



St Leonard's College
An education for life.

From the Principal

Peter Clague



Future-Ready

A Teacher's Reach

The day I started work in my first job, a teacher died. Her name was Christa McAuliffe, and her death was witnessed live by millions of people around the world, many of them school children. That was because she was NASA's first 'Teacher in Space', although tragically, she never got there. Instead, she perished alongside six other astronauts when the Challenger space shuttle they were aboard exploded shortly after lift-off in 1986. In the aftermath of the disaster, Christa was remembered for many things, not least of which was a phrase she made famous when she proudly told the pre-launch media – "I touch the future; I teach". In the 38 years that have followed my first day as an educator, I have come to know the great privilege and daunting responsibility of those words.

The NOW Generation

"The Future is Now" is a clichéd slogan, beloved by climate change activists, superannuation salespeople and the writers of B-Grade sci-fi movies. Intended to suggest both how advanced the world has become, and the rate at which we are messing it up. Of course, the future isn't now, it is yet to come. And teachers only touch it by preparing their students for tomorrow, today. Hence, the St Leonard's College vision of "An Education for Life".

But increasingly, there is another interpretation of "The Future is Now". From the Millennials, through Gen X and Gen Y, to today's Generation Alpha, each new cohort of young people born this century has increasingly come to expect things 'NOW'. From Uber Eats to online shopping, ultrafast broadband to air pods, Spotify to Snapchat, and every immediate-and-direct itch-scratching application in between, instant gratification and the need for speed have become the norm.

So, there is the teaching challenge: how do people born and raised in the past prepare children living in the present for a future that neither of them can foresee? Especially when those children are ever more conditioned to believe that all they may desire should come easily and instantly. In an age of overwhelming choice, immediate fulfillment, along with the rapid disposability of products and ideas, what durable lessons should we be imparting to those who will walk into the future long after we are gone? Ironically, the answer may lie in the past.

A Mother's Wisdom

Fifty years ago, raising five children whilst holding down a job was undoubtedly a challenge for my mother. However, she was aided by a collection of stock phrases that were regularly deployed to remind us how to behave. A favourite was "Patience is a virtue". Children are hard-wired to be impetuous, with brains that struggle to see beyond the present.

Growing up involves learning the power of delayed gratification. Resilience and success later in life come from mastering the ability to live comfortably with a little bit of discomfort, whether that be worrying about what the future holds or impatiently hungering for what you hope it will bring.

My siblings and I learned those lessons through necessity, with shops closed on the weekend, a single, wired telephone in the house, piggy banks that swallowed most of our pocket money and the only available public transport option being the ageing family bicycle with no gears. If we wanted something, we walked, wheeled or waited. Anticipation became something to be enjoyed rather than endured, but mainly because we had no choice.

Jump forward 50 years and who can blame today's children for satisfying their developing brain's craving for instant gratification? Young people have always desired everything, all the time, all at once. The only difference in the modern world is that it is more readily available. Why be patient when you are always a click or swipe away from novelty?

Another of my mother's pearls of wisdom was "Only boring people get bored." As children, we were often left to entertain ourselves after school and on the weekend. Yet this was an age before screens (other than a single black-and-white television console, whose 25-inch screen took five minutes to warm up before displaying either of the two channels on air in those days). Hence, we made our own entertainment. Without an endless stream of digital media to quench our inquisitiveness, we were forced to create games, invent toys, and engage with each other in order to stave off boredom.

I am not trying to be 'holier-than-thou'; I have no doubt that if iPads and YouTube had been around back then, backyard cricket would have soon been abandoned and the Meccano set left to rust. But digital technologies didn't exist, so our childhood was defined by active creation rather than passive consumption. And those acts of creation taught us the universal truth; that human happiness is a function of our relationships with one another and the places in which we roam.

The Past Has Already Passed

Short of uninventing the iPhone and mandating meditation on a mountaintop, there is no going back to the halcyon days of my carefree childhood. But I hear its echoes to this day. It taught me that self-regulation is a superpower, and that perseverance magnifies every human endeavour. I also know that whatever their future holds, children will always walk in two worlds as adults, the natural and the human. Learning to appreciate and contribute to both brings not only a sense of belonging, but also deep fulfilment. Active relationships, with people and places, sustain the soul. All teachers need to do to keep touching the future then, is continually seek interpretations of these old lessons.

Three Heads Are Better than One

The College already practises some tried and true future-proofing techniques: experiential activities, crafted to give young people genuine agency and a confidence-building sense of independence; outdoor education camps, revealing the natural world that exists when the virtual one is switched off; social action projects, where outreach triggers the profound sense of self-worth that comes from serving others.

Yet we must not be complacent. Rapid changes in society call for an equally innovative response from teachers trying to stay within arm's reach of the future. Accordingly, three new roles within the College have recently been established.

In pioneering work as our first Head of Futures, Justin Peat is throwing off the shackles of outmoded approaches to career counselling. Rather than the old cliché of asking, "What do you want to be when you leave school?", he poses the question, "Who do you want to be?" Asking our senior students, "What is your purpose and how will you chase it?"

At the same time, our new Social Responsibility Co-Ordinator, Alex Treloar, has been appointed to harness the twin ambitions of social action and sustainable practice within the College. Her work will build on our belief that young people can and should have a hand in shaping the world they will inherit, be it through discovering the joy of nurturing others, or the wisdom of caring for an environment that they will ultimately rely upon to nurture them.

Meanwhile, as Emily Price commences her role as Head of Wellbeing, she is channeling a little of Immanuel Kant's famous 'three rules for happiness'. That to be happy, a person needs "something to do, someone to love, and something to hope for". Emily's work will build on the College's established pastoral ideals, fostering a positive outlook and a healthy sense of anticipation as an antidote to the many stresses and anxieties that beset young people today.

A Legacy That Lasts

"An Education for Life" goes beyond a simple slogan. It is a lived reality for all who work at St Leonard's College. Our vision reflects our belief in Christa McAuliffe's truism that, as teachers, we touch the future. To do that, we aspire to send young people out of our gates equipped with a sense of purpose, an affinity for the people and places they will encounter and a wealth of things to do, love, and hope for. In short, we aim to ensure that every student leaves St Leonard's College future-ready.