

# HOW TO DESIGN EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT AND ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

## A TALK WITH ATSUSI HIRUMI, SPEAKER AT THE NEXT L&D TALKS

At the next edition of the L&D Talks on October 27th, we have the honour of welcoming Atsusi '2C' Hirumi for a keynote about hybrid learning. He will be talking about key lessons learnt and tactics for facilitating online and hybrid learning. We decided to already give you a heads-up interviewing Atsusi at the very start of his one year sabbatical, asking him about instructional design and how to set-up an efficient and effective online, blended or hybrid learning experience.

### **You have just started your sabbatical. What is it all about?**

Atsusi: "Next to relaxing and rejuvenating, my main focus is to learn as much as I can about healthcare and how different countries prepare health care professionals throughout Europe and Eurasia. The focus of my research these days is on how to improve health profession's education. About 10 years ago I was asked to participate in a grant to design a virtual patient simulation in the US. They had already built a beautiful simulation, but the education part needed some work. After successfully completing the project, I was invited to join the faculty, in the college of medicine. I did so half time, and that really refocused my research. I really want to dedicate the rest of my career to improving health profession's education, particularly in resource scarce countries, so I'm taking this opportunity to learn as much as I can throughout Europe and Eurasia this year, and then add that to what I've learnt in the US. As I travel I'm asking anyone about their health care system. At each major stop in Europe and Eurasia I already have something scheduled: in Germany I stop at a company that develops medical platforms for healthcare profession's education, in The Netherlands I visit a university, in Belgium I present at the L&D Talks ... Then hopefully I will travel back to Africa, where I grew up, and other resource scarce countries, to see what I can do."

### **You are an expert in instructional design. What does this mean for you exactly?**

Atsusi: "People in the field of instructional design, like myself, are supposed to be experts in how and why people learn, how to design training and educational systems, and how to work with content experts to take content, and design an effective, efficient and engaging learning experience. University faculty and trainers are typically experts in the content, but not necessarily in teaching & learning. Subject matter expertise is essential. You need the knowledge to train & educate people about a topic. But you also need to know pedagogy, have experience with emerging technologies, and experience in designing training & educational systems. That is what instructional design specialises in."

**First there was training and development, then learning and development, then instructional design, learning experience design, learning design ... Is there a need for these different labels? Or are they just different words for the same thing?**

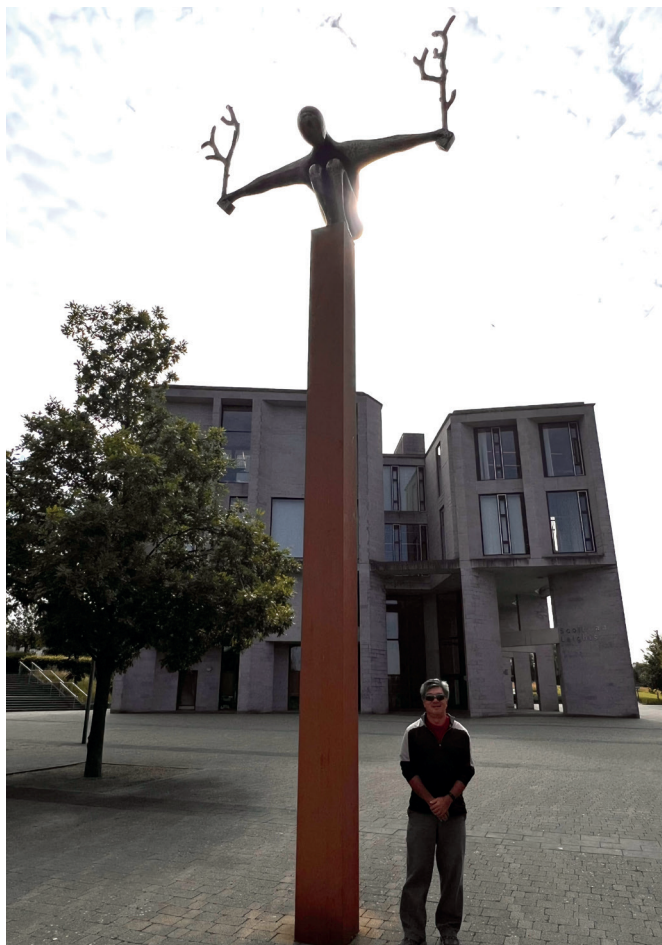
Atsusi: "My dad always says: 'Oh, you social behaviour scientists, all you do is play with words.' And many times I agree. We try to articulate

how we differ from what other people are doing. That's why we invent different titles. Learning engineer is a very popular one right now, and that includes things like AI and machine learning. You have to define your terms as you articulate what you're doing, just to make sure everyone's clear about what you're doing. But in general what we do is all about teaching and learning and facilitating human performance."

**From research conducted by Stimulearning we learn that L&D professionals in Holland and Belgium think that blended learning will be the most popular way of learning in the future. What would be your definition of blended learning? And what is the difference with hybrid learning?**

Atsusi: "Honestly, I think ubiquitous learning is the future: we learn anytime, anywhere, in any form, without this distinction between synchronous, asynchronous, online, face to face. You're just learning in a way that suits you or the group the best. I agree that blended learning has lots of advantages. Again, in my opinion, there are fundamental aspects of designing educational materials and learning experiences, no matter what technology you're using. In blended learning some of the experiences are synchronous and some of them asynchronous, facilitated in different technologies. The synchronous portion can be





done face to face or in a video conference, asynchronous is typically via internet somehow, either the worldwide web, e-mail or discussion boards ... To me blended means a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning. I don't make a distinction between blended and hybrid learning."

**Do you have an explanation why we think this is the way of learning for the future?**

Atsusi: "In blended learning you have the opportunity to continue learning - if designed properly - without having the requirement to travel. It's convenient. And the convenience of not having to travel outweighs so many things. I've been doing blended learning for over thirty years. At first it was partially face to face in a traditional classroom, and the rest was asynchronous through e-learning. At that time, at graduate school, I had about 50% attendance in the face-to-face classes, which is kind of high. During the pandemic we started using Zoom for the synchronous portion. And now the attendance is 90% or higher, because students don't have to travel to campus. The key, in my opinion, is not if it's online or offline, synchronous or asynchronous. The key is interactivity: what is the nature of interactions, how often do you interact? That interaction corresponds to the time on task: you're thinking about the subject, you're learning ... And the wonderful thing about the internet is that before you could only interact with the people in the classroom, but now you can take a trip around all the world."

**Do you think classroom trainings will be back?**

Atsusi: "I love classroom interactions. They will not disappear, but may occur less frequently and the nature of the interaction in there must

change. We have to get away from lecturing about basics. Many now call it flipped learning: traditionally we learnt the content during the training, and then did homework to apply the content. We have to flip that around: we learn the content online first, and then when we meet up for a class room training we apply the content with the guidance of the instructor. I think we can do a lot of understanding of key concepts and things that don't change asynchronously out of the classroom, and keep the rest - higher order thinking, problem solving, issues where there's not necessarily one right answer - for the synchronous interactions. In my opinion there's no going back to full classroom trainings."

**Why do trainers who are exceptional at teaching in a traditional classroom setting have so much trouble facilitating online or hybrid learning? What makes it so difficult?**

Atsusi: "A really good teacher in a classroom will facilitate many interactions intuitively, based on their experience or their intuition. All those interactions have to be carefully planned in an asynchronous environment where you don't have the body language, the freedom of communicating verbally ... That's the most difficult part: how do you plan and integrate those into an online or asynchronous learning experience? The fundamental problem, in my experience, is they don't know how to plan, sequence and facilitate these essential interactions."

**Do you have any tips for our readers on how to get better at this?**

Atsusi: "It usually is an evolutionary process. Thinking that someone will go online and be exceptional within three or six months is not feasible, unless they are given really high quality materials, which us industrial designers are supposed to design. In most cases first you have to learn how to use the technology, and then you have to think about how to change the traditional practices to meet the different requirements and practices of the online environment. That's why it takes quite a bit of time to learn how to teach online or in a blended environment, where the key question is what you teach synchronously and what asynchronously. I'm a strong proponent of evidence based education, where decisions are based on research. There's hundreds of years of research that say that certain interactions are essential, and over time lots of different instructional strategies have been published. What they all do is list the different interactions that should occur during a learning experience. I use those to help educators design the interactions and then determine what should be done synchronously and asynchronously. So my advice would be to use instructional strategies and learning principles, to work with people who have online and hybrid experience, and to base it on evidence. I don't focus on the technology as much. We have to understand it, but people will enjoy a well-designed paper and pen based instruction better than a poorly designed really immersive simulation."

**Actually, how important is the technology in all of this?**

Atsusi: "There's research that says that the degree in variance in people's reactions and motivations and learning is much greater in terms of design, rather than technology. The different technologies just give you opportunity for different types of interactions. You have to understand which technology allows you what type of interactions. Is it realtime or asynchronously, one to one or one to many or better for a small group, is it better for speaking and listening, or for reading and writing? Another thing we have to understand is that in a class room most learning occurs in speaking and listening, but in asynchronous learning most learning occurs in reading and writing, or listening to video. That changes the learning experience significantly. It takes much more time to read and write than it does to speak and listen. Therefore, it takes a

lot more time to facilitate asynchronous learning through reading and writing than synchronous learning through speaking and listening. You have to understand this, in order to design an efficient learning experience. I do understand managers have to prove the method of their choice is effective in order to invest resources, but to me the question is not where you should go for blended or hybrid of class room training. The more appropriate question is: how do I design the learning experience to be more effective, efficient and engaging? Not what technology to use to deliver."

**Our own research points out that 'engagement' is not one of the top 10 reasons for companies to invest in L&D technology. However, providers focus on it a lot. Why is that?**

Atsusi: "To me, the three fundamental keys to quality are effectiveness, efficiency and engagement. If people are not engaged, they are not learning. I think providers focus on it because they understand how important it is. However, the tool isn't what makes the experience engaging. It is the design of what the tool uses."

**The same study shows that in Belgium and Holland 31% of the companies don't measure any key performance indicators about learning & development. Of those that do, 13% doesn't do anything with the results. What do you think about this, as a believer in evidence based learning?**

Atsusi: "I think they may be wasting money. To me performance is why we train and educate. We're trying to facilitate people's ability to perform and to make appropriate decisions. If you're not collecting data on whether your learning is facilitating performance, how do you know if it is effective? I use Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation to determine effectiveness, and have added a fifth level. Next to reactions, learning, performance and impact I have added level zero, which is their use and engagement in the training."

**To sum up, if someone were to start creating a hybrid or blended learning experience, what would be the key steps to take for them, according to you?**

Atsusi: "The first thing is to have a very good understanding of why you are doing the training & educational experience. What do you want your learners to be able to do after the experience? They call it backwards or systematic design. From there you define what skills and knowledge the learners need to have in order to perform. Then I recommend a whole series of analyses: a learner analysis which teaches you what your learners know and don't know, what their preferences are and their access. Then you have to understand the context, the equipment and facilities they have. Next is the performance context: where are the learners supposed to perform after the training? In my personal opinion, the analysis part at the beginning and the evaluation part afterwards is what companies don't do, and where most improvement can be achieved." ■



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