

Co-curricular activity

Connections

This activity was designed to develop awareness and foster an acceptance of and respect for the elderly. Primary-aged students were introduced to a number of willing residents at a local retirement village, with the aim of establishing friendships and working relationships with people outside their usual sphere of contact. The students acted as mentors in developing the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills of the retirement village residents they partnered. In turn, the students developed an awareness of and respect for a sector of the community that they may not interact with on a regular basis. The real-life context ensures that this learning is embedded in authentic communication tasks involving multiple literacies.

Year level

Middle Childhood (10–11 years)

Explicit values focus

- Care and Compassion
- Doing Your Best
- Respect
- Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion
- Cooperation

Key learning areas

- English
- Information and Communication Technology

School profile

Sherbourne Primary School is located in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, 20 km from the central business district. The community is fairly monocultural and most students are economically 'comfortable'. The school envisages the future as one in which e-learning is an integral part of everyday life. Therefore, we acknowledge the potential of e-learning to impact significantly on learning outcomes for all students. In particular, the term 'literacy' is considered to encompass digital literacies, which are regarded as just as important as the traditional '3Rs'. Students from Prep to Year 6 regularly use digital communication tools for their daily literacy activities.

We also seek to prepare our students to become adults who embrace differences as the world in which they live is extended by the availability of a new connectedness to the global community. The school also seeks to broaden the experiences of its students in all aspects of community life and to prepare them for a diverse world in terms of the social groups they will interact with. Connections is the result of combining these principles.

Reason for co-curricular activity

As a school, our objective is to develop students' awareness, acceptance and tolerance of the individuals and groups of people that make up our society, as well as to prepare them as citizens who are responsive team players, intellectual risk takers, and knowledgeable problem solvers. An innovative approach to curriculum is encouraged at the school. Therefore, projects that further the

school's vision through authentic and meaningful experiences for students are also encouraged. We extend students' problem solving and thinking skills as well as their digital literacy and English capabilities through authentic communication activities that depend upon the use of ICT as tools.

Many schools have the ability to communicate and interact with people outside the school setting at the local and global level but far too often learning is confined to the classroom. Sherbourne Primary School is in close proximity to aged care facilities. Not all students have regular interaction with elderly people and this project provided an opportunity to broaden students' understanding and acceptance of a different social group. The elderly in our community often have a wealth of knowledge, experience and skills to offer that, more often than not, can go unnoticed by students. Elderly people often have preconceived ideas about young people as well. This was an opportunity for the two generations to learn, accept and understand more about each other, and to form a genuine positive connection that would not otherwise occur.

Implementation and development

Prior learning

Students began by discussing their perceptions and prior knowledge of aged care settings and why they existed. They were introduced to the task of teaching elderly people to use ICT. Students discussed the rapid and ongoing changes that the world experiences today and how their view of the world is different to the way their elderly partners viewed the world. Students also considered what life was like for the elderly when they were young children.

The project

Students prepared PowerPoint presentations, introducing themselves (and computers) to their elderly 'buddies' during the first session. Students were transported to and from the retirement village by car or minibus on a weekly basis over a two-month period. Each week, a different task was set by the teacher, which involved students individually tutoring their elderly partners. These included web surfing, video chats with the students, friends and relatives, emailing, the use of digital scanners and cameras, online games, and PowerPoint presentations based on the lives of the elderly buddies.

Documenting the project

The project was also filmed by students with the express purpose of documenting the learning involved for both groups. Students used PowerPoint to produce weekly reflections. A celebratory party was held at the end of the project. The documentary of the project was edited later and shown to the residents in a return visit.

Outcomes

Students established bonds with their elderly partners and the divide that existed between the generations initially was bridged during the project. Students assumed responsibility for their own literacy learning and research skills through mentoring others. Students engaged in problem solving and collaborative learning, which enhanced their own communication skills. The project provided them with a sense of social connectedness and community service.