BCCIE 2017 Summer Seminar conference theme:
Faster, Higher, Stronger: technology, learning and identity

Over 200 years before Columbus sailed the ocean blue, Johannes Gutenberg changed the world. In 1439 he introduced movable type to the printing press, launching the Printing Revolution and allowing the great mass of humanity its first unfiltered access to print, reading, learning, literature, media, science and religion. It has been deemed the greatest invention of the Second Millennium, opening the door to modern human history, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution, Civil Society and our modern knowledge-based economy. If no Gutenberg, then arguably no Marie Curie or Louis Pasteur, no Darwin, no Edison or Wright Brothers, no Watson and Crick, no Einstein, no Bill Gates, no Mark Zuckerberg.

Gutenberg kicked technology into overdrive. The technology curve, having spent millennia clambering along the primordial X-axis began its gradual ascendancy up the Y-axis. Five hundred years later the introduction of the Internet put the technology curve on steroids. In modern memory a mere novelty, the Internet is now the very foundation of our Information Age, a pervasive utility we rely on absolutely but barely comprehend. Gutenberg to Zuckerberg. Prometheus Unbound. Pandora's Box.

The Internet and the computing power on which it rests have abetted our exploration of space, land and sea; the mind and learning; the body and our understanding of disease, health and reproduction; our access to and understanding of dynamically changing culture and cultures. It has led us on a giddy ride of technological advancement in every facet of our lives. Its ability to instantaneously create levels of interconnectedness has put globalization on speed and allowed greater global discourse, trade, migration and contact, for both good and bad.

Technology has helped to design better chemicals and weapons, with impressively more efficient delivery systems. It has allowed more pervasive and insidious access to our personal lives and habits for friendly and hostile nation states, shadow states and corporations. Its dark side shields the creepy and the terrifying. It shreds social fabric and rusts civility. It allows advocacy and its shadows incite offence to persons, race, culture, gender, religion, anything sacred. Its anonymity erodes a thousand years of evolving civil discourse and intelligent tolerance.

As with all media before it, the World Wide Web started off like a swell idea and soon commodified content and morphed into the worldwide mall. It also created a medium that allows passage to all. If you are not online, where are you? Who are you? If a tree falls in the forest …

Facebook is now among the largest media company in the world and it neither creates nor provides content. Ditto Uber, without a single car, or Airbnb without a single bed. The medium truly is the message. The process is the product, the vehicle the destination. Social media, once a 'thing' to do outside the classroom, is now how a generation is living its life, their profiles how they define themselves, their 'likes' their opinions, their 'friends' their networks, a generation embracing externally-driven concepts of worth, ethics and identity. Social media is not even social.

Technology has also disrupted the academy: its reach, its modes of delivery, its content, methodology and philosophy. The academy is a very conservative animal; but in the face of declining social dollars for public education, no educational provider could survive without social media marketing schemes and an online presence. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) were going to change the world but did not, but technology has upended traditional modes of delivery and with that content. Access to content has been exponentially increased, distance education is pervasive, and technology is now as omnipresent in organized learning as it is in Sugata Mitra's holes in the wall.

The subtext on offer is that educators need to worry less about inculcating critical thinking and content when all computations, reasoning and information are already available on your device. It is all there in the palm of your hand: thoughts, truth, post-truth, fact, blogs, 'news', fiction, propaganda, opinion and the history of all things, all jumbled up like a boatload of Skittles. Even with personalized 24-7 learning plans and healthy skepticism from the academy, technology has seduced us like drunken sailors into the consumption of content with few filters. We are laying the foundations for generations of non-discerning readers who can't think critically, who cannot discern fact from fiction or news from opinion, abetted by pedagogy's rush towards 'learning how to learn' in the Information Age at the expense of real learning and critical thinking. Uninformed or biased opinion becomes as valid as fact; they would not print it if it was not true, and you get points for trying.

We as front line educators, international educators, administrators and leaders need to be cognizant of the issues and push forward the conversation about the role of technology as carrier and not content. Victor Frankenstein's creation is sitting up in bed and is too important to leave alone with the wonks.

There is little escape from the warm clutch of technology, for it will advance and we must accommodate that progress. But as we watch it advance ahead of our ability to lead it, we must influence better controls, more responsibility and stronger containment rather than assuming that incessant advancement at any cost is a given.

Citius, Altius, Fortius: **Faster, Higher, Stronger**, the Latin motto of the modern Olympics. We strive for personal best in the pursuit of progress, but at a cost to be determined later. Technology on steroids moves quickly and we are not keeping up. Culture and learning are slow, sometimes tedious. Policy is boring. Perhaps we need to take stock and see where the unquestioning embrace of progress is leading. I would talk to my son about this but he is on the iPad.