Creating Hybrid Workshops that Really Work
Episode #18
with Joanne Bentley and Graham Edmondson

[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. Listeners, Graham and I want to talk to you today about an infographic that we've put together to help folks. Working in this hybrid environment now where they have some remote learners and some in the room, and they're struggling to figure out how to put together those workshops, those training events, where they have that distributed learner set in a way that really reaches out and engages everyone.

So, talk to us Graham a little bit about where you think we should start.

[00:00:50] **Graham Edmondson:** Well, I think it's some of the same themes that you and I have been talking about and thinking about for the last few weeks, really Joanne. But I think it's time to kind of pull it all together. And I think this infographic tries to do that because this idea of hybrid learning is absolutely crucial for the next few years.

This is what I guess designers, facilitators and learners are all going to have to adjust to the idea that you've got a mix of people. You and I've used that phrase *"roomers* and *zoomers"* in the same classroom experience. Some of them will be physically in the classroom. Some of them will be in the virtual classroom. That's how it's going to be.

We've talked about the major shift being the mindset that doesn't make the remote learner, the second-class citizen, but makes them the first-class citizen. And the phrase that captures it for us, I think is it's a digital first mentality where you put the emphasis and you almost prioritize those people who aren't in the room. So, they don't lose stuff. They are the primary focus.

It's a big mind set shift for the designers, facilitators and learners. And with your own background, Joanne, I know you've spent a lot of time thinking about how this impacts the designers themselves -- how designers have got to think like this. It's not dramatically different learning, but it's subtly different learning.

[00:02:29] **Joanne Bentley:** It is! Designers really need to apply hybrid learning strategies. And we don't really get a lot of training background in that... sort of how do I reach out across distance? Most of our instructional design and learning theory is based on an in-room experience. And we are stretching into new areas as we try to figure out how to design training, how to design that hybrid learning environment.

When we have to assume that the facilitator could be remote and there might also be learners in a room. There might be a variety of configurations. We have to integrate remote engagement tools — and there are lots out there. Things like Mural that allow us to brainstorm, to give simple things like annotate, and using the breakout rooms effectively, to generate those small group instruction and small group interactions.

We want to use a variety of tools and activities that make it really Impactful for the learner, because we want them to dig into the meat of the material and not get bogged down in the distance part of it. When designers think that way, when they think about how do I reduce the impact of distance. That's when they really see a lift in that true hybrid environment, they're going to put the Zoomer first.

Instead of seeing them as a silent observer, they're bringing them in and helping them to feel like they're a really critical part of every learning activity. And when they feel that way, they engage that way and distance sort of fades into the background.

[00:04:11] **Graham Edmondson:** Because one of the experiences that I think we're all familiar with is in the past, when you've dialed into an event like this, you know, even a conference call or a video call or a workshop, where you've been in the minority, and you've not physically been present. You sometimes feel like you're watching the whole event from the outside, something that's happening somewhere else. So that's what we're fighting against. Isn't it? It's not happening somewhere else. It's happening right now, here, for everybody.

[00:04:43] **Joanne Bentley:** Well, and it's happening to you! Because when it goes into sort of TV mode, where I'm just a passive observer and I have to fight to talk over the top of other people and get myself off mute so that I can insert that one pithy comment into this hour-long conference call.

I sort of feel like I did battle to try and get my opinion out there because no one really solicited it. Or if they did, they did it in a really odd way. Where they're talking (in the room) then all of a sudden, so what do you think, Joanne? (When I'm on the phone) it's like, hold on, what? No pre-warning, no, I'm just blindsided (and put on the spot).

Often, you're struggling to get off mute. You feel like a naughty child set outside the room, listening in on other people's conversations. You know you want to insert your opinion and yet not really feeling like it's wanted or needed.

[00:05:42] **Graham Edmondson:** And you and I have delivered a lot of hybrid workshops of late. You know, where we've had this particular challenge of people in the room and some people not in the room. And I think one of the weirdest things, particularly for a facilitator Joanne, even if they've got materials that have been designed with hybrid in mind. The weirdest thing for the facilitator is I think they should be *focusing on connecting with people through the video*.

So, I think as a facilitator, you're talking to your webcam even if you're physically in the same room as half the learners, for example, and that's just an odd feeling. You could talk to them directly, but you're choosing to connect with them in very much the same way as you connect with your remote audience. You're talking through the PC, which is just very different -- Isn't it?

It's a very strange experience to ask the facilitators to do that. And I think this whole idea of hybrid, we've got to think about that in every sense of things, right down to the fight that when, as a facilitator, you divide people into breakout rooms, the easy option would be to say, okay, we've got eight of you the class.

That's two groups of four. And the eight of you online, let's divide you into two remote breakout groups, but we don't think that's necessarily the best practice. That's not truly hybrid, is it?

[00:07:18] **Joanne Bentley:** It isn't, you're not mixing them in a way that adds value. You're mixing them by location and that's not particularly helpful.

You want to include them across different platforms. And so, you want to get that mix in the breakout rooms of folks in the room and remote, and that you're *really drawing on their experience rather than their location.*

[00:07:44] **Graham Edmondson:** Yeah, it's almost like trying to do everything we can to take away the advantage that the roomer has.

I mean, in fact, there's a lot of those advantages will still be in place, but we're trying not to let the Zoomer feel that disadvantage. We've used the phrase, "creating an equitable conversation," a more balanced way of looking at it, in a more balanced way of focusing on people.

And the only way to do that is to shift artificially further towards the zoomer than you might feel comfortable doing (at first). Because only if you go that far are you realistically going to level it up because the roomers have such an advantage. That's not a problem that they have an advantage, the problems that the zoomers have a disadvantage.

So, it's getting the balance right for people, I think. And we talk in this handout or [infographic](), we talk about the learner's experience, because they're going to have to learn-to-learn differently. In a sense aren't they? They certainly can't tune out as the focus is going to be on them. They're going to have to be a little bit different in terms of their mindset.

[00:09:01] **Joanne Bentley:** They really are, and they're not going to see the same things. We're not going to be using flipcharts for example, anymore in our workshops. Because that disadvantages the folks who are joining by Zoom as they can't see the page.

The camera's probably not at the right angle and switching between cameras can be quite tricky. So, you're going to build those things that you would normally construct from students' comments, but you're going to do that maybe in PowerPoint, we're going to do it in some other format where you're constructing those responses, you're going to be using different tools.

And that's going to put the learner off just a little, they're going to say, "oh, we're, in the room. How come we're not using the whiteboard." So maybe using a digital whiteboard, but so that you're thinking ahead and planning for the Zoomer.

Another thing that you've got to think about is audio. Can I hear the learner, can the learner hear me? And if I turn away from my screen, away from my camera, then you're not going to be able to hear me very well. And that's a very unpleasant learning experience for the Zoomer.

Now, the person in the classroom, still going to be able to hear you, but you've got to plan for those interruptions to the learning event and reduce them as much as possible. So does that mean as the facilitator, if you're in the room that you may need to be mic'd -- absolutely! But if you're remote and there are learners in a classroom, then obviously you can use whatever microphone headset set up that you have that you would normally use for virtual facilitation.

You're trying to think ahead and reduce those interruptions to the learning event. The learner has to shift and also the facilitator has to shift -- they're using some different tools. It's a little bit more about what the learner needs to do as a part of that digital first mindset.

[00:11:01] **Graham Edmondson:** I'm thinking back to the instructional designers. Do you think there may be people listening who are thinking, "oh, I understand all that because I've been designing primarily for virtual delivery for the last 18 months." So, you don't think people might think it's just basically what we've done for virtual delivery and think that they've got it?

[00:11:26] **Joanne Bentley:** Oh, wow. That is a good point. I would caution listeners if they feel that way, because when you have groups of learners physically together in a classroom or on distributed remote sites, they behave differently.

Oh gosh... When I taught at Utah State University, many years ago, it wasn't uncommon to have 17 remote sites with two or three, and as many as 10 learners in each of those distributed sites and they have a flavor all their own. When you're rotating through screens and looking at your distributed sites, you need to leverage the fact that they're together and build on that rather than ignoring the fact that they're together. [Reflecting on the needs of Roomers and Zoomers]

You can leverage the synergy that comes from shared group ideas, so that you're using the structure of what you have in a very different way. I think that learners get excited when they get to share ideas and they find and discover something new. That's the *energy* in the class that you're trying to cultivate.

So you have to look at what your particular setup is, and say, "Yeah, maybe everyone was distributed individually before for social distancing for health reasons." But now we're moving into a lot of different configurations, and we don't want to lose the power behind that synergy and just treat it like everyone is absolute individuals, no interaction within the physical sense. So, you've got to be careful. We've got to do what's good for roomers and what's good for zoomers without creating a disadvantaged group.

[00:13:21] **Graham Edmondson:** So, if people want to learn a little more about what we're thinking about this and download our infographic, it'll give them a little bit of a flavor. It won't answer every possible question around it, but it'll give people a little sense of the reminder, at least around some of the key messages for the facilitators, for the learners and crucially for the designers.

And this is something that people can have a look at or get their hands on quite easily, Joanne.

[00:13:49] **Joanne Bentley:** It is! This is an absolutely **free download.** It's our gift to you. Check out the transcript. The link will be there. We'll pop it in when we post as well, so that all you have to do is enter your email address and you're able to download this really helpful resource.

We'll get you started going in the right direction for building, what we consider to be, true hybrid learning.

[00:14:13] **Graham Edmondson:** And we're going to keep talking about *Hybrid Learning*, aren't we, in both our podcasts and our blogs -- because this is the biggest challenge that people face right

now. Designing well for hybrid learning is going to become more important than anything we've had to deal with in the L&D world for quite some while.

So, you're going to hear variations on this message. We're going to keep talking about successful hybrid learning on this show because I think learning professionals genuinely have a way to go to be really comfortable in this space.

[00:14:46] **Joanne Bentley:** Absolutely! Listeners, thanks so much for joining us today. You've been listening to the Leaders in Learning Design podcast by Blue Consulting and Resourcing a regular podcast for cutting edge learning design.