Innovation in Higher Education
... and Other Blasts from the Past

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Editor's Note

This was originally posted to Tannis Morgan's blog on May 24, 2017.
I had the pleasure to be a keynote at CNIE 2017 in Banff last week, 14 years after first attending the very first iteration of this conference in the exact same location. This year’s theme was Exploring our past, present and future, which could not have been a more perfect theme to talk about a topic I’ve become quite interested in over the past year. Last year I began looking into the past of concepts like open pedagogy/pédagogie ouverte and delving into this past has really helped me gain some perspective on how we are currently talking about open. Preparing for the CNIE keynote gave me a great opportunity to delve more deeply into the past of other concepts such as innovation, ed tech, and open in particular.

The point of this presentation was to take a journey to the past, the 1960s and 70s for the most part, and talk about current day open, ed tech, and innovation in relation to the past.
We started with the *Then or Now* game. I put up 4 slides of different quotes from 1960-present and you had to guess whether the quote was from the past or present. As expected, this wasn’t an easy one to guess, the point being that a lot of the past rhetoric on open, ed tech, or innovation sounds very familiar to those of us who’ve been in the field for a while. You can see the quotes in the slide deck, but the references for those slides follow:

1. The Erosion of Innovation in Higher Education, 1970. (A dissertation written by the future president of Buffalo State College, or was it really written by Gail, his wife?).

   *Gail Johnstone, the author's wife, not only typed all drafts, but made both literary and substantive contributions to virtually every page of this study.*

   *note: you need access to pro quest to access this one, full citation here: JOHNSTONE, DONALD BRUCE. University of Minnesota, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1969. 7001794.*

2. *The automated university: bots and drones amid the dreaming spires, 2017*


And my personal favourite:

The point of the Then or Now game is that there are many recognizable tropes in those quotes, and what I learned in looking at 1960-1980 is that for every gushing Chronicle or Ed Surge article you can find a 1960s or 70s equivalent. Of course, there is both great comfort and room for critique in that observation.

“The crisis facing higher education in our nation has been mentioned so often that I fear we may tend to consider it an old story. It is not.”

In 1963, where this quote is from, it turns out there actually was a crisis in higher education in the 60s and 70s. What we learn from reading about this time period is that the drivers for the crisis, perceived or real, are not dissimilar to today.
For example, there is a pressure of numbers- in an OECD report in 1968 *Change and innovation in higher education* pointed to the pressure of numbers (changing demographics) as a result of growth in population and demand for greater equality – for example, I was surprised to learn that in UK between 1961 and 1968 24 new universities were created.

Also noted is the driver of scientific and tech progress: “new disciplines must be introduced; boundaries between the old ones become artificial; the rapid obsolescence of existing technologies has to be taken into account”. Those same drivers appear in this Huffington post article from 2015.

I then continue with more echoes from the past including:

2. No shortage of buzzwords and technology solutionism: “technological revolution” is a term “used with great abandon and little definition”. From 1968 *Educational Technology: New Myths and Old Realities*.
3. And no shortage of skepticism – the newest trend becomes embraced or critiqued: “in spite of or because of its obscure meaning, individualized instruction is held up as a panacea for the ills of education”– 1968: *Educational Technology: New Myths and Old Realities*
4. And of course, the obligatory tech as distraction reference: “Kids who are used to having blaring transistor radios around hem every waking moment have trained themselves to ignore anything coming into their ears, and therefore hear very little of what comes out the the earphones they we are in the language lab” : 1968: *Educational Technology: New Myths and Old Realities*
One of the greatest higher education innovations was the Open University. I find it curious that during the MOOC mania, there was little discussion about how open universities were a real solution to a demographic/accessibility/education massification problem, AND they actually provided students with real credits in a meaningful education “currency”. The OU UK was established in 1968, and many other open universities followed. Here in Canada, as a result of the Quiet Revolution, there was the establishment of a new higher ed system called CEGEPs in Quebec in 1968, resulting in 46 new 2-3 year colleges that were accessible and largely free. The scale of higher ed expansion at this point in time is mind-boggling. In a period of 10 years, 28 other open universities were established around the world.

In 1979 John Daniel writes somewhat retrospectively on this phenomenon in *Opening Open Universities*: “They are designed to serve working adults, usually without any academic prerequisites for entry, and they involve the delivery of instruction at a distance. Best
known of these new institutions is the Open University of the UK, which has identified some 29 other universities around the world which implement the open university concept in various ways. For most of these universities, adult off campus students constitute the sole or primary clientele”.

Here in Canada, in 1972 a task force on the Télé-Université reported that the establishment of TELUQ should address these challenges.

- Lifelong learning
- Real accessibility for all.
- Social development.
- Needs of working population.
- Greater mobility of knowledge.
- Wide use of new media and techniques.
- Rethinking the learning situation.
- Taking account of people’s prior life experiences.
- Reduction of unit costs

What is striking is how incredibly ambitious this list is.

In comparing our current day solutions to changing demographics, population, tech change, accessibility, to those of the 60s and 70s, where there drivers were very similar, it is notable that in the 60s and 70s the open universities had very ambitious agendas. Today, it appears, we lean on MOOCs and OERs to address our higher ed problems, and we are certainly asked to buy into a rhetoric of disruption.

What is interesting, however, is that in the 60s, disruption meant actual student protests and disruption on college and university campuses around the world. Today, it means the creation of new tech products, that will somehow solve higher education problems. This is the innovation conversation of today that many of us in the ed tech field are familiar with. As this graphic from 2015 shows, the sample of the ‘ed tech players’ are for the most part LMS or MOOC platforms.
And we are breathlessly reminded that this is a growth industry.

Keep in mind there has always been an education market. In 1966-67 it was estimated to be worth 48 billion dollars in the US, second only to defense. Today the ed market, however defined, is second only to
heath care in the US.

The question is, how much of what we are doing is recreating the past. To this, we can look at Open Pedagogy as a possible example.

When I began looking into the origins of open pedagogy, I didn’t find many references in the English literature, but found a body of work in the French literature that dates from the early 70s, associated with Claude Paquette, a professor at UQAM.

Open pedagogy in its current day form has been argued to be the pedagogy that results when open education resources (as defined by the 5R permissions) are used. Along with this definition are the 5Rs as articulated by David Wiley.

Retain – the right to make, own, and control copies of the content

Reuse – the right to use the content in a wide range of ways

Revise – the right to adapt, adjust, modify, or alter the content itself

Remix – the right to combine the original or revised content with other material to create something new

Redistribute – the right to share copies of the original content, your revisions, or your remixes with others (e.g., give a copy of the content to a friend)

As a result, this is a content focussed definition, and Wiley has since reframed his definition of open pedagogy as OER enabled pedagogy.

What becomes interesting is when we contrast the current day open pedagogy, centred on the permissions surrounding content, with open pedagogy of the 1960s where learner emancipation, not the use of OERs, was the goal of open pedagogy. Claude Paquette outlines 3 sets of foundational values of open pedagogy, namely: autonomy and
interdependence; freedom and responsibility; democracy and participation. For me, this is a much more ambitious definition of open pedagogy, focussed less on the how and more on the actual goal.

So what happened? We can perhaps look to the 80s for some clues, although I spend less time in this era of the literature and there is more work to be done here.

The first hint I found is from Patricia Cross, speaking about community colleges in 1981: “the message seems to say that the old ideals of the 1960s that used to excite and inspire, albeit midst frequent controversy, are gone, and new ones have not yet emerged”. She describes the emergence of a plateau “between 2 periods of high energy and a sense of mission in the community colleges” and notes that the early ideals have receded. In this article, she compares ‘should be’ goals at a 10 year interval and notes particularly the decline in the should be goal of accessibility, a significant decline in esprit de corps…mutual trust and respect among faculty students and administrators.

We also can see the emergence of corporate-speak applied to higher education as exemplified in this quote from 1982:“institutions of higher education lag behind most other sectors of the economy in their capacity to improve productivity”. This article, which was published in Journal of Higher Education – is entitled The Impact of Organizational and Innovator Variables on Instructional innovation in Higher Education.

There are some interesting examples from the graveyard of dreams that also demand us to pause and ask how we came so close to getting it right.

Consider, for example, the case of the Earth Sciences department at St. Lawrence University. In 1977 Bill Romey (same author of the blobs of jello quote) writes: “An opportunity arose to implement a new program in a conventional academic department of geology and
geography at St. Lawrence University. Would it be possible to bring about extensive change from within a conventional department in an old-line, conventionally oriented liberal-arts school?"

The change Romey describes includes 10 or so characteristics of the new program that would have considerable appeal by current day standards. These include:

- Independent project work at all levels, for all students and faculty, would replace all standard courses.
- Students would evaluate their own work.
- Students would keep portfolios of their own work as an alternative means of showing what they had accomplished. There would be no more examinations of conventional types.
- Students and faculty would participate fully and equally in the governance of the department.
- The department was to run as an open organism with free access for everyone in the university, whether or not they were formally enrolled for credit.
- Each person would function both as a teacher and as a learner.
- The faculty accepted responsibility, in cooperation with the students, to create and maintain a rich and stimulating learning environment for the benefit of all.

Romey describes the evolution over a few years, and notes that conventional thinking is starting to creep back in but for the most part the department is operating as described above.

If you go to the department page today you will see there appears to be no essence of this spirit left and the now Geology department adopts a structure not unlike many other universities. In fact, the only hint of this former time can be found on the academics page, where some amount of program customization is referenced, but this comes across more as academic strategy-speak than real.

It’s important to underline that there were lots of these types of
idealistic experiments happening on campuses across North America (see the chapter on Recent Developments, p.10, for a good description of this) – St. Lawrence not the only one and it would take some work for somebody to dig in and explore how they look today. Also notable is that there were several threads of open across concepts such as individualized learning, open enrolment, and open classrooms, to name a few.

Fortunately, there are also some examples of things that have only gotten better with time – in 1970, MacManaway writes what can only be described as flipped learning 1970s style – provide students with the lectures scripts for private reading and use the classroom time for small group discussion and assignments.

What the past and present version of ourselves shared was a common desire for teaching, learning, and student success. And this is where I think current day higher education can innovate with openness. Of course, openness is often associated with Creative Commons licensing. But increasingly I’m less interested in potential of CC licensing and more in the question of Open as a means to what? I feel like our 60s and 70s counterparts were much more clear and explicit about this question.

In this section of the presentation I describe some examples where I think we can clearly answer the question, Open as a means to what? These include:

1. BCcampus as providing the higher education sector in BC as a means to collaborate.
2. The BC Open Ed Tech Collaborative
3. The beginnings of a WordPress Cooperative as a new model for doing things together
4. Some JIBC examples of open for the public good: eg. Fentanyl Safety, which was recently written up in the Atlantic
5. An international collaboration between JIBC and University of
Guadalajara where early discussions and contract language included a CC BY NC license.

6. JIBC’s work in developing an open textbook Zed Cred/Zee Degree in Law Enforcement Studies

7. Virtually Connecting

If I can note anything about this journey to the past, it’s that the 60s and 70s literature is not dull reading...many of the articles linked above are written with incredible candour and passion, and there are plenty of LOL moments.

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