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The Future of our 'Green' Generation

This weekend marks the deadline for entries by Fredericton students for the 2nd Annual Green Matters Essay Contest. Students from kindergarten to grade 12 were encouraged to write to the Prime Minister and tell him how they think we can become a greener country.

Today's youth are tomorrow's adults and leaders. And already they are 100 percent more environmentally focused than I was 30+ years ago at their age when environmental issues were not on our collective radar. Interestingly, the term 'sustainable development' is only twenty years old.

This all leads me to wonder what careers of the future will look like for today's kids. We will still have lawyers and engineers and teachers, but perhaps what those people do and how they do it will change in the next decade or two. So let's have some fun and speculate on what some careers may look like in 2030.

Let's start with engineers. A few decades ago, engineers built large coal-fired generating stations, large cars and record players. Today, engineers are designing wind turbines, electric vehicles and cell phones that play music, take pictures and play movies. Think about your son or daughter in elementary school right now, if they are a future engineer, they may be helping design a vehicle that gets over 100 miles per gallon (if gasoline is still in use); or a solar panel that NB Power leases to you for \$100 per month that provides all of your electricity needs; or a cell phone that shuts off the electricity in your home until you arrive in the driveway and then turns necessary things back on.

And what if your offspring become lawyers or politicians? Perhaps he or she will be drafting the next piece of legislation to get global greenhouse gas emissions down from 20 tonnes per year per person in Canada now, to 15 tonnes in 2030, and 5 tonnes in 2050 (the experts say that's where we have to go).

Let's say your son or daughter wants to be a teacher. By 2030, high quality teleconferencing will be ubiquitous. Maybe your son will be a Grade 6 teacher who has 5 students from Fredericton, 5 from Kenya, 5 from South Korea, and 5 from Afghanistan. Imagine how much these students will learn from their classmates on the other side of the world, and how that can be used as a tool to help different cultures learn and interact with each other.

Now let's think about certain jobs today that will most certainly look different in 20 years. I am guessing that the training for an automotive mechanic may look a whole lot different in 2030 – less oil and more electronics. And perhaps gas station attendants will no longer be pumping gas, but replacing rechargeable batteries for vehicles.

Transmission line technicians will certainly go through a transition over the next couple of decades. In 2030 we will be living on a smart grid – televisions and refrigerators will know when to turn themselves

on and off, cars will be plugged into the 'grid'. And there will be a lot of electronics involved in distributing electricity in the future.

Some of these changes may seem farfetched today, but imagine reading an article in 1988 that said 20 years from now your cell phone will replace your camera, video camera, Walkman, newspaper and map!

So, if your child has green on their mind today, help it to grow. Remember Spring is a time for renewal, so let's renew our environmental commitment together. There are many reminders and opportunities coming up, like Earth Day on April 22nd and Environment Week from May 31st to June 6. Or you could start right now and rent the BBC series 'Planet Earth', this will undoubtedly cultivate your family's awe of our planet and start many dinner table conversations!

A popular Native American Proverb still says it best: "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children".

Peter Corbyn is a co-founder of GreenNexus.com and a board member of The Climate Project – Canada.