



What's the Magic Magnifier in eLearning?

Podcast 25

[00:00:00] **Joanne Bentley:** Hello and 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. So, listeners, last time we were chatting with Linnaea Marvell. And, exploring this idea a little bit further about curated learning and learning in the flow of work, and we wanna dig in a little bit further.

How can curated learning in the form of pathways and learning journeys really leverage what seems to be the “magic magnifier” of learning in the flow of work?

[00:00:53] **Graham Edmondson:** Well, Joanne, I think first thing, we need to clarify exactly what you mean by a “magic magnifier.” What is that?

[00:01:03] **Joanne Bentley:** I'm glad you asked because, from a psychology standpoint, if we're not looking at how the brain is preparing “to be ready to learn” then I think we're missing some key opportunities to understand “learning in the flow of work.” I think relevance is the magic magnifier.

When you have a problem and you're stuck and you think, "oh, how do I fix this? What do I do next? What do the experts say on this?" Then you're waiting. There's this delay time if I have to wait for, say, three months for a full day workshop on how to improve my communication skills. There's a big gap and the relevance has dropped. The urgency was today. I needed help understanding how to structure my argument so that I could go in and talk to my boss or I needed help doing a specific skill and not a full workshop.

So, I want help today. And yes, I signed up for a workshop. I do [still] need deeper learning! But today, it's the [immediate] need that makes “learning in the flow of work” so powerful – it's relevance.

[00:02:27] **Graham Edmondson:** Yeah, I get that completely because that goes back to one of Malcolm Knowle's key principles of adult learning, doesn't it?

People want to know that what they're learning is going to be immediately relevant and it's gonna help them solve real world problems. That is how adults are primed and prepared and willing to learn. I totally understand that Joanne, but of course, it's not physically possible to have available a deeper solution at [every] point of need.

You can't immediately access the depth of content that you might need at or within the flow of work. So, do you not [see] that there is a real risk in saying that “curated learning” is the answer to addressing point of need learning. Do you not think there's a real risk that we end up with just superficial learning rather than deeper [meaningful] learning?

[00:03:30] **Joanne Bentley:** Oh, absolutely – I think it's a risk! A risk that we devalue deep learning. I think that's going to be critical because when does a degree, for example, become more relevant? I mean, yay for certificates, yay for a five-minute learning module on Bloom's Taxonomy, but it doesn't teach you to be an instructional designer where you've gotta do project work and interact with others and really digest theories and look at different applications.

So, we need the deep work still. But there's so much that's going on in corporate training that's just a lot of fluff. They're long courses, lots of introduction, lots of setup and not always drilling down to very useful applications. Maybe it's somebody's book or something that's being discussed in a workshop. But not every aspect of the book is relevant.

[00:04:32] **Graham Edmondson:** Yeah. So, we're talking now about the fact that a lot of the deep learning, the more formal learning events themselves are just not very well designed. Is that what you're saying? And that kind of works against them as being a really effective learning tool.

[00:04:52] **Joanne Bentley:** Absolutely. Even degreed classes are not always structured in a highly relevant way. They can be a bit esoteric.

[00:05:03] **Graham Edmondson:** I think you'll recall from the conversation we had last time about curated learning that I'm a little more cynical... I was talking with a client recently Joanne, and they've made available a vast array of content to their learners where they're able to access all kinds of resources on all kinds of topics.

And that's a problem because they cannot sort the wheat from the chaff. That their learners cannot figure out, "yeah, if I Google communication skills, there are 418 resources available to me. Which is the most relevant to the need that I have." I think that's one of the issues with curated learning and the platforms that they're used to access them at the moment.

The fact that the content may look superficially relevant to the need that somebody has in the flow of work, but actually it's just a word or two that have triggered something to pop up in a search engine and that's not good. That's really, really concerning.

[00:06:21] **Joanne Bentley:** It is. It can be a black hole, where you start that search process, and you think you're gonna find two or three relevant solutions.

And the first one, they're defining it very differently than the way you were thinking about it. So, you refine your search a bit further and exclude that aspect of the topic. And then, after several tries you begin to get closer to what you were looking for, but it's still not quite what you want.

If you can't do that in a relatively quick way, you may have spent an hour refining your search, and that's problematic and it definitely doesn't hit the magic magnifier. Now you're frustrated and you are still unable to do your work and you've essentially quote unquote, "wasted an hour of your time."

[00:07:12] **Graham Edmondson:** I agree.

And unfortunately, both you and I have seen that happen and have heard stories about how problematic that can be. I was reading a little bit about this a few days ago. There's a great definition of curation and curated learning from the Deloitte report, which said, "Curation is the art or science of identifying the best information for the organization and providing context and order to it."

And I think a lot of times that center stops halfway through. It's the provision of the context and the order to the actual curated material that I think is the real art or science that instructional designers are gonna have to focus on, rather than just dumping stuff into a repository and asking people to kind of skim through it and find what suits their need most effectively.

Because that's not a very fruitful way I don't think of making learning solutions available. What do you think.

[00:08:27] **Joanne Bentley:** I love the idea of better context and order. In fact, several years ago I wrote a [journal article](#) that suggested we needed a “soup can label” on our courses that described in much more detail what's actually in it.

And if our courses are shorter, broken into more meaningful chunks, that soup can label, if you will, describes the context, describes the order, describes the activities, the learning theory, all of the things that we have at our fingertips as instructional designers but often are constrained by the tool with just four sentences.

Let me describe what this is. Does it have a pithy title? Sometimes the title might even be a bit misleading. You are using a buzzword in one way and maybe the industry is thinking of it in a different way. Those paragraphs that are supposed to be marketing pieces to draw you into your course, may or may not be truth in advertising.

So, context and order as described with all of those pieces that really give meaning to that learning and you know, a series of hashtags at the very least which help you drill down into what they're gonna get from that.

[00:09:52] **Graham Edmondson:** I mean, I think that's where the instructional designer focus has got to be.

You know, I really think there's a role and far from the instructional designer becoming redundant or less relevant because of the advent of curated learning. I think it just throws a focus on how important it is for a learning and development professional to be providing that context and an order or sequence or tracking and mapping to ensure that people are not just fumbling around in a myriad of possible solutions.

You and I both know of an organization has made so much material available and is now finding that the instructional design job is to create, if you like, ways to access that material, you know a portal in a sense that does indeed provide some context and organization. Specifically provides pathways for people, and a sense of growth a way to build one thing that leads to another

on truly a learning journey around a topic rather than just 28 titles that have got the word communication in it.

And I think we're gonna see, or we should, much more instructional design effort focused on doing that. Because as we said in our last podcast, unless we do that, there's a real risk that some of these attempts are going to lead to curated learning, possibly even being seen as a fad or something that didn't truly achieve what it claimed it was going to achieve, because people are just lost.

People are just lost!

[00:11:40] **Joanne Bentley:** They are, and I think IT folks would respond that this AI system (it really does have some very strong similarities to AI) -- that artificial intelligence is relatively new in that recommender space, although we've had recommender systems for about 20 years now. Most folks aren't aware it AI when they see those "folks like you also like this" course or "folks like you also liked this" on Amazon.

Google has become the new encyclopedia. It doesn't mean that everything there is super valuable, and interestingly enough, if you play around with Google, when you get off of like the fourth page, there's actually nothing there. They've truncated those because people never look past the first or second page. And you know, those 3 million hits on your topic, they didn't even show 'em to you because it was a waste of their time to curate them.

I think as we see this space grow for curated learning where YouTube experts are chunking their content into five and 10-minute insights, that LinkedIn Learning has lots of mini courses that you can jump around through, which is a constraint that most training courses in industry don't have.

They can't get their heads around what happens if you don't complete their course. Well, nothing because I didn't want to complete your course. I just wanted this piece of information from chapter three, section two. And that's a strange space for measuring completion rates – and industry really values that.

What if I just wanted the summary from your course? Can I get into it and get [quickly] to the "so what?" What if I just use that bit of information at a really superficial level, because I don't need the deep insight. I just need the "so what." I think typically we just can't unpack all of those pieces from the new

world of learning and a different way of thinking about what it means to know something.

[00:14:02] **Graham Edmondson:** That phrase "the new world of learning", it is really significant, isn't it?

Because in a sense, it's so new that the learners themselves have got to learn to learn in a different way. And the learning and development professionals, we, I think, have to learn to unlearn or let go of some of our old paradigms and ideas like, when you come to my workshop, you need to be there to the end to get credit because that's old school thinking.

Really, really getting in the way of us being able to move into this new world of learning. Until the instructional design, the L&D professionals grasp that there's a different way of thinking about things. I think the learners are gonna struggle to learn, to learn in a new way. It's a two-sided equation, isn't it?

All of us have got to learn something new about learning.

[00:14:59] **Joanne Bentley:** Yes. And I think when we teach virtual live workshops or in-person workshops, if somebody gets up and leaves 15 minutes before the end, we take it as a personal affront, like, where are you going? I'm not done yet.

And it feels so personal, but from a learning journey standpoint, that wrapping up and anchoring of those key takeaways, may or may not be very valuable for the person, and they may have something more valuable -- that in their mind that they need to go and do.

And so, what we attach value to as the facilitators, the instructional designers, the learning professionals, the learner may not have equal value assigned to that task, or they're just wrapping up, they're just recapping, I'm not missing anything, so I've gotta run. I've got X, Y, and Z to do. And for them wrapping up is a low value activity.

They've got the juicy, meaty bit from the workshop that they needed to implement. And they feel quite comfortable, much more comfortable than they've been in the past to just leave.

[00:16:08] **Graham Edmondson:** And really, I suppose if you're facilitating a workshop like that, you probably need to learn from that because what the message is, if you've lost three quarters of your learners by module seven, maybe module six isn't delivering the value that you thought it was going to.

You know it's interesting, isn't it? We gotta start thinking differently. All of us, instructional designer, L&D professionals generally, and learning facilitators. You know, we can't cling to the old way of viewing this and thinking of it because this is very, very different to what most of us grew up learning about learning.

[00:16:49] **Joanne Bentley:** Yes. And I am seeing a trend in the sales space where they have some sort of giveaway or some sort of massive value-add at the very end. So, if you stay to the end, then you'll get this free download or this “whatever thing” that helps the learner to stay motivated to continue to the end.

So much of what we interact with in social media is swipe up, swipe right. When we are done, we are moving on flick, you're gone. Not that I want learning to be quite that impulsive, but I do think we need to think about what captures the learner and how do we keep them engaged until the very end. What is it that we are giving them that motivates them?

[00:17:36] **Graham Edmondson:** So, we started off talking about how curated learning, you know, pathways and learning journeys could leverage this magic magnifier of learning and the flow of work.

What are the key takeaways from what we've been discussing here, Joanne?

[00:17:55] **Joanne Bentley:** So, I think...

- a. Relevance is the solution to a lot of our frustrations as a learning professional.
- b. Relevance gives the learner so much more staying power.
- c. When we focus on what gives value to the learner, we'll begin to be more creative in our solutions.

Whether that's a five-minute micro-learning or a four hour workshop or a half day –there are still a need for those, but it's about how relevant we can make it. How quickly can we deliver it?

Making the learner wait for three months for a course is really frustrating. So yes, live courses are more interesting cause they're more responsive, but what else could you do? And asking that, *what else could you do to captivate and leverage relevance?*

Because you know that for the learner, it lowers their frustration in wallowing the status quo. Like, I need an answer now, not three months from now. So, lowering that frustration, giving them something to be going on with that immediately gives them relevant options.

So, in a pinch, do this. There are lots of other options, but here's a good solution.

- Have you made [all the parts of] your course accessible?
- Have you chunked it out so they can get to that pithy takeaway quickly?
- Have you created a reason why they would need to go back and dig in deeper.

If we can shorten that delay in finding an actual solution, I think you will grab the learner's attention and you'll create, if you will, a tribe of learners who like to learn in the way you disseminate.

And there is this vibe from the way someone designs an e-learning course, even if their face, their touches are not immediately obvious. Just the other day I had a subject matter expert say, can you redo this course? It's not terrible, it just needs your touch.

And I said, well, how do you know I didn't create this one to begin with?

And they said, I can just tell. One of the other developers in your office must have worked on it because it doesn't feel like you, it's not as personable, it's not chunked in a meaningful way. So, I think your flavor of instructional design, of learning delivery, helps a learner to connect to the content, connect to you, as if you're there virtually.

Those ways which create relevance and tribe of connection. You know that if you've read books, when you find an author that really speaks to you -- that just expands your thinking. You follow up and you read everything they write on the topic because they speak to you. They communicate in a way that's easy for you to understand.

Most people don't need to know everything about the topic, but they need to know that you do and that you have insight. And so, you break it all apart. They follow you. They watch your YouTube videos when they come out. They watch for your courses when they pop up on LinkedIn Learning. They trust you as a recommender.

And I think, if we're not creating pathways by people who do the job, then we are going to have pathways that don't feel authentic -- that they don't feel like here's a tribe of us employees doing a particular role. The best people out there are recommending these things cause it helped them, not cuz someone else thinks it might help that role.

I just think there's a flavor there that is just so easy to connect to and it's relevant and it's interesting. If it's not highly relevant now, they've just gotta help open up that and show how it's going to be relevant in the future.

I mean, I know we've used the algebra example before on the podcast. When a teacher tells you you'll use algebra one day. I just think that's such a cop out. Math teachers know when you use algebra, they should be listing off like 10 different professions and scenarios in common everyday life situations when you do actually use algebra.

The relevance for learning something shouldn't be delayed for 10 years. And then maybe you never see the connection and you never know that you actually used algebra last week because you think it's not relevant.

You think it's useless -- you say, man, that algebra is useless! But the reality is I'd say 75% of the population used algebra last week and probably didn't even know. It's got to be relevant cuz relevance is the magic magnifier.

[00:22:43] **Graham Edmondson:** I totally understand what you are stressing about relevance there. And I think my only concerns are around making sure that we genuinely don't throw out the baby with the bath water, thinking that the immediately accessible solution is always the best.

I think you put it very nicely, and I think that phrase, *“curation is the art and science of identifying the best information for the organization and providing context and order to it.”* I think that's a real key phrase because I think the instructional designers listening in today should be focusing on doing that.

Like you said, within the flow of work, an immediate solution might be a potential need at a certain time. But it should also reference the fact that there is this workshop coming along in three months, that there is a deeper learning opportunity. Maybe what we provide at point of need within the flow of work is just a stock gap solution – that's a taster for something that will teach the how at a level of depth that we mustn't forget. That's my key thought around this Joanne.

[00:24:03] **Joanne Bentley:** I couldn't agree more. Graham.

Listeners, you've been listening to the Leaders in Learning Design Podcast by Blue Consulting and Resourcing a regular podcast for cutting edge learning design.

See you next time.

References:

Bentley, Joanne & Tinney, Mari & Chia, Bing. (2005). Intercultural Internet-based Learning: Know your audience and what it values. *Educational Technology Research and Development*. 53. 117-127.