Promising Practices in Collaborative Digital Literacy and Digital Media-Making with Older Adults

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Abstract. For the past seven years, the Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT) team (http://actproject.ca/) has been creating workshops and events that engage older adults, many who have limited access to digital tools and technologies, in digital media-making projects. We collaborate with elders in a variety of Montreal settings, from public libraries, to public housing and organizations founded and run by seniors developing ways to both meet their individual wish to engage with digital media, as well as their collective desire to "take a class" that is social and sociable. Building on our past work on "precarious ageing and media-making", as well as the impetus to "mediatize" older adults and organizations, we focus on both the concept of promising practices and the specific insights of those who lead these workshops: the students and professionals employed by ACT, all of whom are young adults, between the ages of 18 and 35. We begin by offering a set of five "promising practices" for collaborative digital media making with seniors. From our point of view, promising practices are not prescriptive, but rather a way of contesting some of the imperatives and normativities subsumed by the idea of "best practices". We conclude the paper by describing the key principles to our contextualization of "best practices" in terms of digital workshops for seniors.

Keywords: Promising practices · Aging · Digital literacy

1 Introduction

For the past seven years, the Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT) team (http://actproject.ca/) has been creating projects that engage older adults in digital media-making and digital literacy workshops. We have collaborated with elders in a variety of Montreal settings, from public libraries, to public housing and organizations founded and run by seniors. Many of these participants have limited access to digital tools and technologies. In all cases, we have taken on the challenge to meet their individual desire to engage with digital media while "taking a class," or partaking in an activity that is social, sociable and enjoyable. By organizing and facilitating these workshops, we have recognized that working with different groups and in different settings can drastically change learning contexts, and we need to be attuned to learning dynamics that are in flux over time.

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Building on our past work on precarious ageing and digital literacy [1], as well as on the pressures to "mediatize" older adults and organizations [2], we reflect upon lessons learned over the course of several varied workshops, from the basics of learning the internet, to digital scanning and photography, to making blogs. We offer insights on what has worked and what has not, presenting these ideas as a set of "promising practices". In this paper, we focus on both the concept of promising practices and the specific insights of those who lead these workshops: the students and professionals employed by ACT, all of whom are young adults, between the ages of 18 and 35. This is distinct from our previous discussions, which have been based primarily on conversations and surveys with the older adults who are workshop participants. For this paper, we have interviewed the young workshop leaders about their experiences in leading these digital workshops over several years. These interviews form the basis for intergenerational knowledge sharing and collaborative digital media making with older adults over 65.

From these interviews, we articulate five points: flexibility, meaning of technological devices, boundary setting in workshops, openness of outcomes, and the celebration of shared success. These are points that our interviewees identified as key elements for organizing and facilitating a successful workshop or series of workshops, and together, these points can be thought of as an interlocking set of promising practices. We conclude the paper by drawing from our reflexive comments about workshop practices to flesh out three key principles that inform and contextualize our approach to using the term promising practices, and more broadly our approach to sharing methods and processes related to digital workshops for seniors.

2 Methodology

2.1 ACT and Its Approaches to Digital Workshops with Seniors

ACT is a seven-year research project that is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). ACT was launched in 2013, but we have been developing and leading digital literacy and digital media-making projects with seniors since 2011. These projects have been essential to building long-term relationships with community organizations serving the needs of older adults in the Montreal area. In this paper, we draw specifically from our long-term connections to some of these organizations, including digital literacy workshops in Montreal low-income housing buildings in partnership with Groupe Harmonie, digital media projects done in collaboration with activist group Respecting Elders: Communities Against Abuse (RECAA), and various creative projects undertaken with the community group Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Seniors Citizen Council (NDGSCC), and the Atwater Library and Computer Centre (ALCC), each of which serves a large population of seniors. We also include in the scope of this paper podcasting and video-making workshops that were components of "aging activisms capsules," undertaken with colleagues at Trent University [3]. These projects vary widely based on the needs, interests and proclivities of the seniors with whom we often co-design workshops, as well as the mandates of the organizations and groups with which we collaborate. Since 2013 only, we estimate that we have given over 300 individual workshops, and well over 500 seniors have participated in them.

We typically run two basic types of workshops: those focused on enhancing the basic digital skills of our participants (like using the Internet), and others focused on participatory media making as a way to enhance the learning of digital skills through collective projects. The former workshops have entailed "technical drop-in sessions" that are held on a monthly basis, where seniors bring their devices to troubleshoot or learn new computing tricks on ACT's devices. An individual can attend only once or can choose to return several times for more sustained learning. Through lessons, conversations and engagements with devices and software, participants learn the basics of the Internet or they are invited to ask "tech mentors" for assistance in addressing specific issues or problems. Our second type of workshop typically involves projects with significant creative components. Examples include recent workshops on building a food blog, workshops on taking, processing and exhibiting digital photography, workshops on telling, recording and sharing stories about the city, and a video series about participants' lives. What these workshops have in common is that the learning of digital technologies is accomplished by focusing on a collective, shared goal using a community-arts approach, usually over several sessions over the span of a few weeks or months. Often, these workshops culminate with an exhibition or vernissage of some sort.

The increasing scope of ACT's involvement with community groups and digital literacy workshops since 2011 has meant that over twenty young people have been employed at ACT. These young adults have held various roles in these projects: research assistant, workshop facilitators, tech mentors, coordinators and leaders. These individuals are MA or PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, or recent graduates turned professionals. They have worked at ACT and collaborated with community organizations for several years, often throughout the duration of their graduate degrees and even beyond.

For a number of students, employment with ACT has represented the first time they engage with the topic of aging and the topic of later life as part of their formal education. Partaking in an intergenerational digital literacy workshop is often their first experience of working with older adults, and the first time they are pressed to reflect on digital media and ICTs from this perspective. Although support through regular meetings and other means of training is provided, learning to be a facilitator for ACT team has been a proactive and collective project-one in which we have tested, succeeded, failed and tried again together, through various iterations of projects, and slowly built the contours of promising practices along the way.

2.2 Interviews with ACT Workshop Facilitators

To understand what current facilitators might share with future facilitators, we undertook semi-directed interviews with four current and past employees of ACT. We interviewed Kendra Besanger, Kelly Leonard, Ashley McAskill, and Magdalena Olszanowski, hereby identified by their first names only. We approached these particular four individuals for two reasons. First, they all had been in charge of one or more intergenerational digital workshop over the past three years. Second, they had been working (or had worked) at ACT for a significant amount of time, with the durations ranging from two to six years. Third, they had each been involved in more than one form of workshop, and thus could offer insight into the diverging contexts in which ACT workshops unfold.

We used an interview template that included ten open-ended questions that were common to all, and then asked further questions in relation to specific projects they had facilitated. In answering their questions, the participants were invited to draw from concrete examples from their experiences. As co-authors of this paper, we also have interviewed each other, and discussed our own experiences facilitating and organizing workshops. These six interviews are used to identify some thematically dominant themes that outline five promising practices for running either a technical workshop or a more collaborative community-based arts workshop. They also inform our conceptualization of the undertheorized term 'promising practices'.

3 Theorizing 'Promising Practices'

3.1 Questioning Best Practices and Prescriptive Approaches

We use the term promising practices deliberately, and in response to the prevalence of best practices in the current literature in the social sciences and the humanities. The term "best practices" originates from the field of management and the model has been taken up in various areas of public policy, as well as in several academic disciplines [4]. Best practice guides often discuss the insights gleaned from what has been previously implemented elsewhere, and what has been proven to work [4]. The term best practice, for Bretschneider et al., implies that the practice in question is considered "best when compared to any alternative course of action and that it is a practice designed to achieve some deliberative end" [5]. Best practices are, as such, recognized as being superior to any considered alternative, and are often geared towards efficient attainment of a well-identified objective or set of objectives.

As Overman and Boyd argue, one of the strengths of best practices is that they allow practitioners and researchers to distill complex situations, and turn them into a readable and prescriptive format. This is often done "by avoiding negative analysis and focusing instead on possibility and change" [6]. What this approach does, however, is cast aside discussions of failure, which can be just as informative, illuminating and rich as stories of success.

There are a number of other theoretical and methodological issues that can be raised in response to the development and widespread use of best practices (see those compiled by Veselý, for instance), including a lack of common methodologies for identifying best practices. As Bardach suggests, the term "best practices" can be misleading, as it implies that all other options have been tested out and considered, which is rarely, if ever, the case [7]. In addition, it is not always evident how one set of best practices can be transferred to a different setting [6]. The specificity and context of the original terrain of study or original "case study" is usually not relayed in a way that provides a complete or satisfactory picture of the original context and existing conditions. Despite what the term boasts, best practices do not necessarily reveal an optimal path that can be applied in diverse settings. The idea of best practices thus sets up a normative course of action that may very well be inappropriate for the context at hand.

3.2 Towards Promising Practices

In her study of caregiving institutions across a variety of countries and contexts, Canadian age studies scholars Pat Armstrong, with Baines, Daly and Braedley, uses the notion of promising practices, or "ideas worth sharing," to articulate a set of contextual possibilities for caregiving [8–10]. To demonstrate the range of caregiving possibilities, Armstrong and her team have produced an intentionally accessible series of small books, or "bookettes," of what they term promising practices in long term care. The bookettes do not lay out a set of conditions to measure the efficacy of care. Rather, they articulate a range of practices for caregiving in a number of different countries. With each case being distinct, they collectively provide a vantage into the ways caregiving can be reimagined and implemented within institutional settings. These bookettes of promising practices incorporate vignettes and storytelling culled from "flash ethnographies" of long-term care residences that researchers visited for a short period of time. The bookettes, and their vignettes, effectively document different forms of caregiving that are not prescriptive. They contest the idea of universally applicable solutions, and engage with complicated sites and situations. It is worth quoting at length Armstrong and Braedley's description of their approach to promising practices:

> Too much research looks for universal patterns and solutions, eliminating variation and conflicting interests. In contrast, we seek to recognize differences and identify ideas worth considering by those on whom they have an impact, allowing them to do so in ways that take their particular context into account. We also seek to recognize conflicting approaches and interests, looking for ways to balance them rather than ignore them or choose one side. This is why we talk about promising practices rather than best practices or a single, right way [10].

Following Armstrong's lead, it is possible to imagine the potentials for using interviews and observations to articulate promising practices for enhancing and sharing different digital literacy and digital media-making workshops with seniors. Although we are not doing a "flash ethnography" that is either "institution by institution" or "project by project," we are inspired by the potential of the term promising practices, for those doing community engaged research using digital media tools with older adults.

Promising practices, in the context of digital media-making with older adults, present a vision of what participatory collaborations with older adults can do to bridge digital and intergenerational divides. As Magdalena reminds us in her interview, taking a prescriptive approach to teaching technologies can have an undesirable outcome. As she explains, too rigid a set of expectations "might reinforce their fear and discomfort with technology, or reinforce their assumption that they are unable to learn to use technologies" precisely because they cannot learn through rigid or recognized teaching models.

In this context, we contend that the ideas of sharing promising practices means representing the insights gathered from empirical first-hand experience. These practices are guidelines that are not fixed, but are used to initiate a reflection on the multiplicity, context-specificity and fallibility of approaches. Describing a promising practice must pay attention to the open-ended character of research relationships and collaborations. Outlining promising practices, to recapitulate, entails engaging in a collective and reflexive exercise to document and open up a repertoire of approaches and tools that can

avail themselves to practitioners and researchers. Promising practices challenge cookie-cutter approaches, and instead promote experimentation and collaborations on-the-ground, and allow for the building of relationships of trust. We build upon this these ideas, and upon this definition of promising practices, for the remainder of this article. From the interviews conducted with participants, we present five overarching promising practices, that gain specificity and context through their explanation. The practices we put forth in the context of this paper contribute not only to our understanding of how to create meaningful intergenerational digital literacy workshops, but to enhance the conceptualization of promising practices within the social sciences and humanities.

4 Five Promising Practices for Digital Workshops with Seniors

4.1 Be Flexible

One promising practice is learning to balance organization and open-mindedness, and imbuing each aspect of the project with flexibility. Seniors are not a homogeneous group, particularly in a highly multilinguistic and multiracial city like Montreal. Workshop participants who come to ACT typically arrive at a session not only with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, educational and workplace experiences—they come with a wide variety of experience using media that has been accrued over years. Many have accumulated a multiplicity of devices over time, and have variegated experiences with technologies, digital and otherwise.

Given this great potential variety within the population of older participants, we have learned, in the words of one facilitator, Ashley, to "expect the unexpected". Expecting the unexpected is particularly critical when working in "the field" rather than a classroom setting—in our case in senior's housing complex or a community centre. Ashley adds that "you may arrive with your toolkit, and realize that you'll have to try out lots of different tools, and maybe these won't work either". This point highlights several dimensions of why being flexible when working with seniors on site matters.

While a typical advertisement for a workshop may promise the delivery of a particular set of learning outcomes—say to learn how to take, edit, and print a digital photograph—when giving workshops to seniors, one needs to be in conversation with the participants and adjust accordingly. Kendra noted that "you have to be genuinely willing to include their vision of the workshop into their plans, and work towards that vision". As digital activist Virginia Eubanks pithily writes in Digital dead end, it is important to value what participants bring to the table individually [11].

Being flexible, not only with learning outcomes but with a work plan, means being responsive to unforeseen contingencies. Workshops must leave the time and space to discover new things, that are unexpected by the participants. Further, participants may either have trouble putting into words what they do not know, or conversely, they may underestimate what they do know. As Magdalena put it "people don't know what they don't know". She further asserts that it is important to be aware of this fact, and to "read between the lines and to surmise their technology needs in alternate ways".

While all of the facilitators interviewed emphasized that it was important to come prepared with an agenda and a plan for a workshop that includes a set of goals and steps

to achieve those goals, each of them had contingency plans to help with different kinds of potential learning styles within this already heterogeneous population. Some people like to learn through written instructions, others by oral directions, visuals, or by trying to use a device. Further, having supplementary materials is important. For Magdalena, giving a sheet "primer" at the beginning of a workshop allows for room in the workshop to take tangents, without feeling like she has not covered the basics. For Kelly, a worksheet with the information that could be taken away meant that people who do not want to sit through a workshop, and just want a worksheet, could still have access to basic information.

One of the key themes that emerged in interviews with these facilitators, which we too have observed, is the import of being mindful of "time". This emerged in interviews in several respects. While there is the myth that seniors have much time on their hands, many had sudden appointments with medical practitioners, which are always more important than our workshops. Facilitators also stressed that it was important to make it clear to people that they can drop out of the project at any point and that they will not be penalized for doing this. Yet at the same time, this volatility in membership can pose problems in meeting a project's stated objectives.

Working with groups sometimes means that things can take longer than expected, and part of meeting people where they are means respecting the time it takes for them to experiment with devices and to learn with them. "You shouldn't necessarily set expectations for how things need to happen, because then you miss on a lot of good surprises." Ashley further emphasized that it was important to "make time" to let things happen, and often this means letting the group take the lead and help steer the project in the way they wanted.

4.2 Address What Each Technological Device Means Culturally

Digital devices are not only technical objects, but cultural objects that are imbued with histories of meaning, and individual anxieties and fears. Attention to the symbolic power of technology needs to be built into the workshop, and it can be helpful and revelatory to encourage conversations on this matter. If one is not attuned to the complex nature of technology, one risks missing something important. As Kendra suggests, "sometimes, people need to talk about their fear of or their uneasiness with a technology before a workshop can proceed". She adds that at first, she did not think to ask questions like "are you comfortable with a microphone". Kendra describes how she learned to be a better facilitator when she acknowledged the discomfort of a participant in a digital storytelling workshop. This participant felt uncomfortable with a microphone propped up in front of her; the device made her uneasy, though she expressed that she wanted to be recorded. The facilitators found an arrangement that allayed these fears by putting the microphone behind her. This incident launched ongoing conversations about microphones being objects of power within the context of that workshop. Different anxieties, decades of perspectives about complex social and personal implications of technologies often surface, reminding facilitators that technologies are not neutral tools.

Universities often have better equipment than individuals, and sometimes the most cutting edge of technologies may not be the most appropriate: they only remind people

of what they cannot afford. In some instances, it has been helpful to eschew the use of the latest and greatest, an ethos followed by the ALCC, whose workshops with seniors use the least expensive equipment possible. Instead of choosing the best device, a favoured alternative has been to use point-and-shoot cameras. Instead of purchasing one camera, we are able to afford purchasing one camera per participant and the facilitators were then able to lend out these cameras to the participants between workshops. This gave them the chance to practice their newly-acquired skills but more importantly to play and experiment with the devices without having the feeling that someone was looking over their shoulder. Yet, the devices themselves also offered challenges. These smaller cameras were more difficult for participants to use because the buttons were small and difficult to manipulate from an affordance perspective.

Again here, there is not one solution or best practice—balance and context are key. For some facilitators, these workshops are a way to let participant have access to more expensive or professional tools that they might not otherwise buy. Some seniors are keen to try out more expensive and complicated digital cameras. As Magdalena describes, "participants do enjoy using the DSLR [digital single-lens reflex camera] because it gives them a certain access to a camera that is professional, and that they otherwise would not have access to". However, she is at the same time aware of what this can mean for participants and emphasizes that "it's important to demystify the technology and to show how certain functions correspond between devices". This expensive equipment can also deter participants from playing around with the device for fear of risking breaking it. Magdalena's experience suggests that when dealing with the meaning of technologies in these situations, that ultimately facilitators must "make sure that the equipment that is not overwhelming to people".

4.3 Navigate Social Boundaries

For the facilitators, key to setting up workshops for older participants was the process of creating a sense of familiarity and openness between participants and facilitators, and challenging the hierarchy of a typical teacher-learner rapport. This, however, needs to happen while navigating sometimes difficult social dynamics provided by varied workshop settings. As Kelly points out, she found that this hierarchy was somewhat challenged from the onset for facilitators in these intergenerational settings, "because they are older, I feel uncomfortable being in a role where I say 'you should do this'". Further, facilitators adopted workshop themes that would engage the participants and their experience (like recording stories about living in the city, for instance). This was specifically done so as to promote knowledge sharing, and not knowledge transfer, and to assert the roles of seniors in the workshop as knowledge bearing assets within a digital technologies workshop setting. Ashley, mentioned the importance of "trust building" and "creating lasting relationships" in her approach, and building the conditions for people to feel encouraged to ask questions and for knowledge to be shared in a reciprocal way.

Ashley further notes that it can be important to set limits to the level of familiarity one seeks to cultivate in a workshop, and not doing so can make the workshop dynamic unravel. Similarly, Kendra remarks that "we're not part of their everyday life," and we cannot expect that bringing together strangers, friends, or individuals with histories of

conflict with one another will generate the same workshop dynamic. For instance, in working in low-income housing buildings, where tenants are living together out of necessity and not out of choice, facilitators have encountered conflicts between tenants, and have often had to find workaround solutions to deal with situations of conflict. Facilitators developed tactics for dealing with moments of friction, like bounding conversations more strictly to the subject matter at hand, or relying on knowledgeable community partners for input and guidance.

Conversely, the facilitators' experiences have been different when they worked with groups of seniors who choose to congregate and spend their spare time together. Working with RECAA, an activist group of older adults, can be quite different than working with seniors in social housing. As we have argued elsewhere, eating together, engaging socially and building friendships are essential building blocks to their activist project, and these activities structure the way they engage with their activist project [10]. As such, the digital literacy projects ACT has undertaken with RECAA entailed workshops that usually followed potluck-style lunches. These lunches became a way for facilitators and participants to get to know each other, but also to build the social connections that would carry over into the workshop.

Magdalena emphasized another balance that needs to be struck in setting the tone for a workshop. It is important to navigate a line between using language that is simple, and that risks being infantilizing, and using language that is too advanced, and that risks being alienating. This line is one that can change from group to group, depending on the skill levels of the participants and facilitators alike. Further, others pointed to the fact that it was important to be open with one's own lack of knowledge about technology, and thus show to the participants that learning to use the latest device or software is not so easy, and that we are all learning all the time. For example, Kelly explains: "sometimes, they ask me questions, and I do not know the answer. I tell them 'I need ten minutes to figure it out, and then I could explain it to you'". She adds "they usually laugh, they say 'See! The young people they can't figure it out either!'".

4.4 Be Open to Different Outcome and Successes

Part of building flexibility is opening up the workshop to have different possible measures of success and different possible outcomes. As previously discussed, while the facilitators noted the need to have a set of goals at the beginning of the workshop, they all emphasized the importance of parting with some of them along the way, when they no longer fit with the trajectory of the workshop.

This is illustrated especially well by an example from Kelly. She explains that she worked with a man from Serbia in the context of workshop in a low-income housing building. He participated in a workshop on learning to navigate the Internet and it became clear that the only thing he really wanted to do online was find his childhood home on Google Maps. "We wanted to show him how he could do this on his own, but he wasn't interested in doing this". She explains that "we found it for him and he then talked to us about his childhood home and neighbourhood for some time. I think he was just happy to show us his home, and his town, and sharing this with us and the other participants seemed to be important to him". Kelly recognized that this man wanted to engage with

the digital, but wanted to do so in a way that would allow him to connect to people around him. The workshop became a place where he could see his former home, but also a place where he could break his social isolation.

Success in the context of digital workshops for seniors does not usually mean that the participant will become a regular user of a technology or that they will become proficient 'super users'—though this has happened on occasion. To define success as technology adoption or use would be to misunderstand the diversity of reasons that push seniors to follow the workshop in the first place. In ACT's experience, workshops are valued as a place to learn but they are just as valued as creative and social spaces. In this sense, as Kendra emphasizes, it is important to ask participants what they want to get out of the workshop, and to constantly be attuned to this when thinking about outcomes.

Facilitators also noted the need to be open to victories and successes that were not foreseen. ACT, in collaboration with partner Groupe Harmonie, organized a digital photography workshop that took place in the common room a low-income building was especially difficult for the facilitators, Ashley and Kelly. There was much enthusiasm for the workshop, and five participants joined it at the beginning. However, a conflict arose, and one participant was diagnosed with a serious illness. These conditions diffused participation and the workshop eventually dwindled to two facilitators and one participant, an older African woman who had been living in the building for about a year. There was question at this time as to whether ACT should cancel the workshop series, but it was decided that it was important to move forward. This woman created a series of digital photographs and exhibited her collection in the common room of the building. If one were to match the outcome of the workshop against narrowly-established goals about teaching digital camera skills to the seniors of a single building, one might miss seeing how the project actually succeeded. The facilitators and the participant organized a vernissage to open the exhibit and put the spotlight on this woman's work. To everyone's surprise, the event drew a crowd of over fifty individuals, most of whom were from the building itself. This enthusiasm was an anomaly in a building where interpersonal conflicts were rampant, where the common room is often shunned and locked, and where participation in social events is meagre. A few months later, we learned that the woman who had completed the workshop had remarked that, while she was the subject of significant racism in a building of Caucasian inhabitants, the workshop had significantly lessened these racial barriers with the other tenants. The photography workshop had made her feel more at home in her building—a success well outside the bounds of what facilitators could have imagined for a digital photography workshop.

4.5 Share and Celebrate Successes, Whatever They Are

Over the last few years, we conclude digital media-making workshops with the organization of public events such as the photography vernissage described above. We have also hosted launches for podcasts, "listening parties" for digital stories, and screenings for video capsules. These events often include "Q & A" sessions with the participants, biographical notes about the seniors, and interpretive information about each collection or piece on display. Participation in a workshop is never contingent on sharing one's work publicly or on participating in the final exhibit. Nevertheless, nearly all workshop

participants have partaken in the public exhibit over the last few years, and in doing so, have collaborated towards its organization through its curation, and by having an input on the venue, guest list, theme, and so forth.

In preparing public events, it is important not to bog down the curation stage with narrow aesthetic ideals, or to seek technical perfection. Several facilitators who had worked with digital photography pointed out that it was okay if not all the final images turned out perfect, or if they were conventionally beautiful images. What was most important is that they had been taken as part of the workshop, had reflected the participants' vision for their own work, and had been chosen by the workshop participants because they were proud of them.

This practice of organizing public events has been especially fruitful in the low-income housing setting, where building residents can participate in a social event together, and see their common room cleaned up, decorated and repurposed into an exhibition space. In addition to neighbours, friends and family members of the workshop participants are invited, and they often come to the exhibitions to celebrate the work of their loved ones. Members of ACT often attend, as do community partners, and past workshop participants. The exhibit has served as a way of highlighting the work of the seniors, and also the work of the facilitators, and it has provided for all a common and shared goal towards which everyone can work over the course of a workshop series. Further, it has been a ground for creating conversation about digital technologies and aging, and of reaching out to prospective participants for future workshops, and even building further connections within the Montreal community.

5 Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

In this paper, we have articulated five promising practices gleaned from ACT's work organizing and facilitating intergenerational digital workshops for communities of older adults in Montreal. Drawing from interviews conducted with facilitators, we identified five practices that we have mobilized in our workshops with seniors. These practices emphasize the importance of flexibility, of positioning devices and technologies culturally, of navigating social boundaries, of having plural measures of success while remaining open to different outcomes and, finally, of celebrating successes, whether they be big or small. We built upon on these approaches to challenge the rigidity of best practices and instead foreground the term promising practices. In this light, we outline below three principles that guide our understanding of promising practices in the context of digital workshops for seniors.

First, our approach to promising practices is inspired by a commitment to accounting for the heterogeneity of later life. Older adults live in different contexts informed by their social positionings, and they engage with technologies in vastly different ways. We understand that in the context of digital literacy or digital media-making workshops, what works in one setting often does not in another for a wide array of reasons-ranging from the workshop spaces, [12] to the level of interest of the participants, to mobility and physical access, to the weather, among countless others. Promising practices, then,

make us attuned to the uniqueness of encounters, and seek to instill within us an awareness that a holistic approach to thinking about context is essential.

Second, our approach to promising practices connects to our commitment to emphasizing process over results, to engaging earnestly with failures, and to challenging normative measures of success in digital literacy. There is much to gain from not shying away from thinking and writing about failure, and this goes well beyond knowing and sharing information about what not to do. What could be considered failure for some in the context of intergenerational workshops on new technologies can still offer a wealth knowledge about people and the contexts for learning, knowledge sharing and co-creating. Some failures also reveal paths towards unexpected successes, and can put into focus that learning to use a device or technology is far from being the only or most important outcome of such projects. In this sense, promising practices are committed to a plurality of processes and outcomes.

Third, promising practices are open-ended, and signal a commitment to collaboration and long-term engagements. Promising practices imply that they are constantly in flux, always being tried and tested, and potentially tweaked or overhauled. Researchers, and in our case, workshop facilitators and coordinators, are not the sole keepers of knowledge about how best to structure our own workshops, and finding methods that show promise is always a process that involves conversations and negotiations with colleagues, research partners and workshop participants. The open-ended nature of promising practices for our research group has also reflected a commitment towards building relationships with community partners and seniors that extend beyond the parameters of a single project or workshop.

In fleshing out our own set of promising practices based on interviews with workshop facilitators, we have deliberately outlined five practices that emphasize the openness, contextuality and responsiveness we collectively value in teaching digital technologies to seniors. These are traits that we also find to be lacking in the prescriptive best practices model, that claims transferability and predictability of outcomes. The facilitators interviewed in the context of this paper offer not univocal approaches, but varied and complementary ideas that are attuned to the specificity of each teaching and learning context.

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