



Leaders in Learning Episode #2 with Rio McBride

with Joanne Bentley and Graham Edmondson

[Joanne at 00:00:00] Today we have with us Rio McBride. Rio is an experienced instructional designer and teacher for over 20 years. He has worked internationally in the United Arab Emirates and in several well-known institutions across the US. Currently he is employed at Full Sail University. Graham and I are delighted to have you on the show Rio.

[Rio at 00:00:41] Thank you, Joanne. I appreciate it. Honored to be here.

[Graham] So Rio, perhaps the best place to begin is for you to maybe explain just a little bit more about your background and particularly the kind of involvement that you've had in virtual learning in the past, I've been teaching for over 20 years.

[Rio at 00:01:02] I got my doctorate back in 2005. I thought I love technology. So, I thought, let me do an instructional design and technology or instructional psychology and technology degree. That's what my degree is in because I love using technology.

When I teach, it's as an instructional technologist. At a community college where I was before, I actually wore several hats, blackboard administrator, distance learning administrator, instructional technologist, all at the same time. I taught faculty how to bring their courses from the brick and mortar classroom into a virtual environment -- distance learning.

And I had to teach them that you cannot teach a virtual classroom the same way that you do a traditional classroom. And I had to teach them the correct pedagogy with that.

[Graham] Rio, a lot of people listening in to the podcast are probably very much involved in that migration process. Just now moving from the classroom into virtual. And as you say, it's not that easy, is it that there's a world of difference between the classroom and the virtual classroom in your experience? What are some of those key differences?

[00:02:50] You can't really see the faces in a virtual classroom as such. We won't always be in front of our instructor, but so what you do, you have to craft your lecture -- I call it chunking -- into six-minute bits. Anything over six minutes, you're going to lose the learner.

The ability to retain past six minutes with lecture doesn't work. We meet with our students once a week, online through zoom and I get them to do the talking between each other as well. Not just to hear me talking to them all the time. I get them to talk to each other online. And then I show videos I create for them. I keep those videos under six minutes, so it doesn't cause a cognitive overload for them. As long as I put that into six minutes per video or less mind you, then I'm okay. And the students are okay.

This is a big difference compared to the traditional classroom, because there's this continual discussion talking back and forth sharing ideas when you're in the same room with them. But



when you're not, you have to do things a little bit differently, so really what's the magic behind the six minutes.

The research that's been done shows that students tend to lose about 50% of their ability to retain after six minutes. It's just the attention span. And that's the rule right there.

If you want them to retain what you're saying, keep it at six or below. After that, the research shows that it goes down about maybe 50%, which is not good. So, break it up.

Other departments who had brick and mortar classrooms, they had to quite literally overnight switch from traditional classroom to the online environment. And it was different for them. They had already had material online, but now their lectures had to go online as well.

[Graham 00:06:45] I'd like to follow up on some of those ideas. As you think about how you've helped others and how you work in your own classroom, what do you think are some of the biggest challenges that you face when you think about virtual training in virtual learning? Chunking would be one of them, but what other considerations do you put into how you design those virtual classrooms?

[Rio] One of the other challenges is getting the students to talk to each other. Say, in a traditional classroom, we have students talking to each other in discussions, et cetera. We can employ the use of discussion boards online, but I also have the students record each other. I mean, when I say record each other, they make recordings, video recordings to each other, responding back and forth to each other, not just typing it out which is boring.

[00:08:16] We're teaching our month six course, which is called digital media learning applications, where we have them discuss the multimodality modes of audio, visual and interactive media. Well, instead of writing out their discussion board to each other and responses back forth with each other, we actually have them record audio back and forth and then record video back and forth where they can see each other talking directly to their peers.

[00:08:52] Now that brings a lot of engagement in -- more so than just, "I've got to read this paragraph written to me by one of my colleagues or one of my fellow students," but to get to see them, on the screen or hear their voice in an audio recording that makes all the difference in the world.

[Graham 00:09:16] I really liked that as an idea for engagement. What else do you do to engage your students and to help them engage with each other?

[Rio 00:09:30] During our weekly zoom meetings, I introduce the topic at the time, but then I turned the time over to my students. I have them discuss with each other, present ideas back and forth to each other. That way they're not hearing from me all the time. And they don't want to hear from me all the time.



I don't want them to hear from me all the time. I want them to be able to hear from each other.

[Joanne] Is there a pedagogical underpinning to that? Is that an application of some kind of theory? It sounds like you're asking them to synthesize information and then reteach, and that that might have some pedagogical basis.

[Rio] I wish I could quote it to you right now, but I can't, but I do know this I'd rather have them synthesize and summarize their information and what they're learning and when they can share it with each other, they're actually teaching it to each other. If you can teach it to each other, you'll remember it more and you'll retain it more.

[Joanne] I was struggling with the theory connection myself. So that's why I was asking why to have that connection, but it seems like Dylan Noe used to write on this topic of each one, teach one, and that's a way to encourage engagement. And I think that that's an element that is missing in a lot of virtual classrooms is this idea of reteaching the topic.

[Rio] Right, if they can do it verbally to each other, you know, they tend to listen to each other. More so sometimes than they do the professor. So I become the guide on the side, if you will. I prefer that there are sometimes when I have to start out as sage on the stage. Okay. But then turning over to them where I become guide on the side. And when I do that, I get greater results from them.

Greater retention. And this shows in the papers, shows in the work that they do, it shows up in the projects that they're doing, and it's far better than making them listen to me for a one hour lecture live, which is, you know, death by Zoom. It used to be death by PowerPoint, now it's death by Zoom.

[Joanne] I want to dig into this at another level. Full sail is well known as a for-profit, application driven institution. Talk to me a little bit about what you're doing in your virtual classrooms that makes it so applicable on the job.

[Rio] We base what we do on what's happening out in industry. We will go out and research, for example, job applications for instructional designers and see what's being asked for, et cetera. And we have committees that will help us out that are made up of individuals in the field who are outside of the university as advisory committees, if you will.

[00:14:05] They're called program advisory committees. And that keeps us in line with what's happening in the industry.

We don't have tests or quizzes other than I quiz on the reading, just to make sure that they've done readings. But mainly what they do is work on projects that they would be working on in the industry. This goes into a portfolio for them and they keep a mastery journal as well. And they create a portfolio at the end of the program where they can share their work with, prospective employers.



[00:14:53] They can show the employers, but also it gives our learners the foundation that they need -- having them work on these projects. They saw what is happening out in the industry. I love that -- real-world tasks to apply the classroom knowledge makes it come alive for students.

[Joanne] It does sound really innovative. It truly does because, we have one student, for example, who has gotten a job now working for the military as an instructional designer based on projects that you worked on in our program. It gave her the experience. In fact, when she came in, we just thought, okay, we're just going to let her run with what she knows what she's doing here and help her give her the theoretical background, et cetera.

Her projects are all based on what she would be doing in the industry. And that's what we do. And so instead of students having to turn in a resume saying, this is what I can do.

They're not only saying this is what I can do, but also let me show you what I've done. So that would give you an indication, would I be able to do for your company?

[Joanne] That's great. I love it. So, as you think about what we've been going through for the last couple of months, what do you think is the outlook for virtual training in the next couple of years?

[Rio at 00:16:45] I think we're going to see more virtual training happening more universities. This is my opinion. One, I find it to be less expensive. What I like, I'm working from home right now is that I don't have to drive into the office. I'm saving gas. That may sound silly, but it's a reality.

[00:17:12] I can teach from home and the student doesn't have to travel into the class.. Now we are a Full Sail University. We are teaching media production, et cetera. So, there's some things that have to be done on campus.

[00:17:39] They've just recently opened up certain labs to happen on campus, especially for those students who are seniors, who must take certain labs. And so they're being very careful about that. Following CDC guidelines, et cetera.

[00:18:00] But for the most part, though, we're going to see, in my opinion, more universities going online, offering courses online. I just wrote a recommendation for a colleague of mine to get his doctorate. And the university is all online. I mean, how cool is that? He'll begin his doctorate online and he's got his doctoral committee.

[00:18:35] He has to go through all the same rigorousness of it. It's there. It just, that you're not meeting in a brick and mortar classroom.

[Joanne] That's really interesting. As we see more online programs developing, how do we know which ones are the good ones? This idea of a rush to put everything online due to COVID-19 has me really concerned that the quality is not being built in upfront.



They want to do something, and they feel the need to get it up there. When do we circle back and look at the quality and decide what they should look like?

[Rio 00:19:35] And I worry about the quality. That's a good concern. In my mind, you have to go back and look at the courses that are being offered. Look at the mission statements and the learning outcomes that are being offered and see how they match up against the standards of what's out there in the industry.

[00:20:04] Again, going out there, looking at the job descriptions, et cetera. See, what's being asked for, how well do those programs meet the learning outcomes. Compare against what is being asked for out there in the industry, and also, is it based on good pedagogy. Is it based on good theory?

[00:20:29] Do they have that background? Do they have that foundation as such? That's what needs to be looked at and looking at the quality of these courses that are suddenly being populated out there. But now it's, I want to go back to David Merrill's first principles of instruction where, you know, there's activate demonstration, application, integration.

[00:21:01] Are these being used to help develop the course, the courses out there? David Merrill would always say, "If it doesn't teach, don't call it instruction, call it information, but don't call it instruction." We want to make sure our students are not just receiving.

[00:21:22] Are they actually being constructed? Is teaching actually taking place with them? And so, it's these things that will be able to help us make sure that the quality of the courses we are choosing are actually good. Not just information being put out there.

[Joanne 00:21:44] So in conclusion Rio, if you could give the listeners maybe just two or three nuggets of things based on your experience that you think are really good pieces of advice to bear in mind when you are rapidly migrating something from a traditional classroom into virtual, what would those couple of ideas be?

[00:22:08] What I have found is this by relying on the first principles of instruction. And what do you know, activation, duration, application integration, all of these, and stating what the problem is, and then building around that, using these first principles from instruction instructional designers.

[00:22:34] We'll be able to create instruction that is engaging and enthralling for the students, help them to retain, not just give them information, not relying on these principles to bring about true instruction. And when you bring about true instruction, not just information, but instructional teaching, then they'll be able to teach each other. And help each other through those rough spots.

[00:23:08] Jonathan Irwin said this, "as we decrease uncertainty, we give ourselves permission to increase fidelity." So, you increase the fidelity by applying the first principles



of instruction, no matter how quickly. And even if you do it quickly, you can still do that and apply the Addie process and relying on those first principles of instruction.

[Joanne] Thanks so much trio. We appreciate you joining us today.