a Syrian refugee camp; of a female ANU student who cycled from central India to the foothills of the Himalayas; of a UTS student who is so desperate to work for the UN given his personal circumstances, that he is learning all six official languages; of a Monash student who was so shocked by a documentary of the depravities of Indian society, that she lived for three weeks in a place where the recycling of Mumbai’s detritus was the only source of living for all.

It seems that today’s youth are often the understated and perhaps misunderstood vanguard of an international movement. These are students who have often been conditioned to travel by their access to study tours and exchanges at school, by international media, by mobile parents who work around the world, by the ability to procure almost anything from anywhere online, by easy access to travel and cheap flights, by the multicultural revolution which Australia has so embraced and, by the immediacy of access to anyone anywhere, whether physically known or virtually unknown.

For today’s generation their world is now devoid of postcodes. They no longer just connect with their local community. They are global citizens for whom political, economic and social borders are no longer barriers.

Their world is Facebook. And for so many of these students their personality, identity and presence is captured and reflected in how they present themselves via their images, posts and likes in this all-consuming tool called Facebook. Their attitudes towards global issues are defined by such connectedness. But often the reliance in Facebook can lead to an acceptance of inaccurate truths.

A question I often ask students during discussion groups is to define their favourite food. Twenty years ago, I doubt whether we would have seen such a diversity of culinary interests. Preferences would have been captured as Chinese, Italian, French and Greek, as souvlaki, pizzas and kebabs.
However, the multicultural nature of Australian society coupled with access to global media, have opened this generation’s eyes to an extraordinary range of cuisines and cultures. Today’s favoured cuisines may be Northern Peruvian or Southern Mongolian, even the delights which Hamish and Andy have endured on their gap year sojourns.

Twenty years ago, the concept of travel to most students equated to holidays and tours, exposure to different countries and societies. For today’s generation, travel is a means to an end and very often it is the necessary part of a journey to pursue an area of interest. Today’s generation is actively engaged in conservation, environmental, charitable and development projects all over the world, with the proliferation of countries of interest extending from Laos to Mexico.

For today’s generation, travel is the vehicle to opening doors to the world and for enjoying experiences which will enable them to build that coveted portfolio, that kitbag on their back which is tangible proof of their portability and versatility.

Today’s generation of global citizens are innovative, ingenious and creative. Life used to be a series of inter-connected projects defined as a linear journey. Today life is a complexity of multi-faceted projects, with one stage of life’s journey never completed without another stage of their life’s journey planned.

Perhaps these are the new post-materialist values.

Travel is a stimulus for ideas. Opportunities to study abroad are strongly aligned with employability, with increasing numbers of students encouraged to participate in internships and work experience programs around the world.

Universities have long had formal study abroad programs and there once was a time when universities struggled to get Australian students to study for part of their degree abroad.

Not today. While there still remain perceived barriers notably language, cost, time and for many students, relationships and part-time employment, today’s generation of students are adept at finding alternative solutions to realise their goals.

Over the past year, I have discarded the concept of Generation Y. Generation Y is passé. We all know that students multi-task, we all know that students are adept independent thinkers whose values and self-esteem must be met in their workplace and through their learning. We all know that their formative years have been spent on the web and that technology is an everyday part of their lives.

Generation Y has been usurped by Generation G. This has been fostered by changes in education, through initiatives, media and society.

Generation G are citizens of the world. Global citizens. For this generation the world is an open map where they can park their bag in any new location.

Generation G is receptive to challenges, fights causes, protects the environment and humanity and, above all, practises what the older generation contended otherwise.

I recently asked several forums of students whether they preferred to read a hard book or an e-book. Every student stated a hard book, even though most acknowledged that when travelling an e-book was more practical.

The advertising agencies which target Generation G still spend millions on television advertising. Yet, how many of this generation realistically sit down and view television in their home, as opposed to downloading content to look at a place and location of their choosing in a format of their choosing.

Generation G care. So, many of this generation are committed to humanitarian causes. They are socially responsible. So while Generation Y often blames their predecessor generations for the damage caused to the world, the environment etc., Generation G are committed to pragmatically and practically finding and delivering solutions.

As Generation G travels the world, new opportunities arise. Rarely do I meet a university student of Generation G who does not have an active project on the go or a global interest in mind. These projects often have no definitive start point, they just evolve.

So let’s embrace for one moment the values of today’s generation of global citizens. A generation which is both ageless and define-less.

As global citizens Generation G has a fascination for global issues and affairs. They have been conditioned to think globally through their education and by their networks and peers. There is no future for a graduate who can only see local.

As global citizens they plan to see and experience the world through each of their senses ... through sight, sound, touch, sense and taste.
As global citizens they don’t expect the world to come running to them, they acknowledge that they need to cement their place in the world through both deed and action. So they embrace different cultures, languages, societies, creeds and values.

As global citizens there is no sense of a recognised workplace or living space. They want immersion into different places and spaces, to make their mark, to return at whim and to connect at will.

As global citizens they can no longer leave their mark locally, through their known networks, as global citizens they want to leave their footprint on the world. Not as a Hollywood hall of fame imprint, that place where prosperity and notoriety are the only measures of success, but as a sense of having done something to secure the future security and prosperity of the world.

As global citizens Generation G need a sense of place and purpose. They need to touch the world. And above all, Generation G need to leave their mark on the world.

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