

## Digital storytelling for community resilience: Art as public pedagogy

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### ABSTRACT

This article proposes that positioning digital storytelling as public pedagogy fosters community resilience through the intersection of art and social movements. Two collaborative art education projects—mini-documentary videos highlighting senior immigrants’ resilience during COVID-19, and a series of soundscapes developed for an urban ecological soundwalk—explore how digital storytelling practices amplify marginalized voices and mobilize collective action. The research identifies three themes: digital storytelling as public pedagogy, collaborative narrative construction as a catalyst for social movements, and digital platforms as tools for intergenerational and ecological advocacy. These projects illustrate how arts-based digital practices create spaces for dialogue while facilitating cultural and ecological knowledge exchange. By bridging individual and collective experiences, digital storytelling emerges as a vital medium for developing resilience imaginaries and building collective capacity through creative expression and participatory engagement.

**KEYWORDS:** resilience, digital storytelling, public pedagogy, community art education, arts-based digital practice

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Digital storytelling is a distinctive form of narrative practice that integrates established storytelling conventions with contemporary artistic tools and platforms. It supports multiple modes of expression, including visual, auditory, and interactive forms, while increasing

accessibility and engagement across diverse populations. Building on these capacities, digital storytelling draws from historical art practices connected to social movements and activism, including Suzanne Lacy's concept of "new genre public art," which emphasizes feminist consciousness-raising and community engagement (Lacy, 1995), and Judith Baca's community mural practices that confront racial injustice and marginalized histories (Indych-López, 2018). Along this trajectory, digital storytelling positions creative practice as a mode of collective resistance and cultural reclamation. At the intersection of art as public pedagogy and social movements, digital storytelling enables community members to collaborate with artist-researchers, respond to issues that matter to them, and collectively pursue social change and community resilience (Benick, 2011; Pettengill, 2020).

This article frames digital storytelling as an arts-based, public pedagogical tool that fosters resilience across cultural and ecological domains: encouraging dialogical engagement and enabling communities to co-construct meaning, reinterpret shared narratives, and collectively navigate challenges. Toward that end, we first review scholarship examining the role of digital storytelling as a dialogical practice and a catalyst for collective action. We then focus on two digital storytelling projects: (1) mini-documentary-style videos that highlight the resilience of senior immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) a series of soundscapes developed for an ecological soundwalk event. These two cases serve to explore how digital storytelling informs and nurtures community resilience through the intersections of arts, public pedagogy, and social movements. Synthesizing insights from both projects, we show how digital storytelling functions not only as a creative pedagogical intervention but also as a means to strengthen community resilience through collaborative narrative construction and social change efforts.

## Literature Review

### Community Resilience and Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling builds on art education scholarship that positions artistic practice as a vehicle for critical inquiry, imagination, and social transformation. Within art education, digital storytelling has emerged as a pedagogy that integrates visual arts, narrative, and technology to promote multiliteracy skills, aesthetic sensitivities, and critical thinking (Pavlou, 2020). Art educators have adopted digital storytelling practices, including video histories, oral narratives, and multimedia productions, as tools to engage students with local communities, preserve cultural identities, and address socially relevant issues (Benick, 2011). As a form of community-based art education, digital storytelling

has the potential to support community resilience, which has long been recognized as a crucial element in navigating adversity through collective action (Jewett et al., 2021), with its importance becoming even more evident during recent global challenges. To understand how digital storytelling supports community resilience, it is vital to examine the theoretical frameworks that explain how communities collectively respond to challenges. Community resilience can be understood as “a collective attribute and foundation for action” (Chaskin, 2007, p. 67). It encompasses the ability of communities to collectively respond to and recover from adversity, drawing upon internal resources and strengths to adapt and thrive (Brown et al., 2017). According to Chaskin (2007), community comprises “contexts” and “collective actors” capable of demonstrating resilience through organizing and responding to challenges (p. 65). Pitidis et al. (2022) introduce “resilience imaginaries” as communities’ collective visions for responding to challenges, which emerge through shared narratives and creative practices that shape perceived capacity for adaptation and transformation (p. 699). Across these approaches, community resilience emerges through collective action and shared meaning-making, processes that digital storytelling can support and amplify. As a medium to capture and understand the experiences of community resilience, digital storytelling has emerged as a way to leverage multimedia tools and platforms, amplifying community voices and facilitating collective meaning-making.

Digital storytelling is one way by which communities can “reimagine” and respond resiliently to challenges. As a participatory media practice, it combines personal narrative with digital tools, such as video, audio, photography, and interactive technologies, to create short, multimodal stories that encourage community dialogue and social change (Couldry, 2008; Lambert & Hessler, 2018). Beyond individual narrative creation, this practice encompasses collaborative processes in which community members engage as co-creators, utilizing digital platforms to amplify marginalized voices and strengthen the collective capacity for addressing shared challenges (Burgess, 2006).

Community arts practices such as digital storytelling serve as vehicles for manifesting these imaginaries, where participatory processes of creative expression enable communities to develop both individual and collective strength through shared meaning-making (Hutzel & Cerulean, 2009). Through collaborative narrative construction and creative expression, digital storytelling becomes a site of resilience-building, facilitating knowledge exchange and mutual support networks through shared experiences. This process operates through intentional community engagement, involving members as storytellers, content collaborators, and audience participants. Rather than being an individual experience, digital storytelling functions as an “inter-subjective

process in which meaning is derived collectively” through dialogue and participation (Meban, 2009, p. 33). This participatory approach creates spaces for collective meaning-making whereby communities can document their experiences, share knowledge, and build stronger connections through digital narrative practices.

## **Digital Storytelling as Dialogical Meaning-making**

Digital storytelling serves as a dynamic process of cultural and interpretative meaning-making (Meretoja, 2018; Meretoja & Freeman, 2023). Drawing on Gadamer’s (1960/1997) concept of dialogical encounters, digital storytelling becomes a reflective and participatory practice in which meaning is co-constructed through the interplay of personal, cultural, and communal perspectives. This interpretative process reveals how communities construct, frame, and adapt to challenges through dialogical engagement with their narratives, promoting resilience through collective meaning-making and shared understanding. In our collaborative projects, this dialogical process emerged as participants’ personal narratives encountered artist-researchers’ interpretative frameworks and community contexts, producing new perspectives that exceeded what any individual could articulate alone.

As Meretoja (2018) elaborates, storytelling is inherently interpretative, shaping meaning through the interaction of personal and cultural lenses. In the context of digital storytelling, this interpretative process takes on new dimensions as communities navigate both traditional narrative forms and emerging digital modalities. The digital landscape enables communities to engage in dialogical practices across geographical boundaries, creating opportunities for broader participation and diverse perspectives in the meaning-making process. These digital spaces facilitate both synchronous and asynchronous dialogue, allowing communities to build shared narratives over time while preserving individual voices and experiences. By bridging individual and collective experiences, digital storytelling preserves and shares narratives while facilitating collaboration between artist-researchers and community members to co-create stories. This dialogical engagement functions as public pedagogy: participants (in our case are older adults) become knowledge producers through collaborative meaning-making, with their narratives creating sites of collective learning accessible to broader publics.

## **Public Pedagogy, Art, and Digital Storytelling in Community Practice**

Public pedagogy broadly describes the ways in which education occurs outside of formal settings: including art, activism, and culture (Sandlin

et al., 2011). This concept has been shaped by critical theories, cultural studies, feminist approaches and other perspectives, highlighting the role of education in social transformation. Public pedagogy's relevance to digital storytelling emerges through two key dimensions: centralizing marginalized voices by positioning storytelling as a counter-hegemonic act that amplifies underrepresented narratives and fosters solidarity (Giroux, 2000) and facilitating collective action by leveraging storytelling's potential to mobilize communities for social justice and resilience-building efforts (Brady, 2006; Gablik, 1995). These interconnected dimensions of public pedagogy reveal digital storytelling's dual potential as an educational and political act within the broader context of community engagement, setting the foundation for understanding how communities can leverage digital narratives for social transformation.

Adding to this understanding of public pedagogy, Sandlin et al.'s (2011) review of public pedagogy scholarship (1894-2010) explores how public pedagogy cultivates resilience and inspires social change, offering theoretical frameworks that continue to inform our understanding of digital storytelling's role in community resilience and social change. Gablik's concept of "connective aesthetics" (1995, as cited in Sandlin et al., 2011) emphasizes art's potential to cultivate empathy and relational understanding, resonating with approaches to art education that prioritize experiential learning and critical engagement: from museum education practices (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011; Skregelid, 2024), to social justice approaches (Bae-Dimitriadis & Ivashkevich, 2024; Rallis et al., 2023) in art education, to arts-based inquiry methods (Leavy, 2025). These developments reflect the field's ongoing evolution toward collaborative and digitally mediated art education practices that emphasize relationality.

The understanding that "the relationship is the art work" requires a "responsiveness that comes from the whole being" (Gablik, 2001, p. 38), calling participants to "attend to both self and other with respect, compassion, and care" (Walsh & Bickel, 2020, p. 140). This relational approach to artistic practice is particularly relevant in digital storytelling contexts, where communities collectively construct and share their narratives across various online spaces. The digital medium enhances these connections by enabling multiple forms of cultural performance: varieties of expression and interaction ranging from text and images to audio and video.

Such cultural performance not only creates rich opportunities for empathetic engagement and collective meaning-making, but can also challenge domination and connect individual biographies to broader social structures work on performance and activism (Denzin, 2003; and

see Sandlin et al., 2011). Denzin's (2003) emphasis on performative inquiry in particular enriches our understanding of digital storytelling's pedagogical potential, highlighting how narrative practices can blur boundaries between personal and political domains while developing critical consciousness and collective action. For Denzin (2010), performance-centred narratives encourage both self-reflection and social transformation. This transformative potential manifests when participants collectively share and witness stories that challenge dominant narratives. As an example, when older adults share oral histories documenting displacement or marginalization, these performances validate silenced voices and catalyze intergenerational dialogue, with storytelling becoming cultural activism that reclaims narrative authority (Baker & Lin, 2023). Digital spaces further amplify these possibilities, as stories can be performed, shared, and reinterpreted across different cultural and social contexts, creating layers of meaning and opportunities for collective learning.

The shift to digital spaces has also created what Ellsworth (2005) calls "anomalous places" (p. 41), where communities gather, share, and learn collectively in ways that are irregular, spontaneous, and transformative. Building on Ellsworth's concept, Triggs (2020) emphasizes how these "anomalous places of learning" cultivate embodied and relational learning experiences, positioning storytelling as both a method of engagement and a tool for addressing complexity. In these spaces, art and narratives provoke public dialogue, challenge dominant ideologies, and enable communities to reimagine their identities and develop resilience.

As digital technology becomes embedded in daily life, it moves beyond its role as a tool and shapes economic, political, and social structures. Blurring boundaries between physical and digital spaces creates hybrid environments where learning and storytelling may occur simultaneously in-person and online. These interconnected environments amplify Ellsworth's (2005) vision of spontaneous and transformative learning by facilitating engagement with stories over time: enabling deeper reflection, ongoing dialogue, and new ways of navigating power relations while maintaining the core principles of public pedagogy. Here, public pedagogy and art converge, creating opportunities for community engagement and social transformation, particularly within social movements seeking change.

## **Storytelling and Social Movements**

Digital storytelling's role in public pedagogy and artistic practice informs its application in spaces where narrative practices serve as catalysts for collective action and social change. Within social movements,

storytelling functions as a repository of shared experiences and a driver for collective action. By bridging personal and collective narratives, storytelling advances justice, preserves cultural heritage, and cultivates solidarity across diverse communities (Davis, 2002). Recent studies have highlighted how digital storytelling drives sustainability movements through narrative-based advocacy (Funk, 2024; Wang & Coren, 2024). Digital platforms have changed this dynamic, enabling stories to traverse geographical and cultural boundaries with unprecedented speed and reach. This shift not only preserves the personal nature of storytelling but also creates new opportunities for coalition-building, collective action, and the preservation of cultural histories. Through digital storytelling, narrative practices now serve documentary, pedagogical, and activist functions simultaneously. Communities can use these platforms to educate broader audiences, mobilize for social change, and maintain control over their narrative representation and distribution. The participatory nature of digital platforms enables narratives to adapt and evolve in response to changing social conditions, making storytelling an essential tool for sustained movement-building and social change.

## **Research Approach**

To explore how digital storytelling functions as a public pedagogical tool that fosters community resilience through collaborative artistic practice, this study employs an arts-based research methodology (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Springgay & Truman, 2018), which positions artistic practice as both method and outcome. Drawing on collaborative inquiry approaches (Heron & Reason, 2006), we engaged in a collaborative interpretative approach whereby community members and artist-researchers co-constructed knowledge through shared creative processes. Emily and Sonia (authors) documented their reflections and insights through field notes, reflective journals, and artifacts during their storytelling collaborations. Our interpretative process included structured dialogue sessions with all authors of this project examining patterns and divergences across the two collaborative projects. Finally, we identified themes through iterative discussion rather than conventional coding procedures.

## **Storied Practices**

### **A Mini-Documentary Series: Sonia's Story**

Sonia, a multimedia artist specializing in film, photography, and design who was collaborating on this research project, met Tina and Celia—both older Chinese Canadian immigrants—through her connection with Ching, who was directing another aspect of the research. Ching



introduced Sonia to these two women when members of their club for older immigrants expressed interest in having their stories documented. Both women were navigating life in a country where language barriers and cultural differences often compounded the challenges of aging. Yet their stories were not defined by hardship alone—they were stories of adaptation and strength. As an immigrant herself, Sonia saw their stories as not only about survival but as testimonies to how societal values and cultural perspectives shape older adults' development of resilience and adaptability.

### *Documenting Two Journeys*

Tina was living alone when she began experiencing persistent and excruciating stomach pain. With limited English proficiency, she struggled to communicate her symptoms and navigate the healthcare system. Diagnosed with stage four lymphoma during the height of COVID-19, she faced an overwhelming reality—compounded by hospital restrictions that prevented her son from being by her side. Despite the grim prognosis, Tina approached her battle with unwavering resilience, finding solace in moments of connection and strength in her determination to persevere (Restorytelling Community, 2024a).

Celia had spent much of her life in Canada caring for her granddaughter. With limited English and no prior experience with technology, she never imagined she would one day become a digital content creator. However, the pandemic forced her to adapt. Isolated from her usual social activities, she took on the challenge of learning video editing, navigating computer programs, and even using AI tools to generate content. What began as a necessity soon became a passion, and over time, she emerged as a leader in her community, a senior club, teaching others how to use technology to tell their own stories and stay connected (Restorytelling Community, 2024c).

Sonia set out to showcase these journeys by directing and producing a mini-documentary series, highlighting how both women overcame personal and systemic challenges to reclaim their sense of agency and purpose. The project emerged from Sonia's belief that immigrant seniors' stories often go untold or are oversimplified in mainstream narratives. She envisioned a series that would capture not just their struggles but the intricate ways they had rebuilt their sense of identity and community. From the beginning, Sonia invited Tina and Celia to be her collaborators, shaping the narratives together. This collaborative approach, central to the project, allowed Tina and Celia to share their stories on their own terms, enabling a sense of ownership.



## *Tina's and Celia's Stories: Endurance and Transformation*

Sonia structured Tina's documentary around three key themes that emerged during their conversations: the physical journey through illness, the emotional landscape of isolation, and the power of human connection in healing. Creating a mini-documentary with her mobile phone, Sonia recorded video interviews that captured how Tina endured radiation, chemotherapy, and endless tests while navigating the complexities of the healthcare system in a language she barely understood. Yet she found comfort in small but meaningful moments: the kindness of hospital staff, a reassuring phone call from her son, and the simple beauty of watching the sunrise from her hospital window. These fleeting moments became anchors, allowing her to maintain hope in the face of uncertainty. Sonia worked closely with Tina to capture these nuances, listening intently and ensuring that Tina's story was not just about struggle but about the perseverance that emerges from human connection and hope.

For Celia, resilience was about transformation—a shift from individual growth to community impact. Sonia saw Celia's story as the development of agency, carefully documenting not only her technical learning journey but also the ripple effects of her newfound confidence throughout the senior community. Initially guided by her son, Celia slowly mastered video editing, experimenting with transitions, music, and visual effects. When she produced her first video, her confidence blossomed. What began as a personal project soon evolved into a community effort: Celia became a mentor, proving that age was no barrier to learning new skills or embracing innovation. Sonia documented these moments through Celia's teaching sessions, interactions with mentees, and video work. Her story motivated other seniors to document their experience through interest-driven digital media and peer support. In a collaboration marked by mutual respect and shared creativity, they crafted a narrative that celebrated Celia's process and achievements while highlighting the broader impact of her journey on her community. Both women encountered significant hurdles. Tina faced the isolation of undergoing cancer treatment alone, the difficulty of making medical decisions in a language she was not fluent in, and the psychological toll of her diagnosis. Celia had to confront the ingrained perception that older adults couldn't learn technology. She faced frustration, self-doubt, and the steep learning curve of digital tools, yet she persisted.

### *The Power of Collaboration*

Sonia's role as a storyteller was to encourage Tina and Celia to articulate their experiences and support them as they re-experienced these challenges. Using her artistic vision, she amplified their voices while remaining true to theirs. The collaboration extended beyond the inter-

views and filming process: Sonia's approach involved both women in key creative decisions from shot selection to narrative structure. She organized regular check-in sessions where Tina and Celia could view rough cuts and provide feedback, ensuring their voices remained central to the storytelling process. This iterative process was not just about refining the films but about building trust and developing a sense of partnership. For Sonia, this was a reminder that storytelling is not a one-way process but a dialogue—a shared journey of discovery and meaning-making.

### *The Impact*

The documentaries' impact extended far beyond the screen. After enduring treatments and eventually achieving remission, Tina became a source of hope for others facing illness, reminding viewers that resilience is shaped not just by personal strength but by community support and human connection. Celia's journey inspired a wave of digital learning among immigrant seniors, proving that resilience can also mean embracing change and redefining what it means to age. For Sonia, both women affirmed storytelling's role in fostering connection, empowerment, and social change.

Reflecting on this process, Sonia was reminded of why she is passionate about storytelling. It is not just about recording experiences but about amplifying voices, shifting narratives, and strengthening deeper understanding. Through collaborative storytelling, Tina and Celia's experiences highlighted the shared collective strength of communities. By involving Tina and Celia in the storytelling process, Sonia ensured that their voices were not just heard but celebrated, creating a space for dialogue and connection that transcends cultural and generational boundaries. Sonia hopes others find the courage to face their challenges with similar determination and spirit. For her, this project is a reminder that resilience is not an individual trait but a collective effort, one that is nurtured through community, creativity, and care (see Figures 1 and 2).

Through collaborative storytelling with Tina and Celia, the project generated resilience imaginaries, narratives that reframe aging, illness, and immigration as sites of collective strength rather than individual deficit. These stories functioned as public pedagogy by providing audiences access to alternative understandings of resilience grounded in older adults' lived experiences. As viewers encountered Tina's and Celia's documented experiences, they learned to recognize community-based care and creativity as valid knowledge, thereby challenging institutional narratives that position older adults as care recipients rather than knowledge producers.

**Figure 1**  
*Tina Being Interviewed by Sonia*



**Figure 2**  
*Celia waves goodbye to Sonia after their final walk and interview*



## **An Ecological Soundscape: Emily's Story**

In the urban environment of Burnaby, British Columbia, Emily—a sound artist and researcher—met John and Alan, two dedicated streamkeepers and long-time volunteers with the Stoney Creek Environment Committee (SCEC). Their work centered on protecting one of the region's critical fish-bearing creeks, a lifeline for salmon and a symbol of ecological resilience. John, the SCEC president, had spent years advocating for the creek's protection, balancing his frustration with bureaucratic challenges with a commitment to the creek's survival. His deep knowledge of the ecosystem was evident as he pointed out native tree species, identified birds by their calls, and taught others to spot young salmon by the delicate shadows they cast between sunlight and current. Alan, with quiet but resolute certainty, meticulously tracked the returning salmon, monitored water quality, and documented persistent threats posed by construction runoff and urban development. Together, they represented a legacy of environmental stewardship that had shaped the creek's survival.

### ***Building Trust and Relationships***

Emily developed the Stoney Creek Soundwalk project to share these stories through sound. She understood that this required building trust and comprehending the deeper narratives embedded in the landscape. Over three months, she travelled weekly from Vancouver to Burnaby, walking the nearly 1.5-kilometre trail alongside the creek by herself or with SCEC members. These walks became a process of relationship building as John and Alan shared their experiences and the broader history of community advocacy that had sustained the creek for decades. From them, Emily also learned about the unfulfilled promises from municipal and provincial authorities—commitments to stronger environmental protections, restoration funding, and pollution mitigation that never materialized—while ongoing threats to the creek remained overlooked.

What began as structured interviews evolved into organic conversations shaped by shared walks and moments of observation. John and Alan spoke as they moved through the landscape, their narratives unfolding in rhythm with the creek's flow. Sharing their stories of struggles and ongoing efforts, they also came to understand what had drawn Emily to the creek and what she hoped to contribute. As these exchanges established trust, Emily realized their efforts extended beyond simple conservation; it was a mission to safeguard older generations' ecological knowledge and commitment, ensuring this would endure and guide the stewardship of the creek for generations to come.

## *Composing the Soundwalk*

The soundwalk project took shape as six distinct compositions, each weaving field recordings, oral histories, and original music to illuminate the complex relationships among the creek, its caretakers, and the broader forces shaping its existence (Restorytelling Community, 2024b). Emily structured the compositions around three central themes that emerged during her time with the community: ecological resilience, intergenerational knowledge, and the significance of listening as both a political and emotional act. Two tracks focused on the delicate balance between perseverance and precariousness, featuring John and Alan's reflections on their roles as streamkeepers and the interconnection of all living things—what Alan called “the oasis of nature in the middle of a bustling city.” Another pair of compositions explored the historical and cultural layers of the creek, incorporating archival recordings emphasizing the deep temporal connection between land and sound. The final two tracks examined the implications of sound and noise in relation to the threats facing the creek, making explicit the tension between natural and urban soundscapes.

## *Knowledge-Sharing and Connection*

Emily worked closely with John and Alan to ensure their voices were represented, incorporating their perspectives on everything from salmon counting methods to the challenges of urban development. While she retained artistic direction over the recordings and final structure, the content was deeply informed by the knowledge and experiences shared by the community. For instance, when John and Alan provided photographs documenting critical environmental issues—fish kills, concrete washout, and illegal garbage dumping—Emily integrated these visual elements with compositions about human impact, reinforcing the urgency of the narrative. Her composition and storytelling created an immersive experience that captured not only the natural soundscape but the human dedication that had preserved it. As Emily's connection to the creek deepened, she moved beyond the role of observer, contributing two poetic soundscape compositions that incorporated her own voice—an artistic choice that reflected her evolving relationship with the landscape and the advocacy embedded within it.

## *The Public Experience*

In April 2024, a one-time guided soundwalk invited the public to collectively experience the creek's soundscape (see Figure 3). Using QR codes placed along the trail, visitors accessed soundscape compositions and accompanying videos, immersing them in the auditory and narrative layers of the creek's history and ecology (see Figure 4). At key



locations, Emily urged participants to listen beyond the recordings—to hear the creek itself. At one point, she guided them to observe the water closely, training their eyes to detect salmon swimming just below the surface. The walk became a space for collective listening and learning; long-time residents discovered new ways to hear familiar landscapes while newcomers developed a deeper connection to this vital ecosystem. A long-time resident expressed surprise at hearing the landscape in ways they had never noticed before, while another noted how the interplay of natural and human-made sounds heightened their awareness of urban encroachment on the watershed.

**Figure 3**

*Emily and Alan Engage in Discussion During the Community Soundwalk*



**Figure 4**

*Alan watches the soundscape video during the community soundwalk by scanning the QR code.*



### *The Impact*

The project's impact extended beyond its initial launch. In January 2025, John shared remarkable news; the fall 2024 salmon run had seen the highest recorded return in recent history, with over 3,200 chum and more than 1,000 coho returning to the creek. While this success validated decades of community-led conservation efforts, it also reinforced the precarious nature of their work. Each return remains uncertain, requiring renewed effort, advocacy, and vigilance from the community. The SCEC's commitment to the project's legacy was evident in their interest in creating permanent installations for the soundwalk's QR



codes, ensuring future generations would continue to hear and learn from these stories. With collaborative storytelling, Emily ensured that John and Alan's voices were not only heard but celebrated, creating a space for dialogue and connection that transcends generations. Emily hopes others find inspiration in this model of community resilience, one sustained through creative expression, shared responsibility, and unwavering care for both place and people.

The project functioned as public pedagogy by making John and Alan's environmental knowledge publicly accessible through QR codes embedded along the trail. As listeners encountered the soundwalk, they gained access to decades of community-led conservation practice and place-based ecological understanding grounded in the lived experiences of longtime stewards. The soundwalk positioned community members' experiential knowledge as valid, representing how digital storytelling can render visible the connections between personal relationship to place and collective environmental action.

### **Emerging Insights**

Through our collaborative analysis, we identified three themes that highlight how digital storytelling strengthens community resilience: (1) digital storytelling as public pedagogy, (2) narrative co-creation as a catalyst for social movements, and (3) digital platforms for intergenerational and ecological advocacy.

Across our two cases, the mini-documentary-style videos and the Stoney Creek soundscape, we observed how digital storytelling serves as public pedagogy through two core processes: connecting personal narratives with collective experiences and elevating marginalized voices. These processes underpin all three themes we identified, demonstrating how resilience is not merely documented but actively co-created through participatory storytelling processes. This collaborative approach helps construct resilience imaginaries by collectively developing visions and strategies for adaptation and transformation through the artistic and participatory methodologies employed in these projects. These methodologies function as public pedagogy because they position collaboration itself as the means through which community-generated knowledge becomes publicly accessible: the frameworks participants co-create through artistic processes for understanding resilience, place, and care circulate beyond the immediate project context to inform broader public understanding.

In the mini-documentary series, the stories of older immigrants created an imaginary of resilience through technological adaptation and cultural preservation. Similarly, the Stoney Creek Soundwalk project

constructed an imaginary of ecological resilience through interweaving environmental stewardship narratives and place-based storytelling. These imaginaries, formed through artistic practice and public pedagogy, become tools for mobilizing collective action and cultivating community transformation. The process of creating and sharing digital stories enables a space where artistic expression, lived experience, and collective action converge. A space where personal narratives transform into shared visions of community resilience.

## Digital Storytelling as Public Pedagogy

As both projects demonstrated, digital storytelling is a dynamic process where artistic practice and public pedagogy intersect. Drawing on Gadamer's (1960/1997) concept of dialogical encounters and recent work on relational and participatory digital practices (Eglinton et al., 2017; Hartley & McWilliam, 2009), we see digital storytelling as a reflective and participatory practice that bridges personal narratives and enables collective meaning-making. This dialogical process is evident in shaping Tina's and Celia's narratives with digital documentation and in the collaborative exchanges between Emily and the Stoney Creek streamkeepers, manifested through interactive soundscapes and QR-coded trails. According to Emily, the process of composing the Stoney Creek soundwalk expanded her understanding of pedagogy beyond instructing others to deep listening. Through her walks with John and Alan, she came to recognize how listening itself functioned as an educative act, allowing her to tune into the layered histories of the creek and the tension between sound and silence, memory and advocacy. Sonia similarly observed that through video editing sessions with Celia, what began as documentation evolved into a shared act of learning and mentorship, with Celia's journey teaching her as much about resilience as it would teach the potential viewers of this film.

The pedagogical dimension manifests distinctly through practitioners' approaches to both relationship-building and narrative development. Drawing on McLuhan's (1964) well-known insight that "the medium is the message" (p. 7), Sonia's documentaries demonstrate how the form of storytelling itself shapes understanding and connection. Her documentary format acted as a bridge, enabling seniors to share experiences across generational and cultural boundaries while ensuring their stories remained accessible beyond immediate communities. Sonia's work with Tina revealed how storytelling could capture moments of human connection during cancer treatment, while Celia's journey from technological novice to mentor illustrated the ripple effects of empowerment within senior immigrant communities. Such an approach, when individual stories become catalysts for broader social consciousness, aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of critical pedagogy

and its contemporary developments (Darder, 2018; hooks, 2020). This storytelling practice creates spaces for intergenerational learning and knowledge democracy while challenging traditional power structures through digital formats that amplify marginalized voices.

Emily's Stoney Creek Soundwalk exemplified pedagogical potential through deep environmental engagement and relationship cultivation. Her regular walks with streamkeepers developed listening as both a political and emotional act. Emily observed that the creek environment functioned as a site of learning, where knowledge flowed between streamkeepers and visitors, transcending traditional educational boundaries. Through digitally crafted compositions weaving field recordings, oral histories, and original music, Emily conveyed the complex relationships among the creek, its caretakers, and the broader forces shaping its existence.

### **Narrative Co-creation as Catalyst for Social Movements**

A central theme emerging from both cases is the importance of digital collaboration for enabling community agency and empowerment, extending Gablik's (1995) concept of "connective aesthetics" into the digital realm. Both projects show how relationship-centred storytelling operates through three key dimensions. First, power dynamics shifted fundamentally through sustained collaboration. Sonia's approach positioned Tina and Celia as active shapers of their narratives, involving them in creative decisions from story structure to final editing. Likewise, Emily's relationship with streamkeepers John and Alan evolved through shared walks and ongoing dialogue, ensuring their environmental knowledge and advocacy shaped the soundwalk's development. These approaches demonstrate how authentic collaboration transforms participants from subjects into co-creators of their own stories.

Sonia initially approached the project thinking she was helping Tina and Celia tell their stories, but through the editing process, realized they were helping her rethink her role as a director. She noted how they gradually took ownership of the narrative in ways that reshaped her approach to directing. Emily experienced similar dynamics, identifying a pivotal moment when John suggested layering his voice with creek sounds and construction noise—a creative choice that represented his form of protest. This moment helped Emily recognize how the soundwalk had evolved from an artistic project into a shared act of advocacy.

Second, trust-building emerges as fundamental to successful digital collaboration. Emily emphasized that trust did not precede the sound-

walk but developed through continuous engagement with the environment and participants. She noted how the return visits, walking the trail, and listening together gradually built mutual trust. This relationship-building process had to happen first, before the actual storytelling work could begin. In parallel, Sonia built trust with Celia by participating in her folk-dance classes, showing genuine interest in her video-making process, and accompanying her on neighbourhood walks. Sonia recognized that understanding Celia's cultural background and immigration experience was essential to collaborative storytelling. She observed that Celia's sense of cultural pride and self-expression flourished during these shared activities. These were the moments when Celia began suggesting edits and claiming creative space in the documentary process, showing how culturally informed engagement enabled collaborative narrative co-creation. This relational approach enabled stories to emerge organically through dialogue rather than structured interviews, underscoring the essential role of trust in community-based research (Wilson et al., 2018).

Third, these projects challenged dominant narratives while preserving community voices. Sonia's documentation of older immigrants' resilience and Emily's amplification of grassroots environmental stewardship contribute to emerging discussions about decolonizing research methodologies (Archibald et al., 2019; Denzin & Giardina, 2019; Smith, 2021). Their work demonstrates how storytelling can honour community knowledge while connecting it to broader social movements.

### **Digital Platforms for Intergenerational and Ecological Advocacy**

Both cases illuminate how resilience is strengthened through intergenerational knowledge transfer and ecological advocacy. These projects reveal resilience not as an individual trait but as a collective process sustained through shared storytelling, community bonds, and collaborative action.

The mini-documentary series revealed how resilience emerges through networks of support and mentorship: Tina's narrative captured the strength found in health care support and family bonds, while Celia's transformation from technology learner to community mentor demonstrated how individual growth catalyzes collective empowerment. Sonia's documentation of this process revealed how personal stories could extend beyond individual narratives to become foundations for intergenerational understanding. Throughout the filming, she witnessed how both Tina's and Celia's stories resonated with viewers across different age groups, creating intergenerational connections based on shared experiences. Sonia observed how Tina's journey through illness inspired younger community members to better un-

derstand their elders' resilience, while Celia's technological adaptation encouraged both younger helpers and senior peers to recognize the value of cross-generational knowledge exchange.

In a comparable way, the Stoney Creek Soundwalk emphasized the intergenerational nature of environmental resilience. Emily's documentation of streamkeeper knowledge and advocacy practices illustrated how ecological care passes between generations through story and shared practice, with John and Alan's stewardship preserved through interactive soundscapes and QR codes. The project demonstrated how environmental storytelling can preserve crucial knowledge while inspiring future stewardship, particularly evident in the record salmon returns of fall 2024 that validated decades of community care. During the soundwalk event, Emily noted how the soundwalk's structure enabled intergenerational dialogue in real time. During the soundwalk event, she observed a young participant crouching by the creek searching for salmon while listening to Alan's recorded voice through headphones. For Emily, this moment represented temporal connection through sound, linking decades of advocacy to present experience and making the soundwalk feel vibrant rather than merely archival.

Emily reflected on how digital platforms bridged generational divides in ecological advocacy. She observed that QR-coded trails allowed for both immediate engagement and long-term preservation of environmental knowledge, enabling a temporal connection between past conservation efforts and future stewardship. Similarly, Sonia recognized that the digital documentation of immigrant seniors' stories created an accessible intergenerational living archive that extended beyond the immediate community. She noted how digital platforms enabled Celia's technological journey to inspire not only her peers but also younger family members, friends, and community members who gained new perspectives on aging, resilience, and cultural knowledge transmission.

### **Reflective Conclusion**

Through our collective analysis of these two distinct digital storytelling projects, we have shown how such creative practices function as public pedagogy by making community members' experiential knowledge more widely accessible, thereby contributing to community resilience while cultivating public engagement. Drawing on Chaskin's (2007) framework, these creative pedagogical interventions position communities as both contexts and collective actors, where art becomes a force through which communities demonstrate resilience by organizing, responding to challenges, and co-constructing knowledge through creative narrative practices. When digital storytelling integrates with community partnerships, creative practice itself becomes the pedagog-

ical site, where making art and building relationships operate as inseparable dimensions of knowledge generation.

The relationship-building evident in both projects also suggests that responsive art education requires long-term commitment and iterative collaboration built on trust. This approach reconceptualizes pedagogical relationships, positioning students and community members as collaborators who engage in reciprocal knowledge exchange through sustained partnerships. As communities face increasingly complex social and environmental challenges, these projects show how digital storytelling operates as a public pedagogical tool that enables communities to share and mobilize knowledge grounded in lived experience.

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