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Drawn by Disa Kauk from ThinkLink Graphics, live during my OPSOA presentation on April 18, 2017

Making Education the Foundation for our Innovation Economy

Published on May 7, 2017 | Featured in: Big Ideas & Innovation, Economy, Education

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Over the past few weeks I have had the good fortune to spend a lot of time with teachers and administrators of schools and school boards around the province (including my recent keynote to OPSOA). I've been passionate about the critical role educators play in helping us shape our Innovation Economy and preparing our future workforce for a digital world.

The business leaders that I engage with daily all recognize that their organizations will be disrupted. Consequently, they appreciate that they will need to transform themselves over the next three to five years in order to stay productive, competitive, and relevant. During this transformation we will see yesterday's jobs become obsolete, and new jobs be required for tomorrow's reality. Already we're seeing that six out of ten most popular jobs today did not exist ten years ago. With great certainty, we can say that industry's expectations and the jobs of tomorrow will look even more different than today.

The kids in elementary or high school today will end up entering a workforce and economy that we don't know what it exactly looks like. Tomorrow's economy is being transformed and disrupted by current-day technologies such as mobile, video, internet of things, big data, analytics, and cloud/edge computing. Furthermore, drones, robots, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and autonomous cars (just to name a few) are technological advances that will further re-define our future.

Our new reality poses some serious challenges to today's educators.

First, "what" we teach needs to be updated and upgraded to reflect the rapid changing needs from tomorrows industries. Coding skills become equally relevant to learning math, history, and language (both English and French in Canada). Not every child will become a programmer, but every child will need to understand how future roles will evolve and new jobs will be created. This is not a higher education or k-12 challenge alone. This transformation relates to the whole education eco-system…preparing our students for a new reality - from kindergarten through college and universities, including access to continuous learning after we enter the workforce. "Learning" in today's Information Age and digital economy will never stop.

Second, "education" is an industry itself that will increasingly be disrupted in the Digital Age. Like every other sector, the education industry needs to transform itself and embrace digital capabilities to enable, differentiate and (re)define itself.

In k-12 we see some clear opportunities on how to renew, rethink, and re-imagine the future of education:

Anytime and Anywhere

Learning does not only happen anymore in the classroom in front of a teacher. With mobile and video technologies, every child can learn whenever and wherever. The classroom dynamic is about to change. There will be more time for inclusive and personalized learning and teaching. For example: meet Peyton Walton. Payton is 10 years old and had to undergo cancer treatment while being away from school. To help her through this tough time, what she really needed was the normalcy of her classroom and being with her friends: https://youtu.be/Bf1QUYXUZrY

Global Classrooms

The experiences in the classroom can be enriched with video technologies and emerging capabilities such as virtual and augmented reality. Children can visit countries, cultures, museums, peoples, etc. in ways they've never experienced before. Immersive experiences will (re)engage students in new manners. There will be more time for richer and experiential learning and teaching. For example: Connected Connected is connecting over 100 indigenous classrooms across Canada with each other, and schools and institutions across the country. Learning extends beyond the walls of (remote) classrooms. Children across the country are learning from one another and they each get to experience global curriculum as if it happens right in front of them: https://youtu.be/CSjslZ4hr_4

Smart Schools

Technology allows school boards to redirect cost of schools and operations to learning

and teaching (where the spending belongs). The Internet of Things connects all the building and learning systems in schools and classrooms. Big data analytics as well as centralized control and operations will streamline the performance of the physical assets. Spaces become more dynamics and responsive to the changing needs of the educator and student, while being cheaper to operate.

The Future of Schools and Education is Digital. Are you ready?

It is time for education administrators to see the disruption of economies and industries (their own included). Our children are a lot more ready for the digital world than we give them credit for. The question we should ask ourselves: are we providing the appropriate skills, learning experiences, and teaching environments that will truly prepare them for tomorrow's future? Are we giving our teachers the tools and resources so they can renew, rethink, and re-imagine the future of education?

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