Abstract

There is an increasing demographic shift with the number of older adults increasing globally. With this shift come many challenges and opportunities. Older adults may benefit by increasing their digital literacy skills, sharing their life experiences through story, and participating in lifelong learning. This thesis describes a project that provided these opportunities. The theoretical lens used is a combination of a life course approach, narrative theory, social constructivist theory. The project used a case study approach that examined 15 offerings of a digital storytelling course attended by a total of 98 older adults. Each course ran for 8-10 weeks (two hours once a week). Data collection for the research conducted involved background information including participant computer skill level, post course evaluation forms, focus groups, and a questionnaire handed out to viewers during a “Sharing our Stories” event. The findings indicated that there were many more female participants. Over half of the participants had immigrated to Canada at one point in their lives. There was a range of digital skill levels at the start of the course, with most participants claiming to be beginner or intermediate. Results suggest that most older adults who completed the digital storytelling course reported an increase in digital literacy skills (computer, software, and internet) and digital storytelling skills.

Educationally, the course was also seen to be beneficial as participants suggested they had learned something new, whether from the program, the process, or both. However, sometimes the technology posed a challenge and time constraints were highlighted as being an issue. Participants also reflected on their stories and lives, at times reliving them and reshaping their stories. The artefact created through digitizing a story was considered as a way to connect to future generations and current family. The digital storytelling course appeared to create social connectedness to self and to others (in the past, present, and future). These findings suggest that courses using story and technology and creating a community of learners can be a beneficial approach for older adult learning environments. This thesis project contributes to the field of education by providing an innovative and effective educational experience for older adults. It provides insights into the experiences, possible benefits, and challenges of participating in a digital storytelling course with other older adults. It also examines the way in which storytelling and multimedia can play a role in lifelong learning.