Increasing Staff Engagement with Training Materials Through Storytelling

Patrick Hoecherl, Staff Development Coordinator
Salt Lake City Public Library

There are so many things to love about a good story. The way the world falls away and the only thing that matters is finding out what happens next, every page break or chapter feels like an invitation to read more. Wouldn't it be nice if we could make our staff feel that same way about the training we create for them? What if they came back each time excited to find out what happens next in the training and when they clocked out for the day they groaned and said "I wish I could read just one more page, I gotta find out what happens next."

While I'm not sure that scenario will ever be fully achievable, I have had success increasing staff engagement by using a variety of storytelling techniques in my training materials. Here are a few storytelling elements you can easily tap into as well as a technique for integrating those elements into your training.

A good story needs characters. They provide interest and are an opportunity for the learner to see themselves or the people they typically interact with reflected in the story. When thinking about your characters, try distilling their personalities down to a few essential

elements. Ideally one or more traits will relate directly to the concept you are trying to teach. For example, when writing a training about conducting a reference interview you could use a character who is given to brevity. This would allow you to demonstrate techniques for using open-ended questions to draw out answers.

Don't worry about creating a fully imagined character with an extensive background. Push hard in one direction or another with personality traits, this will make your point come through more clearly.

LearnRT Elections

The Learning Round Table needs your help! We still have open spots on our ballot and elections don't close for a few more weeks.

If you LOVE professional development and learning, we need you! We are currently running elections for:

VICE-PRESIDENT/PRESIDENT-ELECT
   - Write-in Candidate: Amy Eiben

SECRETARY

MEMBER-AT-LARGE

Please consider running and help shape Professional Development. If you are interested in being a write-in for an open position, let the group know so we can get you elected.

Please cast your vote before the election close date - April 6, 2022 at 11:59 PM Pacific Time.

Creating Multi-Purpose Microlearning Assets

Brittnee Fisher, Ed.D.
St. Johns River State College

As technology changes rapidly, the need for up-to-date instructional materials can seem like a never-ending task. In the world of academic libraries, students and staff use many of the library systems in similar ways. Microlearning opportunities may serve as a training solution for the instructional needs of staff, both in and out of an institution's library and for students. Strategic creation of short, informational videos can meet a variety of training and instructional needs at an institution and cut down on time dedicated to either type of project by library staff.

St. Johns River State College's Learning Resources Department began strategically creating and distributing focused microlearning videos while librarians worked at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, librarians had observed anecdotally that students preferred short, one to five-minute instructional help videos on library resources and services. Additionally, even before we began to work and learn from home, on-demand library help was more convenient for students at a commuter state college than face-to-face instruction. Research in training and development on microlearning supports the library staff's observations and experiences. Microlearning assets can include short, on-demand resources such as videos, documents, and infographics. As librarians at St. Johns River State College learn more about the research on microlearning, more opportunities for multi-purpose microlearning resources have become apparent to them.

Implementing a new next-generation integrated library system and discovery service at our institution served as a significant catalyst for creating microlearning opportunities for various users. Full-time staff members and faculty librarians needed to participate in ongoing, in-depth ILS training provided by the vendor. This level of training would not be necessary for our part-time staff, especially considering that part-time work is on a semester-to-semester basis with many turnovers expected.

Microlearning quickly became a viable solution for our staff training and student instructional needs for these new systems. Short training videos on the next generation ILS work well with hands-on training with a full-time staff member. Microlearning videos created on different discovery service functions help instruct students, library staff, and other library patrons.

Library staff easily create videos using the institution's learning management system's video creation tool, Canvas Studio. Canvas Studio's automatic captioning tool allows library staff to quickly request and edit captions for

IFLA Coaching Initiative: a Success Story

Ulrike Lang

Chair of CPDWL and Convenor of the IFLA Coaching Initiative

Why is there a need for coaching in an institution supporting libraries?
The IFLA Guidelines for Continuing Professional Development: Principles and Best Practices state "the individual library and information professional is primarily responsible for pursuing ongoing learning that constantly improves knowledge and skills." Individuals are responsible for their own career planning and development as trends in our societies, such as digitalization, urbanization, and increased globalization are placing new demands on the information sectors, including libraries. It also seems to be imperative for institutions and associations, especially international organizations, to be "learning organizations" and prepare the library staff and information professionals for these changes, and develop them by providing opportunities for continuing professional development and workplace training.

The purpose of the IFLA Section Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning (CPDWL) is to develop a robust and varied selection of continuing professional development opportunities to better prepare IFLA and the global library workforce to support 21st century users.

Beside conservative educational formats with a teacher and learners, and a fixed sequence of learning units, it is important to create more formats centered on the individual.

In 2018 CPDWL started for all World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) delegates by offering an open session on career and professional development coaching for the individual. Business coaching focuses on aligning organizational and individual goals to improve individual performance and to ensure that the organization's mission is achieved. The event was a drop-in session where the participants could be coached in a variety of areas such as professional development and lifelong learning, career planning, people management and leadership,

CPDWL

project and change management, marketing, or work-life-balance.

Because of the success of the session we continued in 2019 in collaboration with the Management & Marketing section (M&M). In 2020 the WLIC was cancelled due to the pandemic and we prepared online coaching via Zoom, Skype, and other online tools. In 2021 the WLIC was held as a virtual conference and we continued with more than 120 online coaching sessions the weeks before and after the conference.

How to prepare professional coaching sessions?

As coaching is different from mentoring, you need well prepared coaches, who are active listeners with good questioning skills.

They do not need to know the area or subject, but need to ask open-ended questions and listen to the responses to ask follow-up questions, and help bring the coachees to their own solutions. The risk of knowing the subject too well can increase the opportunity for mentoring, so sometimes it is useful to have a coach with a completely different business background.

We planned the coaching sessions in-person for around 30 minutes just as a beginning into matter. There were hosts at the entrance of the ballroom style room to guide the interested coachees to an available coach. In 2019 we started to offer the coachings in all official IFLA languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Arab, Chinese and Russian) and beyond, because sometimes people have difficulties describing their subjects clearly and it might be harder to do it in a foreign language.

To prepare coaches and coachees we created information with the support of Vera Keown, a certified coach from Canada and member of our working group.

The evaluation we did regularly after the sessions showed that there is a high demand for coaching in the worldwide community, because in your professional business environment there might be obstacles to implement, like finances, lack of culture of using coaching, no knowledge of whom to ask for, or the fear that secrecy may not be guaranteed, etc.

In 2021 we used Squarespace as a booking platform. It was very easy to use, with the possibility of creating personal calenders for more than 35 people. You can also add a short biography and picture of the person, so interested colleagues can learn more about the person that will serve as their coach.

Coach and coachee were responsible for arranging their coaching sessions. Most used Zoom to meet and most of the sessions took 30 – 60 minutes. Some arranged another meeting or agreed to stay in touch in the future. As these coachings are free of charge and usually held in the spare time of the members involved, it is up to them to create their relationship.

CPDWL

The following evaluation showed, that most of the coachees were first timers to the IFLA conference and really enjoyed the possibility of this coaching.

When we had the in-person coaching sessions in 2018 and 2019, there were also a lot of long term visitors of the WLIC. So the lower registration fee for the virtual conference may have attracted more people. The age distribution was very mixed, newcomers in the library field up to colleagues shortly before retirement.

What's up next?
Of course we'll continue. As the WLIC 2022 will be held only as an in-person conference, we are planning to come back to the face-to-face coaching in a two hour session. As some colleagues may still have travel restrictions in their countries, or problems with visas for Ireland due to the pandemic, we'll also prepare online coachings the week before and the week after the conference.

Participating in international activities always broaden your perspective and even coaching with colleagues from abroad could help to find your personal solution for your problem. For the coaches, it is very interesting to learn more about professional situations worldwide and the culture to solve problems.

If you are interested in joining us as coaches, please let us know. And if you are interested in being coached in July 2022, please stay tuned with CPDWL and the IFLA community.

For further information please visit our website Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section – IFLA or contact me ulrike@lang-site.de

Ulrike Lang

Until June 2020 she was head of the Education and Training Department at the State and University Library Hamburg, Germany, also responsible for Health management, conflict management, diversity management and addiction prevention.

She is member of the German library association BIB and gave several presentations at national and international conferences.

Ulrike Lang served at IFLA for the Continuing Professional Development Section (CPDWL) as co-chair, was also member of the Education and Training Section of IFLA and is again chair of CPDWL since 2021. She is convenor of the IFLA Coaching Initiative and served as coach in the past years.

New ideas to share?

Send your articles to the editor at

editor@alalearning.org

STORY, continued from front

Give your story structure by seeking inspiration from genre fiction. Genre fiction works well because it tends to have strong tropes that are easy to parody. It lets learners instantly identify what is going on, and gives them clues as to what to expect. It also allows you to combine a narrative that will feel familiar with learning something new which can be stressful and sometimes outside the learner's comfort zone.

Use pictures to add visual interest and support the narrative. When a learner sits down to a wall of text it can instantly put a damper on their experience. Alternatively, a picture can draw them in and make them want to find out more. This is a picture I used in a training about my library's committee and task force structure. Adding a light sci-fi theme and some fun visuals helped spice up a dull topic.

The picture also provided a great opportunity to involve additional staff in the creation of the training. Collaboration leads to the best ideas!

Finally, make writing more manageable by bookending sections of your training with a story. Trying to integrate a story into all elements of your training can feel overwhelming. Take a more focused approach with your story and simply introduce a concept or scenario. From there you can transition to an informative writing style to guide the learner through the concept you'd like to teach. Return to the story at the end to provide resolution. Here is a (very) simplified example:

It was a dark and stormy night at the library. Maria sat alone at the reference desk, silhouetted against the lightning streaked sky. The old wooden floor squeaked as a woman approached.

"Tell me who did it! Who is responsible?" she inquired as she leaned over the desk, eyes narrowed.

Maria knew she was in a tight spot, but one question, the right question could solve this mystery. But which would it be? Something open-ended? Something specific? It was all riding on this reference interview.

An essential element of meeting our patrons' needs is successfully conducting reference interviews. Asking the right question makes all the difference. Here are questions that are effective in X situation: (list). Here are questions that are effective in Y situation: (list). Which question do you think would be most effective for Maria to use in the scenario above?

Story

Microlearning

"Would you tell me more about what you'd like to know?" Maria asked.

The silence stretched on for what felt like an eternity, then was interrupted by a brilliant flash and a peal of thunder. Slowly, the woman set a small origami crane on the reference desk.

"I was just wondering if you could tell me who is responsible for making these? I've found them throughout the library and they are simply delightful." The woman couldn't help but smile as she gushed.

"This little crane made my day and I would like my heartfelt thanks passed on to whomever is responsible!"

Next time you design training materials consider adding some storytelling elements to increase staff interest and engagement. Remember, characters and pictures help immerse learners in the training. Structuring your story to mirror a particular genre can help the learner feel comfortable as they engage with new content. Keep the story manageable by using it strategically to introduce a concept or scenario.

If you are attending ALA this summer, stop by a session I'll be presenting with a couple other LearnRT Members (Cassandra Collucci and Colleen Hooks): "Once Upon a Story: The Impact Of Stories On Learning And Engagement" for a more in-depth look at how to use these techniques. Thanks for reading!

the videos to make them accessible to viewers. Canvas Studio hosts the video and provides a sharable link and an embed code, making sharing and posting videos for on-demand use simple. The embed codes can be easily added to LibGuides pages or used in online classes in Canvas.

There are various other video creation tools on the market comparable to Canvas Studio but be sure to check with other departments within an institution before committing the library's financial resources to purchase a product. There are at least two products readily available for use at this institution. Some video creation solutions are more robust than Canvas Studio and include many video editing options; however, we have found that when sticking with the microlearning model of resource creation, video editing has not been necessary. By keeping videos short and focused, a creator can limit making mistakes during the creation process, eliminating editing.

If an institution is exploring manageable options for employee training, microlearning may be a possibility. When creating instructional and training resources using strategic planning, microlearning assets can serve as resources for various users. Using student help videos has cut down on the amount of face-to-face training full-time staff members must do with new hires. As technology evolves, our department will continue to use multi-purpose microlearning as a practical training and development solution.