

UNPLUGD

Canadian Education Summit
AUGUST 5-7, 2011

Why “_____” Matters



The Preface

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WHAT IS UNPLUG'D?

“If a teacher thinks in the forest, does he/she make a sound?”

A diverse collection of Canadian educators with experience that spans primary, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary classrooms, answered that very question at ‘UnPlug’d: Canadian Education Summit’.

UnPlug’d delegates gathered amidst the concrete of downtown Toronto, before making their way to Northern Edge Algonquin, a retreat on the northwest corner of Algonquin Park. By the time the weekend was over, participants had traveled by plane, train, bus, kayak, canoe, and mountain bike, all in order to connect with transparent learners who embrace opportunities to think, learn, and teach.

By unplugging from their highly networked personal and professional lives, participating Canadian change agents:

- reflected on personal and professional learning while forging connections to the learning stories of other participants;
- shared stories of small scale innovation with colleagues who are similarly engaged in discovering what matters most in teaching and learning;
- transformed digital relationships through face-to-face encounters, strengthening the loose ties that bind us as networked Canadian educators;
- went deeper with ideas than might otherwise be possible, amidst the hush of a natural, purely Canadian setting;
- came to appreciate what it means to be a teacher and learner in Canada, both today, and for tomorrow.

“But did it make a sound?”

A multitude of conversations, stories, and ideas will resonate from the UnPlug’d experience. One artifact of the collective wisdom of the group is this document: “Why _____ Matters” which was first published on the heels of the summit.

To discover more about UnPlug’d and to meet the participants, visit www.unplugd.ca To tour the host site, visit www.algonquincanada.com To receive UnPlug’d updates, follow @unplugdca or the hashtag #unplugd11 To learn from the delegates, follow the group: http://twitter.com/#!/unplugdca/unplugd-2011
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A CANADIAN CONTEXT

Being Canadian can be tricky. We are relatively few people, who live in a very large country. People who don't live here think we're all about snow and the RCMP. But the truth is that Canada is an innovative, multicultural, urban nation. This summit was about the changing reality of education in our time.

Unplug'd was different from other conferences for a lot of reasons, and one of them was that it was a distinctly Canadian experience. Thirty seven educators gathered in Toronto, Canada's largest city, but we didn't stay there. Instead, we climbed on a train and travelled four hours north to an off the grid lodge in the Ontario forest. This was our opportunity to look deeply at learning in our nation. Discussions took place by the lake, in the lake and on the lake. We gathered around a campfire and around sunrises and sunsets.

This summit didn't take place because a corporation or government agency brought us together, but because of a dedicated group of volunteers who had the vision to see what was possible when things grow out of a grassroots movement. And in the end, when our work was finished, the entire set of artifacts produced; the photos, the essays, the doodles and the videos are not for sale anywhere. Instead, they are all being released under a Creative Commons license to encourage wide sharing.

Unplug'd included urban and rural. It included Anglophone and Francophone. It included East and West. And it was all Canadian. Canadian educators coming together from across our nation to talk about learning for our time. This book is our voice to the world and to ourselves.

Clarence Fisher



UnPlug'd Photo by Andrew Forgrave taken August 6th at 5:40 a.m. at Northern Edge Algonquin

WHY UNPLUGGING MATTERS



by [*George Siemens*](#)

Take a minute and think about the routines that define you and the activities you engage in each day. You get up in the morning. Have a cup of coffee? Go for a run? Take the dog for a walk? What about your commute? Same route every morning? Same bus? Once you're at work, sit in the same chair? Greet the same people?

If you're like most people, much of your day is on autopilot. I know mine is. My commute to work is so structured I can spend the entire time lost in thought or lost in a podcast. Sometimes I'm not able to clearly recall what happened en route.

Routines are great for producing consistent results and outcomes. Without some level of routine, society would not function. In fact, the automation of normal routines contributes to advancement of any field: once a basic routine has been automated, we can begin to focus on the next level of complexity. For example, if we don't spend several hours a day worrying about how to catch our dinner in the wilderness, we can devote our focus to other tasks. Behind that stop at the supermarket on the way home, rest thousands of automated routines.

Routines – the ones we personally engage in or the ones that define society – are the embodiment of values we've held and choices we've made in the past. Routines support and reinforce the system in which they function. Sometimes, however, it's important to break the normalizing influence of routines. Structure and routine produce consistent results. If we're not happy with the results we are getting from our schools, our governments or our society, we need to break structure so that we can encounter new ideas and develop new perspectives. This is about more than unplugging technologically. It's about unplugging from the structures that we render to an unconscious and non-reflective state. Sometimes that takes a new location, a new group of people to have conversations with and disconnecting from the technologies that normalize our activities. Times of change require new thinking. Unplugging enables us to recognize that newness.

WHY UNPLUGGING MATTERS -A STORY BY GEORGE SIEMENS



Video recorded by George Siemens in Edmonton on August 4, 2011

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