



TEACHING SENIOR CITIZENS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY

"We often hear about stepping outside ourselves, but rarely about stepping outside our generation."

—*Chriss Jami*

OVERVIEW

Students engage in community service by helping senior citizens troubleshoot digital challenges.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As a culminating project or event near the end of a unit
- As an ongoing service-learning partnership

TIME REQUIRED

- Multiple Sessions

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- Can be done with varying levels of technology equipment, e.g., Chromebooks, other types of computers, tablets; however, for equity and distractibility reasons, phones may not be the best choice
- PowerPoint or other presentation software
- Projection Equipment or Smart TV (Check with your senior center partner for availability.)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Troubleshoot various technological problems and propose solutions
- Develop and present simple slides with clear text and confident voices
- Disprove ageist stereotypes through human interaction

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to consider some of the stereotypes you may have (or have had in the past) about senior citizens. Then think of a person you know who is a senior citizen, and consider the ways in which they do or do not fit your stereotype.

INSTRUCTIONS

PREPARING FOR THE PRACTICE

- Reach out to senior centers, independent/assisted living, and/or nonprofits who work with seniors in your area.
- Explain that you are a teacher who is interested in coming together for an intergenerational partnership focused around technology.
- Discuss the kind of technology trouble-shooting that might be most beneficial for the community partner's population. (Note: learning how to operate devices is in high demand.)
 - If you want to involve your students in this decision, have them design and carry out a survey of the seniors that asks them what they need.
- With the community partner's help, determine the schedule and format of the event. For example:
 - A one-time event with presentations and technology assistance built into the schedule
 - A weekly class field trip where relationships are built and skills honed over time
 - Pairing students with individual seniors to forge strong relationships and to test students' troubleshooting skills

THE PRACTICE

- Craft your instruction around whatever is most beneficial to the senior center and/or your students. For example, if focusing on troubleshooting and/or the dangers of scams and viruses, the following steps might be helpful:
 - Begin by teaching students basic troubleshooting skills on their chromebooks/computers/etc. For instance, if something doesn't work, try it a different way, restart, ask a friend, ask the teacher, or ask the Internet.
 - Teach students good Google skills as a crucial part of Google-troubleshooting.
- Teach students about the dangers of scams and viruses, e.g., common tricks to be aware of, what information should never be given out, etc.
- To prepare students for their visit(s) to the community partner, have them form groups to create slideshow presentations on the topic.
 - Emphasize that the presentation is for senior citizens.
 - Brainstorm with students how presenting to seniors might impact text size, font, colors, including memes, etc.
 - Discuss assumptions they might have about the baseline of understanding that older adults might have or not have regarding technology.
- Have students practice their presentations.
 - Because many seniors experience hearing loss, emphasize to students that they will need to project their voices to be heard.
- If possible, have a staff member from the senior center visit the class to preview the presentation and provide input.

CLOSURE

- After their visit(s), have students complete the phrases below to show their growth and learning:
 - Growth: "Before going to the senior center, I thought _____, but now I think _____"
 - Learning: "Before going to the senior center, I didn't know how to _____, but now I know that _____"
- Have students share how they have grown and what they learned, recording their responses in two lists on the board or on poster paper.
- Ask students whether they notice trends, similarities, or differences among their responses.

EXTENSION

- Have students continue their relationships with the seniors they met as e-penpals. They can practice using proper email format while staying in touch and deepening the connections they made.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did they speak positively about their experiences with senior citizens? Did it change them in any way? If so, how?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A [study](#) of a diverse group of almost 17,000 high school students found that community service, especially when it is long-term, incorporates student autonomy, and serves a humanitarian cause, has been shown to make students more prosocially oriented.

More specifically, a [case study](#) of intergenerational community service found that young people learned important skills, such as listening, decision-making, communication, and critical thinking. And both the young and the elderly benefited from the undoing of negative aged-related stereotypes towards the other.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The key developmental tasks of adolescents are to discover who they want to be (identity) and what they want to contribute to the world (purpose).

Both of these processes, when pursued in a healthy way, lead to long-term well-being. Indeed, people with higher levels of purpose tend to be [happier](#) and feel more [satisfied](#) with their lives. They have stronger [identities](#) and higher levels of [self-esteem](#), and feel more [hopeful](#), [optimistic](#), and [confident](#) in their abilities. What's more, they are more likely to be engaged in their communities in [positive](#), [helpful](#) ways.

Schools can play a major role in helping students cultivate their identities and sense of purpose, by helping students explore their values and what matters to them, and by providing opportunities to use their skills to make a difference in the world.

SOURCE

Abigail Henderson, STEM Guide, Millennium School

Millennium School is an innovation lab in the heart of San Francisco that is exploring the intersection of developmental science and adolescent education; it is developing an integrated educational program based on neuroscience and developmental psychology. Millennium School's intention is to create a model middle school that implements best practices for holistic student development, translating leading research and experiential learning techniques into practical application. The program combines integrated academics with self-discovery and real-world application through student-centered projects.