

Futures Tools and Techniques (1995, 2002)

Introduction to First Edition

For some time there has been a need for a practical workbook of futures tools and techniques. This booklet is an attempt to fill that need. The material it contains has broad applicability not just across the school curriculum but also in tertiary and other contexts. Given this range, I have tried to present material that is structurally simple but capable of being modified in various ways. For example, teachers of young and low-ability students will need to simplify both the content and the language of some sections. On the other hand, most of the exercises can be elaborated according to need. In all cases the book provides starting points for a wide variety of cross-curricular and interdisciplinary work.

As is explained below, I take the view that futures study is not simply a new subject entering into competition with other subjects and disciplines. It has been, and can be, treated as such where conditions permit. It is, however, best regarded as a dimension of all educational work. Teaching, learning, curriculum innovation, professional development and research are all activities that require a future. They make little sense without it. The fact that this connection has been obscured by the partiality of Western cultures and inward-looking traditions of teaching and enquiry does not make it less central.

There's an interesting contradiction at the heart of much educational work. Careful study and research shows that the past is often assumed to be dominant, powerful and authoritative. By contrast, futures, if they appear at all, are represented as being problematic, empty or merely 'speculative.' Too close an association with empirical/analytic modes of enquiry can generate questions like 'how can one study futures if they do not exist?' I have come to regard questions of this type as products of an inadequate epistemology and worldview.

It is often forgotten that most of what we call 'history' has vanished without trace. Furthermore, there are numerous other aspects of our lives such as values, purposes and meanings that are in no way diminished by their non-material character. Futures as a focus of teaching and research can be seen as the forward-looking equivalent of history. If the latter is concerned with where we have been, the former considers where we might go and how this might be achieved. That is partly why many of the criteria often applied to history (coherence, fit with evidence, internal consistency of arguments, fruitfulness of explanations etc.) also apply to futures. In fact it is no harder to teach and to carry out research into futures than in any other area. The major difference is that futures has, until recently, been 'non-traditional.' There is nothing unusually difficult or obscure about it. It is essentially a question of familiarity.

In its more predictive and extrapolative forms, futures study and research also been widely taken up by governments, business, industry and the military. But

the association of futures with marketing, planning and forecasting by no means exhausts the symbolic and methodological resources available. The growth of futures work in education is a direct response to the perception of pervasive change. Many of yesterday's certainties no longer hold and few realistically expect the future to be much like the past. It seems to me that in this context the forward look actually becomes more important than the backward glance (though both are constitutive of the present). In this view, the futures field can be regarded as offering a broad map, a symbolic, intellectual and practical overview of the coming decades. Clearly this is a resource with relevance to education at any level.

Futures as a distinct field of enquiry belongs in education by virtue of the fact that schools, colleges and universities are already in the futures business. Everything they attempt refers forward. Their curricula are particular instances of the general principle that human activity is always mediated by past experience and by notions about futures. In my view the main purpose of futures in education is not to predict. It is rather to gain knowledge and understanding of alternatives. These return to the present as considered actions and choices. In a democratic society this is something in which everyone can be involved.

I hope this book will support the view that it is no harder to teach about futures than it is anything else. It may even be easier since those whom I have worked with have generally found it personally empowering and professionally indispensable.

The book is organised thematically in sections. Each double page provides an illustration, diagram or exercise on the left and a short briefing with suggestions on the right. The latter are not intended for direct use by students and I have kept 'instructions for use' to a minimum since I could not anticipate the wide range of situations within which the book would be used. Practitioners will, however, find that some exercises benefit from careful preparation and lead-in work, while others can be assembled into a productive sequence. For example, time lines may generate questions about students' fears. In that case, there are two other exercises dealing with optimistic and pessimistic responses. They, in turn, lead on to work on social inventions. Very many other combinations are possible.

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March 1987

Introduction to Second Edition

It is a pleasure to bring out a new edition of Futures Tools and Techniques. The first edition was distributed worldwide and sold out some years ago. This edition is about double the size of the first, with five sections having been expanded to ten. I have, however, kept to broadly the same format and approach. This is not an issues-based book and it is not prescriptive. Too

often in scanning the futures education literature I have seen the topic approached through issues. I take the view that the keys to futures thinking lie primarily in accessible concepts and tools. When used well these provide access to a futures discourse. The latter opens up 'the future' as a symbolic and practical arena of human concern. Many issues can certainly be tackled in this context, but in my view they are secondary. What our culture so clearly lacks is any real commitment to long-term thinking and cultural innovation. Issues we have in plenty, applied foresight is still rare.

This book is intended for use in combination with the *Annotated Futures Bibliography* and with *Futures Concepts and Powerful Ideas*. Together, these and other works in the series are intended to place in the hands of users some of the core material available in the futures field.

As the millennium approaches I realistically expect to see a steady growth of interest in the attempt to come to grips with what the twentieth century was about. There are bound to be many attempts by historians and others to draw understanding about our historical predicament from this work. By the same token, I also expect there to be a steady turning of interest away from the past. While it powerfully shapes the present, it does not determine it. 'The future' always remains to be created by those with the courage and foresight to do so. Hence, there will be an outpouring of concern about the future. This will be driven both by a keen awareness of the danger humanity is collectively in, as well as by a perception that a new millennium is one of those rare turning points in history when the new, the novel, the unprecedented and the innovative are welcome.

I hope that this book will play a small part in this process of re-thinking and renewal.

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January 1995

SLAUGHTER, R. A. *Futures Tools and Techniques*. Futures Study Centre, Melbourne: 194 pp (1995, 1998 revised 2000, 2002) ISBN: 0-7316-2650-8

Out of print in this form.

Revised, expanded and re-issued as *Futures Thinking for Social Foresight* (book and CD-ROM), FI and Tamkang University Press, Taipei, Taiwan, (2006). xiv + 195pp ISBN: 986738541-1.