

Deep Learning in a Digital World

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MICHAEL: Our interest in deep learning has from the beginning and all of our work actually is that we look at whole systems. And so the minimal pieces of this are make sure you zero in on pedagogy, the best possible learning that encompasses everybody and attracts everyone. Make sure that, that pedagogical learning is seen as a causal pathway to measurable outcomes, but newer outcomes including the six Cs.

So we have pedagogy, we have the linkage to the measurable outcomes, and then the third part is what surrounds it at the school and the provincial or country level? We'll just call it the bigger infrastructure. It's part of our framework. So if you ask what has to happen with that bigger picture my general frame of it is--and this is a bit abstract and I'm going to fill it in a bit--is that the centre, let's say the government frames the direction. So right now in Ontario not only is literacy, and not only is it math, although it is math, it's also wellbeing, and equity, and the global competencies. So it frames the direction.

The middle, which are the 71 districts--stick with Ontario--get stronger. So the middle frames, the middle strengthens, and then the bottom liberates, the freedom of what I'm talking about, the deep learning. And it's much more dynamic than I've just described. Sometimes the bottom is pushing upwards, sometimes the middle is partnering with the centre and nobody is--everybody's semi-autonomous. Nobody is able to carry the day and should not carry the day on those three levels but if you think of the three levels dynamically going up and down, and sideways that's the image I have of it.

The middle as I've called it, the school districts shouldn't wait for the government to get the policy right. They should be pushing ahead, and getting this, and doing this work, and this is what's happening in Ontario. So in some ways they're ahead of the government policy.

In the meantime the government should be allocating enough resources. When I say frame it, they're also resourcing it. And then they should start--I got to put it this way--catch up is the best way. Catch up to the best examples in the field of what this looks like and say well, we better start thinking more in our own global competency subgroups, our own learning secretary to support a pedagogy and we have also a very good hidden I'm going to say, almost learning mechanism in Ontario is that the government in its Learning Secretariat and other parts of the government, we second a lot of the best principals and consultants and teacher leaders into the government for three year secondments. So there's a steady traffic going upward into the government

of those that are leading already in their field, and then after their three years they're going back so we constantly meet people who say "oh yeah, I just came from being two or three years in the government, now I'm in this position in this district." Or I go to the government and I meet somebody that'd say "yeah, I just came from one school and that." So this is a hidden I'm gonna call it, resource way of making sure the ideas are represented at all three levels that I've described. So what the government has to do I think is start to project forward and wanting to encourage innovation. Not innovation in the sense of anything goes, but some people call it a culture of yes.

The culture of yes is if people come to us with good ideas or seemingly good ideas they've got the energy and it sounds good we're willing to encourage it. and then we do, the image I have is it's more letting go and focusing direction which is the framing, letting go, which is allowing things to happen, and the reining in what are we learning? So this makes it difficult for governments that are used to saying we have priorities, we'll implement them, we'll measure them, we'll make correction. Much more dynamic, but I think the innovative role here is not just any innovation you want. It's deep learning innovations. It's innovations that let's call it focused, or disciplined innovation where that you do have the leeway to do it but in response for the leeway and the resources you have a responsibility to work with others and to represent back to us what are you learning so we can reinforce it, or spread it, or learn from it or not continue it if it's not working. So I like the innovative dynamic. It's innovation and improvement all brought into one and governments have to be that agile now I think t do that, and that's what I have been advisor to the Premier and the Minister along with three other people and that's our discussion.

We had this week a meeting with the minister and all the advisors and the senior people said this is the nature of the work now and you need to be front and centre in this in terms of engagement. And there's responsiveness to do this and a willingness to do this so that's what it's starting to look like. More permeability of boundaries, more leeway to do things, still commitment to rein in and focus what are we learning? Consolidate it and do more. It's a dynamic learning proposition.