

## Interview with Nik Peachey

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Google the name “Nik Peachey” and you will over 68,500 results. Nicholas Peachey, known as Nik Peachey, is a well known learning technology consultant, trainer and writer. Nik, who won British Council ELTon Award for Innovation in Teacher Resources in 2016 and ELTon Award for Excellence in Course Innovation in 2012, has been a leading learning technology resource person at various educational technology conferences and learning technology trainer across the globe. The author of *10 Lessons in Digital Literacy* and *Web 2.0 tools for teachers* and co-editor of *Creativity in the English language classroom* answered questions related to learning technology, its impact on learning teaching and learning, types of training English language teachers need, etc. in an interview with **Dr Albert P'Rayan**. Here is an extract from the interview:

**Nik, first let me congratulate you on winning the ELTons 2016 award for Innovation in Teacher Resources for your ‘Digital Video – A Manual for Language Teachers’. This is the second time you have won an ELTons award for Innovation. In 2012 you won the award for the blended learning course you developed. How important are these awards to you?**



Thank you Albert. Firstly I think the awards themselves are very important. They set a standard for us to aspire to and they also give us an opportunity to celebrate achievement within our profession. I think we need to do more of that.

For me as a freelance trainer, writer and consultant, winning the awards is very important. They help me to get work and boost my credibility in what’s becoming a very competitive space. The most recent award for my ebook *Digital Video - A Manual for Language Teachers* is especially important because it’s the first publication from my own company <http://peacheypublications.com/> and because it is so hard to convince teachers to buy ebooks, even though they are much cheaper. I hope that having the award will give teachers the

confidence to buy. It's also really important because I crowd sourced the funding to produce the book. More than 140 people donated their time and money to help me create the book and so I feel that winning the award vindicates the trust they placed in me.

**You have been in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) for over a quarter century and you have been a teacher trainer and learning technology consultant for over two decades. Can you share with us one or two of your major success stories?**

It's difficult to define success in language teaching or in teaching generally. It seems like the work is huge and never will be done. There's a quote from the Irish writer Samuel Beckett that I often think of "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better." For me personally there are some milestones, like winning the two innovations awards or co-editing Creativity in the English language classroom with Alan Maley that I can look back on as times when I failed a bit better, but probably the real achievements happen at times that I'm not aware of. My blogs have now been read more than 3.5 million times and every now and then someone comes up to me at a conference and says that they read them and learned a lot from them. That's probably my biggest success, the small changes - the small change that I've enabled someone to make in their teaching and thinking.

**In the age of information and mobile technology, do you think technology has**

**changed the way learners learn English and teachers teach the language? In other words, have language teaching and learning become easier because of technological innovations and tools such as mobile apps, podcasts, vodcasts, etc.?**

I don't think it's become easier. We've become resource rich, but in some ways our job has become harder. Technology has changed the way people communicate and interact with and through language. My children now experience language through technology in a much more diverse range of forms and contexts than I did when I was growing up and that's challenging for teachers because we need to help them mediate and use those communication genre effectively in their first language and in English. That has broadened the scope of what we need to do and the range of skills we need to enable that process. For me that's quite an exciting change, but for many teachers, that's not easy at all.

**Based on your experience and interactions with teachers of English across the globe, can you state that teachers are showing interest in integrating technology into language teaching?**

Yes. For sure. Wherever I go I meet lots of teachers who are really keen to understand and exploit new technologies. I also meet teachers who are doing really great things with their students and are so enthusiastic about what they do. Of course I also meet teachers who are very resistant and dismissive of technology, but they are

becoming increasingly few and their arguments are also becoming increasingly weak.

**As a technology trainer you must have conducted numerous workshops and training programs on Web 2.0 technology and tools for English language teachers in different parts of the world. Do you think teachers utilize the tools effectively and have made an impact on English language learners?**

I think it varies enormously, but what's important is that as a profession we are making progress in this area and our understanding is growing. Where teachers are basing their use of technology on sound pedagogy and where they are able to put the technology into the hands of their students and enable them to use it to interact with language there has been a lot of success. I think where teachers struggle most is when they are using technology as a form of gimmick to increase motivation. The novelty soon wears off and students lose interest.

**I remember that in one of your blogs you have mentioned two types of training: i) technologically-focused and ii) pedagogically focused. How important is technology training for ELTs to integrate technology into language teaching? What should be the focus while training ELTs to get interested in integrating technology into ELT?**

Ideally, I think we need to combine both. Many teachers need help to feel confident

with the technological side of things, but this has to be delivered within the context of creating learning for students. A lot of technology training fails because it is devoid of context. It focuses on how to use elements of the interface, etc. without really putting the application to a sound pedagogical use. Too much training is also theoretical and hypothetical when it needs to be practical and hands on. Training that involves teachers just listening and making notes is going to have very little impact. Teachers need to use the technology to create materials or learning opportunities for their students during the actual training.

**Is it difficult to motivate ELTs who think they cannot use technology in the classroom?**

I haven't found this to be the case. If the training is practical and they can see how easy it is to create something with a genuine use for their students then most teachers get motivated pretty quickly. Many older teachers are afraid of technology. They think it's difficult and complex to use, but the reality is that whilst becoming more powerful, technology is also becoming much simpler to use. Nowadays you can create some amazing things just by pointing the mouse and clicking. These kinds of things took hours or days of complex coding ten years ago. Nowadays you can create and edit a video on your phone using a free app in just a few minutes. That's really amazing.

**Can technology be more effective than inspiring teachers who are not tech-savvy in making learners master a language?**

Technology without inspiring teachers or inspired learners is incapable of achieving anything. Technology in the hands of motivated learners and inspiring teachers can achieve amazing things.

**Do you think technology has the potential to replace English language teachers in the near future?**

No. Not in the near future. It can augment good teaching and make good teaching more diverse and powerful. It can enable a change in the role of the teacher too, but I don't see it replacing a teacher.

**In what ways can technology promote learner autonomy?**

Technology is a huge enabler of learner autonomy because it can give students access to such a large range of materials, sources of information and useful applications and as teachers if we focus on helping our students to understand how to use technology to become more autonomous learners, then we could really start to realise the full potential that technology offers us.

**Can web technologies (social networking tools, ...) be used effectively to promote the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills: communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking?**

The ability to be literate in the 21st century resides in our ability to effectively use those kinds of tools and especially to use them for collaboration and creativity, so my answer is a categorical yes. Critical thinking is different however, but still vitally important and always has been, but I think

it's something we need to constantly encourage and foster regardless of the medium.

**According to the research by Professor Patricia Greenfield of UCLA, as technology has played a bigger role in our lives, our skills in critical thinking have declined. As a technology trainer, do you agree with her? Is it possible for technology to foster critical thinking among learners?**

No. I don't agree that technology has created a decline in our critical thinking skills, rather that it has highlighted a greater necessity for them. In the past we have been too quick to assume that something written in a book has authority and is correct or true. We've built an educational culture around this kind of indoctrination, but now that students have much greater access to a wider range of opinion it's become much harder for educational establishments to maintain a specific bias in terms of what is or isn't fact. The reality is that most of what we know is opinion rather than fact and what we know changes as our understanding grows. Within the world we inhabit there is a vast diversity of opinion and interpretation of knowledge. What we need to do is help students to understand that and rather than teaching them to look online for what has genuine authority and then dismiss all other sources, we need to help them to question the validity of authority and understand why different perspectives may have emerged. We need to help them to look at different opinions, evaluate their credibility, not based on the

authority of the source but the rationality and sincerity of the logic of their ideas. If we can do this we may be able raise a generation of students who are much more intelligent open minded, independent and tolerant in their thoughts.

**In spite of rapid development of information and multimedia technology, ESL and EFL learners find it difficult to master the language according to various reports and studies. Does it imply that technology has not been effective as expected?**

No. It implies two things. The first is that our original expectations may not have been correct. Learning anything is always going to take hard work and thought. Technology won't take that away.

Secondly it implies that we haven't applied effective methodologies to our use of technology. Technology is a tool and as such is inert. In order for it to have positive impact we need to be pushing it in a direction which will help us to achieve our goals. Our understanding of how to push it needs to be based on a thorough understanding of the kinds of pedagogy and methodology that will make it impactful and as a profession we haven't reached that place yet. There are a lot of reasons for this. I wrote an article about this some time ago with the title '11 Reasons Why Teachers Don't Use Technology': <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/11-reasons-why-teachers-dont-use-technology-nik-peachey> but at the heart of the problem is that our mindset hasn't yet shifted significantly from the ways we were

taught. I think we are still embedded in the educational past where we are trying to get students to follow a prescribed path that we can measure and evaluate and we are grafting technology on to that as a form of support. We are still measuring students' abilities to give the answers we want to the questions we have created. Instead we need to get to a point where we are helping students to use technology to create and answer their own questions and explore and discover learning for themselves.

**Do you envisage that technology will play a very important role in education? What will it be?**

For sure. Above all I think technology gives people access to a huge range of information and learning opportunities. It can also give people a voice to share what they know and learn from each other.

A lot has been written about helping guide students to choose the 'right' materials that have 'authority' when they access the online world, but I think that's a mistake. There are no wrong or right sources of information, there is only information. We need to help students to think critically about that information understand the arguments within it, the rationale behind it, the bias that influenced it and above all how they, as individuals, personally respond to that information and apply it to their lives. There is a wonderful line from a poem by Walt Whitman "re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a

great poem and have the richest fluency". This was written in 1855, but in the world we now live in, this above all is what our children need to learn.

I've tried to base my recent book '10 Lessons in Digital Literacy' around these principles. The ebook is a collection of lesson plans. The materials are designed around authentic online information, but they help students to think about their own understanding of the issues within the information and to respond to the information on a personal level. They also guide students to use technology to create research to find out more about the topic

and to re-evaluate their views based on what they have discovered. The lesson plans are based on some of the principles of connectivism - a theory of learning that has been promoted by Stephen Downes and George Siemens.

Personally I believe this is an amazingly exciting time to be involved in education. Technology offers us huge potential to transform education on a global scale, but we need to ensure that this is done in a way that will empower people and open their minds to new possibilities rather than prescribe and control what and how they think.