Julian Stodd: [00:00:00] Almost everything we see around us is made up. Very little of it is actually really real. It tends to be a matter of social convention and codified power and codified knowledge and so on and so forth. The structures of society are structures of education, are structures of finance, are structures of government and control. These are all made up, and all have changed in the past, and all will change in the future.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:31] I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:33] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:42] Welcome to episode 321, which features a conversation with Julian Stodd. Julian is a writer, a researcher, an evidence-based practitioner, and, as he describes himself, an explorer of the social age.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:57] Jeff and Julian talk about what the social age is and what living in the social age means for learning and leadership. They talk about social collaborative learning, expertise, storytelling, failure, the curse of busyness, and dis-engineering. These are lofty and philosophical subjects but ones with profound and practical implications for learning businesses. Jeff and Julian spoke in August 2022.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:29] Can you tell us a bit about the work that you do? I know you've got Sea Salt Learning. I think that's kind of the hub of your work. What kind of work do you usually do?

Julian Stodd: [00:01:40] Yeah, so my work explores aspects of social collaborative learning, leadership, the creation of culture, and models of change at the intersection of formal and social systems. So, essentially, "the social age" is a term I use to describe the context of my work and the context of our organizations.

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Julian Stodd: [00:02:03] It describes a somewhat subtly evolved reality and the ways in which we need to adapt pretty much everything as a result of that. My work is largely distinguished by being exploratory and quite often wrong. It's very much a process of exploration and sense-making and trying not to rely too much on that which we have inherited before.

Julian Stodd: [00:02:33] Essentially, it says, technology primarily has changed almost everything, but I'm very interested in the social nature of that change. What has changed in terms of social structures and hence organizational structures, indeed even national structures around that? And how would we adapt to that new reality?

Jeff Cobb: [00:02:54] And I've already come to appreciate, in what I've experienced of your work so far, the fact that you're very often willing to say, "I was wrong before," or "I thought this way before; now I think this way."

Jeff Cobb: [00:03:05] And in wrestling with some of these concepts that are at the core of your work, and I'd love to get you to go a little deeper around that concept of the social age because I think it is so fundamental to what you do. So can you say more about what that means to you? And then, for listeners who are going to be engaged in thinking about learning experiences, designing and facilitating learning, I know social learning is at the core of that as well. Can you talk a little bit more about how that potentially impacts their work?

Julian Stodd: [00:03:36] Yeah. So, if we think about some of the broad trends that we've seen, one trend is away from infrastructure being owned and controlled. So, when my father used to work in higher education research, and growing up we used to write our shopping lists on the back of the punch cards that he would bring home.

Julian Stodd: [00:03:58] As he was doing his doctorate, he would feed thousands of these punch cards into a computer that sat in the basement of the town hall because the university didn't have a room big enough to fit the computer into. Now, clearly, that was one model of infrastructure—massive, expensive, complex, and owned.

Julian Stodd: [00:04:16] Today, to all intents and purposes, infrastructure is devolved and democratized. So the ownership of infrastructure no longer in and of itself gives an organization mass and power and potential. So, as infrastructure becomes distributed, the very question of what does an organization do or own or hold becomes distributed.

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Julian Stodd: [00:04:40] Another thing technology has given us is radical connectivity. So, historically, our connection tended to be dictated by our language, by our geography, by our education, our social status, our class. So it tended to be sort of local and similar and dogmatic.

Julian Stodd: [00:04:57] And now it's probably global and distributed but potentially still dogmatic. But we are radically connected in many different ways, across many different technologies. In my own research in the National Health Service in the UK, across 5,000 medical professionals, when I asked them about the technologies they used to connect, to collaborate, to be effective—which is essentially another way of defining learning—they described 17 different technologies, 16 of which they were forbidden from using.

Julian Stodd: [00:05:30] So we see that radical connection happens often in informal and hidden spaces. So we start to paint a picture of individuals connected in local geographical structures, informal organizational structures, and in global distributed structures but being effective through all of them.

Julian Stodd: [00:05:53] So the very notion of what an organization is starts to blur around the edges at the very same time as the notion of career fragments. The idea that you would spend 30 years in one place is largely a fiction to most people today. So, just scraping the surface, we see that all sorts of things have changed.

Julian Stodd: [00:06:15] And what I try to remember in my own work is that almost everything we see around us is made up. Very little of it is actually really real. It tends to be a matter of social convention and codified power and codified knowledge and so on and so forth. The structures of society are structures of education, are structures of finance, are structures of government and control.

Julian Stodd: [00:06:41] These are all made up, and all have changed in the past, and all will change in the future. And, as we move into this kind of interesting, post-industrial, hyper-connected world, we should ask ourselves, "What should we carry forward?" Because, in a very pragmatic sense, we will need to invent anew the structures that we are going to inhabit.

Jeff Cobb: [00:07:07] You talk about, in concert with that radical connectivity, the idea of the democratization of capability. Capabilities that used to be centralized in organizations are now distributed to individuals who now have at least the potential to accomplish much more than an individual could have in the past.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:07:27] But then you also say there's this need for complex collaboration. It may involve collaborating with people who are completely different from you, who you disagree with, who might even be characterized as enemies, but, to get things done in this radically connected world we live in, that's now necessary. Can you expand on that a little bit?

Julian Stodd: [00:07:47] Yeah. Let me sort of put it like this. We inhabit a space of understanding, which is both individually created and socially co-created. So our understanding of pretty much anything is created in that way. My understanding of how retail works or finance or what the rules of an organization are, what the rules of my culture, these are things which I have created or participated in the creation of as a group social phenomena, and then I become trapped within it. Very often we end up learning and performing within a sort of socially constructed reality, which becomes set in stone. So we learn our own constraint.

Julian Stodd: [00:08:29] Now, when organizations talk about innovation and change—and trust me, nearly all of them do—they are trying to reinvent themselves to do something different. But they're trying to reinvent themselves within this glass bubble of learned constraint. So we talk a good game, but, ultimately, we become limited by what we can do.

Julian Stodd: [00:08:51] I mean, to give you a sense of it, I was just talking earlier today with somebody from a global organization with a massive cultural challenge which they want to solve in six weeks. And I said, "Well, why is this suddenly so urgent?" And they said, "Well, the person before had it for 18 months, but they were just too busy to do anything with it."

Julian Stodd: [00:09:11] And I said, "They probably weren't too busy. They probably just didn't have a blind clue what to do that would be acceptable." Because, clearly, anything that you do will challenge the power of today. People who hold power today are unlikely to want a future where they may not hold so much power.

Julian Stodd: [00:09:28] But that general rebalancing of power, the re-contracting of the social contract between individual and organization, is a core aspect of the social age. If we want people to be engaged, if we want to do things differently, if we want to get the wisdom of broader knowledge and broader communities, we'll have to earn it.

Julian Stodd: [00:09:51] And sometimes that will be uncomfortable. So you tend to find that people split into three spaces: that which I know and I'm comfortable with, that which I can tolerate as different, and that which I abhor. And understanding where those boundaries lie is

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important because we are likely to need a fracturing and fragmentation of our certainty if we wish to truly find some kind of advantage, be it intellectual or competitive, or otherwise.

Jeff Cobb: [00:10:26] Well, it's interesting. I hadn't really made this connection before we started talking here, but I'm at a conference right now, and the conference has a theme, as they often do, and the theme of this one happens to be that disruption equals opportunity.

Jeff Cobb: [00:10:38] And it occurs to me that, you know, in all of this radical connection that we have and this ability to connect with others, it opens up the possibility for other points of view to come in if we will let them do that and if we'll invite that disruption. Do you think in those terms of actively inviting some form of disruption in so that you do shake things up and can start to think differently?

Julian Stodd: [00:11:00] Yeah. At the moment I've got some work running which looks at social movements—so how change happens through social movements. And it's quite interesting because, in fact, it's one of the areas where I've really shifted my own understanding. What you tend to see is that social change is about the fracturing of a legacy dominant narrative and the emergence and rapid prototyping of new dominant narratives.

Julian Stodd: [00:11:25] But that time of inflection is a very painful one. You see the re-imposition of legacy power, you see the elasticity of social norms and narratives, and sometimes you see the emergence of the new. So we see that at the moment in all sorts of ways.

Julian Stodd: [00:11:39] We're seeing it around hybrid work and return to work. We're seeing it around gender identity. We're seeing it around discussions, around transgender and what that means. We're seeing all sorts of social narratives which are being challenged and stretched and evolved. So, to say that opportunity lies through disturbance, is blindingly obvious.

Julian Stodd: [00:12:02] Opportunity doesn't probably lie by continuing to do the very same things we've already done and not adapting. But what we're often unwilling to entertain is the notion that we individually are wrong. It's quite easy for me—I was writing the other day about this.

Julian Stodd: [00:12:18] Most people, when you ask them, have no difficulty in describing a legacy version of themselves that is a stranger to them. They say, "When I was at university, I was this rather awkward social individual, and I had this terrible taste in fashion and some questionable friends, and now I'm an entirely different person."

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Julian Stodd: [00:12:34] So, looking back, we tend to have no difficulty in seeing that we have always changed. Looking forward, many of us don't sit here today thinking, "Oh my goodness, I'm only 60 percent of the person I need to be." It's quite easy to find a fault in others, but it's quite difficult to find that disturbance in ourselves, especially when we're busy.

Julian Stodd: [00:12:53] And busyness is the curse and the great excuse of modern organizations. It's consistently the number one thing that people come up with to say they are unable to learn, to evolve, to change. They're just too busy. But, when you think about it, it doesn't seem all that likely.

Julian Stodd: [00:13:09] Busy as we may be, it just doesn't seem likely that there's all that much work, that we are constantly busy. We've probably just created systems that make us busy. When we see somebody sat around doing nothing, we don't tend to reward them and say, "What can I learn from you?" We just call them idle and disengaged.

Julian Stodd: [00:13:28] We are rewarded for being busy. We have this sort of heroic culture of busyness that sort of fails to question why. Why are we so busy? That leads you into thinking, well, what could we stop doing? What could we dis-engineer? What could we take apart? What could we leave behind? One of the most important questions.

Julian Stodd: [00:13:48] Unless you believe that development is additive, that you just keep adding more flour and water and eggs and sugar until the cake becomes fantastic, you've got to ask, what can I take away? What can I free up? What can we stop doing? What can we stop believing or knowing?

Celisa Steele: [00:14:05] At Tagoras, we're experts in the global business of lifelong learning, and we use our expertise to help clients better understand their markets, connect with new customers, make the right investment decisions, and grow their learning businesses. We achieve these goals through expert market assessment, strategy formulation, and platform selection services. If you're looking for a partner to help your learning business achieve greater reach, revenue, and impact, learn more at tagoras.com/services.

Jeff Cobb: [00:14:40] As I'm sort of reflecting on what I've read of yours so far, it seems almost inevitable that if you're going to wrestle with this, you're going to have to evolve into some sort of new view of leadership. And you have, in fact, focused quite a bit on leadership, what it means to be a leader in the social age.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:15:01] Can you talk a little bit about how leadership is now different in the types of structures that you're describing and how somebody who aspires to lead or is leading is actually able to accomplish that now?

Julian Stodd: [00:15:15] Yeah. My work on social leadership looks at leading at the intersection of systems. So it doesn't say we need to get rid of what came before. It says we need to broaden and add to it. So, roughly speaking, it says in the industrial organization we needed a type of leadership which was about resource and management and control.

Julian Stodd: [00:15:35] It was about collecting together diverse talent, using system and process and established power to direct it in one direction, to quality assure it, to get the output right. And it built a pyramid with people at the top holding power and people at the bottom doing the work—so the traditional view of the modern organization.

Julian Stodd: [00:15:55] What I think we need now is to add to that, to make it the multidimensional organization. So we still need some formal power, but we also need social. We need the authority-led organization, the authentic leader, leaders who are connected within many and diverse communities.

Julian Stodd: [00:16:09] On average, across my research on the landscape of communities people describe, there are probably around at least 15 different communities that help them to be effective. Most of them are informal, social, hidden, legacy, precursor networks. So we need leaders that understand that and that understand the types of power that operates in those spaces and that understand who controls the narrative and indeed who controls consequence in those spaces.

Julian Stodd: [00:16:37] So I have a major research project running this year, looking at experimentation and failure across around 60 of the FTSE 250 companies and beyond. And what's interesting to me is that in the prototype work, which I have completely done that, people describe all sorts of elaborate mechanisms for the initiation and governance of experimentation.

Julian Stodd: [00:16:59] I mean, half of them say they're unable to experiment, essentially, but, of the ones that are able to, they can either do 300 experiments without getting breathless, or they can do three big, sanctioned, organizational ones. They take a whole range of different approaches, but not a single one of them, so far, has described a methodology for failure.

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Julian Stodd: [00:17:19] They leave it to intuition, which means the experience of failure is erratic and tends to flow along lines of social connection. So, if I like you, I'm less likely to punish you than if I don't like you. But, if I know you, when we leave failure to intuition, the experience of failure becomes erratic, and, if the experience is erratic, people are unlikely to take too many chances.

Julian Stodd: [00:17:44] So, when we look at the ways we rewire or rebuild our organizations, it's likely to include both a formal and a social perspective, which would recognize that people come and go in different ways, that they collaborate in different ways, in different spaces, that trust flows unevenly between spaces.

Julian Stodd: [00:18:08] And we can see this happening. You see organizations that scale without accruing or accreting much hierarchy, system, and process. You see organizations that are just bedeviled and trapped by system and process. Typically, the very mechanisms that made us safe yesterday cast a shadow into the future.

Julian Stodd: [00:18:33] And very few organizations have a specific capability in dis-engineering themselves. They tend to just bolt things on or acquire things, but they never truly rewire themselves from within, and I think that's one of the great challenges today. In 2019, I published a book called *The Socially Dynamic Organization*, with a rather grand [sub]title of *A New Model of Organizational Design*.

Julian Stodd: [00:19:01] I suspect that very few people read it, but I also suspect it's one of the most important things I've written because I think you have to take it down to that. What type of organization will you design, and how will you lead within it, and how will people learn within it, and how will it be effective?

Jeff Cobb: [00:19:17] What's the role of storytelling in that? Because I know you emphasized the importance of stories, as a leader, being able to tell authentic stories and the connection between story and culture. And, of course, culture seems to be so deeply embedded into this idea of the social age and the idea of being able to make progress and change. Can you elaborate on those a little bit?

Julian Stodd: [00:19:38] Storytelling has sort of come under fire a bit recently. But, I think, that's more to do with some of the programs and quality of work around storytelling that you see. I

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mean, my work, you won't find anything about hero journeys and all the rest of it. I'm not into that space.

Julian Stodd: [00:19:53] What I'm primarily interested in is the way that we construct different narratives, individually, collectively, organizationally, and how they intersect. So, inside your own head, you have constructed a story about me, and I have constructed one about you, and together we may construct a story about somebody else.

Julian Stodd: [00:20:14] We lead, we seek to project stories, or create a space for people to invest themself in stories. We are narrative creatures at heart. From our very earliest ages, we tell stories. I've been off camping with my three-year-old, and we've had a couple of weeks under canvas in the depths of Wales.

Julian Stodd: [00:20:36] And we didn't take any books with us, but so at story time I would just light a fire and make up a story. And, when we got home last week, we went to bed up in his room, and I said, "Shall I read you a story?" And he said, "Oh, Papa, no, talky talky stories for when we're camping. Read-y read-y stories are for when we're back home."

Julian Stodd: [00:21:02] Talky talky stories, which are made up on the spot. Read-y read-y stories are the ones that are captured within books, and hence they're like butterflies pinned. We need a bit of a mixture of both, you know, a bit of the read-y read-y ones and a bit of the talky talky ones.

Julian Stodd: [00:21:19] And then, of course, it raises questions about who owns them. So your reputation is a story. We're only talking today because I had a very great conversation with our mutual friend, I think, in a car in a thunderstorm, and your name came up, and my name came up, and then she shared something of our reputation with each other. So reputation is a story told about us, and one that traps us, and one that enables us. You can understand pretty much anything through the lens of stories.

Jeff Cobb: [00:21:52] And I'm thinking, the people who are listening, who, in a sense, are the weavers of stories—or could be the weavers of stories—across these networks and communities that they serve because most of them are representing membership communities, membership organizations, or, at the very least, they're not so much focused on a single organization. They're focused on dispersed groups of people for whom they're trying to create and facilitate learning experiences. Do you see anything different, or are there nuances in this, that would

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apply to that group of people as opposed to, say, an L&D professional in a corporation? Or is it really the same dynamic, regardless?

Julian Stodd: [00:22:32] Well, you should probably have invited Sae [Schatz] back for that, for this part of the conversation. I mean, some things are the same. So, cognitively, certain aspects are the same—the way that we respond to stories, the way that we frame our learning and understanding within them.

Julian Stodd: [00:22:47] But, because the context is different, then I think the role of stories is different. I personally, at this stage in my work, tend to favor, or perhaps I should say, be more interested in social collaborative models of learning, which typically use narrative and discourse structures to allow the social co-creation or social creation of knowledge within a scaffolding or framework.

Julian Stodd: [00:23:19] So there is typically a background, a framework, or a chapter structure, a narrative structure, that we want a program to hold. But it's then about how much knowledge you want to put into it and how much you want to create space for divergent understanding to emerge.

Julian Stodd: [00:23:41] I think, from my understanding of your audience, they will probably have less formally mandated structure in terms of what learning looks like. But I still think that there's a role of scaffolding to help guide people. At the very lightest level, sometimes I just like to use campfire conversations, where you can just use one, two, or three questions just to guide people into uncertainty.

Julian Stodd: [00:24:08] It's almost the greatest gift you can give people, is a space to be uncertain within. And I ran a session this morning as part of my work on quiet leadership, which is leadership in the smallest of actions, on kindness. So I had people from around the world came together, and I said to them, "We're just spending an hour talking about what kindness, what it is, why is it important, how does it work."

Julian Stodd: [00:24:34] But most people would struggle to remember any time in their life ever that they've actually stopped to have a conversation about what kindness is. How does it work? How does it break? Is the intention enough, or is it the impact that counts? And that's often the way.

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Julian Stodd: [00:24:51] We pick up words like tokens as if they carry implicit meaning, but, in fact, the meaning they have is imbued in them. And so the more dialogue and conversation and exploration you can do around it, the more meaning you can find within it. This is a very active debate, though. So Sae and I both know Donald Clark, a fantastic researcher and thinker. You obviously know him.

Julian Stodd: [00:25:16] Donald and I will regularly explore our differences, and he will bring you a very different view on leadership and a very different view on storytelling, and he is right to do so. I still wouldn't argue conclusively that leadership is even a thing, but I think it's more of a thing than he believes because people talk about it as if it's real, and belief is an important force.

Julian Stodd: [00:25:40] But we've been talking recently about the relationship between language and meaning and the extent to which learning is a process that can either be constrained or enabled by our existing language. I think it's a rich area to explore.

Jeff Cobb: [00:25:55] That's interesting, yes, and Donald has actually been on the podcast as well. In fact, I'll have to go back and see if we discussed leadership with him or not. I can't recall right now. It does occur to me, as you were talking about our audience and what they do, that I have traditionally thought, I continue to think that there is tremendous opportunity to take or to capitalize much more on the informal and social opportunities that are available there.

Jeff Cobb: [00:26:21] Because I think what tends to happen in the world that I live and work in is people who are running programs—whether those are continuing education programs, or they're conferences or whatever—are trying as much as possible to impose a formal and measurable structure on something where the most value might be in the informal, in the less structured.

Jeff Cobb: [00:26:42] Because it's all about can you earn credit, can you establish that this event happened, and I was associated with it, and so I get to say, "I learned something." A lot of it's about, frankly, the distribution and the perpetuation of what gets thought of as expertise.

Jeff Cobb: [00:26:58] And so I'd love to ask you that—because it just kept occurring to me as I was reading what I have read of yours—can you be an expert, really? Is that just a myth that we've created for ourselves or, at least, how we conceive of expertise? Are we flawed in how we think of that?

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Julian Stodd: [00:27:15] I don't think we're flawed, but we may be incomplete. My work is held in writing. So I write and publish every day, and, if you're particularly interested in the work on social and collaborative learning, I have a book which is free. It's an e-book called *The Social Learning Guidebook*, which kind of explores some of the research and structure and ideas around that.

Julian Stodd: [00:27:36] The notion of expertise is largely a pragmatic one. I think expertise is very real, both deep expertise and also the expertise of interconnection. So we are, to some extent, in the age of the generalist, and, much to the horror of probably both philosophers and academics, we are in an age where, to some extent, good enough is good enough.

Julian Stodd: [00:27:57] So there are instances when expertise needs to be deep and validated, and there are instances when cursory knowledge is enough. The trick is knowing which space you are in. You know, I don't want my dentist practicing just-in-time learning from something they saw on YouTube last week.

Julian Stodd: [00:28:16] However, I do want them to be aware of the latest insights and innovation. So maybe there's a balance between it. What I suspect, the way I'll probably characterize the conversation is this—and, again, this is something I look at in the socially dynamic organization.

Julian Stodd: [00:28:31] Historically, you and I decided to start a business making a coffee shop chain, a global coffee shop chain. We would just say, okay, we need somebody that's going to find the real estate, we need somebody that knows how to procure coffee cups, we need some baristas and somebody that knows how to train them, and we'd better have somebody to look after the money.

Julian Stodd: [00:28:50] So part of our process of creation would be to define the skills, to recruit people, the expertise we need, build some systems and processes because we want the coffee to look and taste the same in London or Paris or at Changi Airport. We want it to be the same, and that would be that.

Julian Stodd: [00:29:09] But today we probably can gain access, through our networks of primary and secondary connections, to much broader capability and expertise. And that in itself may challenge us more but give us a richer environment in which to explore, if we earn the right to do so.

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Julian Stodd: [00:29:29] So we see this sponsorship of trust through networks into secondary and tertiary connections, and that becomes more important. I think a modern organization should have a direct, employed base but then a kind of aligned or engaged base, and understanding that it's more layered than it used to be.

Julian Stodd: [00:29:49] And, hence, how do we think about boundaries? A boundary is walls that need to be fortified. Or do they need free ports or trading posts or gateways? And how will we earn the right to be in conversations? How will we recognize the contribution to those conversations? And so on and so forth.

Jeff Cobb: [00:30:15] I do always like to ask guests about their own lifelong learning. Obviously, writing's very much at the core of yours, and I'd love to know how that evolved, how that came to be for you. Also, you use illustrations a lot, and I assume you're the one creating those illustrations. Maybe you could talk about that as well. But the writing and visually expressing yourself and how those fit into how you go about your own lifelong learning.

Julian Stodd: [00:30:41] I started out kind of as a pretty mediocre researcher in a sort of postgrad academic space and was tempted out of that into the organizational one, establishing an e-learning business and finding out that you actually could earn some money and afford to buy yourself a new T-shirt once a year.

Julian Stodd: [00:31:00] So I kind of swung wildly between academic and industry for the first 10 years in my career, but neither really suited me. I didn't like being in academia because it was too abstract, and I didn't like being purely in industry because I wasn't doing anything I was proud of, even though we were kind of very successful.

Julian Stodd: [00:31:18] So, around 2010, when we sold that e-learning business, it gave me a bit of breathing space to get back into writing. And I started forming those ideas and that work around the social age, finding a very conversational style. I mean, at the time, just using WordPress as this emergent blogging platform, I just found a space and an audience and really loved it.

Julian Stodd: [00:31:43] But it was only after a couple of years, really when the iPad came out, that I could seamlessly integrate some really terrible illustration within that work, and it just exploded. I mean, it drove up engagement tenfold and hundredfold. It was kind of embarrassing at the start.

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Julian Stodd: [00:31:59] But I'm like a mediocre artist. I'm okay. Watercolor was really my thing, but suddenly I was illustrating on the iPad. And, for a few years, it kind of all swirled around, and then I realized that my writing was changing, and the way that I write changes.

Julian Stodd: [00:32:17] And now I write every day and adhere to a principle of working out loud where I share my evolving thinking, which is really a very defensive posture. Because some people have the confidence to say, "This is the answer. This is the thing." I don't. I don't particularly like conflict, and I'm just not all that certain about it.

Julian Stodd: [00:32:40] So I tend to say, "Here's what I'm thinking at the moment," and sometimes things emerge from that maybe are true, and sometimes they just embarrassingly die and fade away. And that's okay. I'd say that works for me pretty well. So illustration is interesting. I typically start with the illustration and then write around it.

Julian Stodd: [00:33:02] Not always, but I tend to do that. And I think that illustration is a language that's the same as words. It gives us a language. So my writing is—or, I suppose I should say, my output—is very wrapped up between illustration and writing. I remember the first review that came in for *The Social Leadership Handbook*, which was the first major book I published in 2014, for the first edition.

Julian Stodd: [00:33:29] The first review that came in was commendably short: "I like the illustrations." So they probably didn't even read it. But I think a lot of people know me around that side of things. In fact, if I'm honest, I suspect a lot of people don't read. Occasionally people say, "Oh, I discovered your work, and I went back, and I read everything," and I feel terribly, terribly sorry for them because it's very much evolutionary.

Julian Stodd: [00:33:57] But illustrating helps me think, and thinking helps me write. And I'm very lucky that my work has been adopted by just these fantastic organizations around the world, which then gives me more opportunities to meet more fantastic new people and do more fantastic new work.

Julian Stodd: [00:34:15] And funnily enough, Sae and I are just embarking on the journey to tackle *The Learning Science Guidebook*. So that's going to be a book we're hoping to write together, and I feel sure I can tempt Donald into some writing one day as well.

Julian Stodd: [00:34:30] So writing is something that brings us together, but the trick is to remember that difference is actually a good thing. You see, even in our space, and that's the

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learning and development space, you see a lot of people who are willing to be smug in their own confidence about how right they are. I'm glad for them. I'm glad that people have this great certainty. I don't. I'm perfectly okay with critiquing my own work because it's very full of holes.

Julian Stodd: [00:35:02] But, if you want certainty, do what everybody else does, and being sure about those things other people are sure about. But, if you really want to learn, you need uncertainty, and you need to test things in practice and be willing to learn from it, which can be painful and uncomfortable. And it won't happen by chance. You have to curate or create the environment in which that can happen.

Celisa Steele: [00:35:31] Julian Stodd is founder and captain of Sea Salt Learning. You can find links to Sea Salt Learning's Web site and Julian's learning blog in the show notes for this episode at leadinglearning.com/episode321. His blog is a great way to go deeper on the subjects he and Jeff talked about in this interview and an example of working out loud, so we recommend you check the blog out.

Jeff Cobb: [00:35:55] At leadinglearning.com/episode321, you'll also see options for subscribing to the podcast. And 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.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:08] We'd also be grateful if you would rate us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen, especially if you find the Leading Learning Podcast valuable. Jeff and I personally would appreciate it, and ratings and reviews help us show up when people search for content on leading a learning business. Go to leadinglearning.com/apple to leave a rating.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:26] Lastly, please spread the word. At leadinglearning.com/episode321, there are links to find Leading Learning on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. We also welcome good old-fashioned word-of-mouth, so please suggest the podcast to others who might benefit.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:43] 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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