

## An interview with the World' Best Teacher – Peter Tabichi

In the latest event from the current webinar series, Mehool Sanghrajka, the CEO of Learning Possibilities, was speaking over an online link with Peter Tabichi, who won the Varkey Foundation Global Teacher Prize in 2019, the first teacher from the African continent to do so. Peter is based in the remote village of Pwani in the Kenya's Rift Valley and he teaches at Keriko Mixed Day Secondary School; a government school serving the local community. Not only is Peter the first prize winner from Africa, but he is also the first teacher who is under Holy Orders. As a Franciscan Brother he sees teaching as a calling wherein he serves the local community at all levels, as gifted science teacher and agriculture adviser. In keeping with the traditions of the Order he seeks no personal wealth or material gain from his work, and gives 80 per cent of his salary to local charities supporting the poor and destitute.



Peter's work in his local community includes educating the subsistence farmers about modern farming techniques, including the cultivation of drought-resistant crops. His calling into the teaching profession follows closely in the footsteps of his father and several other members of his family. His science teaching promotes practical and project work, as well as embracing new technology. He believes that to be a great teacher, you need to "do more and talk less". This philosophy is evident in the emphasis that he places on encouraging the students' enterprise; their capacity to undertake research projects and compete in national school science events – where they recently beat all rival entries from across the region to win with a project, showing how it is possible to generate electricity from lemons and cow dung!

Peter sees the importance of educating and caring for the whole child, not just about their learning but their nutrition and well-being too. He points out that it is no use trying to educate a child if they are too hungry to concentrate; his school feeds, as well as teaches the students, 95 per cent of whom come from very poor families. As a committed team player, Peter works closely with his colleagues at Keriko school to make sure that the lessons are as good as they can be. In this learning community, teachers themselves are constantly improving their knowledge and skills.



The school does not have fully dependable internet connectivity and the staff and students must rely on buying data bundles from their local telecommunication provider, to ensure continuity in learning. Peter himself recently bought several smartphones and data bundles for the students, so that they would be able to learn on-line at home during the recent school closures caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. He also runs after school science clubs where strongly motivated students can further develop their understanding through practical projects and challenges.



**Dr Michael Lightfoot**  
*Senior Education Consultant*

Michael is a senior education consultant, with more than 30 years of professional experience in the fields of Education Technology, Capacity Building, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Lifelong Learning including technical advice on technology in education to governments in European countries, The Middle East, South America and South East Asia. Michael holds a Doctorate from the Institute of Education at University College, London.

### Contact us

📞: UK: +44 (0)208 236 1000

✉: [enquiries@lpplus.com](mailto:enquiries@lpplus.com)

🌐: [www.LearningPossibilities.com](http://www.LearningPossibilities.com)

With characteristic humility Peter said that “Winning the Global Teacher Prize was a like a dream”. He had never travelled so far from his local community, and the glitzy event in Dubai exceeded his expectations. He did make the important point that it’s not so much winning the title of the World’s Best Teacher, but just the taking part in the event has its own rewards. With the top 50 teachers and then the ultimate 10 finalists working together, this in itself has enormous benefits as it creates communities of great teachers around the world, who keep in touch with each other and continue to share their successes and their exemplary professional practice. He encourages teachers from all sorts of schools from every corner of the globe to apply for what he promises will be a life-changing experience. Despite all the opportunity Peter has had to travel to meet, for example, President Trump in the Whitehouse and Pope Francis in the Vatican, he keeps his feet firmly on the ground, rooted in his local community which he serves with passion and commitment.



The parallels with St Francis of Assisi are hard to avoid. Saint Francis, the much-loved thirteenth saint called himself a ‘fool for Christ’, in the sense that he was happy to play the troubadour and the humble clown to get his messages across. He lived his life in a way that would be an example to others at a time when commercial greed, leprosy and the black death were stalking Europe. His vows of humility and service inspired him to live his life as a symbol of how he expected others to live, and soon he built a community with hundreds, then thousands of followers. In common amongst the early Franciscans was their endeavour to mitigate what they saw as the horrors of the material world through adopting a simple lifestyle; close to nature and encourage others to follow their example of self-denial and service.

The global Covid pandemic has, according to Peter, been highly traumatic for his school and local community with students out of school for months at a time. The smartphones and data bundles that were purchased for the students, served to mitigate the worst of the impact and the social problems arising from the lockdowns; but these will be with the community for many years to come. As is so often the case during periods of trauma and privation, girls have been disproportionately affected with a rush of early marriages, and unwanted teenage pregnancies that will serve as a legacy.

So what of the future? Peter is determined to pursue his mission and will continue to serve his community in the ways whereby he can best achieve success for his students. He has set up a foundation which will be the focus of the fundraising attempts to expand the student accommodation and facilities at Keriko school. They want to build more and better classrooms and get new equipment to support learning with the best and most suitable kit that Education Technology can offer. They are keen to get a sustainable solution for their internet connectivity, so that the school no longer has to rely on buying expensive data bundles for access. Everyone is encouraged to give what they can to this important endeavour, by logging on to the website of Peter’s Foundation, [www.petertabichi.com](http://www.petertabichi.com), to learn about the amazing work Peter and his colleagues/ brothers have done and donate by following the link.

In the spirit of St Francis, Peter reminds us that life is for living, with hope, optimism and with a song in our hearts. “Every day is a learning day” says Peter; without learning you will never grow and everyone should take full advantage of the opportunities available. Maintain hope and remember that the world will be a better place when we all work together to achieve prosperity, peace, and harmony. Mehool closed by echoing these comments and offering his own prayer for the success of Peter’s mission.

