



# IMS Global Learning Consortium

## Series on Learning Impact

Subscribe to IMS articles and interviews at <http://imglobal.org/articles/>

### Understanding Media Psychology and Learning to Learn: An Interview with Bernie Luskin of Fielding Graduate University



*It is difficult to describe Dr. Bernard Luskin without using the word pioneer. For more than four decades, Bernie has been at the forefront of developing technology in the classroom and has been a long-standing contributor to the research of media psychology—the study of how technology affects the manner in which we teach and learn. He has been president and CEO of divisions of innovative Fortune 500 companies, including Philips Interactive Media, Mind Extension University, and Polygram's American Interactive Media. He is the recipient of two Emmy awards and serves on the Education Policy Committee of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Bernie was founding president of Coastline College, president of Orange Coast College, and founding chancellor of Jones International University, the first fully accredited, web-based university. He currently serves as executive vice president and director of the Media Psychology, Media Studies program at Fielding Graduate University. He recently was appointed a member of IMS's Executive Strategic Council and, earlier this year, spoke at IMS's Summit on Global Learning Industry Challenges conference in Indianapolis. IMS talked with him about the study of media psychology and technological advances in the classroom.*

**IMS Global:** How do you define media psychology? And why does it make sense as a new field of study and research?

**BL:** Media psychology is really the application of psychology to media. It's as simple as that. It's the application of psychology to the human experience. The field actually has quite a long history, but the use of the term is more recent. In my own case, I've been working in media psychology for more than 40 years. And yet, the term didn't come into common usage until recently. The definition is much broader today than it was in the early 90s when the media psychology division of the APA (American Psychological Association) was formed. At that time, it was mostly talk-show hosts, the Tony Grants, and the Dr. Ruth Westheimers, who were either on television or were radio psychologists, talking about media psychology. In the 90s, we began to realize that psychology was relevant to software design, to tele-medicine, to public policy, and government-related issues, to all facets of education, entertainment, and software games simulation. All of those areas became, in the current vernacular, silos. In 1997, the media psychology division of APA decided to do a study of psychology and new technologies and I co-directed the study. It identified about a dozen areas where psychologists had the professional opportunity to work in the areas of media. That broadened out the whole division. Following that, I started teaching a course in media psychology at Fielding Graduate University and now we offer a Ph.D program in media psychology and an Ed.D concentration in media studies.

In the media psychology program, the field of study is really media studies. It's the study of media effects. What effect does this convergence of iPods, television, and the like have on learning? In learning, you have to look at nature and nurture, but you have to also look at the physical technologies, the psychology and

the physiology of learning. With magnetic resonance imaging, we can now track the learning experience much more effectively than ever before. We know the brain centers used in learning. We've learned that the emotional response is different from the cognitive response in different places in the brain. We now know more than we understand, which is one of the learning challenges before us.

**IMS Global:** What have been some of the most profound changes in teaching and learning as a result of the introduction of some of these new technologies?

**BL:** Early on, in the 60s, I taught what was called data processing and my dissertation was on computer-assisted instruction, which is really media psychology today. In the latter part of the 60s, I worked with Carl Rogers at the Center for the Study of the Self in San Diego. In 1972, we created a television series called *As Man Behaves*. We did it when I was at Coastline Community College. It applied psychology and media through the medium of television. My point is that the aspects of media psychology as it relates to teaching and learning have long historical roots. If you go back to the tele-courses, you can go back to *Sunrise Semester* in 1979 when they were offering the talking-head courses on television. Through the 80s, they had auto-tutors and computers were beginning to be used in different ways. Even slides were a big thing in those days. By the late 70s, the Adult Learning Service at PBS got set up. *Sesame Street* had been created and was having some success. As we got into the 80s, we shifted from analog to digital media and the boom took off. Cable television grew dramatically, and they perfected devices, including the laptop computer and audio-visual kinds of things. The 80s was really kind of a decade of spreadsheets and limited audio-visual impact in the learning environment.

The 90s has actually been kind of a decade of the gadget. The invention of digital everything and the proliferation of media, including satellites and all those kinds of things, really came into their own only at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We're right in the sweet spot at the moment where the audio-visualization of media, both in and out of the classroom, is accepted. The obstacles are pretty much diminished. Almost every college and university in the United States today is offering online courses using some level of media. It's becoming more personal rather than less personal. Both mass media and individualized use of communication is booming on all sides. In the Georgia Medical College, for example, they have an experiment going on whereby patients are being treated by physicians in central locations who are using their computers with cameras. This kind of thing is spreading in all forms of distributed learning. Online is a term that is fading and the notion of learning is really more of being distributed. I mean, knowledge is portable, it's pliable, it can fly through the air.

At USC, they've had big projects going now in visual learning. And one of the arguments is that if we hadn't developed alpha-numeric processing, the use of alphabet and numbers, we would be much more sophisticated in audio and visual communications today than we are.

**IMS Global:** Back in the 70s and early 80s, everybody was talking about distance learning and how technology was going to revolutionize the way in which we teach and learn. It seems like that prediction sort of fizzled initially, and that it's only within the last decade that we've seen some of those visions come to fruition. Did higher education initially go down the wrong path or was technology simply not advanced enough to meet the expectation?

**BL:** I don't think we stumbled at all. I think it's been a process of evolution, competition, invention and it just takes time. Pick any device. Pick the airplane. The first airplane flew 5,000 yards, then it was a fixed-wing plane that barely flew. Then they added a second engine. How many years does it take to do those things? It takes generations, and I think the cycle is pretty consistent. In my experience, as I look back from the evolution of the book and all of the things that we know about, they continue to get better, they continue to be used more effectively and we continue to improve their applications in the learning environment. For example, if we go back to the 50s, we cut our teeth on programmed instruction and people learned to write around the use of objectives and put materials together. In the 80s, I was part of Philips Interactive Media, which was, at that time, the largest interactive media company in the world. We made a lot of breakthroughs. The interesting thing is there were a lot of formats out there at that time, as there always are, CDI, CD-ROM, CD-TV, the whole alphabet soup. They were all trying to do the same thing. Capitalism was at work, people were trying to get proprietary ownership of certain things they could invest in. Little by little, the dominant technologies in media prevailed whether they were the best or not. It's still argued in computer circles whether MS-DOS was the best operating system at the time or not. It just became the standard and Microsoft became what it did because of what they did. History is littered with the carcasses of formats that were really quite good but were part of the convergence. So going back to your question, I really don't think it has been a false start. It's just a process of research and development and I think we've just barely scratched the surface yet in the use of media and learning.

**IMS Global:** We realize that a lot of this emerging technology is a passing fad and some will be around a while. What advice would you offer to other institutions as to which technologies they should watch and invest in?

**BL:** Let me answer that by providing six suggestions. First, I would shift emphasis to the learning priority. It's all about learning, it is not about media or technology. It's about the message, it is not about the message. At Fielding, for example, we recently eliminated the CIO's position and moved the learning system into the Office of Academic Affairs and set up the position of Chief Learning Officer. So my first suggestion would be to shift learning to the number one priority.

Second, understand what we have learned. With magnetic resonance imaging and other kinds of advanced technologies, plus all of the research we've done about learning, we know a lot more about how to help people learn both inside and outside the classroom.

Third, recognize the globalization and the fact that the world is, indeed, flat. Albeit that it's a world of cultural differences and dissonance, the die is cast on world communication. Every college and university that I know of today is using media in the classroom and has non-classroom based media instruction. In terms of informal learning, people are learning how to learn. If you look at the new consumerism, people are constructing their own materials and the way they do things now, too.

Suggestion number four would be to get with the program. I think we're beyond the point of no return. The media is here, the technology is here. The demand is absolutely here if you look at the

research you get from the telecommunication industry and the desire of people to learn in new ways. The public interest is almost as high on the desire for learning and enrichment opportunities as it is for entertainment and movies. Look at what's driving the NASDAQ. It's being driven to higher numbers now by these private profit-making universities that are experiencing huge success because people want to learn in that kind of environment.

Fifth, don't be cowed by the media. It is simpler than all that. I think it's going to get easier and easier to use. The real solution is to make the media transparent. It's all about the experience. It needs to be used without thinking about how it's delivered.

And sixth, we need to continue to support research on media and its effect on learning. And then we need to fix our schools. K-12, if you look at the national reports that are coming out and you look at the urban school districts, is having a difficult time. I'm proudly chairman of the board of Hi-tech High, which is now the number one high school in Los Angeles. Their focus is on learning, but it enjoys a tremendous technology support system.

I don't claim any originality in any of these comments, but I've paid a lot of attention to the legacy that is passed on by all of those people in the past whose work we have learned together and whose work needs to be shared into the future so that it's understood. I think that is one of the things that IMS is trying to provide, to be a catalytic agent. It's all about synergy and convergence. There is no question that it's more complicated now than it has ever been before because the power of media communication and the power of media learning is beyond our ability to use it at the moment.

**IMS Global:** We marvel at the ability of the younger generation's ability to multi-task. Is the ability to thrive in this new media a generational thing? Or is it possible to train an old dog new tricks?

**BL:** Well, you can train *some* old dogs, but the reason there is a generational gap is because it's hard for old dogs to realize the tremendous changes that have taken place. I have to admit that I'm sort of an old dog. I can hand my niece a Blackberry and she will sit down and use it. I look at it and I need somebody to help me. I was a whiz kid 40 years ago and what we knew then is almost counter-intuitive compared to these kids that I work with today. It's just unbelievable what extraordinary ability they have. It's more important what the students learn than what the teachers teach. If you understand that learning how to learn is really the end game, then you really have something going for you, especially in distance and distributed learning.

We're beyond the point of no return, but there is still going to be a lot of resistance and conflict. There are a lot of issues that have to be sorted out and even learning management systems and all of these mechanisms that carry data back and forth, while they seem improved to us today, are very rudimentary compared to what we're going to have five and ten years from now.

**IMS Global:** In your most recent book, "Casting the Net Over Global Learning," you address media psychology and the manner by which we teach and learn using many of the new technologies. Looking into your crystal ball, what can we expect in the area of teaching and learning during the next two decades? What changes will we see in online and distance learning?

**BL:** I think two things. I think graduate professional education is going to become very sophisticated and the leadership programs that teach people who are going to set up these new institutions are going to proliferate. What we're going to have as a result of this proliferation is a whole generation of new leaders. And the leaders are going to have the appropriate components skill, the understanding of technology, the understanding of psychology, the understanding of economics, the understanding of learning theory, to successfully lead their institutions. All the research they do on companies, if you look at business, most new business ventures fail because of either lack of financial resources or poor management skills. These leadership programs in education are turning out people who can run these institutions, that know how to lead them into the future. So I think the graduate programs at the masters and doctorate level are going to thrive because these are self-motivated adult career learners who will see the vision and really be able to do it.

I also think the undergraduate degree programs are going to grow significantly, the degree completion programs, especially those in diversity using media. I've been doing work with Toro University International. I gave the keynote address at their graduation ceremony last August and they had several thousand students, about half of whom were military graduates, and many of those students were stationed in Iraq. I think there are a number of these institutions—the University of Maryland, the University of Phoenix, Fielding Graduate University—that are leading the way, regardless of the controversy with respect to the distance learning institutions, I think there are new educational metaphors, not only the profit-centric universities, but the diver-

sity of the non-profits into distance and distributed learning, the coming of the corporate university, some of which are now accredited. I think it is a tremendously bright future for higher education in this country.

**IMS Global:** Do you think we will reach a point where learning will become on-demand, where ours will become a society of lifelong, fully-engaged learners?

**BL:** I think we've moved beyond learning as most think of it today. We are beyond what most consider "online learning." Yes, we will become more engaged, more flexible, more independent. Those are terms that are performance based and people can do them. But I think now, with the coming of the dynamics of the Internet and fully wireless communication, learning has become more of a

self-actualized experience. You know, learning is an exercise of the mind. You can put thoughts together as fast as you are capable of assimilating and assembling them. And so, I think the learning experience is a self-development experience that people will be able to pursue at lightning speeds. The present traditional structures are so far behind the power curve in the way that we measure and support, reward and record, all of that mitigates for a different kind of future that goes beyond even the traditional ways that we explain them. The academy, writ large in education, is a huge monolith with a lot of costs and moves like a giant iceberg. It's hard to get things to change. But they are changing, they will change, and you can't stop them. All the pieces are here now, and, slowly, we are putting them all together.

## About IMS

In service to the community of organizations and individuals enhancing learning worldwide, IMS/GLC is a global, nonprofit, member organization that provides leadership in shaping and growing the learning industry through community development of standards, promotion of innovation, and research into best practices.

## Citation

To reference this article please cite:

Humes, L. R. (2006). An Interview with Bernie Luskin of Fielding Graduate University. IMS Global Learning Consortium Series on Learning Impact. 18 September 2006. from <http://imglobal.org/articles/18Sep2006Luskin1.html>

Copyright © 2006 by IMS Global Learning Consortium, Inc.

All Rights Reserved.

The IMS Logo is a registered trademark of IMS/GLC.

tel: +1 407.362.7783

fax: +1 407.284.1265

<http://imglobal.org/articles/>