

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) presents
Rethinking higher ed: Beyond {the buzzwords}
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Day One
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Breakfast Keynote | How technology is igniting educational transformation
John Baker, Desire2Learn

Technology is igniting educational transformation, which is why Desire2Learn is focusing on integrated learning platforms. John Baker wanted to be a doctor during his undergrad but his parents pushed him to take an engineering course, which sparked a passion for design. In that class, he ended up taking on a project where he reinvented the crutch. This made him wonder what other problems he could go out there and solve, and ended up targeting education. How could he help people reach their full potential?

We're transitioning from face-to-face to online and blended learning. Although classes have been traditionally structured around exams and quizzes, we're moving toward an outcomes-based model that focuses on adapting to what students need and one size does not fit all.

Baker praised a number of existing integrated learning platforms: Fanshawe's MOOC on sustainability, Ryerson's Ryecast that live streams ASL interpretation during convocation, and the note-sharing app Binder.

MOOC is a buzzword, but we need to rethink that model – and other existing models – to engage students in online learning in a meaningful way, according to Baker. We may need to scrap exams and try out alternative assessment tools. Two years after graduation, transcripts aren't always used, so how can we change them into something useful?

Learning and knowledge can be used as tools to support community development and will soon transform retail, commerce, banks and other industries. To do this, we must leverage learning to support a talent pipeline. In Singapore, workforce development is linked back to universities. Graduates in the workforce keep students on the pulse of the latest industry trends and enable students to thrive in knowledge economy.

The speed of change is picking up, and the workforce needs to keep up or risk being left behind. Companies that win will be those that invest in learning so employees are able to adapt to changes in the market. At the postsecondary level, this might mean treating the classroom like a meeting, where the instructor posts a PowerPoint online the night before, making class time more effective because it's spent discussing ideas.

Although there are challenges, today's rapidly changing climate of education presents a big opportunity because we have an impact on more students globally than ever before.