

Notes for Presentation

Expert Panel on Technology- enabled Learning

Innovation and Productivity Roundtable

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Leveraging Innovation in Technology-enabled Learning

Mr. Minister, I will, as a typical Northerner, start by praising you. Then, I will boast about some of the significant accomplishments of the colleges and universities in our region. I will focus most of my remarks this morning on bluntly outlining 10 specific ways our sector can leverage innovation in technology-enabled learning to facilitate improvement in productivity and quality for the benefit of students. I will close with two specific asks.

While it is a bit of a mouthful, the term “technology-enabled learning”, which you introduced in the current sector-wide conversation, is strategic in that it has facilitated taking a much wider view of the range of applications of technology in post-secondary education rather than strictly online learning. A good example of that is the increasing focus on blended and hybrid learning.

You have shown leadership in what I call the three “Ps”:

- “Positioning” of online learning or technology-enabled learning

Your Discussion Paper, and previous pronouncements about technology-enabled learning, has clearly re-positioned this important concept from the fringe, where it has been for decades as the continuing education departments, to core academic programs.

- Linking technology-enabled learning or online learning to “productivity”

You have invited all of us in the sector to fully consider how we can use innovation to significantly increase both productivity and quality for the benefit of students.

- Pointing out the great “potential”

Your introductory remarks this morning are another example of you encouraging, prodding, even castigating all of us, to be ambitious in thinking about our tremendous potential as institutions, organizations, and as a sector.

Now let me boast about a set of three outstanding accomplishments by Northern Ontario as one of Ontario’s “Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge” in terms of its demonstrated leadership in engagement in online learning.

According to the 2011 Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Fact Sheet (Summary of Ontario eLearning Surveys of Publicly Assisted PSE Institutions):

- Online programs from Northern Ontario colleges and universities represent 21% of all programs at these colleges and universities: 1st place in Ontario on a percentage basis.
- Online courses from Northern Ontario colleges and universities represent 27% of all courses at these colleges and universities: 1st place in Ontario on a percentage basis.
- Online registrations from Northern Ontario colleges and universities represent 17% of all registrations at these colleges and universities: 1st place in Ontario on a percentage basis.

A copy of the Fact Sheet is attached for reference.

All colleges and universities across the province see online learning as an opportunity to provide flexible access to learning opportunities for students and the institutions, in this part of the province, lead their colleagues in these three key areas. Some are further advanced in turning strategy into action than others.

We, in the North, are particularly proud of the fact that our colleges and universities are leading the way, as a percentage of registrations and innovative practices, in terms of programs and courses. Of course, this is to be expected because we have to be innovators in order to reach our students in this more rural and remote part, which constitutes about 90% of the landmass of Ontario.

Ten Strategies to Leverage/Use Innovation in Technology-enabled Learning to Facilitate Improvement in Productivity and Quality for the Benefit of Students

1. Students

We need to literally conspire with students as partners, not as customers, in the work of re-inventing their future.

We will be surprised about how they tackle this opportunity. Students know what they need and what technology is capable of – let's treat them as partners, not just as "customers".

Of the 500,000 + items in the Apple "App" store, around 6% were developed by students in school, college or university. Mark Zuckerberg made his first \$1 million while at university. Michael Dell created Dell Computers from his university dorm room. This is why we should encourage, enable and engage students in the work of transformation.

Students are not “customers” – they are partners in this learning enterprise. Let’s engage them – we will be surprised.

2. Share

Almost all innovation takes the form of adopting and adapting practices and approaches already in use elsewhere. Enable this innovation. Catalogue success in Ontario and from other jurisdictions around the world and share these ideas across the system.

As part of its Faculty and Instructor Portal, Contact North | Contact Nord’s Pockets of Innovation Series (www.contactnorth.ca/pockets) includes 50 examples of the innovative work taking place in colleges and universities across Ontario in the area of technology applications, course development, student support services, marking, exams, and many other aspects of online and mobile learning. This series is a good example of cataloguing stories of how Ontario faculty and instructors are exploring how emerging technologies and online tools can improve the learning experience for students. In this growing series, Contact North | Contact Nord features projects that have three specific characteristics, including the specific requirement to share:

- They represent a new approach
- They support students
- The developers are prepared to share what they’ve learned and the challenges they’ve encountered with other public universities and colleges in Ontario

3. Core Business

Get Ontario colleges and universities to innovate with technology at the core as part of their strategic plans and not on the edge as they currently do. We need to create incentives for change. In addition to the obvious incentives (more registrations and completions, more student engagement and sustainability), offer fiscal incentives for innovation. For example, transitional funds, one-time allocations of capital for technology acquisition, and access to expertise. This would be good for students and faculty in that it would provide support for the work of innovation. Encourage the development of performance metrics for each institution which will show how their strategic outcomes for online learning and blended learning will be measured.

4. Scale

Scale up to avoid the quicksand of technology resulting in adding costs. Work on adopting/adapting strategies across all institutions for the benefit of students. Create a challenge fund, ask for bids and evaluate success. Include students in the evaluation process. See faculty/instructors working together with students as the engines of innovation, supported by administration.

5. Time

We need to think about changing how we do things and specifically how we use time. Moving from the Carnegie unit – developed in the 19th century to standardize the collegiate experience and then developed as a basis for provincial funding – to outcome-based funding is one action that would transform educational outcomes. Where this transition has taken place, significant changes have occurred through moving to “on demand” learning (continuous admission points rather than 2 or 3) and increasing the speed at which students can complete credits (students write the exam when they are ready). While this may not suit all students, having this option could provide real opportunities for expanding access, improving performance and productivity without increasing costs.

6. Pedagogy

Technology can only contribute to productivity if it is used as part of a strategy to change the process of teaching and learning and the model of education in which it is placed. Without changing pedagogy - and this really means changing teaching methods - technology will increase costs and may not produce the desired gains.

I note that the term “pedagogy” is in fact missing from the Discussion Paper and it needs to be one of the central elements of the report from this consultation process and the final proposals.

7. Assessment

Re-thinking assessment and re-thinking the assessment processes now used could be the most transformative thing we do in the system. Technology could provide the opportunity for a provincial assessment bank and credit processing which would support students and faculty in “just-in-time” assessment (assessment undertaken at the call of the student). Learn from what seem to be off the wall developments such as MOOCs and how assessment takes place.

8. Space

Blended learning (a.k.a. hybrid learning) can change the use of space, but so too can the more widespread, but focused, use of online learning. Imagine a situation in which 100% of all first and second year courses at colleges and universities are available in one of three modes: (a) entirely classroom-based through colleges and universities; (b) partly classroom and partly online – blended learning; and (c) entirely online and on demand – start anytime and call the assessment when the student is ready. Evidence shows that there is a market for all three forms of delivery, but that the fastest growing form would be online learning. This would free up capacity, improve productivity, but also ensure the ability of the student to match delivery with their own learning style. Let’s make blended learning a top priority.

9. Competitors

Understand the key value proposition of competitors such as Athabasca University and Open Universities Australia and out-compete them.

Athabasca University is literally a “machine” in terms of:

- Effective credit transfer
- Prior learning assessment
- Flexible start dates and open admission
- Innovative programs
- Focused marketing

Open Universities Australia is unique in the world in terms of:

- Partnership of 7 public universities as shareholders of a for-profit corporation
- 21 providers of courses and programs
- 200,000 registrations this past year
- \$200 million in annual revenue
- Dividend of \$11.2 million paid to its university shareholders in 2011

Let’s adapt the modus operandi of the late Steve Jobs and study our competitors and their offerings and then use this knowledge to leapfrog ahead of them. We, in Ontario, can do the same, and in fact, can do more and better.

10. High Tech Sector

Currently, there is minimal collaboration with Ontario high tech companies to develop/test new learning technology solutions/services (i.e., games, simulations, virtual learning environments). We need get collaborate now with our high tech sector, and in particular, our leading firms such as Desire2Learn and Research in Motion.

Let’s stop playing with the wrapping paper of the technology gift (which is what we have been doing so far in a kind of self-tease), open the box and really get into it.

Innovation, by its nature, is an experiment with unknown outcomes! Let’s embrace it!

Two Specific “Asks”

To conclude my presentation, I have two specific asks:

- 1) Address the two critical issues of credit transfer and access through transformative policies to effectively and efficiently resolve both issues.
- 2) Data – Data – Data. I praised the Ministry for its leadership in undertaking the province-wide survey of e-learning activity and publishing the results in 2011. There is a need for the Ministry, in collaboration with the post-secondary sector, to replicate this survey and do so on a regular basis (i.e., every two years) so that the sector can establish a baseline and monitor progress which is key to assess improvement in productivity.

These two critical policy shifts, which have the potential to make a significant impact on students, can be enabled through the use of technology.