

2018 OLC Innovate: Education Reimagined
Nashville, TN
April 17-20, 2018

The 2018 OLC Innovate: Education Reimagined conference was a joint effort by Online Learning Consortium (an organization devoted to providing best practices in teaching and learning) and Merlot (a collection of free and open online teaching and learning resources) to provide educators with an opportunity to learn about new uses of old technology and innovative new technologies. One of the greatest challenges facing educators is how to prepare our students to thrive as citizens in a connected world. As educators rise to meet this challenge, we will have to be given the freedom to fail, to essentially learn from our mistakes. After all, this is where innovation spring from! This conference provided a forum for educators to share their work with online technologies through “campfire stories”, emerging ideas sessions, interactive workshops, innovative lab sessions, focus groups, and keynote addresses from leaders in the innovative teaching and learning practices.

While there were many interesting and applicable sessions that I attended, the two that I enjoyed most related managing cell phone use in class and applying flipped, blended and integrated technologies into a course. The session on cell phone usage began with a discussion of strategies for inclusion of cell phone technology in the classroom and ended in a debate over whether they should simply be banned outright. Many teachers in this session shared that they use technology to either block cell phone signals in their classroom or take control of the cell phone so it can only be used for instructional purposes. I was one of the few educators in the session who did not agree with this approach as I felt it did not address the long term goal of teaching students how to use cell phone technology responsibly. Needless to say it was an interesting debate, and I left with some new ideas about how to productively incorporate cell phone technology into classroom instruction. The session on flipping, blending and integrating curricula in an interdisciplinary doctoral program of studies was particularly enlightening. The presenters provided insights into how their approach could be applied to the secondary school setting. The presenters also shared how they maximized periodic, whole day face-to-face sessions with students to create a learning community that would sustain itself through asynchronous flipped and blended learning opportunities for students. They shared with us student products that were higher in caliber than they had received in a traditional model that only met face-to-face with little flipped or blended opportunities to extend student learning.

Finally, the exhibit hall provided an opportunity to review and interact with a variety of free and fee-based resources for online learning. The two most promising companies with open educational online resources that could be immediately used in the algebra readiness class that I teach are CourseArc (<https://www.lrn.us/>) for affordable content development and OpenStax (<https://openstax.org/>) for free textbooks developed to improve student access to education. CourseArc’s mission and motto is to provide affordable content through helping educators unlock the

value of open educational resources. They have free, \$10/student and \$35/student options for educators to select from depending upon which aspects of LrnR the educator selects for inclusion in their course. OpenStax is a nonprofit charity through Rice University that started developing their own online free, peer-reviewed textbooks and corresponding instructor resources in 2012. While the textbooks are somewhat traditional and university-like (at least the math textbooks that I have reviewed thus far), they do provide a nice foundation to build upon and could support and align with the Alaska high school mathematics practice and content standards. I plan to spend time over the summer exploring how I might incorporate both of these technologies to personalize learning for the students in my algebra readiness class during the 2018-2019 school year.

Without the opportunity to attend conferences and trainings through the Career Development Grant funds, it would be challenging to find the time during the academic year to keep up to date on current educational technologies. I would like to thank the Kenai Peninsula School Board and Superintendent for supporting me in this professional development endeavor.

Sincerely,



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