

EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS: DIGITAL NARRATIVES AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSION IN THE AGING PROCESS



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Helena Brandão Viana¹

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article was to demonstrate how the use of Digital Narratives has been used in different cultures. In addition to individual benefits, such as cognitive stimulation and the personal satisfaction of learning something new, digital storytelling projects among seniors have shown positive impacts on social interaction and emotional well-being. The study conducted in Canada and Brazil is an inspiring example of how digital technologies can be adapted to meet the diverse needs and interests of the elderly population. The results of these projects in Brazil showed how stimulating and challenging it can be to work with technologies with this age group, often neglected by society in relation to the advancement of emerging technologies. As society continues to age, initiatives like this become even more relevant, providing not only entertainment and education, but also a means of preserving and sharing personal and cultural stories.

Keywords: Digital Narratives. Digital Technology. Elderly.

¹Dr. in Physical Education
UNICAMP
Email: hbviana2@gmail.com
LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/0493494212541998>
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2018-202X>

INTRODUCTION

Digital narratives emerge as a powerful tool in the field of education, offering new ways to engage participants and facilitate the learning process. Educators have explored these possibilities to not only capture students' attention, but also promote media skills and digital literacy. This article aims to demonstrate how the use of digital storytelling has been applied in different cultures, with emphasis on the methodology developed by Dr. David Kaufman, from Simon Fraser University and the AGE-WELL Institute. (Moura; Viana, 2022; Pedrosa Santos; Brandão Viana, 2024; Viana, 2020a, 2020b; Viana; Moreira; Souza, 2023)

Digital narratives combine the traditional art of storytelling with digital information and communication technologies. They are elaborated using multiple languages, such as text, photography, video, audio and graphics, allowing a multimodal approach in the educational process. This integration of media makes it easier for students to connect with content in a more meaningful way, promoting a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. The importance of digital storytelling in education lies in its ability to make learning more engaging by allowing students to create their own stories and become protagonists of their learning, which can increase motivation and engagement. In addition, these narratives help develop essential skills such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, which are fundamental for success in the contemporary world. (Viana; Moreira; Souza, 2023)

In projects aimed at older people in Canada, where this methodology was initially conceived and applied, digital narratives have played a transformative role. During a 10-week workshop, participants, under the guidance of a facilitator, created their own stories using audio, images, and music. This process not only provided the learning of new technological skills, but also stimulated creativity and offered an innovative way to express their experiences. In addition to individual benefits, such as cognitive stimulation and the satisfaction of learning something new, these projects have demonstrated a significant impact on social interaction and emotional well-being for seniors. Collaborative work throughout the workshop strengthened the bonds between participants and created an encouraging and shared learning environment. (Viana, 2020b)

This methodology, developed by Kaufman, was later adapted to Brazil, taking into account cultural differences and specific challenges. In one of the groups, composed of elderly people without literacy, adjustments were necessary to ensure the inclusion of all.

The results showed that, although the use of technologies with this age group presents challenges, it also opens up exciting possibilities, especially in a context where the elderly are often left on the sidelines of technological advancement. (Hausknecht; Vanchu-Orosco; Kaufman, 2016, 2017, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2019; Schell; Da Silva; Kaufman, 2019) (figure 1) (Viana, 2020a)

With the aging of the population, initiatives of this type become increasingly relevant, offering not only entertainment and learning, but also a means of preserving and sharing personal and cultural stories. For the future, the expansion of these projects to different communities and cultural contexts will be able to amplify their impact, incorporating emerging technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence to further enrich the narrative experience. (Viana, 2020b; Viana; Moreira; Souza, 2023)

In this article we will bring the experience report of two projects developed in Brazil, based on the methodology created in Canada By David Kaufman, from Simon Fraser University (Kaufman et al., 2019).

EXPERIENCES WITH THE ELDERLY IN BRAZIL

THE FIRST DIGITAL NARRATIVES PROJECT IN BRAZIL: ADAPTATION AND IMPACTS

The first digital narrative project developed in Brazil, after the partnership established with Simon Fraser University, was implemented in 2018 within the scope of the college of the third age program of a Brazilian university. The project had the participation of 22 elderly people, 21 women and one man.

Unlike the original methodology (Figure 1), which provided for 10 meetings of 2 hours, in Brazil the project was adapted to 14 weeks (Chart 1). This extension was necessary due to the participants' low familiarity with digital technologies. Many of the elderly had never used a computer and had difficulties with the use of the mouse and keyboard. Thus, the first two weeks were dedicated to the presentation of the project and a lecture given by a sociologist on the importance of transmitting legacies through narratives.

Figure 1 – Original methodology



Source: (Hausknecht; Vanchu-Orosco; Kaufman, 2017; Viana, 2020b)

Chart 1 – Flowchart of the first Digital Narratives project in Brazil

CLASS TOPICS	LOCAL
Presentation of the project and the importance of learning	Lesson 1 Classroom
The importance of life history as a legacy	Lesson 2 Classroom
Project presentation - show videos - give ideas - ICF and protocols	Lesson 3 Classroom
Lesson on how to build a good story	Lesson 4 Classroom
Early Writing of History	Lesson 5 Classroom
Sharing the story with my colleagues – activities in trios	Lesson 6 Classroom
Showing Wevideo® technology	Lesson 7 Classroom
Sharing your story with colleagues – Reading the story for everyone	Lesson 8 laboratory
Choice of images - story board	Lesson 9 laboratory
Recording of narratives	Lesson 10 laboratory
Placement narrated audio, photos, and background music	Lesson 11 laboratory
Organization of the images with the narrated audio	Lesson 12 laboratory
Animation, effects, page finishing, credits, finishing	Lesson 13 laboratory
Finalizing the videos	Lesson 14 laboratory
Final = Soirée	FINAL Auditorium

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The first classes were productive, with participants showing enthusiasm in sharing their stories. The preparation of the reports took place collaboratively, with discussions on

the topics to be addressed and the inclusion of narrative elements, such as humor and emotion, to increase the impact of the narrative.

The main difference between the Brazilian and Canadian experiences was the availability of equipment. In Brazil, the elderly did not have personal computers, and it was necessary to use the university's computer lab. During the first weeks (classes 4 to 9), the participants produced their stories and shared their texts with their colleagues. They were encouraged to bring photographs and images to illustrate their narratives, and the use of images in the public domain was allowed. Some photographs had to be scanned, a step that required additional support. (Viana, 2020b)

With all the images digitized, the participants were introduced to the video editing software purchased for the project. The technological learning stage was challenging, which is why monitors from the computer course and the senior citizen project were mobilized to offer individualized support to the elderly.

PRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF NARRATIVES

After familiarizing with the software, the recording of the stories began (class 10) in a studio provided by the university, ensuring the quality of the audio. Participants recorded individually, being instructed to take long breaks in case of errors, facilitating later editing. The software used allowed cuts and adjustments to ensure the fluidity of the recordings.

The editing of the videos required support from the monitors, but all participants were able to complete their productions. The project ended with a *soirée*, where the videos were shown to family members, guests and members of the university. The event provided a moment of great emotion, as many family members heard stories that might otherwise never have been shared.

The implementation of the project in Brazil demonstrated the feasibility of methodological adaptation for contexts with low digital literacy. Individualized support and extended time were key factors in the initiative's success. The results showed not only the technological impact, but also the emotional and social benefits for the elderly involved. The format can serve as a model for future initiatives aimed at digital inclusion and the appreciation of personal memories. Group collaboration during the workshop not only strengthened the bonds between the participants, but also fostered a collaborative and encouraging learning environment

EVALUATIVE OPPORTUNITIES AND FINALIZATION

In a project like this, which lasted 3 to 4 months, we have opportunities to collect diverse data. In this specific project, data on digital literacy and socialization were collected. What can be seen that the great gain with this project was to improve the socialization of the elderly and their families, as there were moments of involvement of all these actors. Knowing a little about the life of each project colleague was very relevant for everyone. The gain in acquiring a new skill was also highly valued by the participants. Some – who had a computer at home, after learning how to make the video, made new videos in their homes telling new stories.

The moment of the *Soirée*, where the videos of each participant were shown in a projection room, with the presence of all colleagues and their families, was very exciting and extremely satisfying. The Digital Narratives project is indeed exciting for the filmmakers and for the participants.

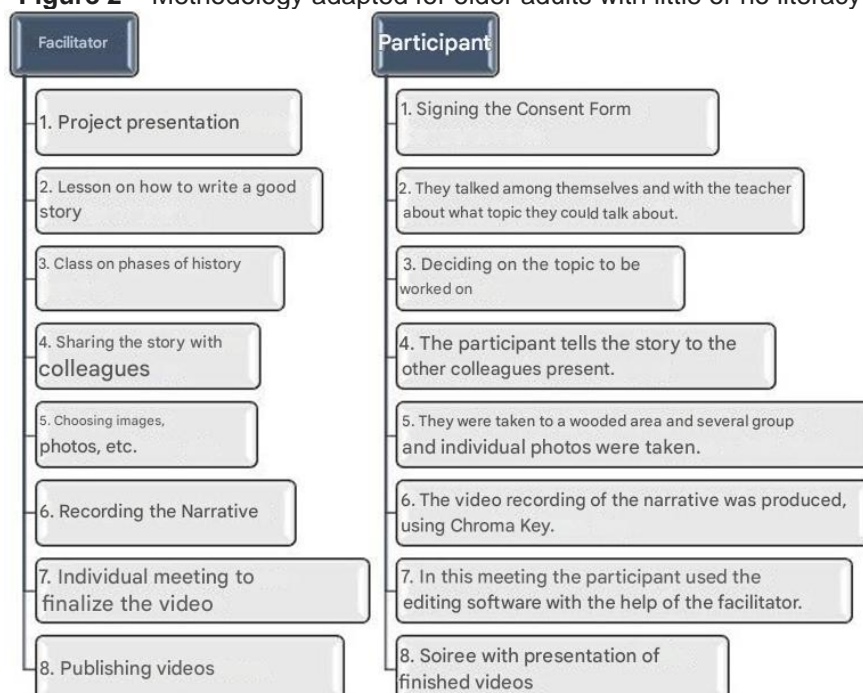
SECOND DIGITAL NARRATIVES PROJECT IN BRAZIL: NEW ADAPTATION FOR ILLITERATE SENIORS

The second project developed in Brazil with the initially proposed methodology was implemented in 2021, after the pandemic and aimed at a group of elderly people without literacy. This group was composed of individuals belonging to an economically disadvantaged community, and lacked reading and writing skills. In view of this scenario, there was a need to adapt the methodology originally conceived by Dr. Kaufman, since the participants could not record their stories in writing, for later reading and recording. (Kaufman *et al.* , 2019)

For this methodological adaptation, initially, we worked with the elderly in the oral construction of the narratives. Each participant was encouraged to choose a theme for the story that they would like to share with the other members of the group and leave as a legacy. Although the initial conception of the project was similar to that of the first experiment described in this article, there was a significant change in the structure, since the writing phase or the video editing phase did not occur (Figure 2).

Although the methodological proposal has 8 steps to be followed, the project lasted 16 weeks, as some steps took more than one meeting to be executed.

Figure 2 – Methodology adapted for older adults with little or no literacy



Source: Elaboration by the authors

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

After defining the themes, each participant shared their story orally with the others, allowing the exchange of experiences and the collective enrichment of the group. As part of the process, a small improvised studio with a green screen was set up at the site where the project was developed. The elderly were then filmed individually, sitting in front of the green screen, as illustrated in figure 3 (at the end we would put images in the background), while narrating their stories. In cases where hesitations occurred or when the narrator wished to reformulate his speech, the recording was resumed from the desired point to ensure fluidity in the audiovisual production.

Figure 3 – Elderly woman being prepared for filming



Source: photo taken by the researcher with signed authorization from the participant

Subsequently, each participant was asked to bring personal photographs to illustrate their narratives. However, it was found that some elderly people did not have images that could complement their stories. For these cases, additional interviews were conducted in order to better understand the context narrated, and, based on this information, representative images were selected from the internet and validated by the participants as to their adequacy to the reported content.

In addition, a group outing was organized to a park with diverse landscapes, where individual, couples, and group photographs were taken. Some of these images were later incorporated into visual narratives. The choice of soundtrack was also a relevant aspect of the project: the participants selected songs that best represented the emotional tone of their stories. The songs used were part of the database of the software purchased for editing the videos, ensuring copyright compliance.

The project lasted sixteen weeks, at the end of which a screening session of the audiovisual productions was organized (figure 4). The event was attended by the families of the participants and the local community, providing a moment of great emotional impact not only for the elderly and the team involved, but also for the community. The initiative allowed fragments of the memory and life trajectories of these elderly people to be

preserved and shared, strengthening the sense of belonging and appreciation of oral history within the community context.

Figure 4 – Cover of one of the videos produced



Source: Survey data

INTERVIEWS WITH THE ELDERLY AFTER THE PROJECT

After recording the narratives, participants were interviewed to share their perceptions of the experience. Some highlighted that it was a valuable opportunity to tell their stories and experiences in an authentic and innovative way, using technology. In addition, they stressed the importance of being able to record and share these accounts as a legacy to friends and family, as evidenced in the following statements:

- I liked to remember my childhood... to be able to tell". (IS Interview)
- "I have always had difficulty witnessing the conversion of my family and I had the opportunity to tell without crying." (Interviewee S)
- "It was very good to take advantage of the exit and take those photos for the videos. I loved the whole process and learning. The enthusiasm was great to see everyone recording". (IR Interviewee)
- "I liked to tell the story, choose and tell it in a different way". (Interviewee C)

DISCUSSION

Digital narratives represent an innovative and impactful tool in the field of education, offering opportunities for dynamic and interactive learning that stimulates critical thinking (Meirbekov; Maslova; Gallyamova, 2022). In view of the experiences reported in the text, it is possible to highlight different perspectives on their role and their social and cultural

implications. (Gkoutsioukosta; Apostolate, 2023; Hausknecht; Vanchu-Orosco; Kaufman, 2019; Meadows, 2003; Park *et al.*, 2017)

Digital narratives allow project participants to become protagonists of their own learning, contributing to the development of essential skills such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. This method stimulates creativity and makes teaching more meaningful, connecting the pedagogical content to the students' personal experiences. However, it is important to consider the challenge of accessibility to technological equipment and the need for continuing education of educators for the effective use of these tools. (Barbeta, 2023; Nuroh; Kusumawardana; Destiana, 2022; Viana, 2020a, 2020b; Viana; Moreira; Souza, 2023)

The adaptation of the methodology for the elderly, as demonstrated in the projects in Canada and Brazil, highlights the potential of digital narratives as an instrument of digital and social inclusion. The use of these technologies can reduce the digital divide, offer cognitive and emotional stimulation, and strengthen social bonds between participants. However, challenges include the need for individualized support, especially for those unfamiliar with electronic devices, and the adaptation of activities to address different levels of literacy and technological skills (Viana; Moreira; Souza, 2023) .

The adaptation of the Canadian methodology to the Brazilian context shows the importance of considering cultural and structural specificities. While in Canada the elderly had more contact with digital technologies, in Brazil there was a greater need for support and infrastructure to ensure the active participation of those involved. Extending learning time and using monitors were effective solutions to overcome these barriers.

By enabling older people to share their life stories, digital storytelling projects contribute to the preservation of oral history and cultural heritage. The exhibition of productions at public events reinforces the appreciation of these memories and stimulates community belonging. This aspect demonstrates how technology can humanize and bring generations together, promoting intergenerational dialogue and strengthening social relationships.

The expansion of projects to different communities and cultural contexts opens up new possibilities for education and digital inclusion. The use of emerging technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence can further enrich the storytelling experience. However, it is essential to ensure that these innovations are accessible to all age groups and socioeconomic levels (Al-Abdullatif, 2022; Chan, 2017; Hausknecht; Vanchu-Orosco;

Kaufman, 2016; Park *et al.*, 2017; Smyrniou; Georgakopoulou; Sotiriou, 2020; Viana, 2020b).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Digital narratives go beyond a pedagogical strategy; They are a tool for inclusion and social transformation. Through these stories, the voices of different social groups can be heard and valued, promoting not only learning but also empowerment and community strengthening. The challenges presented throughout the projects reinforce the need for adaptation and support, but the positive results demonstrate the immense potential of this approach to transform lives and expand access to knowledge and digital culture.

Older people have significant potential to learn new content, especially when teaching methodologies are tailored to their specific needs. According to the document "Aging and health of the elderly" of the Ministry of Health, the assessment of the functional capacity of the elderly is essential to identify their remaining skills and promote interventions that maximize their independence and quality of life. It includes adaptations in the physical-social environment and changes in behavior and lifestyle, which can facilitate the learning process. (BRASIL; Ministério da Saúde, 2006; Lima *et al.*, 2019)

In addition, the study "The perception of the elderly about old age: a look from social representations" highlights that the elderly themselves do not identify with negative stereotypes associated with aging and emphasize the heterogeneity of this phase of life. Recognizing this diversity is crucial to develop educational strategies that consider the particularities of each individual, promoting more effective learning. (Jardim; Medeiros; Brito, 2006; Oliveira *et al.*, 2021)

Therefore, by implementing teaching methodologies that take into account the characteristics and needs of the elderly, it is possible to enable them to acquire new knowledge and skills in an efficient and meaningful way.

For the future, similar projects can benefit from expanding to other communities and cultural contexts, adapting to the specific needs of different groups of older people. This could include incorporating new emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence, to further enrich the digital storytelling experience. In summary, digital storytelling is not only a modern and effective form of education and entertainment, but also an inclusive and transformative tool for promoting the well-being and active participation of older adults in contemporary digital society. By empowering them to create and share their

own life stories in a digital way, these projects not only celebrate the diversity of experiences, but push the boundaries of human knowledge.

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