

Introduction to Shaping the Future videos (1996)

In 2006 an event called *The Earth Dialogues* took place in Brisbane's City Hall. Prominent among the guests was Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of Russia and chief architect of Perestroika. He was there to launch his Green Cross initiative. It's not often that you get to encounter such prominent historical figures, let alone to meet them in person. Yet it was a rather different meeting that remains prominent in my memory.

At the end of a fairly modest and low-key panel session a young woman with a friendly smile approached and said how pleased she was to finally meet me. When I enquired why that was it turned out that she'd been a student in one of the trial schools for the Queensland Futures subject that I'd worked on in the mid-1990s, some ten years earlier. I remember her saying how much she'd enjoyed taking part in the trial curriculum. She added, that it had been one of the highlights of her school experience.

Back in 1994 I'd been appointed Chair of a Subject Advisory Committee (SAC) by the then Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS). Since I was living in Melbourne at the time this necessitated regular trips to Brisbane. I was part of a team that worked on the proposal and the draft curriculum for a subject that was eventually called *Futures – Personal, Social, Global*. Of all the many meetings I took part in the one I particularly recall was that of the BSSS Curriculum Committee and its unanimous vote for the new subject.

With a PhD in Futures Education and a background in school and university teaching I'd never considered a Futures subject *per se* the best or only option. As had been affirmed by the 1994 Wiltshire Report, I felt that *all* subjects should contain a futures perspective. Still, to have a subject was a significant step forward in practice (which had for many years lagged behind theory), in general awareness and also in legitimation. So when the work of the SAC was completed the baton was passed to the BSSSS whose task it was to complete the trial and launch the new subject. The pre-pilot syllabus was released in 1998 for use in 'approved schools' commencing with Year 11 in 1999. I still have copies of interim reports from that time.

During 1999, however, the BSSSS was subject to re-organisation and, during that process, the Futures subject somehow 'got lost.' The substantial amounts of energy, idealism and old-fashioned work that had been poured into the project came to nothing. The support and guidance provided by the Board's Curriculum Committee were similarly overlooked. An innovation that could have led on to many others simply disappeared without trace late in the trial process and no one could subsequently explain why. Some years later I asked a different Queensland Minister of Education why this had occurred. His only comment was that there'd been 'no one on the board to see the project through.' Although he was in no way responsible, I felt that part of the story still remained untold.

Since then I've reflected on the fact that it's at just such times that the veneer is stripped away from state bureaucracies and the interests that decide what education is about are briefly seen, if only as shadowy forces in the background. Which brings me to these clips of a short documentary from 1996 called *Shaping the Future*. It is, in fact, the only record we have that not only features some of those, such as myself and Kathleen Rundle who worked on the project, but also students in a classroom environment who are actually using futures tools and concepts. Moreover, their teacher is seen and heard discussing the trial program. We should listen carefully. For what this story reveals is an ethical scandal and a monumental lost opportunity.

Had the subject been given its chance to develop and thrive, one would not be having occasional meetings with former students and listening to their favourable but dimming accounts of a standout program. Rather, we would be meeting or hearing about hundreds, if not thousands, of students and former students who, during their later secondary years, had had the opportunity to pick up, understand and benefit from some of the more accessible tools and concepts of the futures field.

Had that taken place – as was the will and intention of the profession at the time – we would now have reason for greater confidence in the ability of the current younger generation to deal with a world spiralling ever more out of control. It is a world for which ‘overshoot and collapse’ has become an existential hazard of major proportions. As it is, a growing number of cohorts of young people throughout the nation have had that option removed and it’s unlikely to be easily retrieved. I’d like to think that responsibility for the abandonment of *Futures – Personal, Social, Global* will one day be officially acknowledged. Perhaps then the loss could be made good for a later generation. There are certainly more sources and more recent exemplars to draw upon than ever before.

In the meantime I invite you to view the clips below and to make up your own mind.