

TALK OF AGES TEACHING BRIEF

Understanding the User-Friendliness of Technology from an Older Adult Perspective

Contribute by:

Melinda Heinz, PhD

Assistant Professor of Psychology

215 Liberal Arts Building

Upper Iowa University

Fayette, IA 52142

heinzm@uiu.edu

Activity Description

- Students are placed in teams (no more than five per team) to discuss the user friendliness of technology from an older adult perspective. Students are also encouraged to think about ways in which everyday technology (e.g., cell phones, computers, smart phones, etc.) could be changed or altered to be more user-friendly for older adults. Lastly, they are reminded of age related changes (e.g., sensory changes, mobility differences) and asked to think about ways in which technology could assist with these changes.

Supporting Material

- Please see attached worksheet

Advice to Instructors

- This activity has worked well when groups are diverse (e.g., I have previously paired computer science students with family studies students, kinesiology students with psychology students, etc.).
- I have completed this activity in larger (i.e., 150 students) and smaller class sizes (i.e., 10 students). Both have worked equally well.
- I typically try to use this activity as a transition to my discussion on Gerontechnology after we have finished discussing physical development in older adulthood.
- This activity often encourages students to think about how technology is often designed with the young adult in mind (rather than older adult). Interesting discussion about the “digital divide” often ensues.

Gerontechnology Activity

Team Names_____

Directions: Your team is working for a start-up company designing technology for older adults. The head of your company has called a meeting this afternoon, requesting that each team share their results/ideas regarding the questions below. Your team wants to impress the head of the company and share the most innovative ideas possible. Good luck!

1. What types of technology does your group perceive as being user-friendly for older adults? *Please list below.*

a.

b.

c.

Why?

2. What types of technologies does your group perceive as NOT being user-friendly for older adults? *Please list below.*

a.

b.

c.

Why?

3. What changes do you recommend (i.e., what could be improved) to the technologies listed in your answer for question two?

a.

b.

c.

4. What does your group foresee as the most difficult age-related change facing older adults (e.g., sensory impairment, mobility issues, etc.)?

a. How could technology assist with adapting to this change more successfully?

b. Do you know of any current technology products on the market that assist with this?