

Let's Welcome, Not Fear, Online Learning



ISSUE ORIENTED

The revolution is coming, at least according to Clayton M. Christensen, co-author along with Curtis W. Johnson and Michael B. Horn of *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*. I waited with bated breath to find out what the disruption would be to cause the worldwide change in learning. I knew it had something to do with technology, but I wasn't sure what. I hate to spoil the surprise, but the disruption is high school online courses. How online learning plays into Christensen's disruption theory is just part of his analysis. The book also covers the importance of student-centric learning, improving education research, and leadership tools to foster innovation.

Christensen writes that the disruption also leads to innovation. That did not surprise me in the case of online learning, based on a report I had read called *Laboratories of Reform: Virtual High School and Innovation in Public Education* by Bill Tucker. It was from the Education Sector, an independent think tank devoted to developing innovative solutions to educational problems. One of the most innovative virtual schools discussed was the Florida Virtual Schools (FLVS), also mentioned in Christensen's book. In this issue, Julie Young, Pam Birtolo, and Raven McElman discuss FLVS and the impact that online courses can have on student learning (See "Virtual Success," page 12).

Note that we are not talking about digitizing current courses but about using all the tools possible to differentiate learning for students. These entrepreneurial endeavors have to focus

on "clients" to engage them in learning and provide whatever is necessary so that they continue in the course and complete it. The result is innovation from administration and funding to meeting the individual needs of students.

Although not every educator is involved in teaching online courses, there is so much that technology-savvy educators can be doing for students. When a student is struggling with a concept, we can, as Christensen suggests, search online to find content, tools, or a tutor who can help. And we can create these tools ourselves and share them with the world. Individualizing instruction for all students is a tall order, but Web 2.0 tools and social networks are helping educators do this themselves as well as organize and collaborate to share and tackle difficult challenges.

In the pages of *L&L* and at ISTE's annual conference you will read about, find, and be able to share tools, digital content, and instructional strategies for all curriculum areas. For more on Christensen's ideas, Scott McLeod from CASTLE at Iowa State University will be doing a session at NECC called "Effective Leadership in an Era of Disruptive Innovation." Tom Carroll and Kathleen Fulton from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future will also be doing sessions—Carroll on "Transforming Schools Into 21st-Century Learning Organizations" and Fulton on "Teachers Learning in Networked Communities: Online Induction and Teacher Support." Help us explore individualized learning for all students and organize schools to make it happen.

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