



## Article Series on Learning Impact

### Tackling the Final Frontier: Helping Educators Make Effective Use of Technology

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Technology in education is continuing to advance at a rapid pace and students worldwide remain eager to learn. In order for teaching and learning to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, administrators and policy makers must confront the final frontier of preparing teachers for making effective use of that evolving technology, says an international education and technology consultant.

Lord Jim Knight of Weymouth is a former Cabinet minister in England's Labour Government and is a member of the Privy Council and House of Lords. He will give a keynote address and lead a panel discussion on "Technology, Schools and Personalized Education: How Do School Authorities Enable Systemic Progress?" at the [2014 Learning Impact Leadership Institute](#) in New Orleans May 5-8. The focus of the session is to draw attention to the opportunities and challenges associated with incorporating digital technology into classroom instruction, and to discuss what is needed in order to take full advantage of technology to do things that were previously inconceivable to improve education and learning.

There have been tremendous strides in recent years, not just in the sophistication of devices and digital

applications but also in the availability of content and connectivity, said Knight. "But we've suffered in the past from a 'spray and pray' attitude about technology. We give it out and we hope that teachers and learners will figure out how to use it. Unfortunately, we still have examples of bad purchasing because the teaching and pedagogy has not been thought through. There needs to be a significant investment in professional development of teachers to realize the magical potential of technology for teaching and learning."



*Lord Jim Knight,  
Ed Tech Consultant*

Knight said the reality of today's education is that far too many young people see school as a place to go to have a rest from learning. An anecdote he heard recently was about a young boy living in the remote Shetland Islands. The boy attended the same school as his parents and grandparents and was very much taught in the same way. At age 14, the young man refused to go to school anymore because he considered it irrelevant. He increasingly spent time online, building up an international friendship group. "Four years later, he was imprisoned for being part

of a network that hacked into the CIA and a serious crime agency in the UK. That, to me, is the story of someone who was clearly able, had huge potential to do well, but was completely failed by the system. He was learning a huge amount on his own initiative. It just happened to be that he was learning what we didn't want him to learn.

"I don't think that is an unusual story," he added. "When you're born, you don't know much, and as you get older, you learn. That's the nature of humanity. The idea that any child you meet isn't interested, well, they are not interested if it's not interesting to them. They do naturally want to learn and that's the big challenge for teachers. Technology, and to some extent, large amounts of data, offer teachers the potential to understand their students better. To then personalize and differentiate the nature of learning, to think about how we might assess differently, and to move away from what people like Ken Robinson categorize as the industrial model of learning to the digital model of learning."

Knight said he is uncomfortable with the phrase "self-directed learner" because he believes in the power and role of teachers in the learning process. "But I also believe that teaching needs to change. We are still, by and large, in the situation where a teacher from a hundred years ago could arrive in any one of our classrooms today and be pretty comfortable with what the job entails. That needs to change, not for its own sake, but to reflect the changes that have taken place in society. Just because you are the same age as another learner does not mean you are at the same stage of learning. We need to give every student momentum and we can do that now. We don't have to pitch at the median level of ability in a class. We can pitch at every level of ability in the class."

But how do we go about implementing change in the classroom?

"Accountability drives so much behavior in education," he replied. "This element is non-

negotiable, because education is publicly funded. At the moment, there is a straight-jacket on innovation. No one is going to change anything if they think that the kids will do less well as a result. We need an accountability system that creates room for risk-taking and therefore managed failure. And you learn from failure. That's hard to accept, but I think rounded measures of performance can ultimately result in positive change. As we embed technology in what we do in terms of managing schools and how we teach and how we learn, it's generating much richer, a more granular level of data than a bunch of test scores. We can use that to show parents how well students are achieving, enjoying what they are learning, and how employable they are as a result. We can show learners what progress they are making and we can make the learning more relevant to them."

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Rob Abel, CEO of IMS Global, agrees that empowering teachers with the skills necessary to effectively use emerging technology is critical to its long-term success in revolutionizing the teaching and learning process. "And we believe that providing the IT architecture for enabling that technology will benefit not only the teachers, but also their students. We look forward to continuing this conversation with Lord Knight at Learning Impact."

## About IMS Global Learning Consortium

IMS Global is a nonprofit organization that advances technology that can affordably scale and improve educational participation and attainment. IMS members are leading suppliers, institutions and government organizations that are enabling the future of education by collaborating on interoperability and adoption initiatives. IMS sponsors Learning Impact: A global awards program and conference to recognize the impact of innovative technology on educational access, affordability, and quality. For more information visit [www.imsglobal.org](http://www.imsglobal.org) or contact [info@imsglobal.org](mailto:info@imsglobal.org).

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