

**The eLearning Coach Podcast**  
**ELC 063: The Evolution To Learning Experience Design**  
<http://thelearningcoach.com/podcasts/63/>

- Connie: Hello, learning people, welcome to episode 63 of the eLearning Coach Podcast. In this episode, I'm mixing it up a bit and replaying an episode of the Powered by Learning Podcast that I was on from d'Vinci Interactive. We discussed the evolution of instructional design to learning experience design. We talk about what it means to us, how we can explain it to others and how we can support people on their learning journey. You can find the show notes and a transcript at [thelearningcoach.com/podcasts/63/](http://thelearningcoach.com/podcasts/63/). Here's our conversation.
- Susan: Hello, and welcome to Powered by Learning. I'm your host Susan Korte. With me today is d'Vinci's senior eLearning specialist Jenica Jones. Thanks for joining me Jenica.
- Jenica: Thanks for having me Susan.
- Susan: Today, we are very pleased to welcome long time d'Vinci partner and friend Connie Malamed. Connie is a recognized learning experience designer and is the publisher of the eLearning Coach website, that includes free resources and over 350 articles. She's the host of the eLearning Coach Podcast and the author of two books. Welcome Connie.
- Connie: Thanks for having me, Susan.
- Susan: Well, it's nice to talk to you again, since we last interviewed you for the d'Vinci video blog series, you certainly have a very long and impressive career. Take a minute or two to tell us a little bit about your journey and also what you're doing now.
- Connie: I've been in the field for 20 something years, I've seen so many amazing and wonderful changes in the way people are going about designing learning experiences. And about nine months ago, I started a community called [Mastering Instructional Design](#). And in that community, people get a chance to learn about instructional design and get to practice it. And I give four live courses a year and there are quite a few self-paced courses. So that's been the main focus of my career at this time kind of way to give back.
- Susan: Well, that sounds great. And I know this is something that Jenica is very passionate about as well. So I'm looking forward to hearing the dialogue between the two of you, as the two of you discuss our topic today.
- Jenica: Thanks, Connie. It's so nice to talk to you again. Over the years as we have worked together at d'Vinci, we have certainly seen the training industry evolve. Today, we want to talk about instructional design and learning experience design. How would you describe the difference between the two?

Connie: Sure. I'd be happy to. I think that it's important to recognize that it's nothing clear cut, that I see it more on a continuum and that learning experience design, encompasses instructional design and takes it to a different place from having a different mindset. So, first of all, although there's no agreed upon definition, I think it's a good thing to discuss because a lot of people are calling themselves learning experience designers or saying that they're doing learning experience design, so we might as well try to define it as best we can. So I would say that learning experience design, first of all, has a very human centered mindset and includes human centered practices. And these were mostly borrowed from user experience design. Also, I feel like learning experience design is based on well-known research, so research that can be demonstrated. And finally, I would say that learning experience design is really the best of what we've learned over the past 10 or 20 years about taking people on an extended learning journey, rather than thinking in terms of just one experience.

Jenica: That's great Connie. I love the idea that it's more of just a journey. I think that's where the different, like where learning experience design and instructional design, that idea of the mindset of what we do and what instructional design is, is in some cases, the mindset is on that click through types of training. And if we can get people to change their idea of what learning can be, and potentially the idea of having a learning experience, could open their mind up to doing more of a journey and more than just a one-time experience for learning. And having that journey, that learning isn't just a one-time thing it's something that you have to continue to do. I love that. So what would you say makes a great learning experience? Like what is that idea of just what is a good learning experience?

Connie: Right, first of all, as with all instruction design, it has to have a goal. And in workplace training, it's typically a performance goal and it has to put the learner first. The designer needs to have empathy for the learner, understand the learner, almost immerse themselves in the learners world to understand what you're thinking, feeling, doing, every day. I think that it also has to engage people. I think we don't need to be scared of challenging people, and I think it needs to be motivating. And when it is relevant to a person's job or to a person's internal goals, that helps to make it motivating. And finally, I think it needs to be a great learning experience, needs to take people on a journey that helps them build long-term capabilities. If we just want someone to read a policy, we can send them a PDF document and let them check off that they've read it. We don't need an entire course for one little thing. In those cases, we can send people an email or find some other approach.

Jenica: Yeah. I like the thought that, the performance goal, that performance is the focus or not the focus, but the user is the focus. So put yourself in their shoes, what do they experience? What's the best way for them to learn how to do this? Is essential to doing a learning experience design. Putting them first, I think that's gets lost a lot of times, I know a lot of conversations tend to focus around the content and the information that's in the training and not so much of the learner. So that's great.

Connie: One thing that I've been seeing is that, whereas we used to think of ourselves as content developers, think we're evolving as a field to see ourselves as experienced creators. And that really makes a big difference.

Jenica: Yeah. And the challenging part of it. I think everyone can relate to that, where you've had this experience where things that stand out in your memory and things that you have this breakthrough moment where it was a challenge, it wasn't easy. It was something that you really had to work towards, but you remember that, and that's something that you built on rather than it being very easy and just no challenge to it. There's very low cognitive input into it and it's not necessarily memorable. So challenging the learners and making it a little difficult is a great way to increase the learning. So you talked a little about the outcomes and learner performance. I'm always curious as to what can make a better performance, better learning outcomes. What do you think about this learning experience design could potentially improve the outcomes for the training? What's the benefit of it? Why would somebody want to do this versus what we think of as maybe a more traditional click through track type of training?

Connie: I think that any organization that wants to truly retain their workforce avoid a lot of turnover, build long term capabilities, can get a lot more out of a successful learning experience or learning journey than just these short one time as you call them, click through experiences. And I think that we really need to educate our clients about the advantages and benefits of putting and investing in people, because really that's the essence of an organization, is the people. If everyone leaves, there's no organization left.

Jenica: So the learner's experience is potentially better and in turn will then create a better outcome for the company.

Connie: I think one of the big parts of learning experience design and something that's been missing from our industry, should be that we begin to make everything measurable and that we find metrics on from ones that are already collected anyway, that prove that these learning experiences are effective. So some examples might be reducing the number of accidents, which is probably tracked anyway, increasing sales or something like fewer support tickets. Those are the kinds of metrics that we can measure to see how successful is a learning experience. And we need that feedback loop to be able to tell if what we're doing is correct, if we're on the right path. And it can convince clients that long-term learning is really worthwhile and a good investment.

Jenica: And that all starts with having those really good goals and objectives to figuring out. And it can also come from the source, what's the reason behind this training? Why do we want this? And hopefully there's a reason like maybe there's been an uptick in accidents, or maybe we need to increase sales, something like that, that there can be something that we can measure to see the difference, see what the impact is. I think that that comes from having those really clear goals and objectives at the beginning. Right? So you want to know why are we here? What's the purpose of this training? What are we here

to improve? And then also, something for the client to go back and say, look at this, look how amazing this training was, look at the improvements we had. We've done this, this training was worth it. It was worth the time. Because it takes a lot of time. It's a lot of effort to do these courses and to have people go through these. So there was a purpose to it. It made an impact for the audience.

Connie: Right. And then the interesting thing is when a department begins to measure the performance outcomes they become rather than a cost center, they become a profit center. They're actually saving an organization money by reducing accidents or increasing sales.

Jenica: Yeah. The value, there's that value in the learning department, by like you said, reducing accidents, increasing sales. You're more in demand, what you're doing has a direct impact on the bottom line in their performance. So to switch topics a little bit, part of what we've talked about with learning experience design and how that's implemented if somebody wanted to transition and maybe do more of this learning experience, design thinking, how does that play a role in, I think you kind of touched on it a little bit earlier, but how does design thinking play a role in doing a learning experience design?

Connie: Well, design thinking is one method that I think can work well, but I think the key to the best implementation is that you're using a process that's iterative and it's whatever one works with your company or your organization. So that rather than using a waterfall method, where you start at the beginning and you don't get to evaluate until the end, and all along the way you're not getting any input from users, you should use an iterative method and that's how you can put people at the center or use human centered design. So design thinking is one way to do that. And it's probably the way I like, but that doesn't mean it'll work for everyone. But the point is right from the start, you're developing empathy for the users, you're immersing yourself in their world and you're getting input from them early on through prototyping so that you know whether you're on the right path.

And some people have a concern about that because they might say, well, the users are not experienced learning professionals, so what do they know? So I think you have to find a balance. You get the input from the users and you pair that with your own experience, with the research you've heard of or read about and try to pair the two together. So you find some kind of compromise between what you know and what the users are showing you. I think you can get some pretty good insights from talking to people. I've never had the experience of not getting insights from talking to people. I always learn something.

Jenica: Yeah. They've never experienced where you've prototyped something and they're like, well, that was a waste of time. You always gain something, you always get so much feedback. And like you said, sometimes it's not necessarily a constructive feedback or feedback that you can take action on necessarily or there's always the idea that it's too

slow, it's too fast. There's always, somebody who thinks it's too fast and always somebody who thinks it was too slow or things like that. But there's always something that you can gain from that, from having people go through it. And one thing that, especially here at d'Vinci, we may not have access to the learners, that we're good at creating training for our own employees. So we always struggle with potentially finding that audience or being able to do those prototypes because we don't have access. What are some creative ways that people can do that type of user testing, but not necessarily have access to the end users.

Connie: That's a good question. And it always surprises me when someone does say, well, they don't really know anything, you don't need to talk to the audience members. So I think rule number one or approach number one, would be to push back on that a little in a gentle way and try to educate the client about how it can be an actual money saving effort if you go and talk to audience members and really explain to them why and how on what they do.

Because number one, if they're not letting you talk to people, it means that they may not understand the person's intelligence or insights or maybe what their role is. And they may not understand how it actually prevents you from going down the wrong path and how it can improve performance. So that's number one, I would just try to gently push back through education and tell them of the benefits of it.

But then another way is just to look, possibly try to find other people in the field. Maybe someone knows of someone whom you can test things out on. Another idea is to just read enough about the field, look at that, see what kinds of skills these people are doing. And in every way possible, try to begin to build a persona, not from your own assumptions, but just from research. Maybe someone has a friend who works in a certain field that's similar. Maybe you can find stories about that. I've done that a lot of times when I've written up fictionalized scenarios, I can look and see what others are saying about training in that field and what topics people need to be educated on. So those are some ways that I've been able to do it without talking to the audience.

Jenica: Yeah. And the personas I've seen that also done, and I've done this before, where I kind of, like you talked about having empathy for the learners, you put yourself in their shoes, you come up with the personas for the audience members, of who's going to be there. So you think about, based on that research, not just off the top of your head. Based on that research of who those audience members are, go through the process as you're designing, as you're developing, of putting yourself in their shoes, in the meetings. You can give them a name, what would Tom think of this if they were looking at this course, or what would Susan think of this course if she were taking it and based on her personality and her needs, how would she reflect? Or what feedback would she give? Those types. So that's when potentially when you're brainstorming or when, sometimes when we're designing take that idea of the personas that I've seen.

Connie: I'd like to suggest one other tool, in addition to a persona, it would be an empathy map and you can find them online. And those once you've gotten your persona developed, you can use an empathy map and people really seem to these when I do them during design thinking workshops. They allow you to begin to try to understand how the person thinks and feels and what they do when they're either having a performance challenge or when they are going through your learning experience. So it gives you a whole, a deeper level of insight when you start to fill out an empathy map.

Susan: Connie and Jenica, when you're thinking about the empathy map and the personas and the goals of the training, how does that help you as instructional designers to really create a learning experience that is beyond that instructional design, is beyond, what maybe you both started out doing in your career since this profession has evolved so much?

Connie: Well, one thing is exactly what Jenica said, which would be that you're at a design meeting and you're saying, well, does Tom really have time to sit for eight hours and take an eLearning course? Or does the supervisor really want us to fly everyone to California to take stand up classroom training? So it begins to personalize the experience and you can try to imagine, you can think, oh, look, he works out in the field. He doesn't have time. He doesn't even own a computer. So that means that we have to create something for his phone that he can just swipe through very quickly. How can we do this? Or would he prefer text messages? Something could be the context that the person lives and works in.

Jenica: All right. I think like you're saying, somebody in the field, or maybe a podcast, maybe something that he can sales person or something like that, maybe it's something that they can listen to while they're in their car driving to their next appointment. But that's how, if you put yourself in their shoes and you have the flexibility to come up with the best solution for the outcomes, for the goals and your objectives. What I say is the traditional typical course, maybe isn't the best way, let's think outside of the box. And if we are thinking of those goals and objectives, we can think of these creative ways. Maybe it's an app, maybe it's a podcast, maybe it's just an email that we send them or reminder or something like that that could be more creative and more effective. It's not just more creative, but it's more effective.

Susan: It sounds like what you're saying is those learning experiences then become more relevant.

Connie: And they fit into the person's context and life. And some people say context is everything and it really does make sense. What about people for whom English is not their native language? Well, you're not going to give them big, long text-based screens, or maybe you might need to translate it into their native language. Just context is everything or almost everything.

Jenica: So Connie, I followed you for a long time, seeing your conferences and read your blog. And one of the things I've heard you say several times is that, as instructional designers, we wear a lot of different hats. We have to play a lot of different roles, have a lot of different skills. So are there any specific pats or skills that are important for creating effective learning experiences?

Connie: I think one of them is being able to get outside of our industry and see what they're doing and use your experience design in instructional and cognitive science and visual design. Our field is so broad and that's why people love it. And you really have to be able to touch on some of these other aspects and then bring them into your practice. So I would say that's one thing, is just getting outside of your industry and continually learning. And I think most people in the field do like to continually learn. Another is to be comfortable getting away from your desk and going out to other people's workplaces, the workplace of your audience, when you have the opportunity. And to feel comfortable talking to people, interviewing people, getting rid of your assumptions and biases and being open to what their world is like. And then maybe another is just making sure that you know the research and you understand it. And if you can't understand it, then find people who explain it and then incorporate that research that's been done on how people learn, bring it into your work as a best practice.

Jenica: For instructional design, a lot of people if given the opportunity would do a lot of what we think of as a learning experience design. And just speaking from my own experience, I sometimes have the feeling that people have a, potentially people outside of the learning field, which is, have an idea of what learning is and what instructional design is. So to get them to change the idea or their mindset or the rebranding of instructional design, to a learning experience design to kind of expand their thinking.

Connie: Okay, I understand. That's good. I just hope it will. I mean, a lot of times I think that it's also for our industry itself to help people expand their practice and enhance their practice with user experience and product design tools and methods. But also I think it is a good point that if we are willing to spend the time educating others outside of our field, that it might help them understand that people are on a learning journey, that the journey and the experience takes a long time, that most people forget after one learning intervention. So I think within the industry it can help with change our practices and outside of the industry, it can possibly expand people's perceptions of what learning is and what people need to learn. But I think the onus of the responsibility is on us to educate our clients and others.

Jenica: Yeah. And to make the case for it, to give the offerings, ask the hard questions like you said earlier. Ask those questions, dive deeper, get into more of the details to get to those really good goals and objectives that. And then we can really make the case for doing the creative and the learning journey, not just the one experience. There's a lot that we as instructional designers need to do to get to the place where we can offer those learning experience designs to our clients.

Connie: And I think one thing that makes it all so obvious is that technology, whether it's a technology-based training or not, technology has made the world evolve in a certain way. Things happen faster, disruptions happen more often, everyone has access to YouTube and other means of getting information. And because of that, we need to evolve, we need to stay relevant and we need to keep up the pace with the rest of the world. I'm not saying everything has to be technology based training, but technology has changed the world we live in. And so we have to evolve.

Susan: When the two of you are talking to clients who were looking for a learning solution, how do you explain the difference between instructional design and learning experiences that you've been talking about today?

Connie: I would say that I start out perhaps understanding their goals and where the performance problems are and then explaining how frequently, and there's no one measure there's the forgetting curve, but it depends on so many things, we can't just say that. But I like to talk to them a little bit about the cognitive psychology of it all, meaning that people can only process three to four pieces of information at one time, they forget most of what they learn without additional reinforcement and practice.

And the things that are shocking, the things that, most people think of the mind as a camera that just records everything, yep, one eight-hour training that ought to do it, but that's not right. It should be eight, one hour training spaced over two months, that would much more likely improve performance than one full day. So after talking and educating people about that, then I try to explain that learning experience design is that long term journey for really improving performance and instructional design is part of that journey.

So the learning experience design is more like the umbrella that encompasses user experience, learning experience, cognitive psychology, visual design, instructional design. It encompasses all of it.

Jenica: And the idea that instructional design plays a huge part in learning experience design, but it's getting the client a lot of times to expand their perception of what a learning can be and to potentially go from what they came in thinking that they wanted. An eight hour in person classroom training, or they wanted a two-hour eLearning course, to maybe broadening their perception and thinking, well, maybe they don't need a two-hour eLearning course. Maybe we can do a couple micro learnings with maybe a podcast and follow up emails or something like that that would be better fit for their learners and for the audience. It's more of changing their perception of what the learning can be.

Connie: I agree. So often people need microlearning, like what you were talking about, or some small bits of small tutorials, short tutorials, and then they need job aids or some type of support on the job. That's often what people need. So if there are any clients out there, just come with an open mind and don't even think you know the solution yet, because none of us know the solution, we have to do our research, just like they do in user



experience. In product design, we research things and discover and don't make assumptions.

Susan: I think that's what makes for good learning. And certainly the two of you have given so many great tips today for both clients who need to create learning as well as people who are creating the learning. So, Connie, I want to thank you so much for joining us today. And Jenica, thank you too, for chatting with Connie and also sharing your insights as well.

Connie: Thanks for having us. It was fun to nerd out.

Jenica: Yes. We definitely geek out when we get talking about this topic, definitely.

Susan: Well, you can tell the two of you are very passionate about it, so thank you. Jenica, what are some of the key takeaways from your talk today with Connie?

Jenica: Well, there's so many, the first one that comes to mind is the idea that there's no set definition, even though if you search on the internet, Connie is sometimes given the credit for coining the phrase for learning experience design. *[Note: I did not coin the phrase!]* There isn't an agreed upon difference between the two. And even as you can tell, when we were talking about, we struggle with describing them, because they're so similar and you can't have learning experience design without instructional design. So that's the first thing, is that it's not an agreed upon thing, it's not like you can just go out and look at the definition for it.

Second thing is that it being human centered, the focus is on the learner. You have to put yourself in the learner's shoes, the empathy, we talked about the personas, the iterative testing. So getting that focus back on the learners and having them be a part of the experience and having it being centered on them and their performance.

And I also love the idea that she said that learning experience design takes the best of what we've learned from instructional design. So it's all the good things, I think I mentioned, learning experience design is kind of this things that as an instructional designer, we want to be able to do, that we don't always get a chance to do. So learning experience design takes all of the research, all of the UI UX, all of the best things that we've learned over the years and creates this, I would say, new mindset to it and this new experience for learning.

Susan: Yeah. It seems like a new way of thinking in a sense.

Jenica: Yeah, it's, reframing it in a way, I think that is a better description of what learning can be. It's an experience, it's not a onetime event. You think of it as an experience, they were creating this learning experience for the audience rather than a onetime event. And also going along with that, is that it's a journey, it's this journey of learning because like Connie mentioned, the mind does not work as a camera. You don't just record that eight-

hour training session or that 15 minutes eLearning course that you took, it's not a snapshot. So it's a journey, it's best to do the learning and at different points in time, because that helps you with your learning. And just from the science, we know that that that's the best way to learn. So, the idea of creating a journey for the learners and not a one-time event.

Susan: Thanks Jenica, it was really nice to talk with you.

Jenica: Oh, you too, Susan. This was a lot of fun.

Susan: And many thanks to our friend, Connie for joining us today. If you have any questions about what we talked about today, you could also reach out to us on d'Vinci social channels through our website, [dvinci.com](http://dvinci.com) or by emailing us at [poweredbylearning@dvinci.com](mailto:poweredbylearning@dvinci.com).

Connie: Well, it sounded to me like they did a great wrap up of the conversation. So I just want to remind you that you can find the resources and a transcript at [thelearningcoach.com/podcasts/63](http://thelearningcoach.com/podcasts/63). Take care. And I'll talk to you next time.