

Emergence of Futures into the Educational Mainstream

Richard A Slaughter

Young people do not need to be persuaded to consider the future. They already have powerful interests in the self-constitution of their own lives. A common complaint, however, is that they are not listened to or taken seriously. Despite much rhetoric to the contrary their deepest needs, their highest ideals, do not figure prominently in most educational agendas. If we look very carefully at schools, school systems and tertiary institutions in various countries what stands out very clearly is that forward-looking approaches appeal very strongly to the young, visionary educators and those with progressive interests in education. Many teachers, school principals and schools have taken up and applied a wide range of futures tools, with clear and documented success. But what also stands out is that as soon as one passes beyond the middle level of any school system, futures approaches are seen as of minor interest, at best; they vanish like smoke on a windy day and are seen no more. Grassroots practitioners are denied the long-term support they need; initiatives die and are forgotten. If you return a few years later it is as if they never existed. Business-as-usual rules.

There is, however, another side to this story. Since the mid 1960s innovative educators around the world have been exploring a different view. They have understood the educational significance of the futures domain and have sought to incorporate this in theory, literature and practice.

This chapter reviews of the emergence of futures in education. It begins by considering the grounding of futures work in a cultural diagnosis. It then considers developments in practice and the emergence of a distinct futures education literature. It asks: why did futures become an educational concern and what do young people actually learn? It traces the emergence of futures from obscurity and early work toward wider use. It suggests explanations for sources of resistance within educational systems. Finally it outlines a number of strategies that will complete the process of making futures a fully mainstream concern.

Looking back to look forward

The end of the 20th century brought forth a flood of books and TV programs that attempted to come to grips with the recent past: what was the 20th century and what, exactly, does it mean? These were not simple questions. Historians and social commentators will continue to debate them for a long time. Yet in order to say anything sensible about the future we must know 'our place in time' or simply 'where we are from'.

Our present, our particular here-and-now in the early 21st century, is in fact only one version of what were once a vast number of possible worlds. Had key events in the past worked out differently we would be living very differently. So a careful look at the past reveals how our present world was constructed. And let us make no mistake that, like the calendar itself, our present reality is indeed a construction - albeit an exceptionally complex one. It did not arise by accident, but by the interweaving of a host of socially-, and historically contingent forces and factors. It is for such reasons that deep insight into the nature of our present must necessarily precede any attempt to explore possible futures. We do not begin from an objective starting point. Rather, we begin in a condition of being saturated with a host of 'givens' that, because they are so familiar, tend to be seen as natural and even inevitable. But the fact is that if humanity is to have a worthwhile future, much that was taken for granted in the 20th century will necessarily change in the 21st.

More than three decades ago, in his classic work *The Pentagon of Power*, Lewis Mumford had this to say about a process he called 'the removal of limits'.

To conquer nature is in effect to remove all natural barriers and human norms and to substitute artificial, fabricated equivalents for natural processes: to replace the immense

*(C) Richard A Slaughter, 2004, 2018
All rights reserved*

variety of resources offered by nature by more uniform, constantly available products spewed forth by the machine.

He then added:

From these general postulates a series of subsidiary ones are derived: there is only one efficient speed, faster; only one attractive destination, farther away; only one desirable size, bigger; only one rational quantitative goal, more. On these assumptions the object of human life, and therefore of the whole productive mechanism, is to remove limits, to hasten the pace of change, to smooth out seasonal rhythms and reduce regional contrasts - in fine, to promote mechanical novelty and destroy organic continuity. ¹

The conquest of nature, the removal of limits and the pursuit of economic growth for its own sake are among the guiding assumptions that remain deeply inscribed within the global system. These invisible but very powerful commitments serve to frame the world in specific ways. It conditions how that world is understood and also how the great social formations, such as government, business and education, function. Though this growth-addicted civilisation has been bumping up against global limits for some years there remains an air of collective denial about basic priorities: 'economic growth is good for everyone; the problems are not that serious; we can find substitutes for scarce resources; new technologies will open out new options', and so on.

The human species is nothing if not optimistic. But its powers of optimism are, perhaps, only matched by its powers of self-deception. Another element that makes this perceptual nightmare work, and work so effectively, is that the Western Industrial worldview operates within a mode of understanding in which short-term thinking has become the norm. What this means is that, while everyone is rushing around looking for short-term gains, attending to 'the bottom line', gearing up for the next election, so the downbeat, dystopian futures clearly implied by a culture in denial of limits are de-focused, put routinely out of sight. Hence, 'the system' goes on in its destructive and literally myopic (short-sighted) way, placing everyone's life and wellbeing at risk.

It comes as no surprise that young people already know this. They also know that there is much more to come and, moreover, that we are not at all well prepared for the revolutions ahead - what Jim Dator calls the 'tsunamis of change'. Fortunately, the very forces of globalisation, technical virtuosity and environmental threat that characterise the early 21st century have also stimulated a range of responses. Among these has been the development of the field of Futures Studies (FS) itself and its progressive application within schools. In essence, what FS does is to explore the near-future context using a range of conceptual and methodological resources. What emerges is, in essence, a viable forward view or, rather, a number of them keyed to different needs and contexts. ²

When people discover the many rich understandings available through such forward views, they find many, many uses for them. Individuals gain a new sense of purpose and direction. Schools gain a new set of concepts and tools for exploring future options with the young. Businesses enliven their necessary focus on strategy with the powerful insights that emerge from disciplined foresight. Governments, in those rare cases where they take the forward view seriously, can canvass entirely new policy options. This, really, is the point. As futurists never tire of explaining, there is no one future. Rather there exist a very wide variety of possible, probable and preferable ones. The whole point of exploring this array of future potential is to tease out the critical choices, strategies, possible responses in the here-and-now and to apply these in a thousand different ways. In other words, *the forward view fundamentally changes the way we operate in the here-and-now*. That is essentially why the work of futures educators is vital to the well being of students, schools and society. Instrumental questions about the future of education are ever and always of far lesser interest than those about futures *in* education. The former is usually an extrapolative exercise. But the latter can transform practice in the present. The rest of this chapter looks at how futures education has evolved in response to these challenges.

Development of futures education practice

The earliest work in schools drew upon the wider field of futures research that had developed in the context of the cold war and its military scenarios. The techniques of planning, forecasting, war-gaming and scenario analysis were seen to have value well beyond military applications. With a number of other techniques they were quickly assimilated into government, business and industry.

Rationales advanced for an explicitly futures-focused approach in education are outlined in more detail elsewhere.³ Briefly, they touch on questions of rapid change, the fact that actions and decisions have consequences, that images of the future permeate the present, that the future is 'a principle of present action' that education has its roots in the past but cannot move ahead only on that basis, that the past cannot be changed whereas the future can at least be shaped by human will and intention. Finally, and in contrast to more instrumental views, when our implicit model of personhood sees people as agents (interpreters of culture and makers of meaning) there is a very direct connection between futures and education.⁴ In the 1960s and 1970s such considerations provided a number of compelling reasons why a futures focus in education could be said to be 'a good idea'.

The first school course was taught in the USA in 1966. Several pilot projects were funded by what was then called the Office of Education and these led to the establishment of centers where futures were, and in some cases still are studied and taught (e.g., the University of Houston at Clear Lake City). The World Future Society entered the picture, and, by the early 1970s, its education section had a professional membership of several thousand. Conferences, publications and seminars followed, spreading all over the USA and in other countries. By this time a number of international networks and NGOs had sprung up. Perhaps the most productive and durable of these is the World Futures Studies Federation.

In virtually every Western country, and increasingly in others as well, groups of innovators based in schools, colleges and universities began to learn from each other and to perceive that they were part of a wider shift. It was shift away from immersion in a taken-for-granted past and present toward a conscious evaluation of possible, probable and preferable futures. Then, as practical experience accumulated, a range of highly desirable outcomes were observed. At least five key outcomes were frequently reported.⁵

First, a working familiarity with the symbolic, and to a lesser extent, the methodological aspects of futures, provides the basis for a futures discourse. As noted above, this remains missing from most of the great institutions that structure social life. The catalytic, enabling role of this discourse has, however, already been discussed. Second, teaching and learning about futures has been shown to enhance what is now called 'futures, or foresight literacy'. Thus, concerns that may have been unclear and poorly articulated are re-defined and become the source of innovations, projects and other creative responses. Those who develop these capabilities understand the risks, but they also understand that the key to resolving them lies in the nature of human and institutional responses.

Third, futures teaching specifically encourages constructive and empowering attitudes. In the normal run of events young people are exposed to great deal of negative and destructive material. Teachers of futures explore the significance of such material and lead students to understand its origins in industrialised cultures as well as the many routes and resources beyond it. Perhaps the most widely reported outcomes of futures courses are the constructive shifts in attitude that they engender. Fourth, it follows from the above that futures teaching helps people to develop the skills of proactive citizenship and of leadership. The latter is always leadership toward something, and futures literate people are well equipped to engage in dialogue about what directions, processes, structures and destinations may be involved. Finally, such teaching and learning provide ways of grasping what is sometimes called 'the big picture'. That is, a clear overview of the processes of continuity and change, of challenge and response that structure our world.

While the early gains of the futures education movement in the USA faltered under increasingly unfavourable political and economic conditions, a new generation of teachers and academics took up the work and improved upon it. Still in the USA, the foundation laid down by the pioneers continued through the work of people such as Kristen Druker, Ted Dixon and David E. Smith. One of the strong continuities in this field is that established by Paul Torrence's work (initially with gifted children). From this emerged the Future Problem Solving Program. A mid-1990s FPSP flyer estimated that 200,000 students in all fifty states and numerous foreign countries were using the program's materials.⁶

At that time no other country had been able to sustain this level of success or continuity in futures-related school curricula. In New Zealand and Australia a variety of tertiary courses had been offered, but when teachers returned to their schools they typically had very little in the way of continuing support. This also remained the case in Britain where Hicks' Global Futures Project offered short courses and provided futures-related curricula for primary and secondary use.⁷

Futures programs at the Primary level have been developed in many areas but are less well documented. Many assume that 'you can't teach futures' to young children. But this is not the case. The work of the Montclair futures school (New Jersey, USA) and researchers such as Holden (UK) and Page (Australia) make it clear that a great deal can be achieved at this stage. Given that the age and developmental stages of children are taken fully into account, futures can be, and are, taught at the primary level, and even earlier. Page's book *Reframing the Early Childhood Curriculum: Educational Imperatives for the Future* (published in 2000) is perhaps the first to explore futures in the context of early childhood.⁸

The role of creative individuals and NGOs in the innovation process should not be underestimated.⁹ A couple of brief examples will suffice to provide something of the 'flavour' of these contributions. The Children in Futures project ran for a number of years out of the Open University in Oxford, UK, where Simon Nicholson was based. It began, in part, from the view that children suffered from a 'communication backlash' in that they were denied access to tools of communication and therefore marginalised, made to feel helpless. Nicholson's inspired method was to provide some of these tools in a safe space for children to use in a creative and minimally structured way.¹⁰ The results were spectacular. As Nicholson's frequent collaborator wrote, 'for the past ten years Simon had travelled frequently to all the globe's corners...activating the participation of many thousands of children in imaging the future...' Despite his premature death in the late 1980s, the work of this project provides one model. It also had lasting impacts both upon the participants and also upon colleagues and students who experienced Nicholson's other work at the Open University on the Art and Environment course.¹¹

The Bicentennial Futures Education Project (BFEP) was a two-year government-funded curriculum project initiated in Australia by the Bicentennial Authority and the Commission for the Future from 1986 to 1988. A range of curriculum materials was produced and distributed to twelve 'lighthouse schools' in different states. A number of in-service functions were held and the schools clearly thrived on the opportunity to develop new curriculum offerings on futures. The project culminated with a conference for participants in Adelaide. Soon afterward an anthology of readings was produced and distributed throughout the country.¹² The project clearly raised considerable interest, put 'futures' on the educational agenda and produced a range of teaching strategies and materials. Unfortunately financial control was lacking and evaluation and long-term support were not secured. Before long the BFEP had vanished, it would seem, without trace. Yet the latent demand for futures work in schools remained.

One conclusion to draw from this story is that if teachers and schools are to stand any chance of integrating futures perspectives into their work, they need much durable structures of support than anything that has been provided hitherto. As will become clear below, for this to happen will require

significant shifts in the self-understanding and operational capabilities of educational administration. Developments in futures education literature and practice, as well as the further development of more robust theoretical frameworks, will support this process.

Development of futures education literature

The rise of futures education in practice took place via a widely distributed group of highly motivated individuals, some of whom worked in isolation, while others were linked with an increasingly global network of practitioners. The development of literature and the theoretical underpinnings has been more discontinuous. Perhaps the basic reason for this difference is that innovations in practice can be started just about anywhere by practicing teachers, whereas the opportunities in higher education for writing books and developing the advanced futures discourse to support, codify and extend this work were, until recently, few and far between.

It is a fact that nearly all the early books about futures education were produced in the USA in the 1970s. They included Marien and Ziegler's *The Potential of Educational Futures* (1972); Shane's *The Educational Significance of the Future* (1983); Toffler's anthology *Learning for Tomorrow* (1974); Kauffman's *Teaching for the Future* (1976) and perhaps the best of the lot, Fitch and Svengalis' *Futures Unlimited: Teaching About World to Come* (1979). Two volumes in a short-lived series were published by the World Future Society in 1979 and 1980. The first, edited by Kierstead was *Educational Futures: Sourcebook 1*; the second, edited by Redd and Harkins was called *Education: A Time for Decisions*. Finally there was a collection of articles from *The Futurist* and the *WFS Bulletin* edited by Jennings and Cornish and titled *Education and the Future* (1980).¹³

There is no doubt that these books were up beat, brimming with non-traditional (in education) concepts and ideas, confident of their ground and filled with a sense of mission. But they also had significant weaknesses. For example, all were USA centered. Thus their suggestions did not travel well overseas. Similarly, many relied too heavily on pop psychology and pop futures of the 'future shock' variety and were hence easily dismissed. Finally none of them attempted to ground futures education or curriculum development in any substantive theoretical frameworks. Hence, at that time, the genre was characterised by superficiality and a rather naive, USA-based optimism. That is perhaps why so many innovative futures programs were perceived as marginal in schools across America and eventually phased out.

There's no doubt that much innovative pioneering work took place in schools during this period. But the disciplinary 'glue' to hold it all together took longer to develop and the World Future Society's education section was discontinued in the early 1980s. The commercial considerations on which this decision was based may have been sound. But, from a wider perspective, it was a huge missed opportunity because the inspiration and motivation for futures work in schools have always been structurally related to the underlying processes of development in technically advanced societies (and their associated dilemmas). These forces have strengthened, rather than diminished. They continue to inspire the work of practitioners in the USA and, increasingly, in other places as well.

Some 'European' works stand out during this time. One is Fragniere's *Education Without Frontiers* (1976); another is Botkin's *No Limits to Learning* (1979).¹⁴ While purists might not consider them true 'futures' books, both took a more substantive cultural view and were grounded in wider perspectives and more universal agendas. They touched on wider questions and drew some interest. But again, neither was grounded in an explicit futures view that referred back to the parent field. By contrast the work of Ake Bjerstedt from the Malmo school of Education at the University of Lund, Sweden, took an explicitly futures view. For some years Professor Bjerstedt interviewed many leading futures educators as part of the *Preparedness for the Future* project. Since this work had been little documented elsewhere it was, and remains, a rare and useful attempt to gather relevant information about futures teaching and learning.¹⁵

The 1980s were difficult years for futures education. While a number of university departments had been established, there was still no 'critical mass' of practitioners in schools. During this time people like David Smith in the USA and Noel Gough in Australia continued to teach courses in futures education and to produce useful academic commentaries.¹⁶ In the UK Hicks and Holden began their ground-breaking work on young people's views of futures. In Europe the late Robert Jungk pioneered his particular brand of futures workshops.¹⁷

The present writer came into the picture during this time and, from the early 1980s, produced a series of papers and books on various aspects of futures and education.¹⁸ These sprung from a doctoral thesis that had looked at the role of forward thinking in education and concluded that, rather than being a minor or peripheral concern, such thinking was indeed an overlooked, but intrinsic, part of all teaching, all learning, at every level. If true, this meant that futures education could indeed become a mainstream concern. Such a view was and is founded on the tenets of critical futures study that, significantly, are grounded in some of the same areas of deep theorising as some of the more advanced areas of curriculum theory.¹⁹ Thus, futures education could continue to evolve, and evolve moreover, with theoretical foundations that welcomed the necessary critiques and questions that attend any such process of legitimation.

During the 1990s further works appeared from a growing number of authors who are thoroughly grounded both in the futures discipline as well as in education and related fields (such as planning, design and industrial ecology). Beare and Slaughter's *Education for the 21st Century* (1993) set out a clear and readable approach to the topic. Similarly, a monograph *From Fatalism to Foresight* (1994) set out a 'framework for considering young people's needs and responsibilities over the next 20 years'. The content was, to some extent, time-, and place specific. But the method remains widely applicable. During this time Hicks' efforts had borne fruit in the form of *Educating for the Future: A Practical Classroom Guide* (1994) and, with Holden, *Visions of the Future: Why We Need to Teach for Tomorrow* (1995). Hutchinson's *Education Beyond Violent Futures* (1996) set out a comprehensive strategy for countering fatalism and an impoverished social imagination by expanding what he called 'vocabularies of hope'. Later, the anthology on *Futures Education* (1999) assembled writers and practitioners from a number of countries to provide a global overview of the 'state of play' in this developing field.²⁰ These books all helped to integrate intellectual rigour with insights from practice.

While these foundations were evolving, interest in futures education was spreading. A book edited by Adesida on *Visions of the Future of Africa* assembled valuable material from that under-regarded continent. Back in the USA Lombardo's web-based instructional manual *The Odyssey of the Future* (1998) brought new breadth to the USA tradition. While in Finland, Rubin's doctoral research was published under the heading of *Growing Up in Social Transition: in Search of a Late-Modern Identity* (2000).²¹

Hence by the late 20th/early 21st century the literature and theory of futures education had more than caught up with its earlier applied success. Now there existed a more durable literature, an increasingly capable international futures discourse, a knowledge base for futures studies and, indeed, growing non-Western participation. All helped the field to advance and to equip it for the legitimation battles ahead.²²

Futures education in the 21st century

Futures education appears continue to develop because, as suggested above, it is driven by widely shared human responses to structural change. As one observer put it: 'futures concepts and curricula seem to me to be the most important rising paradigm in education. It addresses the ambivalence of post-modernism and focuses on proactive strategies that attend to the imperatives facing our world'.²³ This singularly concise statement helps to explain why futures education has such profound transformative potential. It is therefore surprising, at first sight, that the most serious impediments to the further development and integration of futures education are not external. Rather, they lie in the

nature of the structure of school systems as they have evolved during the industrial period and prevailing modes of administration at the very highest levels. As noted, top administrators can cope with occasional extrapolative exercises regarding the future *of* education because they fit neatly within present bureaucratic thinking. But it is rare to see high-level interest in futures *in* education, which is a completely different matter. In order to explain this, we turn to consider some of the powerful forces that constrain educational systems.

School systems are quintessentially 'industrial era' organizations. They are rigid hierarchies, mandated and controlled by central and (at least in Australia) State governments, with top-down power structures. One of their key features, therefore, is inflexibility. Typically there is a minister at the top; teachers and students are at the bottom - not unlike a 19th century army. The 'meat in the sandwich' is a layer of bureaucracy that must, at all times, obey prevailing political priorities. Teachers and students remind one of marginalised, disempowered 'foot soldiers'. Indeed, it is vital to appreciate that prevailing 'system imperatives' are not primarily about human beings, society or, indeed, the future. They are largely abstract in nature and may be summarised as: power, control, economy and efficiency.²⁴

At the 'litany' level school systems are widely thought to be serving some sort of human or social needs and, in a limited, conventional sense, there is some truth in that. But the fact is, however, that they are not at all concerned with human and social needs, or where society may be headed. Such themes are powerfully and repeatedly expressed in rhetoric and public announcements. But there are perhaps two key sets of forces, two worlds of reference that set the major 'rules' for such systems. These are politics and economics. The difficulty in both cases is that by the end of the 20th century each had become defective and incoherent. Politics is notorious for its short-term thinking and the ideological conceits of many of its practitioners. Economics lost sight of human needs and aspirations many years ago and remains a very long way from reforming itself. What has been widely overlooked in school systems is that, as they presently stand, *neither politics nor economics are capable of expressing, or responding to widely understood human, social and cultural needs*. John Saul is one of a number of critics who suggest that behind both lies a powerful, but regressive, corporatist ideology.²⁵ In summary, education systems tend to have the following structural characteristics.

1. They are inward looking. Unlike comparable businesses, they have few systemic connections with the wider world; hence they are largely insulated from processes of change of the global system.
2. They are past-, and present-driven; hence they have minimal capacity to create, or engage with, a forward view. This is a major structural defect that requires urgent corrective action.
3. They are governed by fiat and powerfully resist any attempts that are made to revise existing system imperatives. Hence they actively seek to marginalise educational leadership and attempts at system-wide innovation. This undermines their social legitimacy (as agents of social well-being) and cuts them off from sources of human vitality that might otherwise be welcomed and used.

If education systems (from schools to universities) are to re-focus on the needs of a changing world, the needs of young people and eventually future generations, then it is necessary to take action on a number of levels and in a number of different ways.

A first step is to critique and replace the system imperatives that are currently operating. This will require sustained effort over a period of time. A second step is to insist on a number of perceptual and organisational innovations. Some of these are sketched out below. Third, paradigms of education (i.e., 'what education is' and 'what it is for') will need to be revised in the light of the conditions facing society and individuals in the 21st century. All entities within education systems, from primary schools to leading universities, will need to critically draw upon, and use, the tools of prospective analysis, understanding and strategy formulation that have been commonplace elsewhere (e.g., in corporate environments) for a long time.

Educational strategies at three levels

1. *The system level*

The primary requirement for those heading up educational systems is that they begin to develop a clear understanding of the 'civilisational challenge' we collectively face. That is, an informed view of the outlook for humanity at this time. This is not particularly difficult to do, but nowhere is it yet included in the job descriptions of those with executive responsibilities. This is another costly oversight. In order to be able to read and interpret the signals of change educational systems require some structural innovations. For example:

- the creation of an environmental scanning capability dedicated to educational needs;²⁶
- the creation and staffing of functional niches to enable the forward view; and
- the networking of both throughout the entire system to facilitate consultation, feedback and use.

Clear thinking is also required on the nature of 'industrial era' system imperatives and on the reasons why they are no longer adequate. Careful attention should be given to new imperatives, such as sustainability and intergenerational equity. There will also need to be a profound shift of attitude to educational leadership. Much rhetoric has been generated about its importance but, in fact, leadership of the kind that is now needed is precisely what has been discouraged. That is: leadership that is deeply ethical, unafraid to confront embedded interests and genuinely, substantively, proactive.

2. *Tertiary institutions*

Universities are the intellectual gatekeepers of school systems. They are the providers of advanced degrees. They employ influential people. They set standards for university entrance that define what is taught in the final years of schooling. In theory they should support the education profession. But in lacking credible forward views they have overlooked the 'civilisational challenge' themselves and have been too myopically preoccupied with their own issues of funding, status and boundary-maintenance to offer real practical support to hard-pressed practitioners in schools. Of the thousands of universities around the world only a handful support departments of Futures Studies or Strategic Foresight only a handful support any futures programs at all.²⁷

Universities need to embrace the forward view and put in place the specific means required to create and sustain it. Organisations that attempt to confront the turbulence of the 21st century without investing in environmental scanning and strategic foresight will find themselves under threat from a series of rapid and powerful 'tsunamis of change'.²⁸ Universities would be well advised to re-conceive of themselves as 'institutions of foresight' in their own right. Moreover, they need to become explicitly aware of the wider implications of the AQAL perspective. A full understanding of the latter could lead to a more systemic reorganisation of knowledge seeking activities and the long-overdue revision of what are, in some cases, medieval approaches to teaching and learning. Where this is successfully achieved, new roles will emerge. Universities will be at the forefront of new knowledge, and knowledge patterns, not merely following marketing interests or the emerging entrepreneurial knowledge-brokers that are now springing up everywhere. They will be able to lead in fact, rather than merely in rhetoric. They will be able to detect and avoid dangers, as well as exploit progressive (i.e., socially valuable) sources of value and wealth-creation. As such, they will be in a much better position to provide leadership and much-needed support to schools.

3. *Schools*

Schools have long been the focus of intense pressures and expectations. Yet in many places state schools have been starved of resources and teachers have not received the kind of support that they

need in order to carry out a demanding role with the young. One result has been a flight to private, or 'independent' schooling. This is understandable. Parents usually want the best for their children and the well heeled can afford to pay private fees. But this is where what Garrett Hardin called the 'tragedy of the commons' becomes evident.

The drift to non-state schooling is one of a number of social forces that is now actively creating a new 'underclass'. It does not take much foresight to realise that dysfunctional individuals will emerge from it to plague the rest of society. The rush to private schools is partly a result of government neglect of the state sector and partly a security reflex on the part of parents. Private schools, however, although progressive in some respects, are not immune from the defects mentioned above. Many actively cultivate the image of tradition, of the past, but do no more than state schools to prepare young people for the real future they will live in. The long-term solution is not to opt out of public schooling. Rather it is to re-value it and bring it up to a viable standard of operation. Here, again, AQAL approaches to knowledge, teaching and learning would help to resolve the hitherto unsolved 'curriculum problem'. By this is meant the real difficulty of representing to successive generations a viable set of cultural materials and processes that not only serve to pass on valued aspects of culture but also promote the means to reinterpret and renew it. An AQAL view can be developed at any level. It promotes notions of balance. It recognises contributions from many fields. It sets up solutions to human, cultural and futures problems by locating these within a non-reductionist evolutionary framework.

Whether public or private, schools need much more help in carrying out their work to: socialise young people, help them develop their skills and abilities, prepare them for work and successfully integrate them into society. Seen in this light, schools have a long and vital future. But they will never attain that future if they continue to turn their collective backs upon the very field that has evolved to understand and respond to it. *The pivotal contradiction of present school systems is that they ostensibly exist to prepare the young for active citizenship in the future. But, unlike most 'Fortune 500' companies, these systems have little grasp either of 'the big picture' in the present, or of what 'the future' might actually mean.*

For school systems to be able to comprehend and deal actively with the early 21st century context, the forward view must begin to permeate educational administration, thinking and practice at every level. In summary, the central strategies that will move education systems from a past orientation to an explicitly future-oriented one can be summarised as follows.

- The active de-legitimation of 'industrial-era' notions of education based on redundant abstract principles.
- The re-focusing of education systems and universities away from the past and short-term present, toward a substantive commitment to understanding the emerging near-term future.
- The much wider utilisation of the theory, literature and practical capabilities that have been developed under the heading of 'futures education', as outlined here.
- The flourishing of a new type of ethically based and fearless generation of educational leaders who will overturn bureaucratic rationality, control etc. in pursuit of the public good in the long view.²⁹

All education is futures education

The challenge is to reinvent schools on a new philosophical and operational basis, not see them overwhelmed by economic rationalism, still less by the over-hyped 'communications revolution'. The walls are certainly coming down around most built institutions and schools cannot escape powerful competitive forces from, e.g., new media, entrepreneurial penetration and autonomous learning. The lure of 'cyberspace' will continue to make most industrial-era schools seem dull and unresponsive.³⁰

School systems are so change-resistant that they may be undermined by new circumstances. Alternatively they can choose to adapt and re-invent themselves. In the former case public education

will cease to exist as a viable entity. But the social consequences would be immense. Schools are vital locations for socialisation and social cohesion. Without some shared locus of learning, social fragmentation, the rise of exclusive sub-cultures and greater social conflict seem unavoidable.

It is difficult to see how humanity can respond to the coming transitions, and ‘tsunamis of change’ without maintaining socialisation and social cohesion. Seen in this light, school systems must be regarded as assets, rather than costs. Above all, they should be protected from the irrationalities of economic rationalism and carve out for themselves a new futures-oriented *modus operandi* that more fully responds to deeper human and social needs.

In so doing, they will necessarily take up the work of futures educators around the world and move beyond many of the assumptions and practices that flourished in earlier times. They will abandon the empty rhetoric that claims a vague and empty association between schools and ‘the future’ for the reality of a substantive involvement with the forward view at every level.

References

1. L. Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1971, p 172-3.
2. R. Slaughter, *Futures for the Third Millennium*, Sydney, Prospect, 1999.
3. R. Slaughter, An International Overview of Futures Education, *UNESCO Future Scan* 1, 1, 1992, pp 63-64.
4. M. Skilbeck, The School and Cultural Development, in D. Golby (ed) *Curriculum Design*, London, Open University, 1975, p 27-35.
5. R. Slaughter, *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies - What Do Students Learn?* UNESCO seminar paper, Vancouver, June 1992, pp 6-7.
6. P. Torrence, Creativity and Futurism in Education: Retooling, *Education* 100, 4, 1980, 298-311.
7. D. Hicks & C. Holden, *Visions of the Future*, London, Trentham, 1995. Also D. Hicks, *Lessons for the Future*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2002.
8. J. Page, *Reframing the Early Childhood Curriculum*, Routledge Falmer, 2000.
9. R. Slaughter, op cit, 1992, pp 70-72.
10. S. Nicholson and R. Lorenzo, Future Perfect, *Undercurrents* 36, 1979, 12-14.
11. S. Nicholson materials for TAD 292, Art and Environment units, Open University.
12. R. Slaughter, (ed) *Studying the Future*, Australian Commission for the Future, 1989.
13. For a fuller account of this period see J. Dator, The Future Lies Behind, introduction to J. Dator (ed) *Advancing Futures*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2002.
14. G. Fragniere (ed) *Education Without Frontiers*, London, Duckworth, 1976. Also, J. Botkin (et al), *No Limits to Learning*, London, Pergamon, 1979.
15. A. Bjerstedt, *Preparing for the Future as an Educational Goal*, Bulletin 68, Department of Educational and Psychological Research, Malmo School of Education, Lund University, June 1979 (and subsequent series of monographs on this subject).
16. D. Smith, Laying the Foundations: Basic Theories for a Futuristics Course, *WFS Bulletin*, 15, 2, 1981, p 22-24. N. Gough, Futures in Australian Education – Tacit, Token and Taken for Granted, *Futures*, 22, 3, 1990, 298-310.
17. D. Hicks & C. Holden, 1995 op cit. Also R. Jungk, & N. Mullert, *Futures Workshops*, London, Institute for Social Inventions, 1987.
18. See R. Slaughter 1999, op cit, section 3 on Futures in Education.
19. R. Slaughter, *Critical Futures Study and Curriculum Renewal*, University of Lancaster, PhD, 1982.
20. D. Hicks, & R. Slaughter, R. (eds), *Futures Education*, *World Yearbook of Education 1998*, Kogan Page, London, 1998.
21. T. Lombardo, *Doorways to the Future*, 1st Books, 2001. Also A. Rubin, *Growing up in Social Transition: In Search of a Late-Modern Identity*, Turin Yliopisto, Turku, 2000.
22. R. Slaughter, *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*, vols 1-3, Futures Study Centre, Melbourne, 1996. Also Z. Sardar (ed) *Rescuing All our Futures*, Adamantine, London, 1999.

23. Inglis, P. QUT, Queensland, Australia. Personal communication, 1988.
24. Slaughter, R. Re-designing Education Systems for the 21st Century, Turku Futures Forum, 1998.
25. J. R. Saul, *The Unconscious Civilisation*, Penguin, 1997, p 162.
26. C.W. Choo, C.W. *Information Management for the Intelligent Organisation. The Art of Scanning the Environment*, ASIS, Information Today, Medford, NJ, 1995.
27. See Ramos, J. *International Survey of Tertiary Futures Courses*, AFI, Swinburne, 2003.
28. J. Dator, Surfing the Tsunamis of Change, *Proceedings from the symposium 'Construction Beyond 2000'*, Espoo, Finland, 1992. Also see Slaughter, R. Universities as Institutions of Foresight, *Journal of Futures Studies*, 3, 1, 1998 pp 51-72, Tamkang Univ., Taiwan.
29. P. Duignan & N. Bhindi, *A Quest for Authentic Leadership*, BMAS Annual Conference, Balliol College, Oxford, 1995.
30. For a contrasting view of some of the 'good news' about schools see H. Beare, *Creating the Future School*, Routledge, London, 2000.

Note

This paper was originally published in R. Slaughter, *Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight*, Routledge, London, 2004, 186-199.