

HUMANIZING THE DIGITAL LEAP: TECHNOLOGY'S ROLE IN EVOLVING EDUCATION

Host: Julie Keane, PhD, CLO, Participate

Guest: Michael Torrence, PhD, president, Motlow State Community College

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Okay, for folks that can hear me welcome. I'm just gonna be silent while we wait for some folks to blow in.

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But we're gonna start soon to be. Mindful of folks times.

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Thanks, Christine.

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All right, well, well, I'm going to just start and say welcome to my dear friend, Michael.

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Also known to other folks as Dr. Michael, but for all the friends on the on the call and for those who flow in later and for those who registered and can't make it the recordings will be coming and I'll be mentioning that.

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But first off, I'm Julie Kane. I'm a chief learning officer here at participate and together with purpose driven organizations and with friends like Michael we help people learn and work better together through inclusive and engaging online music practice.

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So that's what participate does. And I'm really pleased to welcome you to this episode of our lifelong learning series and I'm so excited that Michael was able to jump on I saw him at a conference last year and I knew that I needed him to come even though Michael and I can talk for hours.

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We're gonna try to do this in 30 min, so I won't take too much longer.

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This virtual series offers informal opportunities to learn from a range of experts this virtual series offers informal opportunities to learn from a range of experts, around empowering lifelong learners.

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So before we get started, I wanna share a few technical notes.

Captions are available for the webinar, but please let us know in the Q&A function if you're having any issues throughout the session.

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And please send me questions through Q&A function on Zoom. We'll monitor this throughout the session and try to get to as many questions as possible.

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And then we're using the chat function on this webinar to share resources. So my dear friend Christine will be doing that along the way.

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Lots to share. From the work that, Michael and his college start doing at Matlow State.

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So before we begin, I would love to get an idea of who is joining us today. So I'm gonna ask my friends to pop up.

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A quick poll. So just let us know in what area of education you're working. So that might also help Michael and myself kind of think about the conversation.

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And, again, we have that slide up which is kind of giving you an idea of what we're going to talk about all of the innovative sort of technologies and and the world in which Michael is swimming right now.

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Around ethics and impacts of new technologies. So I'll give it a minute.

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Okay, so it's a nice range here, Michael. We've got some K 12 colleagues in.

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12 some government folks so this is great and thank you again for joining us so I'm gonna get started so I am thrilled to welcome today's featured guest Dr.

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Michael Torrance. President of Matlow State Community College. And I think many of you probably on the call know that he's been recognized for his strategic visionary leadership.

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He is positioning Matlow State as a beacon of innovation and championing. That strategy he has been a champion of inclusiveness and equity.

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Which we all are really worried about thinking about promoting. Dr. Turns is a fervent advocate for community.

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And economic development, student success, and integration of technologies like virtually reality, augmented reality, and we're going to be talking about that today.

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And Dr. Torrance's expertise is sought on numerous boards, influencing the future of higher ed globally.

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And I think, and I've seen that shared on LinkedIn. Michael, I think you have become really a model when we want higher red in the mix here.

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We know the critical role higher ed plays in communities across this country and globally. And really wanted to be at the center of an innovation and really positioning to serve learners. Dr.

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Torrance holds degrees from South Dakota State University and a PhD in exceptional learning from Tennessee Technological University and also is a distinguished Maxine Smith fellow and a proud Air Force veteran.

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I don't know how you get to do this all, how you fit this all in. So I'm gonna turn it over to you, Michael, and again, thanks for being here.

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Oh, it's my pleasure to be here with you today, Julie, and to all of those colleagues who joined us from Hither and Yon.

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Yeah.

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Welcome. Today I'm excited that we get a chance to go back and forth about Matlow State Community College as a place for innovation to place for a journey towards not only a degree pathway, but a credentialing and as a series points out, a space for lifelong development, lifelong learning, lifelong sharing.

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Yeah.

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Malo is situated in southern middle Tennessee. Just along the whiskey trail for those people that would pique their interest along with the science of spirits, as well as automation robotics and.

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Identifying how credentials and digitization play a role in education and training and the matrix of our ecosystems that we developed to show assertion that someone has the skill to operate in the world around us today.

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That's pretty much what we're about. I'm excited to be here and thanks for having me.

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Awesome. And so I guess, you know, jumping right in, I know if my colleague and CEO of participate is on this call, the whiskey trail, I know we'll be taking a road trip to come see you might go very soon.

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Please do. Please do.

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So we're talking about a broad range of digital tools. I know that you and I have really met within this community practice and ecosystem around digital credentials, verifiable credentials, and we'll get to that.

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But just to sort of lay the groundwork, I know Matlow State is in the area of virtual reality, augmented reality.

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I know you work with our friends at the Learning Economy Foundation around meta diversity and thinking around verifiable credentials, self sovereign identity, blockchain, so lots of areas that Matlow State has come in.

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I know you're working in robotics and talking about the Internet of Things. So given that we have a short amount of time.

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I think what is sort of coming to mind when I say given the transformative economic impact, right, for advanced technologies like

these.

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The social impact. Ethical, political, what do you, how is Matlow State sort of thinking about reskilling and preparing students for this rapidly changing universe.

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In terms of some of the technologies I just whipped off.

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Not sure. I mean, we live in that space where we talk about the terminology. And the terminology and rhetoric are just as important as the topography and demography.

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So that's where we start. I want people to recognize that. We start with where we are, who we're serving, what they need, and the industries that are aligned with the curriculums and expectations of what we produce.

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That is, students that can transfer students that can't go to work and students that can create their own employable aspects based on their skill sets.

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So with all of the terms that you just throughout, Julie, I would say that. Matlab begins and ends with connecting with human beings.

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And I know that in our education, I'll probably should stay student. I should probably say worker as a probable save learner, but human beings because if we don't create human-centered design.

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Which is really important in a fulcrum point for us here. How do we know that we're creating the appropriate types of matrices, curriculum standards, outcomes, objectives, goals, etc, that are going to meet the expectations, not just of the people we serve, the humans we serve, but of the employers that expect to be able to hire them and for these people to walk out and be gainfully employed as immediately as possible.

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Everybody has to get trained and get culturated. But that's that's where we start.

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When we start having this engagement about. How does someone skill

set? Become entertained. I go to moms and dads that stay home or grandparents that stay home who want to earn a little bit more.

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Yeah.

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And I start to attempt to, with our team, identify. What are those skill sets? Are they tangible to something that we offer in business and finance, through communications, through writing, through liberal arts pathways initially.

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And then how do we tackle the importance and the necessary skill? Of information communication technologies, ICTs.

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That is intertwined and betwixt everything today. So, that is, that is our baseline.

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Yeah. Are there specific initiatives? And I know we talked even a little bit before where we turned the, went live here, specific initiatives that you think really exemplify that in terms of how you're focusing on the learners you serve when you're thinking about curriculum, when you're thinking about partnerships, like what are these sort of first things that you're excited about?

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You know, just started into 2,024 like what are you jazz about? Yeah.

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Yes, yeah. Oh, yes, I'm gonna go backwards just past Thursday in New Orleans at the American Association for Community Colleges Workforce Development Institute.

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Awesome.

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We launched Nissan University. Nissan North America is the first postsecondary institution partner in North America with Nissan.

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What this is is a spin and play on a dirt adult learner programs where we hope that Tennessee promise post Tennessee Promise students are eligible so Tennessee reconnect students in the state of Tennessee will become eligible to you last some of those funds and take weekend approaches to getting skilled for the jobs that.

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As well as perhaps they were going to be other businesses in industry that are going to look at automation, robotics, and that field that continues to emerge this tied to EV, as a necessary watchpad to become gain free and be employed.

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Additionally, simulated training and awareness, that's with our AR VR in our XR platform.

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Yeah.

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Where we're tied now to the airports, you know, DNA, anyone who's flown to Nashville knows B and A, and the wool girls that drive around and scream woo, downtown national on Broadway.

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Yeah.

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But our goal there was to tie simulated and situated learning. Be love and Lob and Wanker and Bogotski for those who want to go look at the theory of it.

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Yeah.

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If we can create simulated training the same with the military has for flight simulation, which is our focus.

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We've tied with the FAA 3 white simulators that are FAA graded where we can help pilots stay rated.

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Hmm.

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In the last 3 weeks. Southwest Airlines has relocated roughly 900 to 1,100 new employees in Nashville.

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And that will allow us to create a pathway for those who are have other kinds of jobs in that industry towards becoming pilots because we know there's a need for.

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Right.

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And then the last thing that I'll, mentioned because maybe your CEO or COO and team is listening.

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Awesome.

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We will start the first Tennessee Distillers Program, the Science of Whisk. I in the state of Tennessee this coming fall.

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It is not only going to be focused on a degree pathway, but micro crs, stackable creds, as well as looking at different kinds of ways we can get workforce training.

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So learner earner pathways simultaneously. What we hope will happen with that is that we'll see people from all across the planet who make the pilgrimage to the Whiskey Trail.

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See Matlow as a gateway potentially as we offer. Online certificates potentially and then have to come here for the last one, you know, that nugget or carrot that dangles to allow people to get involved with us in that space.

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Yeah.

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So I know all of those things are very se TTE or STEM centric, but there are also the dispositions that we're looking at in the Because I am a English major by trade and I love jazz and blues.

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So we are you have different ways to point out how communication skills and the like are also badgeable, credential, digitized, that align with, with those STEM based.

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Projects.

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Alright, well, then I'm gonna have to dive into this is just 1 min around because I know the way that we've talked about the digital credentialing, that space.

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I know we're gonna at the end of the call talk about how hopefully we'll meet up at the badge summit, at our friend No, at Guy Sells event every year.

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Yes.

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So can you talk about the sort of impact of working within the space of digital credentialing? What do you think they can provide the type of, how can they serve learners in the way that you're talking about in the way that you want to sort of rapidly, you know, provide these opportunities for the learners that you serve, what are the specific roles you think that digital credentials are going to play in that space or are playing

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already?

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Well, most aptly for me, it's that it's applicable immediately that when you walk into or seek an opportunity post-earning a skill you can actually show that skill and verify it on the blockchain, etc, etc, to the employer with the hiring manager.

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We have seen this actually take place with our own platform that we've partnered with Dexter, Bright Hive, and excuse me, Dexter Institute, Wright Hive and Learning Economy Foundation.

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We've seen our students not only get hired, but they also get promoted in a shorter time frame because they're able to show verifiably and because.

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As the issue, we have to a level of trust with with the industry, which we know that trust and insertion is really important in this space.

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That that is what works and that's what I think is the most important about it. It is Apple immediately.

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Yeah.

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In addition to where do I think the the skill sets of Young people.

Intermittent workers. And others, lifelong learners, where they will find themselves take advantage of digital badging.

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Is that if you're like me and came through when I came through, I still have a PDF.

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File of quite a bit of information. That I'm still pouring into my digital battle, my wallet, if you would.

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Yep.

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But beyond that, this ought to become enterprise systems. And that's what I'm really excited about in this area.

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That. I don't see these platforms as one-offs. I see these platforms as the opportunity to create.

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The ecosystem. Yeah.

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Can I say existential ecosystems in that big? A comfortable phrasing or words to use for it.

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I love the idea that The person owns the information that they earn. Versus having to ask for access to that information.

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That's right. Yeah.

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You've already paid for it. You've already done the, and I don't mean just paid for it monetarily.

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You've already paid for it with sweat. etc, etc, on effort. And time and sacrifice.

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So being able to leverage and commingle a lot of those badges and opportunities or skill sets earned.

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I think just makes for a better world and maybe that's a little wonky

but That's that's best.

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No, I think you're right. So I'm gonna let you address the, we have a question, you know, and we've talked a lot about this and I think as we build this ecosystem, some of us have been thinking about credentials micro credentials, digital credentials.

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Just briefly, maybe 1 min in terms of Matlow States, really context specific. How do you describe to your faculty because that'll lead us into my next question and to your community there the difference that you see between this idea of credentials and then these smaller chunks of micro credentials which is a question from the audience.

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So I think that the difference between the 2 is that we make them different. The idea behind showing bifurcation between a microcred and the actual pathway that it leads to a degree.

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I think that our conversations need to evolve past the conversations of the basic questions that get asked. And not being disparaging in the question, I think it's a great question.

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Yep.

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What I want to point out is that we need to look at the. Transfer of information, the gaining of knowledge as a system and not as a piece here or piece there piece here.

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No, you're good.

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The rationale, I believe, and this is within the 1 min, I'm watching the club, the rationale behind having the micro credential is the fact that you can actually show.

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When someone has to stop out for whatever reason. They have skillsets that allow them to go to work.

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And they can gain a better wage and and literally barter for a better wage when they leave the university, community college or at a technical college.

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I agree.

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And I like to think of it that way versus one or the other. You, I don't believe you can have one without the other.

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It's kinda like that chip commercial.

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Yeah.

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Yeah. And I, and I think that's a really good point. I think a lot of our colleagues in higher ed are really thinking about this, which is how to create.

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I think a lot of our colleagues in higher ed really thinking about this, which is how to create a lot of our colleagues in higher ed really thinking about this, which is how to create, talking about lifelong learners, really this like much more long term relationship with students.

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This is not something that's necessarily 2 years, 4 years. Some people may need to leave and then come back.

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Right.

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And this idea of capturing even smaller chunks of learning and not just a terminal degree is something I think we can see our colleagues in higher ed are really thinking about this really actively and are looking to you and other models of higher ed to actually deploy that.

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So I have a very, I, we're in dear to my heart is education, a educator, professional learning.

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Yeah.

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Virtual development. And so I'm really curious about your faculty. So I know how gracious the learner you are and I'm and you know and you're really pushing Matlas Day to be innovative to serve learners and I'm curious about your relationship with your faculty, how they

collaborate with you, how you're providing learning experiences for them.

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You know, some of them may be experienced. All of this is shifting really fast. So I'm just curious in terms of faculty support.

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Yeah, so faculty support is wonderful. Because we didn't start with the concept of digitization or digital badges.

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Started.

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We started with the concepts of open educational resources. So OERs was where we laid our hats, and then the introduction of VR when it was only VR and no one's really talking about AR or the other Easter stars.

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So that's what we started in 2,018. So a a cultivation that is taking place at our institution with faculty and myself around.

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They know that I'm going to talk about the next emergent platform that will advance and accelerate to 2 things that I cannot give them.

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I'm, able to give them more money unless we are able to secure grants. Secure external funding.

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So here's a way for us to be innovative and leveraged workforce development. And their ability in our ARC.

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So Academic Resource Center. That is the faculty training arm of Matlow State. So more money, more time.

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I look at platforms that we are creating that are emergent technology in that space as being able to create more time for our faculty to do the things I think the most of us got into this business to do in the first place.

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I love being around students. I don't get to do it as much as I would like to, but as a faculty member, I wanted to create more time.

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I don't want to automate everything. I don't think that that's smart to do that.

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I think that the best relationships and the best success stories come when the student has a mentor. A sponsor.

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Or someone who will go to bat for them. Whereas the young people say someone who will cape for them.

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You know, tell the truth. Great. I think that's really important. So with the faculty, we.

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Have a steady diet of. Direct conversations. And early adopters. Moderate adapters and then they're just some folks who are like, I really enjoyed the way that I deliver my instruction.

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I like this modality. I'm good. We're not going to move into that space.

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But specifically as where it changes in the STEM CTE areas. More so than in the liberal arts and humanities or softer sciences.

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That's where I'd love to have more entree and we're digging into that in the history area first in the English.

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English lit area right now because you can literally take people to wherever you want to go inside of these stories and show the historic value or the historic topography and demography, for example.

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Yeah.

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Through the storytelling. So we like that approaching so far so good. Is everybody on board?

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Absolutely not. Do we have a larger number of people on board than I would say not? Yes.

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That's great. Yeah, I think having that support and one thing because this leads to and before we get to the other question that's that's I think around the ecosystem.

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Back to micro credentialing is this idea of the humanities. I have a very good friend that I'm going to introduce you to who runs AI ethics at IBM, Phaedra Voyager, and she talks a lot about the need for everyone.

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Okay.

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To be talking about just shifting. Let's just talk about AI for a minute or 2 in terms of obviously this has been a huge conversation.

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Everyone's having it. It's happening in K 12. We've been really interested in this idea of AI literacy and the extent to which this is another, this is another area of critical literacy development, which I think is definitely in the realm of humanities.

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Right? Everybody poets have to be at the table. Jazz singers have to be at the table.

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Thanks.

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AI is going to affect all of us and it can't be siloed in STEM field.

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So I'm curious about that idea around ethics and whether this is whether you think that might also be an avenue.

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To really get those humanities sort of at the table that where they need to be. Yeah.

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Well, I can't answer the question without saying thank you, cause that was like a softball.

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Yeah.

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Oh yeah, that's right. Awesome.

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You're speaking the language of my dissertation, which was about Polish hip hop. And my master's speech, which was about the use of jazz and blues in Native American and African-american literature.

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The conversations that we're having at the federal level around AI and ethics and even efficacy of the use of it both in government as well as higher education.

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Really in my humble opinion, and this is Michael Torrent speaking. I'm not president of the Matlow State, but as a citizen of the US.

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We do not seem to have the appropriate kinds of backgrounds at the table to have a broad spectrum of.

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Review and input. As necessary. Coders shouldn't be the only people at the table talking about.

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Computer science and literacy. Nor should English people be the own people writing about. Literacy or talking about literacy.

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It takes all of us to create the appropriate kinds of guardrails. And if we don't have the appropriate representation around the table.

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We will have gaps in the policies. And the laws that we create. And I think that this is way too important.

00:24:29.000 --> 00:24:30.000

Right.

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To use a very basic and common term way too important right for us to not have the right folks around the table.

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And I'm not saying that we need Nobel laureates or Nobel laureates around the table.

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Right. No, yeah.

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But I do believe that we need a broad swath of folks that represent higher education. Communities. And it was the terms that whomever we would say are common folk.

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And I think that's all of us to be honest with you. Folks who actually will utilize a lever versus technology for everyday use and these people could be working at McDonald's to be honest with you.

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Yeah.

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Because it is not that the technology is scary or too big, it is how those who will be bumped.

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And utilize and leverage it? That will determine the efficacy of the ethics policies and laws that we create around it.

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And it needs to have a representation from a lot of people. Some of the best comments that we get at the institution.

00:25:24.000 --> 00:25:25.000

Yeah.

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Are when we're talking about policy and governance and we talk to the students about. If you don't talk to the very people that you're building these policies and laws for.

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In support of, how do we know that we're doing it in a masterful way? Because if it doesn't necessarily represent them and it isn't applicable to them.

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It's it's shortsighted. And again, that's my humble opinion.

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Right. Yeah, now I mean I think and I think it really is gonna start at sort of the ecosystems in which we operate.

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I think there's always this like feeling we just have to wait for some. Policy to just come down.

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It's like that is not happening, especially around AI. So I think

you're gonna see particularly local ecosystems like yours really coming into and developing its governance policy.

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And I think when we talk about human sender design.

00:26:05.000 --> 00:26:08.000

Yes.

00:26:08.000 --> 00:26:09.000

Yeah, yeah, I talk to the humans.

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Then you gotta get humans in there. Just be a, you know, just a, a phrase we use, you know, that create, that requires.

00:26:17.000 --> 00:26:23.000

Changes in systems, right, in order to get humans sitting around the table and diverse perspectives. In there.

00:26:23.000 --> 00:26:25.000

I think that's fantastic. Yeah.

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So that's why I'm getting close attention to House Bill, 1630. In the state of Tennessee.

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Yeah.

00:26:31.000 --> 00:26:47.000

Out of Columbia in Tennessee, Middle Tennessee, close to the Alabama border. The idea of what And how we will allow the use of AI in K 12 in higher education.

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It is not brand new. So we can stop saying that it's been around for 50 some odd years.

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Yeah.

00:26:56.000 --> 00:27:02.000

But what is brand new is the access to it. And because of that access, it's really, really important that.

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As I said before. From literally from 8 to 80, Julie. We need to have people available.

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To have conversations that will impact them and beyond our lifespans in terms of utilizing this platform.

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Can you imagine how people felt in the early eighties when we were talking about locked down browsers? To the W web.

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Yeah. Yeah.

00:27:22.000 --> 00:27:35.000

And, and now we're talking about this. So. I see the trickle down with a trickle over instead of trickle down triple over of the same type of oh my goodness, what are we gonna do with it?

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Yep.

00:27:36.000 --> 00:27:42.000

Versus, hey, let's just look backwards and have some historical context of what we do when we see things that impact.

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Our modalities in the way this is going to shift it. Nothing to be scared. Just do it right.

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Yeah. Just do it right. Yeah, and I think, and again, I think creating those systems where you have just more avenues and and I think this gets into our conversation with and you know sort of in our final minute of conversation.

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Even the question in the. In the chat around, you know, to what extent people are consuming back to our conversation around digital credentials.

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I think we see it as these credentials microcredentials as a conversation. Between people who own their own data to the employers around them to to the extent that employers are kind of consuming this and it's sounds to me like your partners are starting to do that, right?

00:28:23.000 --> 00:28:26.000

I mean in terms of the partners at the university, they're understanding these learning and employment records and digital credentials because you're helping.

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Do that. And that opens up that kind of line of communication.

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Yes. And it's really important to. I believe we kind of sit in the middle. I won't say that.

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Yeah.

00:28:41.000 --> 00:28:50.000

I'm trying to be kind. I don't need to be kind when I respond to this.

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Yep. Yep.

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We sit in the middle. And when I say that, I mean that we're in between the LEAs as local education agencies take roles and and sit between the technical colleges.

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Postsecondary is us and then we move to the four-year institution to 3 or baccalaureate granting space as well as employment.

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So we're sitting in the middle. It's a beautiful place to be. Because we need to get to help people understand.

00:29:05.000 --> 00:29:08.000

Yes.

00:29:08.000 --> 00:29:17.000

What does it mean to paint the proverbial country fence? We, we smack on the paint and we're trying to make sure we cover all the gaps in holes.

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But on a daily basis, we go back and we see that we missed the spot or that it didn't drive directly.

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Yeah. Yeah.

00:29:26.000 --> 00:29:27.000

That's great.

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So the conversation is like painting your country fence. We need to know that we have the. We need to have the discussion where it needs

to be and it needs to be a warranted.

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Right, that's right.

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Conversation where it's okay to dissent. This is a space. So long as we do this in the, utilizing civil discourse, it's okay to descend.

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It's okay to say that I disagree with. From where you're coming from. Yeah.

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Yeah. Yeah. It's good old fashioned ethics. Okay, Michael, we're getting cut off.

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Yes. Alright, okay.

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Darn it. I see Liz, my wonderful friend. I, Liz, if you want to put up the poll for folks to, you know, reflect on their learning here.

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I do want to let everyone know the recording will be shared. We'll write up a blog post, Michael.

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Yes.

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Thank you so much. And I hope this is the beginning of multiple conversations. I know we will be visiting you soon and then I also urge everyone to join us, for future conversations.

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We're going to be joined in February by my dear friend, Dr. Ken Simon from Institute for Educational Leadership.

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And in March by Benjamin Young from the New York Academy of Sciences, super cool work around scientists coming together around problems of practice.

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So if anybody's still on the call, I still see we have a bunch of sticking with us.

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What words come to mind to describe today's session and I will try to do some silent time. Alright, got some, I, it was great.

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Thanks for having me. Appreciate you.

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Yes.

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Yeah, I've got some systems thinking in there, Michael. That's fantastic. Oh, yeah.

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I'll let folks just pop on that QR code and again follow along Michael, post a lot on LinkedIn.

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And again, follow on, Michael, post a lot on LinkedIn. I urge you just to see what he's up to. So Michael, thanks again.

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Yes, see you soon. Thank you. Thank you, everyone.

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And I know we will be seeing each other