Culture and Aging

Primary Content Area: Psychology, Sociology

Introduction
The aging process is complex. The more we know about the process, the better we are able to navigate our own aging process. The Culture and Aging service-learning project is an opportunity for students in a Psychology class to study lifespan development during a unit on adolescence and adulthood. The project focuses both on understanding the aging process and the differences among ethnic groups and their care of senior citizens. Students will gain background information on lifespan development through the curriculum and learn about issues that impact Chicago elderly through one-on-one interviews. Students will also have the opportunity to study Nobel Peace Prize winner Jane Addams' and her work in the Chicago area among senior citizens and its impact on senior care today. Students will volunteer at a senior center to interview and spend quality time with elderly.

Essential Questions
- What is the aging process like?
- How do different cultures take care of their senior citizens?

Project Goals
- Students will understand primary and secondary aging and cognitive changes in the elderly.
- Students will understand cultural differences in care for the elderly.
- Students will learn about cultural differences in Chicago neighborhoods.
- Students will develop effective interviewing skills.

Procedure/Project Sequence
1. The classroom teacher should work with Chicago Cares to identify a senior center with which to partner, and schedule dates and times for visit(s). Contact Chicago Cares at 312.780-0800 x122.
2. In class students learn about and discuss development during the Adolescence and Adulthood unit with a focus on primary and secondary aging, cognitive development, and cultural differences.
3. Students participate in class activities designed to help them better understand the aging process:
   - Read with glasses with Vaseline on them to simulate cataracts
   - Put on and take off one shoe with an arm immobilized
   - Put paperclips in a cup with gloves on to simulate arthritis
   - Have a conversation with one another with earplugs in to show hearing loss
5. As students develop an understanding of development changes facing the elderly, they begin to learn about problems facing many elderly utilizing curriculum found earlier in this manual.
6. Students will now learn about Jane Addams and how she fought for the rights of elderly. Divide students into groups and read sections of Jane Addams’ biography provided by the Service-Learning Initiative. The class completes a graphic organizer to piece together the life of Jane Addams.
7. Housing is one of the most important issues facing seniors today. Students will read primary source “Handout C” which describes housing issues in Chicago at the time of Jane Addams. The class then discusses current housing issues in Chicago.
8. In preparation for the service trip, students brainstorm and practice interview questions about housing, health care and the lives of the seniors.
9. Students take service-learning trip to senior center to interview and spend time with seniors. The service experience can include preparing a meal, planning a Jane Addams party, developing senior biographies, playing games, doing crafts, etc.

**Community Partner/Resources**
Chicago Cares  
http://www.chicagocares.org/contact_us

CPS Service-Learning Initiative  
Jessica Marshall, Service-Learning Manager, 773-553-6391  
jmarshall2@cps.edu  
www.cps.edu/ServiceLearning

Question ideas for interview:  
http://storycorps.org/great-questions/question-generator/

**Addendum**
**Standards**
This project addresses the following Social Emotional Standards and the National Standards for High School Psychology.

Social Emotional  
2A.5b. Demonstrate ways to express empathy for others.

Psychology  
IIIA-3.3 c Identify commonalities across racial and ethnic boundaries
IIIA-3.4 a. Identify how cultural differences affect development, such as in collectivist versus individualist cultures

**Project Duration**
Preparation: Students learn about aging and diversity in America  
Action: Students interview senior citizens, serve breakfast and lead activities at center for low-income seniors.  
Reflection: Students discuss their experiences and impact on the community.

**Cross-Curricular Connections**
Connections with Social Sciences could be made during this project.