Chapter 6

Using Storytelling as the Pedagogical Model for Web-Based Learning in Communities of Practice

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to show how storytelling can be used as an effective pedagogical model for enhancing learning in a community of practice (CoP) using Web-based tools. CoPs provide opportunities for learning by sharing knowledge and experience. Storytelling can make the knowledge and experience sharing discourses more engaging. However, crafting engaging stories remains a challenge. Movement oriented design (MOD) paradigm provides a framework for creating effective story plots using principles of good storytelling. Web-based tools are being used for enhancing interaction in CoPs, and now more responsive systems can be created by using Web 2.0 frameworks such as AJAX. Storytelling can be introduced as a mode of discourse in CoPs using existing text and multimedia authoring systems. However, by creating new Web 2.0 tools for story development using the MOD paradigm will allow almost anyone to create engaging educational stories and use these in a CoP.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is a powerful means for communicating experiences, ideas and knowledge; and it has been used since time immemorial. In most traditional societies people sat around a campfire and told stories. Knowledge has been communicated from one generation to the next through stories even before written scripts were invented. With modern technologies we can make storytelling a very powerful pedagogical tool; however, creating effective educational stories remains a challenge. This chapter addresses some of these challenges and shows the pathway to fulfill the potential of storytelling as a pedagogical model for web-based Communities of Practice (CoP).

The concept of CoP offers a new perspective on learning. Anthropologist Jean Lave and educationist Etienne Wenger coined this term while studying apprenticeship as a learning model. Wegner (2008)
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defines a CoP as follows: “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”.

However, a CoP is not formed by people meeting just for a common interest, e.g. playing golf every Saturday. “Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice” (Wenger, 2008). And, storytelling can be used as the vehicle for sharing experiences in a CoP; however, we need to develop better web-based tools to make storytelling easier and more effective for CoPs.

Early web-based CoPs used static web pages and emails for communicating with each other. More recently, Web2.0 has provided new generation tools for collaborating and creating CoPs. Some of these new generation web tools are based on Blogs (web-logs) and RSS (Really Simple Syndication) systems (Wenger, White, Smith, & Rowe, 2005). To some extent Blogs embody some elements of storytelling, but not all Blogs tell stories well.

Some people are naturally good storytellers, while others are not. Thus, there is a need to provide models and tools that help in creating engaging stories. Movement Oriented Design (MOD) provides a methodology for creating educational stories that are emotionally engaging (Sharda, 2006). This emotional engagement makes the message of the story easier to learn and remember. And we can develop Web 2.0 tools that facilitate the creation of effective stories.

Articulating how to create effective educational stories for web-based communities of practice is the overall aim of this chapter, and its specific objectives include:

- To understand how storytelling can improve learning.
- To explore the role of storytelling in the CoP context.
- To explain what is Movement Oriented Design (MOD), and how it can be used to create effective educational stories.
- To investigate Web 2.0 platforms for creating tools for storytelling using MOD.
- To explore how to introduce storytelling as mode of interaction in a CoP.

STORYTELLING AS A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

We need to create a new pedagogical model based on storytelling, because the traditional classroom-based teaching is unable to meet the demands of the modern world of ongoing learning in the workplace and community.

Egan (2004) confirms the efficacy of storytelling as an alternative approach to learning. He states that the teaching that relies on serial development of objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluation techniques leads to mechanistic education and lacks the essential ingredients required for deep learning. Egan focuses on children; however, as per Berne (1996) every adult has a child within, and winning the heart of this child is the most effective way to win the adult. Thus, storytelling can be used as an effective pedagogical model for children and adults alike.

Importance of Storytelling

Knowledge has been passed on from one generation to the next through storytelling for many millennia, because storytelling has a close connection with how the human brain works. As per anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1995) our brain uses a story oriented structure to absorb the events taking place in the life around us. Snippets of our life experiences are retained in the long-term memory as narratives.

Furthermore, even facts, ideas, theories are learnt more effectively if these are linked as a narrative (Heo, 2004). Another advantage of the