

Focus and empathy: Four keys for innovating in education



Empathy, focus, assessment redesign, and observing behaviors are key to innovating in education.

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Innovating in education requires focusing on specific goals, said **Richard Culatta**, CEO of the [International Society for Technology in Education](#).

In his talk, ***“Beyond Barriers: Unleashing Innovation in Education”*** at [IFE Conference 2025](#), Culatta gave advice on innovating in education.

*“It’s important to have a **user-centered approach** and focus on the need to adapt to a constantly changing learning environment, especially with the incorporation of artificial intelligence,”* said Culatta.

Below, we present Richard Culatta’s **four tips** for **innovating in education**.



The talk was given at the Borregos Arena on the Monterrey campus.

1. Build empathy with users

Richard believes that it's essential to understand the experience of students and teachers to achieve **innovation**, since they're the main stakeholders.

*"One effective way to do this is by 'student shadowing,' i.e., following students through their **learning experience** to observe their interactions and challenges," he said.*

2. Observe instead of ask

Analysis to identify student needs goes beyond words, as Richard believes that **observing attitudes and behaviors** will serve to improve the student experience.

*“Instead of asking users what they need, it’s more effective to **observe their behavior** and propose solutions based on those observations.*

*“This helps **identify needs** that users might not be able to articulate,” he argued.*

3. Adopt a minimum viable product approach

Trying to do too much will backfire, Culatta said, since he believes that targeting brings greater benefits.

*“Instead of trying to **solve every problem at once**, it’s better to focus on making small improvements that have an immediate impact.*

*“This allows us to iterate and adjust solutions based on **feedback** and outcomes,” he added.*

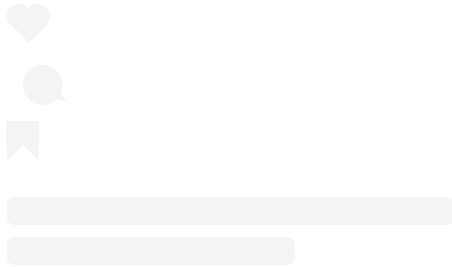
4. Redefine learning assessment

Culatta suggested that **current assessments need to be reconsidered** and adapted to a world where artificial intelligence plays an important role.

*“This means thinking about how you measure **learning** in a way that reflects the unique human skills you want to foster,” he said.*



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The ‘pitfalls’ of innovation

He said there are pitfalls that delay the implementation of **innovation** or make it more difficult to achieve.

*“These pitfalls highlight the **complexity of innovating in education** and the need for more focused and targeted approaches in order to achieve effective change,”* he said.

According to the speaker, not understanding the user experience, solely asking teachers about how to innovate, and trying to solve several problems at once are some of the ‘pitfalls’ people fall into when trying to **innovate**.

*“We often **attempt to innovate** by asking teachers or students what we should do better. This can lead to **superficial solutions**, form-filling exercises, instead of seeking more significant transformations,”* he added.

Richard Culatta identified **three situations that hinder innovation** in education:

1. Not understanding the user experience

Culatta explained that often the experience of students and teachers, who are the primary users of the education system, is not deeply understood.

*“This is complicated because students aren’t the ones making the decision to go to school, which leads to **the learning experience not being optimized** around their needs,”* said the expert.

“It’s important to have a user-centered approach and focus on the need to adapt to a constantly changing learning environment, especially with the incorporation of artificial intelligence.”

2. Asking users how to innovate

In order to **innovate**, it’s important to carry out an analysis that goes beyond asking teachers or students how we can change the teaching-learning process.

*“We often attempt to **innovate** by asking teachers or students what we should do better.*

*“This is an unfair question, as users don’t always have the answer as to how to **improve learning**,”* he added.

3. Trying to solve too many problems at once

Culatta said that there’s a tendency in education to want to **address multiple problems** at once, which is a daunting task and an ineffective approach.

“I call this phenomenon ‘boiling the ocean’ because we try to do too much at once and the reality is that we run the risk of achieving nothing significant,” he explained.

Finally, he invited the audience to reflect upon the **future of education** in the context of increasing automation and technological change.

IFE Conference 2025

The IFE Conference is one of the most important **educational innovation** events in the Spanish-speaking world, organized by the Tec's *Institute for the Future of Education* (IFE).

This is the eleventh edition of this event, formerly known as the International Conference on Educational Innovation (CIE).

The 2025 edition, entitled “**Driving the Future of Education with Innovation and Technology**,” seeks to address the challenges presented by emerging technologies for education.

“IFE Conference 2025 is focused on the complex challenges facing the education sector in adopting innovative pedagogies and advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence,” said Michael Fung, President of the IFE Conference.

*“(This event) provides an excellent platform for constructive dialogue and building collaborations to shape the **future of education in Latin America and beyond**,”* Fung added.

The Tec's Monterrey campus hosted IFE Conference 2025 from January 28 to 30.

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