Diane Elkins (00:00):

So, if we want to be inclusive, if we want to be equitable, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I designing a course that is throwing up barriers to learning?"

Celisa Steele (00:13):

I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb (00:15):

I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele (00:24):

This is episode 304, which features a conversation with Diane Elkins. Diane is co-founder of Artisan E-Learning, which does custom e-learning development, and E-Learning Uncovered, which teaches people how to develop e-learning for themselves. Diane is also a return guest to the Leading Learning Podcast, and we were fortunate to snag her for another conversation. She's insightful and savvy about learning design and someone who leads by example.

Celisa Steele (00:52):

Diane and Jeff talk about how COVID elevated the status of online learning and accelerated its acceptance and the likely long-term implications of that pandemic-driven shift to online. They also discuss meaningful interactivity; accessibility; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and why Diane favors the terms "access" and "ability." They talk too about augmented, virtual, and mixed reality and how it's important for tech tools to add value, not just a cool factor. Jeff and Diane spoke in March 2022.

Jeff Cobb (01:35):

We're in the midst now of, possibly emerging from, a time when e-learning has enjoyed a surge unlike anything that we've seen before. But, obviously, that's been driven largely by necessity. It's been driven by this background of COVID, which has just changed so many things for all of us. So I'd love to get your view. Has what has happened with online learning—so many people now having to participate in online learning, so many organizations having to create it—do you think that's represented a net gain or a net loss for e-learning? I'm thinking mainly in terms of how people perceive it, how receptive they are to it, and then, of course, the actual quality of the e-learning experiences that are out there at this point.

Diane Elkins (02:26):

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Yeah. I think it's a great question. And, overall, I think it has been a net gain, but there's ups and downs in all areas. I think that the requirement to go online has broken through so many barriers that have existed for years, whether it's an organization saying, "We can't afford this platform, we can't afford a learning management system, we can't afford a good Web conferencing tool," whatever it is. Well, they got it done. They removed a lot of bureaucratic and financial barriers. I've been talking to a lot of folks. I was talking to a couple people and some of our association clients who said "Yeah, this stuff was on our roadmap, and this accelerated it." So change that might have taken three years they did in three months. And so I think a lot of organizations have been able to move forward very, very rapidly.

Diane Elkins (03:16):

It's also broken down a lot of barriers in terms of "You can't teach X online," whatever X is. "You have to do it in the classroom. You couldn't possibly have this experience online." And, sure, I'm the first to agree that not everything is perfect for e-learning, but I think a lot of people had preconceived notions and prejudices around e-learning that also got broken down. I had one client who, there was one course I worked with them on, and I flew around the country to help them, and "Oh no, we have to do this in person. We have to do it."

Diane Elkins (03:49):

Well, guess what? They're doing it online, and they're reaching more people. So when I've been talking to a lot of clients recently, reach is a huge, huge aspect, as the move online has removed so many barriers, especially for associations and other training service providers. Geographic reach. Especially with associations, very often their in-person programs are in key cities around the U.S., and, if you don't live in one of those key cities, you're traveling, which means more money, more hassle. You may not have that money. You may not have that time, or you have to be in an area where there's a chapter.

Diane Elkins (04:26):

So it's opened it up geographically. It's opened it up internationally. It's reduced socioeconomic barriers. "Sure, my boss says I can go drive three hours to that city and stay overnight for that two-day course, but I don't have reliable childcare, or I don't have a reliable car." So moving things online has removed so many barriers. I was talking to one person who said their attendance at online conferences has been through the roof because before an organization would only have the money to send their director, but now they can send the director and three people below them. So just the reach and the equity of being able to get training in the hands of more people without the huge financial and lifestyle barriers of traveling to training has been massive.

Jeff Cobb (05:15):

And do you think people are coming around to the idea that e-learning really can be effective, possibly as good as or better than what happens in the classroom? Because I feel like there's traditionally been a very visceral reaction against that. People just think that face to face, meeting in person, in the room, is just always going to be superior, even though we know the research doesn't necessarily support that. Do you think people are coming around?

Diane Elkins (05:42):

I think people are more open to having a conversation. There will still be some topics that are better in the classroom. There will still be people who just prefer the classroom. One thing that

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is a challenge is just sitting at your computer, looking at your screen all day. Going to training shakes things up a little bit. And just the same format, just constantly looking at the screen all day is challenging. And, yeah, you've got better networking opportunities. I go to a lot of conferences, a lot of them are back in person, and I would rather go in person for the networking opportunities. So I get just as good content from an online conference, but I don't get the same experience from an online conference. So I think there's room for both, but people are absolutely open to it.

Diane Elkins (06:31):

I am not hearing a lot of "Wow, our training is so much less effective." I'm just not hearing that. Good design is good design. Bad design is bad design. So a poorly designed e-learning course is not going to be better. A poorly designed classroom course isn't going to be better. But that is one trend that I think we need to be careful about. So much was done so quickly. That second quarter of 2020, so many things got turned out quickly, and instructional designers, instructional technologists were essential personnel for the first time in the history of the world as far as I know.

Diane Elkins (07:08):

They had to work so quickly that the training probably wasn't ideal. And I think now is a great time to look back over the last two years and say, "What have we done? What's working? What's not?" And now we can move forward more strategically. We move from survival mode to thriving mode and really think about the best fit. And I think people will be way more open to that conversation now.

Jeff Cobb (07:33):

Well, I certainly hope it does lead to that, that organizations are able to be more strategic. You mentioned instructional design there. I know from our past research that the use of instructional designers, at least by the types of organizations that are in our audience, as market-facing learning businesses, it really wasn't considered essential. In fact, most of them were not using any form of professional instructional design, whether that meant hiring somebody or having somebody on staff who actually had those credentials.

Jeff Cobb (08:03):

As a result, they probably weren't creating the most effective e-learning experiences in the world, but I'm betting—and we haven't done any research on this—that as organizations had to step up, had to create new content to get it online, I suspect that most of them went ahead and just did what they could without the instructional design help. Probably ran into quite a few struggles. They may be dealing with some backlash from that. Now I'm wondering, in general, what have you seen organizations struggle with the most as they've had to move to creating and delivering probably much more online learning than they have in the past, maybe with an instructional designer, maybe not?

Diane Elkins (08:43):

Some of what I've seen would be polls for polls' sake. I see this a lot. In fact, I remember getting some advice—and we don't do a lot of the virtual live, we tend to do more self-paced, but, you know, people call me—and at least three times in the first month or two, I literally said to people, "I hereby free you from the obligation of using a poll." So it's like they had to, like "Oh, I need a poll question." No, you don't. If you have something worth polling, great. I was talking

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to someone who had to convert a ton of computer training, how to use a computer system online. She had to do it very quickly. It was a huge initiative, made more important by the pandemic because she was handling the call center in retail, and so all of their business was moving to their Internet call center. Hugely important. And she's like, "But Diane, I don't have any polls. I don't have any polls."

Diane Elkins (09:34):

You don't need any polls. She was doing computer training. Their practice, their interaction, was in the system, setting up customers. Her program was highly interactive. And if I had a scepter, I would tap her on each shoulder. "I hereby release you." So that's one of my pet peeves, polls for the sake of polls. I think another big problem people are having is they're just taking their same slides and putting them online. And, let's be honest, most people have lousy slides, and, in a classroom, in a physical classroom, the speaker is the primary visual. And, yeah, I'd rather you have nice slides than bad slides, but a great instructor can carry a bad PowerPoint. You're online, you lose so much of that.

Diane Elkins (10:17):

You're in self-paced online, you lose so much more. And then the other thing is, if you find yourself saying these words, I want you to rethink your life choices. Okay? So you're doing a Webinar. And one of the first things you say is, "I want this to be interactive." If you want people to know that it will be interactive, interact. If they're not interacting—and I don't mean a poll that means nothing—if they're not interacting within the first six minutes, then you're setting the tone for them to sit back and be passive. And you're actually going to have more trouble getting them to be interactive. How do you make them know? By doing it. So I think there are a lot of strategies. And again, that's all virtual, instructor-led, but I think there are a lot of things people can do to make the experience better online.

Diane Elkins (11:03):

It's your brand. And if you're in a competitive marketplace, yeah, people put up with a lot of bad everything during the pandemic—we dealt with a lot—and, as we emerge, people are going to decide who to stick with. So I think really evaluating your quality is going to matter, and I don't just mean your production values. I mentioned our mission at Artisan is to help people know what to do. People will gravitate towards the solutions that solve their problems.

Diane Elkins (11:34):

So if your one-hour Webinar has 20 minutes of intro, that's not going to keep people. What problem of theirs are you solving? What decision are you going to help them make? What thing that they care about will they be better at tomorrow than they are today? If you're that person, it doesn't matter as much if your production values are smaller. Think about when you look at a YouTube video to learn something. You care that you walked away knowing what to do, even if the person wasn't perfectly polished. So, if you're looking to improve, I would focus there first.

Jeff Cobb (12:10):

It's interesting. As I'm listening to you, I'm picturing myself as the learner on the other end. I've been in those situations where I've been subjected to multiple polls that didn't really seem to have anything to do with anything or being told that I need to interact when I haven't necessarily been given anything to interact with. I wonder what your sense is of the average learner in all of this, what they might be struggling with as they have to shift to doing more of

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their learning online. Part of it, I'm sure, is just the experience itself. We've just been talking about the quality of that experience. But, in addition to that, or maybe elaborate on that some more from the standpoint of that average learner. What's the challenge of all this online now?

Diane Elkins (13:01):

I think a lot of it is Zoom fatigue. It's real, where we're just sitting through so much of our day. For folks who are used to working in an office, you get up. You go to a meeting. You go to the copier. You chat with somebody. You go over to talk to somebody. There's so much sitting. So I think we need to be careful. If you're in a live environment, I love that people turn on their video cameras now more than they ever did before.

Diane Elkins (13:31):

I just taught a course on how to use Articulate Storyline, two of them—a two-day course on a Thursday-Friday, a two-day course on a Monday-Tuesday, for different organizations. One of them had a platform where we could use video, one of them didn't. The one with video was so much more engaging for everybody because everybody had their camera on, and you can see each other's reactions. The people got to know each other a little bit better. I think they were more likely to ask a question because of the connection.

Diane Elkins (14:00):

These are not studies. This was just my experience doing a back-to-back. The other one felt so much more one-way. So I love the fact that people are willing to put on their videos, but I also think, if that's your style, make it okay for people to not turn on their video periodically. I have a under-my-desk treadmill. Well, if I've got my camera on, I can't use it because I'm probably going to make people dizzy, rocking back and forth, walking on my treadmill. So if we make it okay, whether it's in the training or in meetings or whatever, to turn off the camera, I think that's helpful.

Diane Elkins (14:34):

But that's also one of the advantages of self-paced e-learning. I can move around. I can go take it on my couch. I can go sit out on my patio. I can do it while I've got my treadmill going. I can do it in more places at more times. I could take it on my iPad, maybe. So I think there are some advantages to that self-paced e-learning. And your average learner, they won't necessarily know, "Oh, that person didn't use good instructional design to solve my problem," but they'll walk away going, "That was worth my time," or "That wasn't." And people will go back to things that made their lives easier. And, if it wasted their time, they're not going to go back. Instead of going to you, they're going to go find it on YouTube instead.

Jeff Cobb (15:16):

And you talked quite a bit there about video, both using it live and people being able to see and interact with each other, but even what we're able to do in self-paced now, the quality of the video, the deliverability of the video, that to me feels like one of the bigger leaps forward in what's possible with e-learning. But I'm wondering, in addition to that, beyond that, if you look at the state of e-learning now versus where we were a decade ago and leaving COVID aside, just the evolution of it, where do you think we've really made significant progress in e-learning being a high-quality, effective approach to addressing problems and opportunities that can be addressed with learning? And where is there just still a lot to be done to realize the potential?

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Diane Elkins (16:09):

I think in the past 10 years the biggest change is that the tools are easier to use to develop it. And that's a blessing and a curse. It's made it more accessible to any number of organizations who don't have to hire a programmer. And some of that dates back farther than 10 years, but the tools are easier to use. That's the blessing. The curse is that it puts the tools in hands of people who don't know how to use them. So I can give you PowerPoint. That doesn't mean you can make a good slide. I can give you Storyline or Rise. Articulate Rise is extraordinarily easy to use. If you are even a remotely competent office worker, you can use Rise. But I've also seen it abused, where people take what could have been a two-page PDF and break it up into all these little pieces, and you have to click 47 times to get that two pages of information because they wanted to make it interactive.

Diane Elkins (17:03):

So I think we need to be careful about, like you said, the value of instructional design in the process. I think, technologically speaking, it's easier to use, and it's also easier to consume. People can use their tablets and their mobile devices, their phones. But that also presents challenges. How do you provide a great experience that works on a phone and a humongous monitor? And not all of the tools are good at that. Some are better at it than others. So, in many cases, you have to use really purposeful design.

Diane Elkins (17:34):

Those are some of the positives. I think some of the things we're still struggling with, a woman named Cammy Bean who coined a term called "clicky-clicky bling-bling," where you're just putting in clicks or coolness just for coolness. I'm seeing that now happen with some AR. I'm seeing some really cool things happening in AR, and I'm seeing other people basically make a click to reveal or multiple choice, and now I got to hold my phone up in the air and point it in different directions just to get a multiple-choice quiz. So, can it be used in a really effective, cool, strategic way? Yes. But can it also just be a lot of flash in the pan? Yeah. So, again, it comes back to being strategic.

Jeff Cobb (18:20):

Obviously there are plenty of mistakes that organizations can make when they're developing e-learning and ones that they tend to make. We've talked to you about that before, some of the common ones that organizations make in developing e-learning experiences. We'll definitely be sure to link to our previous conversation with you in the show notes. But what I'd really like to focus on here, though, is a specific area that seems to so often get overlooked.

Jeff Cobb (18:47):

I would put it in that kind of mistake, and that's accessibility. And I'm thinking of accessibility broadly, and I know you like to frame it really within the broader discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion. But can you give us an overview of how you think about it, how you do frame accessibility, and then what the issues tend to be with how organizations can address it in the best possible way?

Diane Elkins (19:12):

Sure. So, as an instructional designer or an e-learning developer, I'm making design choices every day that in many cases will determine whether or not somebody has the chance to get better at their job. Is that my job? Is it my job to determine who gets to get better at their jobs?

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Because, if I were to say who has the right to get better at their job, most people would say everybody. And yet, if I'm designing a slide, and I don't give it adequate color contrast, I'm saying, yes, everybody has a right to get good at their jobs, unless you can't distinguish between color, or you have low-contrast vision, or you can't read fonts below nine points.

Diane Elkins (19:56):

So we are making decisions, not realizing that we might be designing for people with our set of abilities. We're designing for people like us. And that's where so much of diversity, equity, inclusion runs into problems, is when people assume that their experience is the norm, and they make decisions based on their experience. So, if we want to be inclusive, if we want to be equitable, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I designing a course that is throwing up barriers to learning?" And sometimes the obstacle is not knowing.

Diane Elkins (20:33):

I was in this field for a good 10 years before I ever even considered that that was an option, before I ever even came across. It didn't come to me on my own. I didn't just wake up one day and go, "Oh my gosh, I'm excluding a huge portion of the world." No, somebody had to bring it to my attention—10 years in the industry, and you can still do that. You can come into this industry and just not be aware of it. So awareness is a huge issue. Another obstacle is the technology. It is not an easy thing to do.

Diane Elkins (21:04):

I can't just say, "Here's your six-step checklist, and you're done." You have to learn a lot. I wish it was easier. It's not. It doesn't have to be scary or intimidating, but it takes work to learn how to do it. Another obstacle is people's "yeah, buts." Yeah, I get that whole accessibility, but we don't work for the federal government. Yeah, I get accessibility, but we don't have anybody in our organization who has a disability. Yeah, but somebody with a disability couldn't do this job. And, to those things, I say, well, ask Helen Keller.

Diane Elkins (21:39):

Ask Helen Keller what somebody can and can't accomplish in their job. That's not my place to say somebody can or can't do something. I have a friend who's visually impaired. She's legally blind. She uses a screen reader. She has a guide dog. She beat me in air hockey once. Now granted I'm terrible at air hockey, but, still, she could see a big red puck on a big white playing field. We can't assume to know what somebody can and can't do. And for the people who say nobody with a disability is in our organization or has this job, we don't know that. So many disabilities are what are called hidden disabilities.

Diane Elkins (22:26):

My coworker Amy knows of several people who worked at very high-level management at Fortune 500 companies, one who was legally blind, one who wears hearing aids, and neither of them self-identified to their organizations. There's a stigma with self-identifying. So, A, you don't know that if you want to say nobody in an organization is, A, you don't know that. B, why not? If we really want to ask the questions, what organizational obstacles are in place that are keeping you from having anybody with a disability in your organization? And, thirdly, for how long? I was talking with someone in a disability group in a large organization the other day, and they said, "All ability is temporary." That hit me really hard. So we need to remember that ability is a spectrum. It doesn't just mean fully blind or fully deaf.

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Diane Elkins (23:22):

Sometimes it's temporary. I might not be able to use a mouse because I just had carpal tunnel syndrome. That's a temporary disability. Maybe I can use a mouse, but I'm not super precise with it. So making those buttons so small and so close together, and then I click the wrong one, and you auto graded it. The minute I clicked, it got graded. There was no Submit button. I didn't have a chance. I got it wrong just because I'm not precise with my mouse. Or there was a time limit, and so I work more slowly with the mouse, and that time limit kept me from being successful. Or even just auto advancing to the next slide. That means you're telling me how long it will take me to process this information. So there's so many ways that we can throw barriers in people's way without realizing it.

Diane Elkins (24:17):

And so, if we want to take advantage of this groundswell of support around DEI, we need to make sure that ability is part of the conversation. And I've actually stopped using the word "accessibility" because I think it has a lot of baggage. People have preconceived notions. It either applies to me, or it doesn't. So we need to insinuate ourselves in our organizations, our clients, whoever it is, our clients' conversations, our internal conversations about DEI, and usually it's around race. It's around age. It's around gender identity, national origin. All of those are great things to do, but ability is often not part of that conversation. And so I know a lot of people who are trying to use more representative images from a race perspective or a gender perspective, but what about ability?

Jeff Cobb (25:12):

Is that the terminology you use at this point? You refer to it as "ability" rather than "disability" or "accessibility." You're just talking about addressing ability when you're creating?

Diane Elkins (25:22):

All forms of ability. And then the other term I use a lot is "access." "Accessibility," which is a very similar word, has baggage. I'll be really honest. It has baggage. So, if I ask a question of a client, "Oh, you know how important it is that this is accessible to individuals with disabilities, it brings up their preset answers." But if I say, instead, "Let's talk about equal access to this content. Let's talk about how we can make sure everyone has access to this professional development opportunity," they enter that conversation very differently.

Diane Elkins (25:58):

So I've started talking about access and equal access, and I think it opens up people's minds. And so, if you're a training business, you can do it because it's a competitive advantage and do it because it's the right thing to do. Accessibility is having its day. I have been asked to speak on accessibility more in this last six months than I have in the last five years. And so you're either becoming part of the conversation, or you're going to be left behind because it's happening.

Jeff Cobb (26:29):

I do feel like I hear and see much more about it now. Back in our pre-Leading Learning, pre Tagoras days, we actually had a learning management system company. And we attempted at the time and did the best we could around accessibility issues with learning management systems. In fact, we worked with a great organization, Knowbility that was run, may still be run by Sharron Rush. She was just a great leader, thinker in terms of technology and ability, accessibility, and really helping to spearhead that effort.

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Jeff Cobb (27:01):

But then I feel like once we got out of that and started looking at learning management systems over the years, as we're helping organizations select them and implement them, that it just did not feel like that focus had caught on. But I feel like we are seeing it now. We are getting more technology companies that are tuned into Section 508, that are tuned in to, I never know the right way to say it, WCAG or…

Diane Elkins (27:26):

Yeah, I call it WCAG.

Jeff Cobb (27:30):

Yeah, but those sorts of standards, but it still feels like it has quite a ways to go. We did do a, in collaboration with Nicolas Steenhout, who consults on accessibility and technology issues. We did a video on LMS accessibility as a prelude to our Live Review event that we do every year with LMS demonstrations. And that's been great to have out there as a resource, but, I think you said, like you put it, the conversation is growing. It feels like it's getting a lot more attention. I'm looking forward to it getting a lot more attention than it has and particularly to the platform providers really being tuned into it, and it just being almost something you don't even have to ask about anymore. It's just going to be there.

Diane Elkins (28:11):

Yeah, and that's part of what we want. Very often e-learning is like the little brother running behind the cool kids. If you've ever seen the movie *Christmas Story*, Ralphie is going to school, and his little brother is running way behind. "Wait, wait, wait, wait for me!" E-learning is often that way to the rest of the Web world. We were years behind in terms of mobile design and then responsive design. And I think we are running behind the rest of the world in accessibility. And the tools are making some improvements. They're better than they used to be. I know a lot of the major tool providers have shown a really big commitment to it over the last few years. So it's getting better, but I don't think we're where we need to be yet.

Jeff Cobb (28:54):

Yeah, that is true about the rest of the world too. I feel like one of the sources of positive influence that I'm seeing are Canadian-based technology companies, where they do have better national standards around the issue, at least better adherence or regulation of those standards, I think, than happens in the United States.

Diane Elkins (29:10):

The other thing that's happening that is shifting the conversation is that, from the DEI perspective, it's more that "It's the right thing to do," but then there's also the "It's the law." And the only formal law we have is the Section 508, which only applies to federal government communication. Many states have their own laws, but that also applies only to state communication. However, case law is starting to change that. Case law is starting to say, "No, no, no. If you have to be physically accessible, you have to be electronically accessible."

Diane Elkins (29:44):

So there's case law around Domino's Pizza. There's no law that says their app or Web site needs to be accessible. No law says that. But, Americans with Disabilities, it's being considered

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discriminatory, that says if your physical location is required to be accessible to someone, why wouldn't your Web site be? And so, where there is no law, there's starting to be case law. So whether you want to do it because it's the right thing to do or because it's the law, there are more and more lawsuits coming out now for organization's Web sites.

Diane Elkins (30:21):

And let me just be really clear that I'm a hypocrite right now. My Web site is not WCAG-compliant. I am working on it, progress over perfection. But there are organizations that are using automated systems to scan Web sites and find flaws and then send letters from lawyers. So there's any number of reasons, and, if you're a small business especially, one lawsuit can wreak major, major havoc. And, if you're a big organization, not just the financial but the reputational risk because you don't want to be that Domino's case study in the news.

Jeff Cobb (31:01):

Clearly things are always evolving in a technology-driven field like e-learning and even our understanding of learning itself, with or without an "e," has been evolving rapidly in recent years. I'd be interested to know how do you keep up, and what are some of your go-to sources and resources that you'd be open to sharing with listeners?

Diane Elkins (31:25):

Some of the ways I stay up to date would be, for me, the three main organizations to follow would be ATD (Association for Talent Development), the Learning Guild (they used to be called the eLearning Guild, but they dropped the "e"), and then Training Magazine. So all three of those organizations have blogs, conferences, newsletters, magazines, free Webinars, paid Webinars, so much information. Even if you just focus on the free stuff, so much to learn, and then if you want to go deeper and invest in a conference or something. So those are my go-tos. I get e-mails from them every day. I don't read them every day, but at least skim them to see what's going on. And then I think my other biggest source is LinkedIn. So you connect to some of the right people, and they're just constantly posting articles.

Diane Elkins (32:16):

And then what you start liking, you start seeing more of, and then you connect to other people. And my feed is full of accessibility stuff right now and partially because I think there is a ground swell, but partially because I started liking people's posts and commenting on people's accessibility posts and posting my own accessibility posts. So then that draws more people who talk about accessibility. So now there's more accessibility in my feed. So if you want to learn more about a specific subject, just go into LinkedIn and do #accessibility, and you'll see all kinds of things. And it's just going to start shaping your feed to show the types of things you're interested in, but there's so many people out there just giving great links to great articles. And that's where I find a lot of the stuff that I care about.

Jeff Cobb (33:06):

Accessibility is obviously an area that you're tracking a great deal. What are some other areas? What are some of the trends that have you most excited right now?

Diane Elkins (33:15):

So accessibility, yes, is definitely a big trend that I'm interested in. I've been keeping my eye on AR and VR for quite a while. We at Artisan have never quite taken the plunge. We're very

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market-driven, like many of you listening here, and we haven't had a lot of requests for it. So we haven't really done much in terms of diving in. But it's something I've been watching, and we are actively looking for the right business case for it to really do something where the technology is an improvement. I went to a conference years ago, and it was VR. So you got to wear the headset. And it was around a physical plant type thing. I don't remember exactly— was it air conditioning systems or something like that. And it was a virtual reality, a space that's actually very difficult to get to.

Diane Elkins (34:07):

And it would be hard to take a bunch of people there. And so you get to look around, and certain places you could focus on a button, and it pops up with more information. And I get that you-can't-be-there part, but I'm wearing this thing on my head for what could have been accomplished with a few photographs because it was a click-to-reveal. Don't make me put that thing on my head for click-reveal. But I've also seen some that are really cool.

Diane Elkins (34:38):

I just saw something so cool down at Training Magazine's conference, was recently in Orlando. And David Metcalf from the University of Central Florida was showing this, I think it would be considered mixed reality. You didn't have to wear a headset, which is always a bonus for me. I don't like them. And it was a COVID simulator. And you might have seen a COVID simulation where somebody coughs, and you see a simulation of their particles going wherever. Well, here, instead, you put up your phone, and it shows your office because you're looking through your camera at your office or your space and this imaginary person walks through and coughs, and you see stuff going on your desk.

Jeff Cobb (35:22):

Oh wow.

Diane Elkins (35:25):

That has real advantage. That would be so much more impactful to see how my office is set up as opposed to put this on my thing, put this on my head, and I get a click to reveal. That's where the technology is really making a difference in how people are perceiving that content. So that's what excites me, is not the coolness of the technology, but where it's used in a really smart way, where another technology, a simpler technology, wouldn't get you as far. Because that stuff's expensive.

Diane Elkins (36:05):

I know it's getting easier. Everything's getting easier, but that stuff's still expensive. So I want to make sure that people are getting something for that extra investment and for that potential extra usability. If I have to download an app or something, there's some extra steps I have to take. Make it worth my while.

Jeff Cobb (36:27):

Yeah. I feel like with virtual reality and augmented reality, we're at a point that maybe is similar to the mid '90s or so with the video because, when I first got into e-learning, we were trying to do video, but it was expensive. It was hard. There were just a lot of technical difficulties around it. And I think it wasn't until it became really easy that you could experiment with it and screw

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up and use your imagination. And, like you said, right now VR and AR are expensive. You're not going to play around a whole lot with them if you're trying to develop something.

Jeff Cobb (37:01):

We need to get to that point where you can play around with them and make all sorts of mistakes and try out things that turn out to be stupid but ultimately find the things that, yes, really do add a lot of value. Hopefully that's not the VR version of TikTok, but who knows where we'll get to with it. Well, Diane, it's always such a pleasure talking with you. You're always so smart in how you think about and go about online learning, and that always comes through in conversations.

Celisa Steele (37:36):

Diane Elkins is co-founder of Artisan E-Learning and E-Learning Uncovered and, as you just heard, someone who's incredibly thoughtful about what goes into creating good, equitable, and impactful learning. You'll find links to learn more about Artisan E-Learning and E-Learning Uncovered in the show notes for this episode at leadinglearning.com/episode304.

Jeff Cobb (38:01):

At leadinglearning.com/episode304, you'll also find a link to Diane on LinkedIn, where you can connect with her personally and see some of the great resources and ideas she shares there.

Celisa Steele (38:13):

In the show notes, you'll also see options for subscribing to the podcast. We'd be grateful if you would subscribe if you haven't yet, as subscriptions give us some data on the impact of the podcast.

Jeff Cobb (38:24):

We'd also be grateful if you'd rate us on Apple Podcasts, especially if you find the Leading Learning Podcast valuable. Celisa and I personally appreciate it, and those reviews and ratings help us show up when people search for content on leading a learning business. Just go to leadinglearning.com/apple to leave a rating.

Celisa Steele (38:42):

Lastly, please spread the word about Leading Learning. At leadinglearning.com/episode304, there are links to find Leading Learning on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Jeff Cobb (38:53):

Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

[music for this episode by DanoSongs, www.danosongs.com]

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