



The Challenge of Curation

Episode #15

with Joanne Bentley and Graham Edmondson

Joanne Bentley: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Leaders in Learning Design podcast by Blue Consulting and Resourcing the place to get up to the minute information for cutting-edge learning design. Listeners, today Graham and I wanted to talk about learning curation. It's kind of an interesting concept and as a former academic, I reacted really strongly to Leo Blankenship's discussion last time about curation.

It's almost as if curation is plagiarism and as an academic, we sort of shy away from taking someone else's content and massaging it too much and then calling it our own. Graham, are you seeing this trend? How would you respond to this kind of sort of dichotomy between, do we create new content or are we reusing?

Graham Edmondson: [00:01:06] Well, I think there's a lot been written about it, for sure Joanne, you know, a lot of people are posting ideas around this as a concept. But my reaction, I think it was interesting when we were talking with Leo. My reaction is, in a sense to worry a little bit. I mean, I see some great opportunities and you and I have worked on some projects where we've used curation as a strategy. But I've got a bit of concern because I think it's another of these things that can be done but can also be done very poorly.

So maybe before we even delve into that, I mean, we're using that phrase curation. Well, what do you actually mean by curation? If it isn't plagiarism, what is it? What is the curation thing?

Joanne Bentley: [00:01:57] So I would pull from the reuse literature to define curation. In a museum, they curate art, they collect original pieces and they're very selective.

They are looking for the very best of its type to showcase, to highlight. And within those curated collections they have themes. They have representations that they're trying to get across to the viewer. I think in the same way, we have curated learning where we've gone out, we've searched for the best examples on YouTube or wherever we might be looking for those open referenced materials, bring them in for the best of the best. And then wrapping our context around them. When we make them our own by situating the examples that we include, by wrapping good questions, those things that integrate the original pieces, give new context. So, for me, that's an appropriately curated course, as opposed to just a hodgepodge collection of things that you found that other people created.

Graham Edmondson: [00:03:16] Well, I think that's my worry, because I kind of sense that some people's definition of curation might end up as just a random list of potentially available resources. But let's imagine this, imagine that we're dealing with the topic negotiation for example. I'm using that because I've seen examples of somebody's attempt to curate a learning solution, which amounted, honestly, Joanne, to not much more than four or five PowerPoint decks on negotiation skills that they've used in previous workshops

linked to some YouTube videos and then a list of further reading resource options. But that was their attempted to curate.

It was close to what you were describing as almost plagiarism. It's just saying, well, here's a bunch of stuff that's out there. So, we use, some of it I found quite randomly. You might find some of this stuff useful. That's not curation, is it? That's collating not curation.

Joanne Bentley: [00:04:23] Yes. So, we're not talking about collating a bunch of stuff into a list and, then you know, work your way through these bits.

- 1) There has to be context. In a course that we created for one of our clients. We actually described this process as placing wrappers. So, we gave context for the learner. Situational awareness around why they needed to know this material.
- 2) Then sent them to a resource and said, we want you to do module one of this piece and then pay special attention to the example.
- 3) And then when you're going to come back, into our wrapper and go through an application exercise where we want you to take what you learned in this other piece and apply it situationally for a real-world example.
- 4) And then they had to engage in some peer conversation and feedback and really dig in and understand how that content, that they had reviewed somewhere else, is applicable in their situation.

So [context has to be] wrapped around some other resources. If you're not providing your own business context, I think you're going to slide down that [reuse} continuum and end up collating rather than curating.

Graham Edmondson: [00:05:44] So the way you're describing it, that the wrapper that exists, that's almost like I feel like it's a pathway through the curated content, but the learner proceeds through maybe a pathway with some kind of guide or direction. Making it relevant to their need and sending them out to other places for what you might call the core content.

But then bringing them back to apply that or think about that in the context of the learning needs that they might have. So, that's quite a lot of instructional design that's going on rather than just putting together a list of stuff that might be useful.

Joanne Bentley: [00:06:30] Very much so! And it requires that you're quite clear with your learner, how they're going to navigate through the course and that you've set them up with those expectations ahead of time.

There's a lot of trust involved. Often those resources live outside your company's firewall. But you're sending them to these different places to collect and gather information. The piece that I really like about this is that it mirrors the kind of behavior that you often want your learner to engage in on the job.

All the resources they need to do their job are seldom in a single place. And so, you're saying go out to our learning resource center, go out to the web, go out to this place or some other, and look at these [recourses] and integrate those so that you can move forward and solve a

problem on the job. So, we're mirroring more real-world experiences for solving those kinds of problems, within our training. So, it has a feeling of authenticity that really resonates for me.

Graham Edmondson: [00:07:36] Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense. I mean, what it does mean though is that it's actually, it's not easy for the instructional designers.

And I think this is really important because curation isn't in any way a cop-out. And I think some people have tended to interpret it like that. It's like, I'll just do some Googling to find some stuff that you lot might find interesting -- Job done! And it's so far removed from that I think the task of the instructional designer to source the base core content to design a wrapper around it, that does bring that relevance. That does bring the learner back from those external resources into the actual scenario or into the learning need that is relevant for them. And, also, I think what's worth mentioning is that it's not like this is a job done when the initial curation process is completed.

I think this is very much dynamic because a lot of the content out there itself will change. New content becomes available. The instructional designer, what I'm getting at is the instructional designer isn't going to take it easy because they're involved in content curation. It's just as challenging, at least as challenging as designing a learning solution ever was.

It's just got a different flavor to it. It's not an easy out. Do you agree with that?

Joanne Bentley: [00:09:15] I do. And I think instructional design programs are going to have to step up and into the space because traditional programs teach content creation. But it's important to differentiate because now the skill of evaluating resources has moved up from a very low level, occasionally used skill to something that you're going to use frequently.

I'm looking at four versions of a particular soft skills course. And there are 40 others I could look at. How do I decide which of these resources are the best or the most well done so that I'm only using premium resources and not just any old thing thrown up there [online]?

Graham Edmondson: [00:10:02] Process is really, really key. No matter how good the content is that you evaluate and then decide you're going to use. No matter how good it is. You're going to have to forge links between the different pieces. I mean, I've heard the phrase "mashup" used. Or to provide some kind of linkage, some kind of connection, so that learners are not going to access one resource to hear a story about something and then have something potentially even slightly contradictory mentioned in another resource.

The instruction designers got to find a way to link these disparate pieces of content, haven't they? That's not easy. It's a new challenge. As you say, I think people are not particularly experienced in doing this. But I think it's really, really important that we understand how crucial it is to do that. To find the right resources and to connect them. To connect them in a meaningful learning experience. That to me is the key to good curation versus poor curation or poor collection. That's not the job. That's only a piece of it.

Joanne Bentley: [00:11:25] Well, and you've got to look at your timelines too, because I think when you're curating content, the temptation is to think, "oh, I could do that in 10 - 15% of the time of actually creating original content."

And you can do it in less time, but it's too easy to overestimate how much time-saving curation is going to actually give you. And you have to have really clear objectives as to what it is you're looking for. Just recently I was helping a client curate content and one of the requirements that I actually argued against was how long the piece was.

They didn't want a robust topic. They wanted the shortest learning object they could find on this particular topic, and they were aiming for five minutes. Well, you're not going to find much in the content created environment that fit that requirement. And so, we actually said, you know, if that's a primary goal, then you're going to want to create that summary yourself. Because folks creating full courses out there weren't thinking in microlearning and mini courses often when they created the content. So, you're trying to chunk out pieces. So, looking at your timelines and understanding what those objectives might be for how do you filter, how do you evaluate and pull those things together? Otherwise, you're going to end up with really difficult pieces to work with and wish that you had just created your own course!

Graham Edmondson: [00:13:02] So, in essence this whole idea, or this thing that we're hearing about, it's really curation, but also creation. The instructional designers got to learn how to research, access, evaluate existing content to be curated, but they need to create links. They need to create some continuity, something that binds it together, and need to design. I think it's something we're reading a lot more about. I think it's something that is going to be very much part of the future of L&D.

And I think there's a whole lot for us to learn as instructional designers about how to do this well.

Joanne Bentley: [00:13:50] Absolutely! We just have to give credit where credit's due and integrate those things, or we're going to be in a load of trouble.

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