

Learning and Teaching About Future Generations

Editorial for *Futures* Vol. 29 No. 8 1997

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This special issue of *Futures* contains a number of papers from an invitational conference on 'Learning and Teaching about Future Generations' which was held in Toronto in October 1995. The conference was funded by Katsuhiko Yazaki, the benefactor and founder of the Kyoto-based Future Generations Alliance Foundation (FGAF), and organised by Allen Tough.

Over the past few years the Foundation has held many meetings throughout the world and has pursued the future generations cause with dedication and vigour. Mr. Yazaki has been greatly assisted in this work by two distinctive colleagues: Korean scholar Tae-Chang Kim and Buddhist priest Kido Inoue. Sometimes together, sometimes separately, these three men have travelled the world to support, encourage and participate in a wide range of activities designed to raise the profile of future generations thinking. Not everything has worked. The attempt to create a future generations university in Australia foundered not through any oversight of the FGAF, but as a result of poor management in the host nation. Overall, the futures community has responded very favourably to the foundation, its leaders and the work they have begun. Few organisations have been so focused or so powerfully dedicated to such long-term ends. The strength of the FGAF lies in the fact that it is grounded in a multicultural intellectual framework and also in spiritual values. These give force and direction to its work. They have also been set out in an innovative series of books published by the foundation and distributed by it free of charge.

The foundation is nothing if not ambitious. It seeks to help bring about a fundamental change of thinking from short-term careless exploitation of the earth to long-term commitment and caring. It is a huge task, but also of course, a necessary one. The choice of the theme 'Learning and Teaching about Future Generations' reflects the aspirations, values and also some present weaknesses in the FGAF approach. When I was asked to edit the papers, I was aware that it was a 'big ask' for the simple reason that at this point there is still very little practical experience of learning and teaching about future generations. To me the theme represented, and still represents, an *aspiration* to develop this vital area, rather than a 'report from the field'. So the material that could be drawn together at this early stage was bound to be diverse and thin on the ground.

And so it turned out. About twenty prominent futurists, academics from associated fields and graduate students were invited to the conference and each of them did their utmost to fulfil a demanding brief. Each spoke from their own viewpoint and brought the richness of their understanding and experience to bear. The result is a patchwork of themes that suggests a wider arena but which also, inevitably in my view, has gaping holes. For example, when I ask 'what is a future generations methodology?' I find it difficult to formulate a clear answer. Sohail Inayatullah has attempted an answer in his overview piece, and it is a substantial one. But such intellectual sketches do not yet reflect practice, and may not for some time. So the actual material produced inevitably falls short of the aspirations that were held for this project. This is a 'story in progress', as it were, not yet an accomplished reality. Hence the papers criss-cross a vast and sparsely populated territory, whetting our appetite for more, reminding us of how far there is yet to go.

It seems to me that *Futures* very much fulfils some of its key functions by publishing this material. They include nurturing new ideas, facilitating interconnections and bringing emerging enterprises to the attention of the global futures community. The FGAF is a social innovation *par excellence*

which is making lasting contributions to the embedding of ethically-based forward thinking, forward action, in many contexts. I hope that in making these papers available to a wider audience that others who have not yet thought to enter this arena will discern work that still needs to be done and will turn their hands to it with the same kind of dedication and skill as Mr. Yazaki and his colleagues have done.

In short, the contents of this special issue are a beginning, a report of work in progress. In time I hope that they will help support the full emergence of future generations studies as an academic and applied field. In the meantime I am haunted by a profound irony.

The Great Law of the Iroquois Indians required that a spokesperson for the unborn be present at many of their great councils. The irony is that this early social innovation was forgotten, set aside, in the heady rush of industrial expansionism as the West overran the world with its pragmatic, underdimensioned epistemology and penchant for short-term thinking. But now, as the industrial outlook itself collapses amid the ruins of its own contradictions and oversights, even now as a new and truly post-post-industrial outlook takes shape, so we find it necessary to retrieve the wisdom of the past and apply it to our own future. If the FGAF has done nothing else it has taught us that beyond the Western industrial worldview there is much that has been glossed over or forgotten. In other words, the FGAF reminds us of the value of humility and a little of the richness of 'other ways of knowing' and 'other ways of doing'.

A special issue of *Futures* on 'Dissenting Futures' (now in preparation) will look more closely at examples of both the latter. In the meantime, here are some potent starting points for new journeys of inspiration and hope. Though the road is barely started, we owe a debt of thanks to the FGAF for pointing the way forward.