

The Learning Portal

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One of the big buzzwords you will encounter on the Internet today is "PORTAL". The term does have a slight different meaning to various Internet communities as is evidenced by a quick survey of its usage. A large number of sites that claim they are offering a Portal have just given a new name to their Home Page, or main web page that has links to the remainder of pages on their site (or external sites). However, a true Portal is a web page that acts as a gate to available information. The true intent is to go beyond the traditional home page by providing dynamic data, (different users may be presented with a different layout and content), and a common interface to a various data types and formats from multiple sources.

A user may log into their company Portal from their office or remote location (on the road or at home) and be presented with a screen that displays; their company e-mail; private internet based e-mail ([Hotmail](#), etc.); a calendar program; links to documents they are currently working on and sharing with other users; the company help database; access to a database at the parent company site; and perhaps a area for video conferencing. You can get a taste of what these portals look like by visiting [Lycos](#) or [Excite](#) and creating a profile. When you then log in with that profile, you can customize the content and look what is presented to you.

Many Colleges and Universities are working on developing their Portal pages. They hope to offer a page that will deliver everything the user could dream of that has to do with the institution. While the usual static information will be there (handbooks, calendars, directory information) the uses will also be presented with their personal data (grades, assignments, financial statements). Data from sources on and off campus will be presented in a user-friendly manner and in real time. While it will take some time and a lot of technology to get there, that is what many are planning and starting to build.

There are also a number of grand projects involving Portals underway that will greatly aid teachers. I recently attended a conference session where Alberta Learning announced that they are developing a site (a sample can be seen at: *dead link*) that is vast in its scope and is worthy of the term 'Portal'. It is their intention that teachers and students will be able to use this resource to access all of the available provincial resources through this one site. The province is working on making a wide range of computer based resources available to the parents, teachers and students of the province. They are creating a database of educational "objects" that can then be accessed by an Internet browser. Some of these objects are content developed by the local Universities. Other commercial content that the province has negotiated licenses for, such as materials to go along with the Math and Science textbooks, will be included. This will mean that some access control will be set in place to ensure that only current province residents will be able to access these components Individual teachers will be able to post material that they have developed. All the objects will be indexed to the curriculum guides, so that a teacher may navigate through the indexes to find all items (text documents, videos, simulations, pictures, test materials) pertaining to a given topic. The current timeline calls for another two years before the majority of this content is available, but it sure sounds like a great one-stop tool. Other provinces are sure to follow this model.

In the mean time, several commercial projects are currently available that attempt much of the same. One that is well worth looking at and functional today is the Telus sponsored [2Learn](#) site. While the content is

static on this site, it does provide a terrific gateway (portal) to a vast amount of educational resources that are great for the teacher. Telus has put a large effort into developing the French content on this site. The main page offers you a choice of 5 'strands' that you can explore; Research Strategies, Teacher Tools, Project Centre, Curricular Resources and P.D. Growth. Following any of these links will present you will more choices to narrow down your search.

Listed below are a couple other Learning Portal sites that are worth checking out. Who knows, you might find one that you will want to bookmark and keep coming back to.

[Learning.ca](#)