The fourth annual ABEL summer institute was held at York University’s Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Building from August 23 – 25 2005. The institute included a pre-conference schedule (August 23) and core conference schedule (August 24-25).

The theme of this year’s institute was “Engaging the Learner”. The program focused on assisting teachers/faculty to understand the attributes of the new age learner thereby assisting them to develop curriculum that addresses critical literacies, and leverages broadband networks and information communications technologies (ICT) for teaching and learning.

The ABEL Summer Institute: Engaging the Learner objectives were to:
- Support and strengthen ABEL’s professional learning community
- Develop participants’ knowledge and skills in asynchronous discussion groups, synchronous discussions, videoconferencing, reflective learning practices and collaborative inquiry.
- Provide awareness of and access to resources and tools
- Energize and motivate the participants to develop a culture of collaborative learning
- Provide participants with opportunities to develop and plan collaborative curricular projects and lessons
- Create a climate for turning knowledge into action and an engagement in reflective practices, innovation and research.
- Energize, motivate and enable participants to develop strategies and a culture of learning that supports student achievement, professional growth and leadership development.

Engaging the Learner: The role of information communications technology
This year the summer institute executive committee decided to host the event at York University. Here we had access to a broadband network with a connection to ORION and CANet4 as well as many ancillary technologies. Additionally York’s support team, the electronic classrooms and student assistance made the venue an excellent choice for the conference. The ABEL team was grateful to have access to such a superb facility and support network.

The delegates were exposed to both broadband and narrowband technologies through numerous curricular and pedagogical approaches. The institute theme of “Engaging the Learner” was exemplary in that it demonstrated first-hand, the role of ICT for teaching and learning. The use of a variety of interactive and collaborative technologies to mediate the institute program demonstrated the ‘real-life’ scenarios of practitioners overcoming the challenges that might arise with ICT in the classroom. Interestingly enough in the institute feedback many delegates applauded and appreciated the opportunity to observe the “glitches” that occurred, and the successful results, as it gave them confidence to “try it themselves”. As well many of our corporate sponsors were encouraged to see their technologies being applied in a practical manner and they were able to share in meaningful educational dialogue with the delegates. Below is a list of the technologies that contributed to a successful conference.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>York Net</td>
<td>York University’s wireless network</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 wireless notebooks provided conference use</td>
<td>Blogs, survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>100 computer Mac / PC lab</td>
<td>Survey, tool orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video conferencing</td>
<td>h.323 and Vsee proprietary codec – internal and external – wireless and wired network</td>
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<tr>
<td>RF PRS Personal Response Systems (Clickers)</td>
<td>Remotely controlled by keynote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology Enhanced Classroom</td>
<td>Integrated DVD, computer, VHS, data projector, screen, touch panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital Cameras</td>
<td>Recording of events in still pictures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Site Live</td>
<td>Recorded all session in the lecture hall for later review of participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical staff</td>
<td>The conference hired 2 coop students to manage various aspects of the core conference in addition, technical staff was on standby to assist with equipment difficulties or last minute requirements</td>
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This conference demonstrated how a wide range of technologies could be effectively used for teaching and learning.

This year the ABEL summer institute program included a one-day pre-conference agenda. This was designed for new participants to the ABEL program and was developed to assist participants to develop core understandings about the ABEL program, and to ensure their optimal participation during the core conference. This year 99 delegates attended the pre-conference session. The pre-conference session included based on the feedback from last year’s delegates.

The evaluation of the pre-conference session indicated that:

- 100% of the delegates agreed that the session was relevant and useful with respect to their participation in ABEL and that it will assist them to plan and to develop curriculum that engages the learner.
- 93% agreed that the technology is useful in enhancing and enriching the learning experience.
- 93% of the delegates attending the pre-conference agreed that they gained new ideas and identified new pedagogical possibilities that use ICT to engage the learner.
Overall the pre-conference session was very successful and contributed to the summer institute objectives.

Delegate comments:
"I think the pre-conference is beneficial to newcomers. I think it prepares them and also refreshes my memory with respect to tools we can use in the classroom. Thanks."

“The conference has opened up some possibilities for me and my fellow teachers.”

“Good start. As someone who has been to the last conference, I think that it is a very good idea to separate the newbies from the trained people if only for one day.”

“For the introductory session, a greater emphasis should be on teaching us how to use the hardware.”

“Thank you very much for coordinating this ABEL summer institute. It is great to network, share and learn collaboratively with everyone here!!! P.S. Thank you for the rubber chicken. Does it also work on cars?”

“Excellent organization. Great guest speaker.”

The ABEL Summer Institute: Engaging the Learner Core Conference:
The core-conference was attended by 111 people, and included the new and the experienced ABEL teachers/faculty. This two-day institute presented a very full program agenda including lunch-time sponsor presentations. A variety of key-note speakers and experts presented the delegates with relevant and compelling information and knowledge about the attributes of the learner in the 21st century, the value of participating in professional learning communities, and the design and benefits of action research. Collaborative subject-group discussions assisted the delegates to plan curriculum and identify professional learning needs. As well, true to building and sustaining collaborative professional learning communities there were opportunities to socialize and “get to know each other” at the institute reception and dinner.

Feedback from delegates on the ABEL summer institute and the core-conference was very positive.
- 94% of the delegates agreed that the objectives of the summer institute were made clear
- 92% agreed that the summer institute’s content will be useful for their role in ABEL.
- 100% of the delegates agreed that the keynote by Tom Wujec developed their understanding of the value of ICT for teaching and learning.
- 91% agreed that the session “Engaging Students – Preparing students for a changing world” will help them plan curriculum using an inquiry approach and provide learning experiences that ensure critical literacies are addressed.
- 98% agreed that the summer institute developed their understanding of what it means to participate in a professional learning community.
- 89% of the delegates have a good understanding of what job-embedded learning ‘looks like’.

Overall, 84% of the delegates agreed that the summer institute has prepared them for their work in the ABEL program this upcoming school year, and 90% felt that their expectations with respect to learning about the ABEL program we met.
Delegate comments:
“I was surprised to discover that my expectations of video-conferencing were short-sighted and that there was an entire world of critical thinking that could engage the students in a more meaningful manner than I expected.”

“Enabled me to meet with colleagues from other school boards, showed me what can be done by more effective use of technology, and made me aware of what PD I can get from ABEL.”
“Great shot of inspiration – thanks!”

“Thank you for providing this most interesting and exciting opportunity. I think that all teachers should take advantage of the ABEL information available – perhaps make this a mandatory requirement for up-dating professional development…We need ABEL to become ubiquitous!”

“Wow!! The staff really worked hard and gave a lot of thought to the Institute. Thank you so much for your work planning, contacting sponsors and arranging hospitality.”

“As a whole the ABEL summer institute was a success. I found it very valuable and it will definitely play a major role in my future planning. Most of the speakers (esp Bonk, Bullock and Wujec) were fantastic. The demonstrations were will organized and mostly valuable. The organization team did an awesome job orchestrating the conference as a whole. I am grateful to have been a part of this year’s ABEL conference and I look forward to next year’s conference.”

“What a great time! Focused, useful, supportive – WOW! Thanks”

Summary
Many thanks to the ABEL summer institute sponsors whose generous contribution to the institute contributed to its success. The ABEL Summer Institute Sponsors included: York University, Polycom (Silver Sponsor), Microsoft (Bronze Sponsor), York Region DSB (Bronze Sponsor), Pearson Publishing (Bronze reception and dinner sponsor), ORION, Rogers, Adobe, and Apple (event sponsors). Corel contributed Painter IX software to the delegates. Thank you!

The ABEL summer institute’s success was due to the hard work of a dedicated planning team, the generous contributions of our sponsors and the enthusiastic and professional attitudes of our delegates. Congratulations and thanks! Enjoy an innovative and engaging school year 2005-2006.

Next year’s ABEL summer institute will be held August 2006, dates are to be determined. Visit www.abelearn.ca for information on the ABEL Summer Institute 2006.