

eLearning sucks!

Hi Mary – just a warning for you – we are going to go old school on this one.....and we are going to start with some music.... ☺ - (all music was purchased in iTunes and the sound clips from Youtube....I'm hoping seeing as they were either purchased or in the public domain that means I've covered copyright/copyleft issues)

Start with intro music - Raise Your Hand...by Bon Jovi - fade out after chorus

1 - Welcome to Jane C. and Kris S.'s audacity project on the slide deck presentation of eLearning Sucks! As a team we feel that eLearning doesn't, in fact, suck...on the contrary, in many ways it rocks! (thus the rock intro). In its traditional sense there are some identifiable problems with eLearning but we both feel that with the advent of new technologies such as Blackboard Collaborate, Skype, Facebook and other such communication tools such issues as learner isolation, bland structured programming and unmotivating and unengaging slide-show type courses are regularly being addressed and improved upon. But maybe I'm getting ahead of myself here....let's take a closer look at why Dave Bailey, Managing Director of Red Magma and co-founder of Mediatonic Games feels that eLearning sucks.

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2 – Mr. Bailey begins by stating that “lectures are an inefficient way to teach”. In the past students would sit in rows of desks or tables, the teacher far up at the front with their work on the blackboard almost impossible to see. We don't dispute the fact that lectures have their drawbacks. But picture how this room might look if we removed the rows and moved students into groups, gave them each a computer to work from, maybe even removed the teacher presence in the classroom and instead allowed them to be guiding learning from the background....would that make it better? Would their learning be immediately enhanced given the proper tools to work with? We think eLearning could be part of a solution here.

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3 – Now every good slide show provides some statistics – factual reasoning for what they are about to prove or disprove. In this case we are told that after 10 minutes of lecturing the instructor has lost 35% of their audience.....

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4 - ....and after 25 minutes about 75% of students are thinking about or doing something else.

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5 – Which leaves us, as he says, with a beginning and an end where most learners are engaged in the lesson (or at least interested in what the lesson will be about and then later about the summation and conclusion of the lesson so that they can focus on what they will be doing in the break before their next class) but a severe drop in interest and attention in the middle. A good half of that class is being wasted because learners are zoning out and not fully engaged in what is going on around them.

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6 – In our traditional classroom – instructors are repetitive to the extreme in their delivery to ensure that students pick up on the important information and recognize its significance because it is being said so many times. (insert sound byte of Tony Blair saying ‘education’ repeatedly to match the slide?)

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7 – But the same things can be said of eLearning – in the beginning of an online course there is a hook to spark learners’ interest and pull them into the lesson. They are then given interesting tidbits of information at regular intervals to maintain their interest and keep them going. At the end there is a review activity or quiz that helps them to connect new information with the old and allows them to sign off on the lesson, mark it as completed and move on to the next session. But in the middle there is still a huge amount of information to read, decode and process in order to get from that beginning to the end. In an eLearning environment, as well as in the traditional lecture based approach, what we can use to keep those students going in the ‘in between’ is personal interest, relevance to their daily lives and the ability for them to determine what they will learn. Rather than progressing through a set group of slides, learners should be able to direct their own learning, inquire about other issues or topics that they want to learn more about and find relevance to their own lives in order to cement new understandings based on their existing knowledge. In short, it needs to become more of a learner centered and directed process rather than a teacher driven, lecture based approach.

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8 – Take for example A Corp’s Interactive eLearning Experience. I have no doubt that this was taken from a standard company website training session showing how easy to work through this session would be for an employee. This learner will be isolated, the set program will not match their unique learning needs or style and at the end they will probably receive a mark of completion while not really having gained much understanding of the training they just went through. What we need is not repetitive, information rich but engagement poor boring old training sessions – what we need is engagement, interaction, relevance and meaningful learning. There is a better way to engage learners, by meeting them on their wavelength using their technology and teaching from their perspectives.

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9 – Traditional eLearning has truly been just like being on a one-way path...a train with a single destination in mind and no chance to deviate from the set schedule or course. In this method there is no chance for deeper explorations of related topics, no opportunity to skip ahead over redundant or irrelevant information, no collaboration of minds to improve upon or change the knowledge or instruction. Nope – just sit here, watch the scenery...and if you are lucky, maybe we’ll bring you a coffee.

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10 – But in today’s tech savvy and information rich world eLearning will not be ‘like travelling by train’... the face of eLearning is changing rapidly. Welcome to a new type of eLearning – let’s change the path, let’s speed up our learning, let’s engage our minds and our senses and communicate with others –let’s work together – let’s collaborate! Instead of taking a metaphorical train ride – let’s teleport to new learning heights. (and go where no man has gone before...the first reference to Star Trek ☺).

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11 - With new eLearning technologies we can follow any track, go anywhere at anytime, visit multiple internet sites to get a vast wealth of information on a variety of related topics – all instantly and simultaneously. As Mr. Bailey says, ‘With the web you can Explore, React, Customize, Respond, Interact, Create, Pause, Query, Trigger, Rewind, Repeat, Test, Enquire’, “With the web you can Engage!” Yes, the world of eLearning is changing – and for the better. The possibilities are endless and, in fact, almost overwhelming.

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12 – “..interactive learning content is becoming faster and cheaper” to create. With the advent of mobile devices, cheaper broadband connections and technology use being implemented in schools, libraries and workplaces around the world, eLearning is becoming more convenient, more accessible and more affordable. Though it is true that anyone can build content and anyone else can access that content, regardless of the truth and validity of it, as long as we, as educators, build upon this momentum of information becoming available and use the content in an appropriate and safe way, the benefits to our children’s education will be immeasurable.

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13 – In fact, many of our students are already better versed in the applications of new technology than their teachers are. This new generation is more discerning as to what kind of tools they want to use in their own education to make it interesting and fun for them. As educators we need to keep up with this technology in order to use these tools to our benefit, to grab and hold our student’s attention, to engage them in relevant and interesting lessons that will benefit them in their own future careers and to enhance their abilities to learn what they will need to know and access the information that they will need. There are many companies and individuals already creating content that educators can easily access, adapt and use in their own classrooms to help them achieve these goals of building student engagement and understanding. What we need to teach our students now is how to become critical thinkers who can discriminate between viable, factual information and erroneous or false details.

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14 – We have to be careful in this movement as there can be negative connotations toward what we are trying to do in using engaging technology in the classroom. There is a fear that students today cannot problem solve because they have not had to go through the processes of working with others and communicating to solve their issues. In their instantly gratifying online world students will often give up too easily if a task is too hard for them to work through. Other times we create learning environments that make it too easy on them and they get bored and lose interest. Games are fun activities – entertaining, gratifying and sensory overloading...but fun. What we have to take from the way our students are learning through games is the transference of the engaging aspect of them into the real life problem solving strategies and critical thinking skills our learners will need to apply to real life situations. Where does the critical thinking aspect come in to this and how can they apply it to their real life? Perhaps we can find some sort of middle ground using the benefits of eLearning.

That’s it for my portion of our audacity podcast....please stay tuned for Jane C.’s intriguing and questioning second half to our eLearning sucks presentation. ( Fade out to the sounds of How Far We’ve Come....Matchbox 20)

## Elearning sucks – Jane’s portion

15 – Does eLearning really put engagement second to academic rigour? With the advancements of on-line tools, such as skype and blogs, engagement is becoming more prevalent. We are finding the middle ground between isolation and lecture based platforms.

16 – Learning should be engaging and fun. Many times students play an educational game and may not even realize they are learning something, but they are. The old use of electronic games where only one could play are now progressing to multi-player games with chat. For example, Pogo. Integrating learning games with the interactions of players or cohorts will dispel the misconceptions of the principles of the gaming design being used for learning as being solitary and extracurricular .

17 – eLearning is an integral part to a rich learning environment. Learners need to test and experiment with learning in order to internalize their own schema about the world around them. This can be accomplished very well with eLearning where, for example, failure is not displayed for all to see. Confidence will then be built upon to enable the learner to be risk takers if they know they can make mistakes without having to advertise it.

18 – Elearning DOESN’T have to be like a lecture, especially now with more “face to face” technologies, such as "Collaborate" and "Skype". Students are a part of the lesson not the receiving end of a lecture. The teacher can become the facilitator instead of the director.

19 – By sharing experiences we can build a "collective intelligence". Thank-you Star Trek for seeing into the future. Helping each other by sharing experiences with technology we can learn from each other and try new things that we may not have thought of on our own. Many experiences today are technological. Ask a fourteen year old who is sky ping or tweeting with her friends and finding out about things, places, activities that she may not have as easily accessed before. People can more easily access information about things they wish to "experience" which can enrich their experiences.

20 – Engaging all of the senses is a challenge for eLearning, however, with technology advancing so quickly, we will be able to engage all of our senses through the use of 4D virtual worlds. If we want to take our students to the

top of Mount Fuji, we can. Could the future in virtuality be considered isolating? Possibly. However, again we come to how technology is used to fully engage all learners and their peers in an amazing journey of discovery.

21 – This is a difficult “flow” to manage even in a traditional classroom. eLearning using collaboration and working at your own pace can lessen the anxiety and boredom within any learning environment.

22 – eLearning allows us to communicate critical lessons, whether through blogging or facebook. All we need to do is remember 9/11 and the amount of real life, at the moment reality, with the use of blogging, as the devastation unfolded . Was there a lesson being taught? We may not think of it as a lesson, but there was....

23 – If not for blogging during 9/11 would we have received an in-depth look at what was needed to take place to safeguard people from that kind of catastrophe again? I don't think so.....not with the limited time and news-people to cover all the events that occurred that day. We have learned a great lesson to protect our safety and health by the use of a valuable technological venue.

24 – Immediate access to people and informational sites all over the world have taken us from a closed off little spot on the earth to an all encompassing community who care about what is going on in other parts of the world instead of just with our next door neighbour. We can watch live feeds from anywhere in the world and give our students up-to-date information right away. When we feel that we are connected in this way then the realities of the world and our environment are more accentuated.

25 – The future is not just my future, but everyone's future. We can choose to close the door and ignore things that can harm our future, or we can embrace and cultivate everyone's future for the better. How better to do this than having empathy for others' through their eyes and hearts. eLearning is the portal from which we can experience and cultivate the world's future.

26 – Life long learning through the lessons of protecting our safety and health, our environment, and which protect our future can be powerfully taught through eLearning because we have access to the whole world, not just what the educator or outdated text sources are telling us. By the time it takes to

reprint a book with updated information, it will have already been outdated again.

27 – We need to progress from a lecturer model to a more engaging model. How can we effectively do this? This can be achieved through the combination of educators, interaction designers, and communication experts innovatively, collaboratively, and cohesively working together to bring about an amazing educational platform... eLearning.

28 – eLearning and its unlimited potential.....ROCKS (play Don't Stop Believin)