**Reflection on John Harris’ Session on “From Consumers to Creators of Simulations.”**

December 8, 2015

**Full disclosure:** I felt sick to my stomach for the first half of John Harris’ presentation. Then I was in awe and felt completely inadequate once it was done.

I’m sure the latter half of my opening statement is a common sentiment when someone meets John for the first time. John is easily one of the most incredibly talented, dedicated and intelligent men I have ever had the chance to meet. So why would I possibly feel ill after watching his talk on simulations??? Well in a word, guilt!

That sickening feeling stems from knowing that he taught in the room next door to me for over a year, and I never stopped to ask what he was doing or to sit down after school and pick his highly creative brain. Seeing him on my computer screen and witnsessing the oohs and ahs of my classmates solidified the feeling that I had missed an opportunity to learn from not only a great human being, but a master innovator and educator.

**My recollections:** It was my first full-time teaching gig right out of University, and I was at a school that could easily be mistaken for a BC Hydro Substation in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by teachers who taught in a way that was completely like anything I had seen. I would walk past John’s room in the morning say “hello”, and he would of course reciprocate. He would usually be in his room early, holding court with a parent or student discussing any number of things, from world politics, to advanced robotics to the local community craft fair. It didn’t seem to matter what the subject was, John seemed to know it all. Not only was the man in that room different, but so too was his workspace.

Standing ominously behind his desk was gigantic homemade robot named Robbie, and smack dab in the middle of his room was a gargantuan table full of Lego, little motors and remotes. Around the outside of the class were banks of computers, with students all turned away from their teacher looking attentively at their screens, working feverishly on who knows what. So what exactly had the students so enraptured, I never knew, because I never stopped to ask. I never understood, because I was so self-absorbed with my own work, to inquire about his.

There were times, while I taught, that I would be rattled from my seat by a cacophony of sound that would reverberate through the walls, as students took to the drums, keyboards and electric guitars set up in front of his whiteboard. “What the heck? I thought he had Social Studies?” I would say to myself, never considering the genius of his approach. He wasn’t just playing music with the kids, he was introducing them to music of the era they were learning about. He wasn’t asking students to read about ancient civilizations, he was asking them to virtually recreate them. His students weren’t passively learning, they were actively involved and invigorated by what John was teaching.

**Why Guilt?** As I sat listening to John talk about all these different simulations he had been creating with the students, I finally began to realize what he was doing, and had a better appreciation for his genius. When I saw black garbage bags full of broken white Styrofoam gliders, I thought “what a waste.” I know now, that those broken gliders weren’t a waste of material, but rather the evidence of innovation, discovery and active hands on learning.

**My Regret:** It is always tricky to look back on moments in our lives and say I should’ve done things differently. But after watching John’s Blue Jeans session, I couldn’t help but wish I had been more inquisitive and aware. He said some very prophetic things that resonated with me. One of his observations was that (paraphrased) “*teachers need to be astute analyzers of student potential, and be able to slot students* *into projects that reflect their skills and interests*.” Funny how looking back, I believed that John and I were very different teachers, yet hearing him say “*teachers need to be generalists, excellent delegators and should utilize the community resources around them”* echo my sentiments about thefuture of the educators to a tee.

So while, John’s brilliance may still be lost on my simple mind, I am grateful for the opportunity to better understand his genius and innovative spirit, and to enjoy his wisdom and a trip down memory lane.

\*\**Thank you Keith and Lorrie for lining up the online session*.\*\*