



Leaders in Learning Design

Episode #5 with Julie Dickson

with Joanne Bentley and Graham Edmondson

Joanne: [00:00:00] hello folks, and welcome to the leaders and learning design podcast by blue consulting and resourcing the place to get up to the minute information for cutting edge learning design. Today we have with us Julie Dickson, the author of *Designing for How People Learn*. Welcome.

Julie: [00:00:05] Hi, happy to be here.

Joanne: [00:00:23] Excellent. You've been an author and a thought leader and instructional design for many years. And we're really pleased to be able to glean from your experience today. Reflecting on what I learned from your book several years ago, when I read it, what do you think is some of the most applicable principles as we look at the impact of what's going on with COVID-19 and everybody's drama about moving to virtual training.

Julie: [00:00:50] Yeah. obviously, there are a lot of people having to move things in a big hurry and that's, never your ideal circumstance. You don't want to be just kind of, In a frenzy kind of moving things from live classroom into online. I think one of the primary messages there that I usually have is that it's not a fundamentally different medium.

So I think one of the really big things to remember about it is that even when you're switching from a live to an online medium, you're not fundamentally changing the approach that you use. I mean, good learning is good learning principles, and you should start with those. What's the kind of learning principles and what are the kinds of activities you want learners to do, and then figure out how to do that in an online format, rather than because I've moved at ton line.

I have to fundamentally; they do something different with the learning experience. if the classroom experience involved hands on labs, then you have to figure out how do I do this in an online format, but you don't fundamentally kind of change the idea that, that's the most valuable thing that I can be doing with learners' time.

[00:02:00] I do think there are some big considerations. The medium, um, a logistics point of view. We tend to be very event based with it. So, because I'm flying all these people in, we're going to do this in a two-day sprint and get through all the material in a hurry.

And that's actually one of the constraints that gets lifted when you move into an online format and you can actually ask the question of is two days straight, really the best format for this or. Would it be better if I was spreading this out over a few, the first few weeks of somebody's job training so that I'm, waiting until they've gotten a little bit more experience with it before I kind of add into the next section or before I add into the next section.

[00:02:51] And so, the reason that we have these sort of intensive training, Time periods. Usually with live events has to do more with things like travel logistics or, getting the space or, getting people off the, you know, the production floor or whatever those constraints are. And when [00:03:00] those go away, you can actually ask the question of, well, is this timeframe, the best format for this learning, or would it make sense to spread it out more? So, in some ways that's a really big benefit. Now, the thing that you lose when you move away from a classroom training environment and into a virtual training environment is the focus piece. Because when you take somebody out of their actual environment and move them away from their email.

And yeah, they've still got their smart phones, but it's bad for them to be checking it in the middle of a class. And, everybody knows that they're out of the office that day. so there's an expectation that they won't be as reachable and all of those kinds of things, all help kind of shut down the noise of daily life and let people focus on the learning experience.

That is something that we do lose when we've moved everything to these virtual environment. In our current situation, obviously the fact that people are mostly working from their homes where, when they're doing virtual learning and they might have kids, or they might have, the mailman coming to the door like any of those kinds of things.

[00:04:25] And so we not only have The work interruptions, but we've also got life interruptions when everybody's working from home as well. And so that is a pretty significant challenge. I do think we have to then be a little bit reasonable about our expectations. I taught a full day workshop online on Monday of this week, and that was a really long day to be sitting in front of a Zoom screen for everybody in a way that, classroom doesn't seem to be quite as.

Exhausting. And I don't know if it's just that you move around more or you take coffee breaks or, you know, just physical environment, something about that. But, that issue of what we did, this is a two day thing in the real world where we had, you know, six or eight hour days, we're going to do it on site, in the same format like that.

That is always something that you should really look at. both from what's the best learning experience and also just having reasonable expectations about how long people can sit in front of a screen without moving.

Joanne: Yeah, there's a lot of camera fatigue and attention fatigue. That is different when you're in front of a screen.

yeah, absolutely.

Graham: [00:05:30] so Julia, I think, you know, a lot of people listening to this podcast are indeed instructional designers. And I guess the real big question is what are, in your opinion, some of the biggest challenges that an instructional designer is going to face when they're thinking about designing in the virtual environment, as opposed to the classroom.

Julie: [00:05:52] Well, one of the really important things, which is just a very pragmatic question is, the issue of support for some of the technology pieces. I think we're all getting pretty good at easing or Zoom, you know? Zoom spaces and all of those sorts of things, but, I'm a big believer in having the facilitator and the producer role.

So that's not, a big issue, even if it's somebody who can just be there at the beginning of the class to deal with, so-and-so's having issues with their sound or so-and-so can't get logged into the thing because their passwords didn't work or any of those kinds of things. So I do think that that's just one really simple, practical thing that you should always be doing.

For these, is it the person who is facilitating the class, shouldn't also be responsible for that sort of technical support piece. So there's that piece of it. another thing that I think about a lot and I use this, I use the same analogy when I'm teaching classes about designing for e-learning environments is to think about.

[00:07:00] What are all of the things that a really great live instructor is doing, to make a great experience. So like, if we have two instructors who are teaching the exact same class and one instructor teaches it in a really wonderful way, and everybody wants to take their version of it and another structure teaches it and just.

That's okay, but nothing special. Right, ask the question of what's one instructor doing that the other instructor is not doing, and it might be the engagement with the audience. It might be questions that might be examples that they're bringing to the table. It might be the way that they kind of get everybody excited and so those are some of those extra things that sit over and above, are they using the same slide deck? Cause usually they are. and. When we start to look at some of those and it might be trust-building amongst participants, or it might be just kind of creating, a feeling of kind of collegiality in the group or things like that. the question starts to become, how do I do that in an online environment?

[00:08:00] Cause some of those social pieces are harder. the conference that I've been participating in this week, we're not networking in the same way that we would be, if we were in a live environment, we're not chit chatting over coffee, or we're not kind of go walking, you have to somebody and saying, Hey, I saw your session.

It was really interesting. or, asking questions quite as readily and trying to find substitutes in virtual environments, whether they're. Discussion boards or whether they're some kind of social opportunity around it, or whether it's, doing a better job of making sure that people do introductions upfront group activities, any of those kinds of things can help kind of replace some of that missing stuff that probably isn't happening automatically in a virtual environment. And those kinds of things would happen automatically in an live environment.

Joanne: [00:08:54] One of the things that I've seen that is quite interesting for conferences that are being done virtually is they've actually included discussion room links for after the presentation. So if this was really interesting to you come to blah, blah, blah room and we'll discuss informally in a smaller group.

And so often there's four or five people that go to that room and have that conversation, trying to catch that hallway interaction after presentation at a convention.

Julie: [00:09:35] Yeah. Cause when I go to a conference, honestly, all the best stuff is those hallway conversations. And so trying to find ways to, to kind of replicate that, , I sometimes do a video cast for the learning Guild called nerdy shop talk. And it's specifically, trying to like let people use drop in on some of the interesting conversations that I'm having with some of my other kind of expert friends in different areas and things like that.

Joanne: [00:09:50] That's really great. I love, love that idea. Okay. As you think about the outlook for virtual training, everyone said, you know, Covid is only going to be around for a little while. If this is just a short term measure, six months later, it doesn't feel very short. Does it? So as we look at the outlook for virtual training in the next year or two, how are things going to be the same or different.

Julie: [00:10:20] Yeah. So, I think the initial sort of, you know, kind of panic, let's put it all online, that's subsided a little bit now we're kind of planning for this, and I still have some training events and things like that that are kind of aiming for, scheduling out six or eight months.

Maybe we can do these things live. And the answer is nobody knows. I mean, you know, we just, weren't sure what's going on, but with that, but, , I think as we start to get a little bit more deliberate about it, as I already mentioned the issue of scheduling, so not trying to kind of cram so much into discrete events, but spread things out more, a little bit more over time is going to be a big factor for it. The other piece of it that I think is worth looking at is, how much of this has to be in this format. it's like inside every bloated course, there's usually a skinny job aid struggling to get out.

[00:11:20] But looking at the question of, are there other formats for doing this because, Hey, again, if we went to all the trouble of bringing them into a classroom, we're going to try to cover all the things, but maybe all the things don't need to be. In the classroom or in a live virtual session.

So, if I'm showing you how to do stuff in the software, maybe I can just record videos of that and make those available. maybe I can move some of this stuff to job aids. Maybe I can move some of this stuff to Q&A sessions, as opposed to, I'm gonna make you listen to me, lecture over a PowerPoint is a virtual classroom kind of thing.

[00:12:00] I do think that that focus on delivering these things virtually does kind of open up the box again, a little bit of like, is this the best format for this or some other things that we can do? , I think, we have more things happening virtually after this, even after it's safe to go back to classroom training and there's some things that are always going to be probably more comfortable in classroom training I used to do years ago, right. Did a bunch of e-learning for auto mechanics, but they always had a live lab component. So, you could learn about the brake system from the e-learning, but then you were still going to go into a lab and actually do the repair on the brake system.

[00:12:45] So there's things like psychomotor tasks and so forth where we're always going to want to have some hands on stuff or, there's things where being able to be in the same room and. have a conversation, really feels different for stuff. I think the more that we can pinpoint what that live class stream is really most valuable for, you know, then we can start to be making more deliberate decisions about what am I going to do virtually versus what am I going to move back to live classroom?

And that's a feasible option again.

Joanne: [00:13:20] We've found that we can take almost 80% of most content out of a face to face when we're doing it virtually into e-learnings and videos and demonstrations and other formats. Yeah. And save that 20% of Zoom time for discussion or for actual application that gets really meaty and useful and allows folks to work through the other content at their own speed.

Julie: [00:13:45] Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I think the initial sort of first few months, it was just like, get it online. How do we do that? But now that we know that we're dealing with kind of a longer term issue, we can actually kind of go back and go, well, wait, wait, wait, what's the best medium for different parts of this content.

Joanne: [00:14:08] So Julie, we're wrapping up our time. Any closing thoughts? You'd like to leave with us?

Julie: [00:14:018] Yeah. You know, I have a few kind of, little pieces of advice that I almost always kind of bring up. one is just always to say, so for example, a lot more. and I think that applies regardless of whether it's virtual, but when we're thinking about virtual, one of the big questions that I always have, you know, whenever I'm designing a presentation or anything like that is instead of me telling them, can I ask a question so that they'll tell me.

And I think that that becomes really important and virtual, because you're getting this kind of passive, and I do it too. Right. I was listening to you. I'm actually very good lecture by Wendy woods who writes about she's a researcher into habit formation this morning, but like I've got it over on the other screen and I'm doing my email while I'm listening to this lecture and that's fine for that, but obviously, if I'm doing that and in a class that I'm actually supposed to be attending to get something out of and you know, it's going to be relevant to my job, that's less good. And so, what we want to do is we want to figure out how do we have. Those kinds of interactions, where the people are active participants in the class and not just passive recipients of the information.

And so like I said, , probably my number one thing is just any piece of information and sometimes no, you know, I'm telling you something you've literally never heard of before, you know, it's the formula for X or something like that in a technical training. I'm going to have to tell that to you.

You're not going to be able to tell that to me, but if I'm asking questions about. What are the parts of habit formation? Let's say I'm doing a talk on that. Can I get some of that from the

audience, as opposed to me telling them, and then show them how it fits into your broader model or something like that.

And so just trying to flip that around and make it more of an active thing where they're helping contribute to the conversation, whatever they possibly can.

Joanne: [00:16:08] For adult learners, that's really critical if we want to change their performance on the job and use the material that we're sharing with them.

Julie: [00:16:15] Yes. Yes, absolutely. Yep. Well, and that's what it always comes around to. Right? Like you can present a concept, but then, you know, then what's an example of how it's applied and then what can they do to start to think about how they would apply that idea themselves?

[00:16:37] The other sort of message that I would put out there is we should all be patient with each other on this stuff. This is, you know, this is a hard shift to make and it's a lot of behavior change. And this much behavior change is a pretty heavy cognitive load, which, so everybody's been kind of running as fast as they can on it, but, things like having technical issues or, maybe not the perfect format.

So if everybody can just by kind of, you know, be patient with each other and acknowledge that this stuff is going to take a little while to iron out in a reasonable way. I think that's, a good end point for me. So.

[00:17:12] Excellent. Thanks so much for joining us today, Julie, we strongly recommend your book designing for how people learn listeners. If you want to know more about Julie's book, we will be providing a link below in the transcripts and on our website. you have been listening to Leaders in learning design podcast by blue consulting and resourcing a weekly podcast for cutting edge learning design.

Resources

You can check out Julie Dirksen's book, "Design for How People Learn (Voices That Matter)", on Amazon by clicking [HERE](#).