

Edsurge Fusion Reflections
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I had the opportunity to attend Edsurge Fusion in San Francisco, October 2nd – October 4th. I was attracted to this conference because I follow Edsurge on Twitter and find myself choosing to read more about the items they post. Additionally, the list of speakers and topics was very appealing. Personalized learning was front and center on the agenda.

Edsurge is a research organization. Research was the focus of the conference. Many of the attendees were researchers, or worked with research organizations. Unfortunately, many of the presentations were long on theory and short on application. Some sessions seemed to focus on why a particular organizations research on a topic was so important, rather than how the research can information teaching and learning.

In one round table discussion, the question, “How can we make research more accessible to teachers?” was asked. This was a very interesting discussion. Most of the people at the table were researchers. I offered to them that teachers do not have time to read research papers. (I also think I suggested that research papers are not written to be read by practitioners. They are written for other researchers and academics.) Teachers need application, not theory. Links back to the research are great for those teachers who want to read the background. Most teachers want to see the highlights. They want to see how to improve their practice.

A few nuggets seemed to recur throughout the sessions. One was “the system” needs to be less risk adverse. An example of this would be how we rely on setting goals. At the end of our term we are usually asked if the goal was met, or not. Summarizing a goal in these terms is often viewed as success (met) or failure (unmet). This practice does not encourage risk taking. Many teachers and administrators do not feel comfortable reporting, “this didn’t work as I expected, I need to try something different.”

Another theme was avoiding initiative fatigue. It is important that every initiative needs to have a clear purpose and be part of a unifying initiative. For instance, in the KPBSD, any initiative undertaken should relate to the strategic plan and personalized learning. Blended learning is part of personalized learning. CTE is part of personalized learning. Restorative practices are part of personalized learning. Standards-based grading is part of personalized learning. None of these initiatives should be introduced as something new, rather they are the next step toward achieving personalized learning.

Another important point was the need to observe the world around you to see what people are doing. Projects and pilot programs need to match the community. A solution that works in Seward might not work in Nikiski. This is particularly important for districtwide programs and policies.

The conference was good, but it wasn’t what I was hoping for. It was interesting to experience and learn from the research community. It was also evident that much of the research community is far removed from “boots on the ground” practice. I am unlikely to attend this conference again in the future.


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