**The Foresight Principle - Author's Reflections (2004)**

*The Foresight Principle* began as a short paper of the same name published in *Futures* in October 1990, one year after I had started work at the Institute of Education, at the University of Melbourne. It was only my fourth paper for *Futures*. Here is the abstract.

Foresight has ubiquitous uses in everyday life. But its implementation at the social level presents difficulties that have not yet been fully resolved. This article considers the nature of foresight as a human capacity, some barriers to its use and contexts were implementation is being attempted. It is concluded that foresight activities are basically driven by structural imperatives. They imply a growth of foresight work despite the considerable difficulties involved.  

At the time the term ‘foresight’ had not been widely used in a futures context if, indeed, it had been used at all. It seemed to me, however, that there was real value in the term. People might be confused by terms like ‘futures studies’. But foresight was something that anyone could grasp and, moreover, see operating in daily life. While futures studies were remote and abstract, foresight was clearly grounded in everyday life. It therefore seemed a good term to use.

Then, on one of many trips to the UK, something quite remarkable happened. It was as if there were two ‘balls of energy’ in my mind. One of them can only be described by the term ‘foresight,’ and the other ‘wisdom’. I don’t mean to imply that I understood in any depth what these terms really meant. But what I was aware of was that when they were considered together that’s when the sparks would begin to fly. In other words a huge amount of energy was generated by the relationship between these two entities. Something was obviously happening.

I played with the ideas for some time. When I was ready I went into my office at the university during a vacation and wrote the basic text for the book in two weeks. This would have been late 1993 or early 1994. It then took several months to edit into shape. By the time I’d finished I felt as though I’d finally been able to put together a reasonably concise statement about why foresight seemed to me to be such a powerful, yet underutilised, capacity. It took another two years before I could begin to describe the links between individual foresight and what I began to think of as social foresight.  

But the reviews I received were very positive and I was encouraged to think that I was on the right track. I was pleased, as any author would be, to see that the book appeared on the World Future Society’s list of ‘best sellers’ for some months.

Yet, as the book was taking off, so my relations with the publisher were deteriorating. I had had real problems with the contract and even more problems with the individual who was running the show at the time. Nor was I the only one. This ‘publisher of choice’ for the futures arena shone brightly for a short time and then expired in a cloud of broken promises and terminally frustrated authors. Royalties had stopped long before then. Interesting then years later to see these books still advertised for sale on the Internet. Clearly someone was still
reaping an income, but not the authors. My partial solution to that was to issue a revised version of the book on a CD-ROM with three of my other books. 

By 1995 when the book was published I was again out of the university and learning how to earn a living by working independently. At first it was hard but I soon adapted and adjusted. For a time I worked out of a home office with a schedule determined by my own preferences. And still the energy contained in these ideas continued to grow. *The Foresight Principle* allowed me to express them coherently for the first time, but now it was time to find another approach.

With the help of other colleagues and members of the World Futures Studies Federation, I then began working on *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*. That was, as they say, a whole new ball game.

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April 2004

References


3. Slaughter, R. *Towards a Wise Culture: Four Classic Futures Texts*, Foresight International, Brisbane,