

Fear of technology may hold back change in education, says Lord Puttnam

The "natural conservatism" towards technology of many people in education may "hold back changes" that could happen a lot quicker

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Not enough is being done to allay the fears of education professionals who see developments in education technology as intimidating, the Chancellor of the Open University has warned.

Speaking to The Telegraph, Lord Puttnam, who is Chairman of Atticus Education, an online education company, also spoke of the "natural conservatism" of many people in education, particular in higher education, with regards to developments in education and technology.

“It is possible that those people, because of their fears, will hold back changes that could happen a lot quicker,” he said. “We really need visionary teachers who can use all these new resources,

who are not intimidated by them.”

Having previously spoken at the launch of Mind the Gap in January this year, Lord Puttnam said that many higher education academics are “dragging their heels” when it comes to educational change.

He put the reluctance down to fear of status loss and fear of job loss prompted by a potential future generation of “super professors” who will challenge traditional methods of teaching.

“We are watching a massively disruptive evolution within education, possibly for the first time in 100 years,” he continued. “A lot of people are finding that very uncomfortable, but on balance it’s remarkable and potentially very good.”

The Labour peer – who produced *Chariots of Fire* and *The Mission* – has been working in education for 20 years and told how developments in education technology had been slower than he expected.

He called for more encouragement and support for teachers, to help them integrate technology into a classroom setting.

“What has surprised me is that the most positive and most adventurous professionals are primary school teachers,” he said. “There is a wonderful sense of hope in primary schools and a wonderful sense of how to make the learning experience better.”

He went on to say that the most reluctant to adopt new digital methods of teaching in many – but not all – cases, were those working in higher education.

“If we, as a society, really want to probe the future and think about what the world could be like and how we will cope with it in the years to come, where do we go? We go to higher education academics to have our fears assuaged or our hopes encouraged.

“How odd is it that the very place that society looks to for answers, would seem, at the moment, to be dragging its heels in the development of education.”

Highlighting the exciting possibilities that the Internet can provide to teachers, Lord Puttnam reported that, on one day in January, one million teachers downloaded lesson plans and ideas

from other teachers from TSL Education, of which he is Chairman of the Advisory Board.

Of those downloads, 71 per cent were user generated.

“Lots of people used to think that teaching was a very private affair and teachers protected their lesson plans and didn’t share them,” says Lord Puttnam. “What’s lovely is that we have discovered that this isn’t true. But this sharing online has only really taken off in the last five years.

“What we are seeing is a transition of people coming into the classroom for whom technology is a normal and natural way of life. These are the visionary teachers we need.

“Are these changes disruptive? Yes. Do some people find themselves lost? Yes. But that’s just the way it is.”