

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

INNOVATIONS EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

Profile of their Learning Environment
A Conversation with Dr. Kenneth Grover

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connect. share. discover. lead.

pioneering

Dear Pioneers,

Last week, we had the incredible privilege of spending two days in Houston with 56 learner-centered pioneers at our second Pioneer Lab gathering. During our time together, we focused on what it will take to build a community that has the capacity to welcome and include thousands of pioneers (if not tens or hundreds of thousands) as this movement grows.

With this focus, we wanted to show how the Lab is so much bigger than a place for participants to learn, share, and collaborate for the benefit of advancing the work in their local communities. It is a place where pioneers come together to build a community committed to making learner-centered education available to every community across the nation, evolve shared visions of high-quality education, push each other beyond what we currently see as “possible,” and truly design the systems of the future.

Clearly, this is no easy task. And, we are grateful for the partnership with Lab participants and their respective environments to accomplish these goals. We are also relieved to have discovered so many passionate leaders willing to co-create the spaces, systems, and protocols that could welcome ever growing numbers of pioneers without our having to do so single-handedly.

At the Lab meeting, Allan Cohen, one of the Lab leaders, did a session on emergence. What struck me about Allan’s presentation was the second challenge we are facing outside of shifting from the school-centered paradigm to a learner-centered one.

We need to shift away from the mindset of creating top-down, centrally controlled systems and shift into emergent, bottom-up, top-enabled strategies. Luckily, these strategies are not too complex, but they are radically different than the ways we usually think of accelerating a movement and having a national impact. This topic is so important, I’ll be expanding on the concept of emergence in a future article.

In the meantime, enjoy this fantastic issue of Pioneering highlighting Innovations Early College High School and its founder and principal, Dr. Kenneth Grover. Only in its fourth year, this environment is already a leader in the field. Innovations’ focus on the learner’s interests and their innate state of being as unique, capable and curious drives the design of IECHS’s model.

Enjoy!

Warm wishes,
Kelly Young



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Connect. Share. Discover. Lead.

We seek to accelerate the growth of the movement dedicated to transforming education in America. We invite those excited and interested by the possibility of learner-centered education to discover more, join a growing movement, and begin a journey to make this a reality in diverse communities across the country.





Innovations Early College High School

SALT LAKE CITY, UT

“Every parent hopes for better experiences for their child than they had growing up and Innovations has given our daughter an amazing education that simply didn't exist when we were younger.” – IECHS PARENT

[THE RESIDENTS OF SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH \(link\)](#) have been witness to many innovative moments since the city's establishment in the mid-19th-century. The transcontinental railroad was completed just 80 miles northwest of the city's center, the city tripled in population in the first quarter of the 20th-century, and now it's home to one of the highest concentrations of biomedical, high-technology, and software firms in the nation.

So, it is no surprise that education innovation has made its way into the city. In 2012, Innovations Early College High School (IECHS) stepped onto the field as a learner-centered, transformed environment. Sharing real estate with the local community college and district Career and Technical Education Center, learners at IECHS have immediate access to high-level, non-standard academic opportunities, which makes **competency-based** learning a no-brainer. Learners go at a pace that meets them where they are, while also ensuring they don't fall behind their expected graduation date. Failing to develop in their competencies is not an option. Asking for more time is.

Back when the learning environment was being designed, founder and principal, Kenneth Grover, made it his goal to get learners involved in the design process. He surveyed learners across the local district—asking them to share and brainstorm what could be done differently in “school.” By reimagining learning with the learners themselves, a brand new model emerged.

This collaboration established a **socially-embedded** culture before day one—generating an environment where learners work together collaboratively on various **open-walled** projects, meet one-on-one with mentors to explore the possibilities in their academic path, and, at the highest level, simply get to know themselves in an intimate and dynamic way.

Learner agency is the bedrock of everything that happens at IECHS, which makes even a “typical day” not so typical. From the get go, learners design their own schedules and finalize their plans with a mentor. Outside of two general requirements—being on campus for at least 6.5 hours each day and achieving general academic benchmarks—learners are free to decide when they arrive at and leave from IECHS, when they meet with mentors, who they work with from their groups of peers, and when they tackle particular projects and learning goals.

What might seem like chaos at the highest level is actually a well thought out and cultivated learner plan. In fact, this freedom fosters in-depth acquisition of **knowledge, skills, and dispositions**, which demonstrates what kids are capable of when they are trusted to own their learning journey. In this setting, educators get to do what they do best and guide learners down their unique paths to incredibly bright futures in academia or the working world. In Salt Lake City, innovation is more than just a buzzword. It's real action creating real transformation for the city's burgeoning youth.

LEARN MORE

[High School of the Future](#)

[Innovative Salt Lake high school recognized for learning success](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Public

420 Learners served

Graduation rate: 57% in 2013, 2017-tracking to be 95%

40% of incoming freshman reading below grade level

60% of upperclassmen taking and completing college classes successfully

0 behavior issues/suspensions since the learning environment opened

45% Latino, 45% White

13% SPED

17% ELL

CONNECT

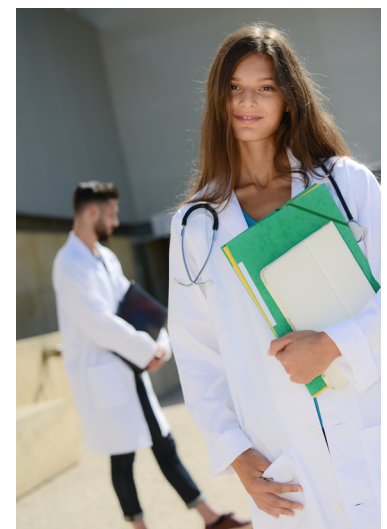
Website

[Innovations Early College High School](#)

Social Media

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)



Innovations Early College High School: A Conversation with Dr. Kenneth Grover



DR. KENNETH GROVER

Q. Did you always think working in education would be your career path? What about this work inspires you?

A. Initially, I did not envision working in education. I grew up on a farm and enjoyed working with my hands. However, during my youth I experienced, first hand, what can occur when one reaches out and provides a helping hand. This experience exposed me to the power of intervention and what can happen when one acts to help others. Paying it forward became my life mission and helping those who cannot help themselves, my passion. There is nothing more rewarding than helping others to achieve and reach their potential. Education is the medium that provides the access and opportunity to tap into the talent inherent in each child. Unfortunately, the current system created to provide an education was created to make widgets, not inspire human beings. As such, I acted to transform an ineffective system into one that honors agency, inspires dreams, and provides determined direction for every student.

This opportunity to inspire and influence the human mind is humbling. I am inspired by the opportunity and power to lead and guide students to use their agency to improve their knowledge and to bring richness and depth to their lives.

Q. Ever since you transformed the system of learning at IECHS, what kind of cultural shift have you seen? How have behaviors changed in learners and educators alike?

A. Through our transformation of education, we have witnessed a shift in teacher and student beliefs and practices.

For teachers, the shift allowed them to be teachers rather than behavior managers and attendance deputies. Teachers could now focus individually on student needs and employ their skill sets to reach a struggling learner, guide students as they discover knowledge, and inspire them to greatness. Teachers are no longer stuck in a structure that limited their creativity, ability to mentor students, and time to collaborate with other teachers in real time. Our teachers are now empowered with all the tools to properly diagnose and treat students with the appropriate levels of support and interventions at all levels of learning.

The culture shift for students allowed them to be free from the limitation-inducing protocols so systematically employed throughout the country. The shift of control from the institution to the student provides them with a sense of pride and ownership, which produces the successful outcomes we are witnessing.

Disruptive student behaviors have disappeared. The learners are in control of their education. This not only empowers students, it also reallocates their control (and dignity) into empowerment decisions that are in their best interests. They are no longer pushing back against the institution, teacher, and system. They are in control.

Q. Why is learner agency important for your learners? How do they respond to taking ownership in their learning?

A. Students have responded with deep gratitude and happiness. They are so appreciative that they are treated as human beings with the capacity to guide their own lives. For some students this freedom can be intoxicating and so full of options that they struggle with the choices. As such, we provide a deprogramming structure that operates until they are ready to free flow. This deprogramming provides a “soft” structure of the traditional school model where students spend four weeks rotating through class meetings, much like they would do at a traditional school. As students rotate to these different classes, they feel less stressed because the “structure” is still in place, even though students are moving at individual paces within each classroom.

As students feel more and more comfortable with this environment, we then ease students into using their agency and reward them by allowing them more control of their education in that they choose, to a degree, where they want to work in the school, what courses to work on at any given time in the day, and the pace they are comfortable with.

Q. How do learners plan their days? How much is traditionally structured and how much is unique to the individual’s interests?

A. Learners plan their day/week/month based upon their goals. We provide an expectation of credit that should be earned each week, and they plan with their mentor how they will accomplish them. Structure is relative to the student. Some need more; others need less. For some students, they prefer working on only one subject at a time, so that once they have finished that course for the year, they can then move on to the next year course. Other students have lofty goals and aim to complete two years of credit in a year. Yet others, based upon academic gaps in their learning are able to engage in content at their level (35% of our incoming 9th grade students read at or below 6th grade) and gain confidence and competency in their areas of need and then accelerate to their grade level and beyond once the foundation has been completed.

Q. You're a promoter of learners having a clear idea of their pathway beyond high school. Why is this important to you, and how do you ensure learners understand their options?

A. We need critical thinkers with skill sets to drive the next era of our country. Providing options and opportunities allows students to make very good decisions about their future, rather than being stuck in a quagmire of indecision in higher education where they are wading through meaningless hoop jumping. Learners are provided the opportunity, or agency, to decide the path they want to follow. Each student has a knowledge of the expectations of each option available to them—higher ed, industry certificates, etc. They are empowered with the knowledge and access needed to make the most efficient and effective decision for their future.

Q. You have garnered interest in your model on a national level. Focusing on Utah, how have local districts responded to what’s happening at IECHS?

A. In Utah, the response has been moderately positive. It is hard to be a prophet in your own land. Additionally, a number of schools have the “good to great” problem and as such, do not have the urgency to improve. In the last three months, two bigger districts have seen the need and are now moving ahead with implementation steps.

“ [Learners] are no longer pushing back against the institution, teacher, and system. They are in control.”

DR. KENNETH GROVER

I have the opportunity to work with a number of school districts throughout the country as they work to transform their schools to a personalized learning model. In working with them, I provide a framework that, when followed with fidelity, will produce similar outcomes to those our school has experienced over the last five years.

One school district comes to mind that took this on as a “whole” school effort, rather than as the “school within a school” approach that most schools follow. Union City High School in Union City, Oklahoma believes personalized learning is the future of education, and upon surveying parents and students, they found their community believed that as well. Their outcomes, to some degree, were better than ours as they were able to learn from our mistakes and success and transform accordingly.

Q. What do you hope to see in the next five years at IECHS and the other environments you’re working with?

A. I expect IECHS will continue to lead the nation and provide others with the courage and know-how to transform their schools. Our students will continue to demonstrate that agency is more powerful than control. I fully expect that over 500 schools within five years will be able to trace their success and sustainability to personalized learning directly back to the pioneering work we are doing here.

“We need critical thinkers with skill sets to drive the next era of our country.”

DR. KENNETH GROVER

Dr. Kenneth Grover created a comprehensive and fully reimagined educational experience for 21st century high school students in the Salt Lake City School District, where he has worked for over 20 years as a teacher, high school principal, and director. Additionally, he has inspired, trained, and collaborated with educators from around the country to understand and implement scalable personalized learning in their schools. He is passionate about providing a personalized pedagogical approach that transforms schools to meet the needs of all children. Kenneth and his wife, Ruth, are parents to three children along with two additional daughters from Mexico and El Salvador that proudly call Kenneth dad.



5 to Thrive

It almost goes without saying that a learning environment's culture, when established well, can open up possibilities for learners that were once unimaginable. Time and time again, we see educators answer difficult questions about learner-centered transformation with the simple response, "We can do it because our culture is right." The barrier in creating such a culture is the amount of time it appears this restructuring will take. The idea of a cultural shift ends up on the backburner over and over again. The team at Mayerson Academy wants to break this cycle and show how cultural transformation can be broken down into bite-size chunks. Through their **5 to Thrive** ([link](#)) toolkit, educators are asked to "dedicate 5 minutes each day for the next month to simple activities that will reframe [their] thinking and improve the culture in [their environments]." Through these challenges, you'll address self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationships. Collectively, these "micro-learning" sessions will elevate your thinking and give you the confidence to act on implementation strategies to shift the culture of your learning community. Check out the toolkit today!

Explain 3D

Regardless of how many resources your community offers, you are likely to find barriers that don't allow all of your learners to limitlessly explore their interests and passions. This is particularly the case when it comes to 3D objects that are commonly viewed in a 2D context. Whether it's exploring the great expanse of the universe or the intricate networks of the human body, these are entities that simply can't be fully understood in a 2D space. Fortunately for the 21st-century learner, technology provides many of the solutions to these problems. One of those solutions is **Explain 3D** ([link](#)), where users can explore dynamic concepts like how a car works, how a wind turbine produces energy, or how dinosaurs would have looked roaming the same Earth we stand on today! This tool could be a great option for learners with interests in the interactive simulations they provide. Check out more below!

Explain 3D Downloads ([link](#))

Explain VR ([link](#))

Explain 3D Demo ([link](#))

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendars! We will be speaking at some and hosting workshops at others. In all cases, pioneers will be front and center! Join us.

**FUTURENOW!
CONFERENCE 2017**
San Diego, CA
April 27-29

[Conference Website](#)

ASU GSV SUMMIT 2017
Salt Lake City, UT
May 8-10

[Summit Website](#)

**PERSONALIZED LEARNING
SUMMIT 2017**
San Francisco, CA
May 10-12

[Summit Website](#)

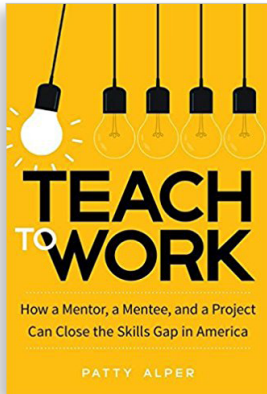
**NEWVENTURE FUND
SUMMIT 2017**
San Francisco, CA
May 16-17

[Summit Website](#)

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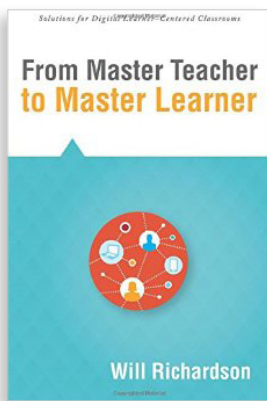
Education Reimagined is hiring for three dynamic, diverse team members! We're seeking an **Associate Director of National Outreach & Community Building**; a **Web & Social Media Manager**; and a **Personal Assistant**. [Learn more here!](#)

B4KIDS is seeking a founding **Head of School** for their 2017/18 academic year! [Apply here](#)



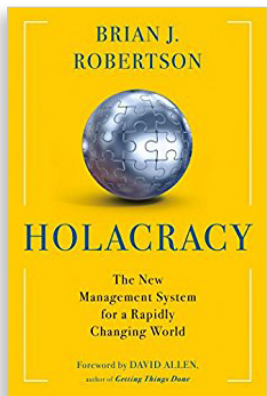
Teach to Work: How a Mentor, a Mentee, and a Project Can Close the Skills Gap in America by Patricia Alper

Not only is there knowledge to be accessed outside traditional school walls but educators themselves have experiences, hobbies, interests, and passions that stretch well-beyond their singular identities in a traditional classroom. Patricia Alper, author of *Teach to Work: How a Mentor, a Mentee, and a Project Can Close the Skills Gap in America*, challenges these educators and community members alike to share their knowledge with learners through mentorship, so their communities can enhance the potential of all their youth. Explore how you can be a mentor to youth in your community, and let us know what you discover!



From Master Teacher to Master Learner by Will Richardson

Implementing a learner-centered model of education contains many important components. Whether it's developing a culture of collaboration, artfully incorporating the voices and perspectives of the community, or creating a system that is ever-evolving, much of this will never see the light of day if educators do not see themselves first and foremost as learners. Will Richardson addresses this possible issue in his book, *From Master Teacher to Master Learner*. He takes readers on an intimate journey of how to be a learner first and an educator second, exploring what is made possible by this mentality. Discover why we are all learners, young and old alike.



Holacracy: The New Management System for a Rapidly Changing World by Brian J. Robertson

A learner knows how they learn best. An educator knows the socio-emotional responses of their learners best. So, when systems are in place that don't allow these agents to create strategies they are the foremost experts in, inefficiencies and roadblocks are inevitable. What type of system can allow this ownership to be realized? Enter the management philosophy known as holacracy. In Brian J. Robertson's work, he shows leaders in all systems—education being no exception—the power in letting roles based on each individual's expertise define who should perform the work, rather than outdated hierarchies or titles. See how this management system could help you redefine your learning environment's structure.

WORTH YOUR TIME

Inside a jail school trying to treat kids like scholars not criminals

What new possibilities can come about when we treat learners as learners, rather than the labels society marks them with when they make a mistake? Discover how a juvenile facility in New Orleans is attacking this question head on. [Watch here](#)

How Do You Teach Thinking?

There's a difference between thinking learners need to be shown how to think and making them present to the deep thinking they already do on a daily basis. Read one educator's story of unearthing this difference. [Read here](#)

Passionate Learners – Interview with Pernille Ripp on TL Talk Radio

Author of *Passionate Learners*, Pernille Ripp, sits down with TL Talk Radio to share about “beautiful questions,” growth mindset, the importance of educators practicing reflection, and cultivating lifelong learners. [Listen here](#)

“ If you have the opportunity to do amazing things in your life, I strongly encourage you to invite someone to join you.”

— **SIMON SINEK**

Read past issues of
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