Transcript for The Art of Storytelling: Personas and Anonymized Examples to Teach Accessibility
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Educational Technology Users Group
Presenter: Luke McKnight

FACILITATOR:
I'd like to introduce our final session The Art of Storytelling: Personas and Anonymized Examples to Teach Accessibility with Luke McKnight. Luke is an assistive technologist at Langara College, and now I'll turn it over to Luke.

LUKE MCKNIGHT:
Hi, everyone. Thank you for the introduction. When I was writing my proposal to present here, I came up with the title, the Art of Storytelling. You know, you've always got to make some sort of hook. I thought, pretty clever. And then, as soon as I clicked submit, I was like, Oh, that's a very famous Rick Ross album. I don't know if anybody else. Sorry, Slick Rick, Slick Rick. And that actually, like most mistakes you make, was actually a really great sort of learning opportunity for me to just remember that there's not really any original ideas. And I'm not trying to undersell my presentation. I'm just sort of telling you that I know I didn't reinvent the wheel here. And I think we've kind of seen that. We saw some storytelling from Trefor and Britt had some use cases and scenarios built in. And that is kind of what I want to talk to you all about today with my specific slant on it.

So normally, yeah, I would do a land acknowledgment. But of course, I would just like to defer to Reeva, this morning's welcome was really great. And I do think that there is a danger in making them performative if they're repeated over and over again.

So I will just move into the material. Today, before you're allowed to leave, we are going to estimate the impact of our instructional material. We're going to evaluate some effective techniques and maybe incorporate some storytelling into our instructional material.

So this is Jacob, and he is a persona of a student that is blind from Camosun's Meet the Students personas. They are openly licensed. I like to use personas mostly to protect student anonymity because I work with students who have disabilities. And how this all sort of started for me was I do a lot of accessibility focus workshops. I can say to the people that come. Don't use links that read, "Click here" or "Read more" and don't paste bare URLs as those are cumbersome for screen readers and lack meaning for everyone. Then somebody in one of those sessions was like, Okay, well, what does that actually sound like? That's a great question. I just started mimicking what a screen reader sounds like. I started reading H, T, T, P, S. And I realized, Oh, I could just record this. I started incorporating more and more of these anonymized examples using student personas. And we're just going to kind of take a look at one right here. And we're going to hear in this video, hopefully. If the levels aren't great, I'm

going to leave the captions on just so you can get a sense of what the audio would be. And so we're going to hear a bad link example, followed by a good link example, a bad link, a good link, bad link, a good link. I'm going to make you listen to them all so that you never paste URLs ever again.

[AUDIO]
Persona heading level two, Hyperlinks heading level two. Accessible link text is essential for screen reader users to navigate content. Better written link text also helps all users understand the purpose and destination of links. Link click here. Link B.C. minister interfering with dismissal of Langara instructor. Link https://fpse.ca/news/fpse-news/fpse-lfa-statement-240126. Link FPSE statement on doctor Natalie Knight's dismissal. Link, read more. Link former B.C. minister's troubling comments about Palestinians.

LUKE:
This is what's called the link list, which is another way might ask you to navigate a page.

[AUDIO]
Click here, eight of 23 B.C. minister interfering with dismissal of Langara instructor, nine of 23. https://fpse.ca/news/fpse-news/fpse-lfa-statement0240126 10 of 23.

LUKE:
You've been good. Okay. So again, I think that that provides a little bit more of a why upfront. So we're going to do a very brief show of hands, thumbs up on Zoom, whatever you feel comfortable with. But keep your hand up. So who here makes content, guides, walk throughs, demo videos. Okay. And who feels like people are meaningfully engaging with them? You can put your hand down. Okay, cool. You know what, good on all of you. I'm sure people are. I'm not doubting you. But I think maybe some of us feel like we're not getting that return on investment.

Um. And so what I'm kind of advocating for is we move a little bit past how. And like I say, with the video I showed, I could open the session by saying don't do X, Y, or Z. Or do X, Y, or Z. But based on the feedback and the fact that I tried to mimic a screen reader in one of my sessions, it just seems like it's a lot more impactful and meaningful for people to have that context. Part of that is because, you know, dictating is for cops, so maybe give some people some why. Maybe appeal to their desire to improve by giving them that tangible example of what real impact can be made with those small changes. And then I think the other thing is, we are probably really well-versed in what we do. I basically deal with accessibility, 90% of my job, the other 10% is meetings. But so I know exactly how a screen reader works. I know what a screen reader is going to do with a link, but most people don't. And I think we make those assumptions, and then people don't know why they would want to do something. The fun little fact for the table of people that know me. Not only do I know where this gif comes from, I've seen every episode of *Gilmore Girls*.

So I'm not going to show you all of these examples, but we will provide these slides if people want to go through them. But I'd like to show a few of the examples. Again, accompanied by these personas. This is a video that I use, is a section of something I do when I'm talking about PowerPoint. Again, we use a persona, Ramone, who's colour blind.

[AUDIO with slides]
In this slide I have some information about accessible colour. I have a heading of "Don't do the things in red," followed by dark text on light background, light text on dark background in red text, and colour alone to indicate meaning and colour to differentiate data in green text. But what if someone viewing this doesn't perceive colour the same way I do? For instance, if they were colour blind or they printed it in black and white, or we're looking at it on a display with a lot of glare from the sun. Now, it is not that you cannot use colour, it's that you can't use colour alone. So I'm going to change the header to "Best practices" and add one for "Avoid." Now, we can determine that dark text on light background and light text on background are best practices. But creators should avoid colour alone to indicate meaning and avoid colour to differentiate data. That way, if someone perceives colour differently, they still get all the necessary information.

LUKE:
Or in this room, I bet at the back, you couldn't even tell that there was colour on that slide because it gets washed out by a projector. No, disrespect to the AV team. That just happens. But again, it's a valuable lesson on why you don't want to rely on colour alone.

This one is one I really love because I know a couple of people with dyslexia and they've said, Oh, that is actually not a terrible representation of what dyslexia is like for them. Now, unfortunately, Harvard has put this behind something that you can't get to anymore, but I saved the copy before. But again, I like to show this because it is really hard for someone who doesn't have dyslexia to understand what something looks like for someone with dyslexia. And again, I've got a persona from the Camosun Student Personas, which have been really helpful.

So I'm going to show this one because it's a personal vendetta of mine in that PDFs are really good for forms and props in 90s office comedies. But just stop using them, please. Thank you.

So we're going to look at an accessible PDF. The reading experience for someone with dyslexia. This is in four times speed, by the way, getting to the content. The real runtime is about a minute 20 to find what they want to read. And we're back to actual speed and activate read aloud, didn't do anything. Okay.

[AUDIO starts]

3

Palestinians in the Gaza strip. These schools are sheltering far more people than their capacity as more than 1.9 million people have been displaced than their capacity as more than one... Palestinians in the Gaza strip.

LUKE:
By the way, that's the only voice available.

[AUDIO]
In Gaza destroyed. It is not just schools that have borne the brunt of the Israel onslaught. Centres of higher education in Geneva-based independent Euro-Med Human Rights monitor said that Israel systematically destroyed every university in Gaza in stages. The first stage includes the bombing of the Islamic and Al-Azhar universities.

LUKE:
When you zoom in on a PDF, you have to horizontally scroll because it doesn't reflow into a single column. And then it just stopped when it got to that link because it didn't know what to do. So for someone with dyslexia, this is a terrible experience. Okay. Now, the exact same content.

[AUDIO]
 In Gaza destroyed. Protesters at UBC display a cardboard sign that reads "All those land acknowledgments and you support Israel?" Please consider the following passage from Al Jazeera. Geneva-based Independent Euro-Met Human Rights of about seven voices destroyed every university in Gaza in stages. The first stage included the bombing of the Islamic and Al-Azhar universities. The monitor said in a statement issued on Saturday, Al Jazeera. For the full article, please read how Israel has destroyed Gaza schools and universities.

LUKE:
Then in Brightspace, you can very easily link to that article. And you can put in an anchor link that takes them right to the heading that they need, as opposed to sort of blundering around in the PDF like we saw earlier, and a little read aloud.

[AUDIO] It's not just schools that have borne the brunt of the Israeli onslaught.

LUKE:
This is about one of 20 voices that's available in Edge.

[AUDIO] Completely paralyzed.

LUKE:
It also has the synchronous highlight.

[AUDIO] Education institutions in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, completely disrupting university education. Geneva-based...

LUKE:
Those are a couple of examples. I've got a few more. This is an ADHD student, and their struggles with the reading order of PowerPoints and how when you don't get information in the right order, you're not learning the material correctly. Skip that video for time.

And again, those are my personas. There's more of them. Camosun provides them with an open license. There's some learned personas you can get from whatever Ontario's version of this is, doesn't matter. As well as you can find them all over the place. One thing that I've actually found is kind of cool. You can prompt ChatGPT to create a persona for you.

So there's a very basic one, but the idea of, like, Hey, it's a first year college instructor. They are not very good at tech, and it'll write you something that's not great, but you can tweak it. But then the really cool thing is then you can get it to draw you a cartoon of said persona. Then you just copy and paste both into your slide, and you've got Dr. Alex Rivera. So again, I think that I just want to say there's an entry point for some of these things. The one thing I will say is this should never be a replacement for real human engagement. I use the personas to protect the anonymity of my students. So you always want to have them grounded in reality and if possible, talk to people, find out where there, you know, pain points and things like that are.

Again, different examples of before and afters. So I found that people really like using the same content, and in my case, one inaccessible and one accessible without any real perceived visual difference by the viewers. And so we won't watch these ones, but basically, just like a video that has poor audio and generally nonsensical descriptions, and then a better video with good clean audio that has more effective integrated audio description in it, and people really seem to click when they can see that before and after.

Something else I think that we talked about, even earlier today was the idea of incorporating use cases, you know, finding people's entry points to the system, examining their interactions within the system, and what sort of outcomes they're looking for. I think that could be a really effective way for us to just bring the more human element to our instruction about technology.

And one other thing. Empathy mapping sort of comes from design schools. So it could be a useful exercise when you're starting to craft your material. So just very briefly on empathy mapping, you know, you know, what are we all thinking? I want to go home. What are we doing? We're packing up our things. Thank you for not packing up your things. What do we hear? Sorry, what do we see? Hopefully, the last slide. And what do we hear? Me still talking. So it's not going to be a one-to-one model for creating all your material, but I do think it might be a useful entry point to just bring more of that human element to some of your material.

And yeah, before you're allowed to leave, just some reminders. Move beyond how. Start with why. Make it real. Personas, use cases, empathy mapping. And I think you're going to get better results from the people you're teaching to, and you're probably going to get higher satisfaction from creating those materials. And the Michael Scott, Win win win. We all win. Thank you.

FACILITATOR:
Thank you very much, Luke. Awesome things to take away and think about and how we can apply them in our own settings. Any questions for Luke? Okay. Hand up right away.

PARTICIPANT:
Hi, Luke. Thank you. As an Indigenous person to what is Northeastern Alberta, thank you for the watermelon. And thank you for talking about that as someone who's doing a PhD at the University of Victoria, I support my encampment by feeding them when I can't be there. Thank you. I think you're touching on something that you didn't really highlight, but I feel it, and I'm just going to name it. I think you're capturing how disability justice is linked to all forms of solidarity, liberation, and justice for all. Could you elaborate on that connection a bit? And also, if you could answer this question, how does empathy mapping connect instructors to dismantling systemic oppression at large? Thank you.

LUKE:
Does someone want to record this for my PhD thesis? Okay. To the first point, I think there is equality for no one until there's equality for everyone is a very simple answer to that. There's not justice for anyone until there's justice for everyone. And unfortunately, with something like disability, it often takes... In Canada, it takes the form of legislation or in the United States. It takes the form of lawsuits and things like that. So I will say, at least in Canada, we're taking a more proactive approach where it may not be incumbent on a person with a disability to sue their school. But yeah, I think that it's very important to recognize marginalized communities of which people with disabilities are, and then of course, the intersectionality that comes with that with other disabilities or with other factors that will play a part. I think ultimately too, how I advocate for accessibility plays a lot into equity and UDL because accessible content is almost always better content for everyone. And so that can reduce some of those other barriers that we're going to see to the Democratic access to information. And I also think it's very important to take a proactive approach to accessibility because a lot of people are not diagnosed properly, misdiagnosed, simply lack documentation. It takes like five years and $5,000 to get an adult autism diagnosis. So there are a lot of people who don't have the paperwork, but will benefit from this. I've been talking too long that I have forgotten sort of your second question. I'd be happy to answer it with a friendly reminder. Okay.

FACILITATOR:
Any other questions? One online. Go ahead.

PARTICIPANT:
So there's one question from online. "Have you used these examples with instructors? How have they been received?

LUKE:
Yeah. I just sort of, like I say, I use a persona to protect the student, and then I take an example of material like a PowerPoint that's read out of order, and then I just take whatever sort of material I have lying around to make something to stand in for it to protect the anonymity of the instructor because I don't want to embarrass anyone by showing their material. But yeah, I think it delivers a lot more of, you can kind of see it in faces that it clicks for people when it's a real example, as opposed to me just saying, Hey, write better links by giving them the why by again, that little bit of informed empathy, not cosplaying as disability, but just being like, Oh, I'd never thought of how cumbersome it is to hear a bare URL read aloud. So I've gotten great feedback from instructors. I did this at a college-wide conference two weeks ago. I don't know, time's a flat circle. And it was very well received.

FACILITATOR:
Thank you. Any other questions for the people online. That's the only thing.

PARTICIPANT:
Information superhighway. We were supposed to work that into everything weren't we? Sorry. Just a technical question. What screen reader do you recommend for, especially in our very specific use case like web design and development?

LUKE: In that specific use case, are you using Macs?

PARTICIPANT: No, PC.

LUKE:
Okay. NVDA. Sorry, that is a mouthful too. NVDA.org. It is a free screen reader. If you had a little bit of budget, you can send them a donation. But, it's free, runs on Windows. I will say that there's quite a steep learning curve to screen readers, but webAIM. I don't know how to spell. webAIM.org has some introductory stuff on how to use screen readers for testing purposes, which I'm assuming is what you're leaning towards. Yeah, I would start there.

PARTICIPANT: Perfect. Thank you.

FACILITATOR:
Any last questions? Yeah. Perfect.

PARTICIPANT:

I absolutely love your presentation. I think your examples were spot on. You, you gave us an experience of what it was like. I'd like to bring you back to your title, the Art of Storytelling. There is a huge amount of science about why story matters and why we learn in story and we could just say, we'll follow the evidence. But I really think there's an art to storytelling, too, and there's an art to what you're doing. Can you now take that leap from a springboard and just tell us what you think I mean, the science or the art of this is.

LUKE:

I will say that as far as art goes in this medium, I'm finger painting. But I do appreciate your kind comments. Yeah. I think that the art, let me just gather my thoughts a second. I think that by developing the human connection between the content creator and 20% of your students, if not more, that have a disability. I think by creating that human connection, that's where you take this purely technological piece and start returning it that ultimately, yes, there's this medium in between us. There's Brightspace or Pressbooks or the video that you're showing. But I think that's potentially where the art of storytelling kind of comes in in that by making it real, trying to build a sense of informed empathy, and not disconnecting us from this technology, but remembering that it's supposed to connect us.

FACILITATOR: Thanks. Any other questions? All right. Well, then I will turn it over to Andy for our wrap-up of the day. Thank you, Luke.