

May 2010

SuperBulletin - Spring is in the air!



I don't know what I may seem to the world, but as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered all before me.' Sir Isaac Newton

Dear Parents and Staff,

I have always liked this Isaac Newton quote. It suggests to me a form of learning that incorporates curiosity -- something not found in a textbook and not necessarily evident in a classroom. How do we layout the great ocean of truth for our students? How do we help them discover the world and all that it encompasses? How can we spark imagination and inquiry so that each and every student can pursue his or her passion for learning? This is the dialogue we need to have as educators and leaders in our system.

How time flies! Several weeks ago, the clocks jumped ahead and left me feeling short of time -- I still have not recovered! I raced around the house changing every chronometer in sight. I fixed all of our timekeeping devices, save for that annoying flashing VCR, which reminds me that for some in this world, time remains frozen, stuck in the past.

I also noticed that for a few of our clocks, the hands remained still. The familiar and reassuring tick-tock had ceased. A battery recharge was long overdue -- reminiscent of my own energy levels. Perhaps this is how you feel? I empathize and acknowledge that this has been a hard year for all.

I know that I lost time somewhere along the way and will blame it on the leap years of times gone by! It seems these days that the pace of change is accelerating. Our email is one cause of this -- probably, this newsletter is just one more item in your virtual mailbox -- filling it to the electronic brim and adding to your day! I hope it is received in the positive way with which it is intended!

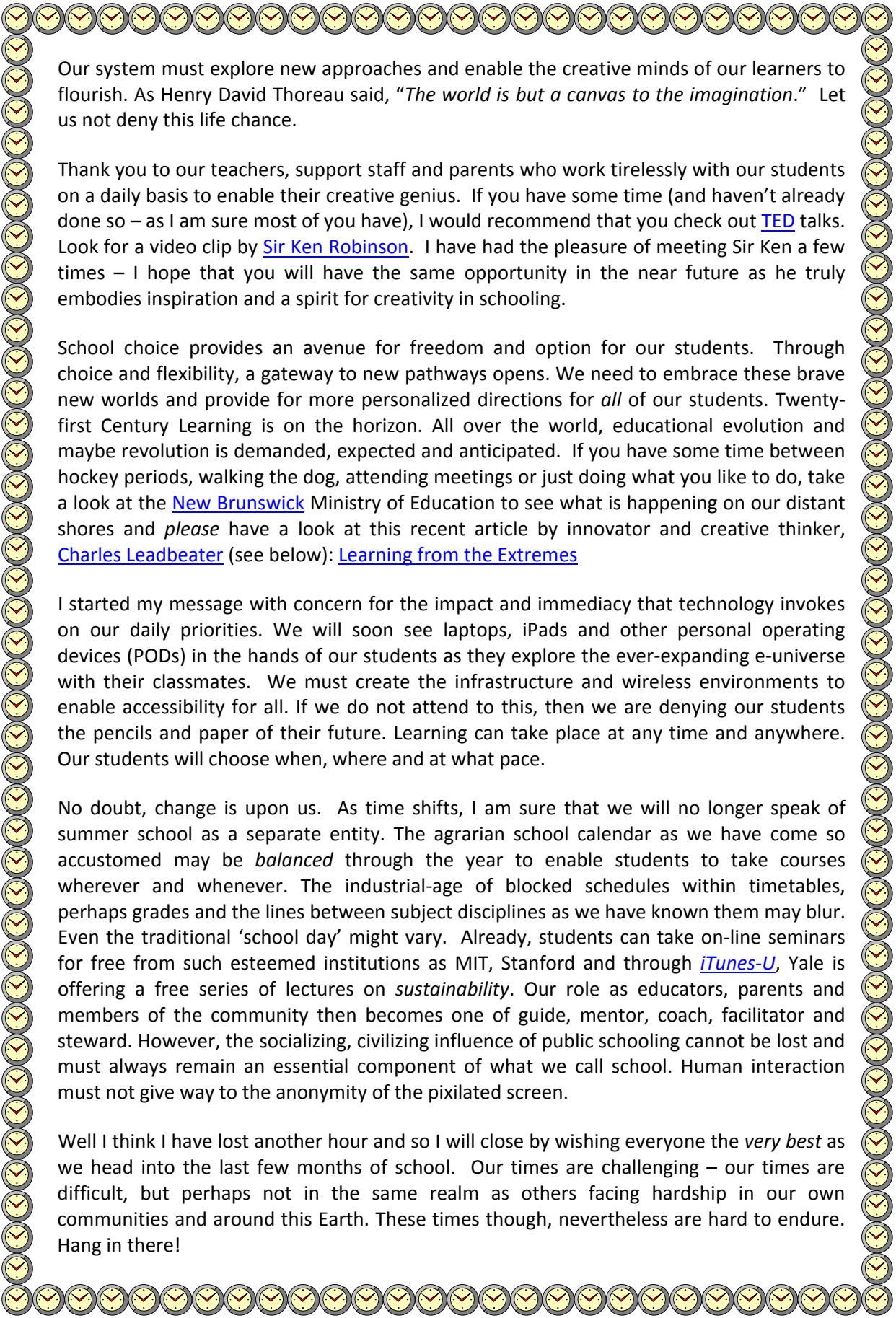
Email is the bane of our times -- ostensibly meant to save us time. This cumulative flood of instant messaging leads to a new *tyranny of the urgent*. The telephone was the first. Technology now enables us to forward voicemails from our cell phones and landlines into our email system. At a meeting I attended last week, it was suggested that rather than meeting face to face, perhaps those from out of town should use web-cameras to converse with us *urbanites*. Maybe we should turn over a green leaf and be Skyping within the district rather than driving to other locations, paying for gas, parking fees and lost time.

Facebook, *circa* 2004 and Twitter, *circa* 2006 are the *au courant* examples of social media, which were relatively unknown to most of us up until a few years ago. I am considering re-booting my *Blog* in the near future. My challenge though will be to keep it constantly refreshed. Not so long ago, these web logs were not part of our lexicon! With such amazing cyber advances, classes around the planet are being conducted in virtual worlds using technologies such as *Second Life*. As in the movie, in this virtual space, *avatars* take the place of real people. One can take on any persona and sit in a virtual classroom listening to a virtual professor. Yikes! This is a very brave and troubling new world indeed; evolving and taking shape at light speed – faster than my ticking biological clock can muster! Behind every change, whether it is ‘rock and roll’ or social media there exists a shadow of uncertainty, resistance, hesitation and mistrust. However, Huxley’s *new world* is neither fad nor fangle. It is here to stay and so we must prepare our students and ourselves to live and work in this environment with the appropriate care, acceptable use and careful approach that we would expect with any change. Education, of course, is key – history has shown that banning, prohibition and other avoidance mechanisms do not work.

So, why do I have this interest in time, space and technology? Several years ago, I had the privilege to personally see and hear Stephen Hawking speak via voice augmentation. I also met one of my science heroes, Bill Nye - The Science Guy and I wondered who encouraged these science enthusiasts to pursue their interests? It seems like only yesterday, but it was a while ago now that I had the distinct pleasure of visiting the Vancouver District Science Fair. This was a real highlight for me, positioned as it was in the midst of some very challenging meetings we have been holding over these past few months! Here stood the young scientists of our future, the great minds that will help solve the global issues of today, pave the way towards sustainability that we crave, and create the better world that we want

Learning for many of these young innovators did not come from a textbook or from a classroom lecture. I asked them, as I walked around the venue, if they had enjoyed working on their experiments and designs. You know the answer! This hands on, self-directed, but facilitated, problem-based learning is what truly engages our students. It inspires them to *want* to learn more. It sparks, motivates and feeds their imagination and creativity. It ignites their passion and intrinsic motivation to go deeper and further. For some, it is why they stay in school. Whether through the Fine Arts, Sciences, Athletics or other areas of our school *syllabi*, active, engaged learning is key. Children learn best when they pursue their passions and are permitted to explore new ideas, investigate phenomena, and create with their hands and minds. This goes to the fundamental principles of our public school system:

- *Learning requires the active participation of the student*
- *People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates*
- *Learning is both an individual and a group process.*



Our system must explore new approaches and enable the creative minds of our learners to flourish. As Henry David Thoreau said, “*The world is but a canvas to the imagination.*” Let us not deny this life chance.

Thank you to our teachers, support staff and parents who work tirelessly with our students on a daily basis to enable their creative genius. If you have some time (and haven’t already done so – as I am sure most of you have), I would recommend that you check out [TED](#) talks. Look for a video clip by [Sir Ken Robinson](#). I have had the pleasure of meeting Sir Ken a few times – I hope that you will have the same opportunity in the near future as he truly embodies inspiration and a spirit for creativity in schooling.

School choice provides an avenue for freedom and option for our students. Through choice and flexibility, a gateway to new pathways opens. We need to embrace these brave new worlds and provide for more personalized directions for *all* of our students. Twenty-first Century Learning is on the horizon. All over the world, educational evolution and maybe revolution is demanded, expected and anticipated. If you have some time between hockey periods, walking the dog, attending meetings or just doing what you like to do, take a look at the [New Brunswick](#) Ministry of Education to see what is happening on our distant shores and *please* have a look at this recent article by innovator and creative thinker, [Charles Leadbeater](#) (see below): [Learning from the Extremes](#)

I started my message with concern for the impact and immediacy that technology invokes on our daily priorities. We will soon see laptops, iPads and other personal operating devices (PODs) in the hands of our students as they explore the ever-expanding e-universe with their classmates. We must create the infrastructure and wireless environments to enable accessibility for all. If we do not attend to this, then we are denying our students the pencils and paper of their future. Learning can take place at any time and anywhere. Our students will choose when, where and at what pace.

No doubt, change is upon us. As time shifts, I am sure that we will no longer speak of summer school as a separate entity. The agrarian school calendar as we have come so accustomed may be *balanced* through the year to enable students to take courses wherever and whenever. The industrial-age of blocked schedules within timetables, perhaps grades and the lines between subject disciplines as we have known them may blur. Even the traditional ‘school day’ might vary. Already, students can take on-line seminars for free from such esteemed institutions as MIT, Stanford and through [iTunes-U](#), Yale is offering a free series of lectures on *sustainability*. Our role as educators, parents and members of the community then becomes one of guide, mentor, coach, facilitator and steward. However, the socializing, civilizing influence of public schooling cannot be lost and must always remain an essential component of what we call school. Human interaction must not give way to the anonymity of the pixilated screen.

Well I think I have lost another hour and so I will close by wishing everyone the *very best* as we head into the last few months of school. Our times are challenging – our times are difficult, but perhaps not in the same realm as others facing hardship in our own communities and around this Earth. These times though, nevertheless are hard to endure. Hang in there!

Thank you for your continued efforts, which are reflected in the smiles of our students and the expressed appreciation of our parents.

As we enjoy the *vernal equinox*, spring is in the air. Spring has sprung and just around the corner sits the summer solstice, where just for an instance, the hands of time really do seem to stand still.

Steve.

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Links:

TED talks: <http://www.TED.com>

Sir Ken Robinson: http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

New Brunswick: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjJg9NfTXos>

Charles Leadbeater: <http://www.charlesleadbeater.net/home.aspx>

Learning from Extremes article: <http://www.getideas.org/learning-extremes>

iTunesU: <http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/whats-on.html>

One cannot buy, rent or hire more time. The supply of time is totally inelastic. No matter how high the demand, the supply will not go up. There is no price for it. Time is totally perishable and cannot be stored. Yesterday's time is gone forever, and will never come back. Time is always in short supply. There is no substitute for time. Everything requires time. All work takes place in, and uses up time. Yet most people take for granted this unique, irreplaceable and necessary resource.
Peter F. Drucker
