**Why E-learning is Killing Education – Aaron Barth**

When I started teaching as a university professor, I did what we all do when we start out as educators. I relied on my intuitions about what good education looks like. And I let everyone in our little secret, my intuitions were really really bad. They were based on my experience in the lecturer model of education. That’s where we talk at people for really long period of time, gives them some textbooks to read and give a test, that’s what I do. I talked at people, kind of like right now. That was my original sin but i didn’t stop there.

Years later when I was working as an education consultant, I was asked to design some e-learning and I hadn’t done that before. You’ll never guess how I went about it. By injecting all the same terrible intuitions into it and it looks something like this. Virtual instructor in front of virtual white board delivering virtual bullet points. I’m pretty sure when we thought of using virtual reality and education. This isn’t what we had in mind. Unfortunately, this is what e-learning looks like today and now one’s learning anything from it. Think about how absurd that is. So how do we get here. We’ll talked about intuition, but let’s actually go a little bit deeper.

Our early insting around education are actually based on storytelling, we know this from archeological data. People telling other people stories, people teaching other people using human stories. It’s how we learn and it’s how we communicate it. Fast-forward 40.000 years, we now have beautiful, scalable mobile enable e-learning that we can use to teach people opposite ends of the world, the same thing at the same time. But somewhere between the caves and the clicking we got so focus to building this technology that we forgot about the one and only thing that matters in education.

The people, e-learning can be used to teach everyone, everywhere, good hygiene practices to stop the spread of diseases. E-learning can be used to teach everyone, everywhere, sustainable living practices to combat the climate crisis. These are the global problem, they require the global solutions, in e-learning should be making a contribution for them but it isn’t. It isn’t because we’ve forgotten about the people, we’ve forgotten about the way people actually learn. If there’s one thing that everyone in this room can do to start refocusing your efforts on people and to start doing e-learning that works, it’s this. Start telling stories again. Not because it’s what we used to do but because the science says it actually works.

We know that scenario and story based learning can accelerate our time to expertise on a given task. It does that because stories stimulate the way we learn through experience. We know that scenario and story based learning it’s more engaging than click than quiz learn. The reason why is that stories create empathy. Empathy in turn creates personal meaning and it’s personal meaning not clicking the drives engagement. Finally, we know that stories and scenario based learning, it’s the best way to teach complex skills, problem solving, collaboration, and creativity. Precisely the skills that work forces of today and tomorrow need to solve our biggest problem. Let me show all this works.

Stevan and his 12 years old grandaughter Rose are going to the bank to open up for the first bank account. She just made a travelling basketball team, and he wants to be able to send her money while she’s on the road. They’re super excited, they booked a meeting way in advance and it’s a big moment for their family. When they get to the bank and start filling out the paperwork, things start to go sideways. Bank employees immediately suspicious of them both. She think there’s a discrepancy in their bank account. But more importantly, she thinks that the identification that they provided is fraudulent. Grabs the ID, abruptly leaves the room and escalates it to her superiors. Shortly after that, the cops roll in. They handcuff Stevan, they handcuff 12 year-old robes, bring them out to the police cruiser and arrest them. So now you might be thinking I mean maybe this is just a big understanding or maybe the ID actually is fraudulent. But let’s add some colors to the story, the truth is that Stevan and Rose are indigenous Canadians and the ID that the bank employee thinks is fraudulent is actually their official government-issued status card.

This is a true story, happened a few month ago in Vancouver. Now for argument’s sake let’s imagine that some time prior to the incident, the bank employee passed with the flying colors, they’re elearning module on unconscious bias. They listen to the virtual instructor in front of the virtual whiteboard to deliver virtual bullet-points. They crushed the drag-and-top activities and after 12 tries they got perfect on the quiz. Do any of us think that this kind of elearning experience would actually prepared the bank employee to deal with the situation properly? We shouldn’t.

We know that twenty minutes after traditional classroom style experience, you’ve already forgotten sixty percent of the content. Now I want you do compare that to how you feel after having heard Stevan and Rose’s story. I guarantee that everyone in this room will remember twelve year-old robes handcuff and you’ll remember it in a way that will actually change your behavior.

So what if the e-learning experience was simply a simulation of this story? What if this story and others liked from the core of the e-learning that bank employee had? Well, if we did that way, we’d be simulating a real-world experience and therefore accelarating expertise. We’d be creating empathy for the lived experience of intersectionality and therefore deeping engagement. And we’d be exposing them to the nuances of unconscious bias and therefore improving the collaboration skills.

When we compare this story based approach to a cliquey module, it’s no contest. Which one is more likely to change our behavior? It’s the one based on the human story. We need to start telling this human story again. It’s not gonna be easy. It means you can keep cuting and pasting content into an e-learning module. It means giving up the avatars, giving up the drag-and-drops, giving up the quizzes but it’ll be worth it. It’ll be worth it because if we can get back to telling this human stories again, we can get back to why we all got into education in the first place. We can get back to empowering people, let’s start telling stories again. Thank you.