

The Classroom Outside Four Walls



Albert Einstein, in his never-ending attempts to discover the mysteries of the physical universe, would perform “thought experiments.”

He would envision odd hypothetical situations, then try to imagine their possible outcomes.

For example, he wondered what would happen to a pair of identical twins if one left Earth to travel through space at the speed of light, while the other stayed home. Would one twin age faster than the other?

Raising challenging “what if” questions is a valuable tool in the advancement of modern science. As a social forecaster, I make good use of thought experiments to comprehend the future. What better place for some of those discoveries than outside the classroom?

In my work, I have conducted experiential learning sessions in Alcatraz, USA; Grenada, Spain; and most recently in Yellowknife—a breathtaking classroom. The Northern Lights are best seen in Yellowknife, capital of the Northwest Territories. They seem like the handprint of The Divine; their spectacular moving displays run the colour spectrum from green, yellow, and mauve, to red.

The Lights used to be seen over Japan, but no longer, thus many residents travel to witness the good luck of the Aurora Borealis. The lowest fringes of the Northern Lights are guessed to be 60 kilometres above the Earth, with the top of these undulating beauties extending to 900 kilometres.

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The Northern culture has endless gifts; the now highly valued works include moose tufting, beadwork, and treasured quillwork from porcupines. Today’s artisans are using the more readily available glass beads. A trip to the Gallery of the Midnight Sun (www.gallerymidnightsun.com) to meet with owner Lisa Seagrave is an education that will leave you wanting for more history, insights, and technical appreciation of those works of art.

A trip into the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre is a walk through 100,000 items relating to the heritage and history of the Northwest Territories. In the feature Gallery is a large boat made of moose skins, built by Shuhtaot’ine Dene elders and youth. (www.pwnhc.ca)

The Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories is now in its first permanent home since the late 1880s, when the Council sat in Regina. With its dome-covered, circular shape, this building is symbolic of the non-partisan consensus system of government and cultural

traditions of the northern people. It is full of amazing art, including Inuit sculptures and paintings by A. Y. Jackson of the Group of Seven. (www.assembly.gov.nt.ca)

Eating can be an education, too. Musk ox and caribou, pickerel and arctic char were on the menu at L'Heritage—considered one of Canada's finest restaurants—and the Oldtown Landing, both in Yellowknife.

We all need to keep aware of the

opportunities that surround us for learning and continue to experience the cultures and customs of others that can bring us new perspectives.

Inside or outside the classroom? You decide! ▲

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The Classroom in the Sky

Photo Credit: T. Macintosh/NWTT

THE Learning Age

We are experiencing a knowledge revolution,

a shift from the Information Age to the Learning Age that will bring its own challenges to the traditional classroom with the ever-growing commercialization of the education industry.

The key trend will be lifelong learning. The future of education will include direct education, home schooling, and experiential schools where the corporate/non-profit sectors can come together and contribute.

Electronic textbooks will bring about worldwide learning, given the convergence of content that includes video, sound, film, graphics, and print along with the delivery media including cell phones, digital radio, TV, and the Internet. With the proposed ELTIS (Electronic Learning Tutorial Instrument System), students will have personal avatars to obtain knowledge from the “Cosmodpedia” of the evolving worldwide information resources.

And the possibility of enhancing a person's intelligence artificially through a “smart pill” raises interesting ethical implications.

In this decade, there will be radical shifts in the meaning of “retirement.” As the demand for knowledge and wisdom grows. “Ageing to sageing” will become an irreplaceable resource for educating our young people. ▲

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