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Article Series on Learning Impact

Today's Apps Changing Teaching & Learning

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Connected learning applications are evolving at such a rapid pace, they not only are providing potential users with more personalized functionality, but also enabling developers the opportunity to go to market faster and with greater flexibility.

“The macro view is that apps have gone from big to small,” said Hap Aziz, Associate Vice President of Global Learning Initiatives at the [University of Bridgeport](#). “People used to think of apps like you would think of Microsoft Word. Developers would try to load them with as many features and functionality as possible in order to make them more desirable. Today, people just want to focus on a particular thing and they want their apps to work together like Lego blocks. That continues to be the trend, which has done several things. It’s allowed the improvement of features at a much faster rate. And those features that aren’t used as much, they can wait longer and don’t hold up the release of a major program waiting on some isolated function to be updated.”

Aziz, who has considerable experience in the gaming industry and the development of applications, is leading the Connected Learning App track at IMS Global’s [2014 Learning Impact Leadership Institute](#), May 5-8 in New Orleans. He also oversaw the

organization’s first ever Connected Learning App Challenge, the five winners who will be introduced at the annual conference as well as many of the nearly two dozen submissions.

App developers today are, first and foremost, interested in creating applications that enhance the teaching and learning process, Aziz said. “And the great thing is, with this small app mentality, and with a tool like IMS Global’s [Learning Tool Interoperability™](#) (LTI™), somebody who has passion can do this in a garage and doesn’t need hundreds of thousands of dollars of venture capital to make it happen. It’s a lot like the days of the personal computer where you had Steve Jobs working out of his garage and Bill Gates working out of his dorm room.”

One of the things Aziz said impressed him about the [Connected Learning App Challenge](#) was the variety of submissions they received. A number of different categories were represented, including collaboration and assessments.

“Another thing that impressed me was the participation from smaller players, not just the usual suspects where you’ve heard their names before. For example, the winner of the challenge was the

developer of an app called [Hoot.Me](#), which I thought was very innovative. It's an app that allows students and instructors to link Facebook and their learning management system together so that if a student mentions their course on Facebook, it feeds into the campus course system and vice versa. The fact that Hoot.Me, which is a start-up, beat out some of the established companies, the message here is that you don't have to be a large company in order to be a leader in application development."

One way in which apps today are changing the learning process is through increasing customization, he said. "I'll give you an example. A while back, when I was working in the game industry, I did some development on a prototype computer game for blind people based on 3-D sound. You never know what people will come up with in reaching markets that are underserved. That's the beauty of the app market today. People are free now, with the tools that are available on their desktops, to create dozens of apps. They don't have to buy expensive computer equipment or have someone funding them. They can go brainstorm with a couple friends and come away with a great idea and then start executing on that idea in a matter of days."

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A major catalyst to app development, Aziz said, has been the continuing establishment of technology standards that are offered through organizations like IMS Global. Not only does it open up the marketplace as well as cut down on development time and costs, but allows developers to leverage on the work that others have created.

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What advice would Aziz offer to budding app developers?

"Remain focused on what research is being done on the nature of learning and the nature of play," he replied. "That has been a recurring theme in my career for a long time. I'm a firm believer that people learn best when they play. If people can play while they learn, the lessons are more deeply embedded and more successful. And building computer-based apps, through standards that enable them to plug and play into any LMS, just plays into the hand of the gameification of curriculum."

Aziz said the Connected Learning App track at IMS Global's 2014 Learning Impact Leadership Institute will offer attendees an opportunity to witness firsthand the revolution of the learning process. "We are really watching history being made here with regard to moving the technology of learning to the next level. Education has been stuck in the 18th and 19th Century model. We're still making paper textbooks, for example. In New Orleans, attendees will be able to interact with these innovators and help shape the next generation of applications. The solutions aren't going to come top down from the Department of Education. They are going to bubble up from the conversations between educators and developers with input from the learners themselves."

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 or contact info@imglobal.org.

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