

Transformational Innovation: This Is No Time for Tinkering

All K-12 education systems in the developed world are facing the same challenge: how to develop and sustain an education system that is in keeping with the expectations and demands of the 21st century. Canada is no exception. Achieving this goal will be no small feat, and it is being made more difficult during a time of global economic stagnation.

It has become clear to all Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members that we need to instill a different skill set in our students than we have done in the past if they are to succeed in a global economy and a rapidly changing world.

As is pointed out in the foreword to the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation's publication, *Innovating to Learn, Learning to Innovate*, creativity and innovation are key 21st century skills. Canadian Ministers of Education echo the same sentiment. For Canada to succeed in the future, we are going to have to equip our students with the skills, attitudes and behaviours they will need for success in a knowledge-driven economy.



As educators, we have known this for some time. As a result, Canadian education systems are being both innovative and creative right now. As with similar initiatives in other Canadian jurisdictions, the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS I) is designed to improve student learning and performance by fostering initiatives that reflect the unique needs and circumstances within school jurisdictions. These types of initiatives have produced real and encouraging results. However, for the most part, educators have approached innovation as a way of improving and sustaining the systems that are in place rather than using it as a method for transforming those systems. In essence, we have been tinkering with a system that was developed in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to meet the demands and needs of a different time.

Our approach to technology is a case in point. We have not fully used technology to transform how our teachers teach and our students learn. We have used the Internet, videoconferencing, intelligent white boards and computers to facilitate the delivery of methods of learning and teaching that were developed in the previous century for students who are very different than those we have now. We must look a how to use technology to transform rather than sustain our education systems if we are going to truly make the leap forward required of education in the 21st century.

The desire to equip our students and, therefore, our educational systems with the ability to be innovative, creative, and adaptive has pushed the need for effective educational leadership to the forefront. Organizations do not change themselves. An organization at rest remains at rest unless acted upon by its leadership. Now more than ever, education needs strong, effective leadership. To be truly effective, one of the major attributes of that leadership will be the ability to explain, initiate and manage transformational change.

Initiating transformational change is one thing, managing it effectively is quite another. Transformational change requires effective leadership. Unexplained and unmanaged change creates anxiety, confusion, and pushback. The need for change must be clearly understood by those who will be affected by it. Desired change must also be seen as realistic, measurable, and reflective of employee input that has resulted from consultative communication with the organization's leadership.

No matter how desirable the change or how good the approach to implementing it, change does not occur without buy-in on the part of those who are required to bring changes to fruition and to work within the changed environment. Effective change management creates a culture of commitment, collaboration, and achievement.

To achieve our educational goals, leaders in education must model the very values and behaviours they want their education systems to instill in their students: creativity, problem solving, analysis and collaboration. They must also show they are both willing and able to remove any systemic roadblocks to the desired change. Transformational change in education will follow from courageous leadership and effective change management strategies that show a tolerance for risk and a bias for action.

Transformational innovation fuelled by creative thinking must be our goal as educators. Rather than looking at where we are, we must focus on where we want to be. We need to build a model of education for the 21st century and then look at what elements of our current system will help us get there and what remains to be developed. Leadership is the essential element for achieving this objective. |

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