

Future Generations in our Consciousness Through
Studies of Possible Futures

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"It is really unbelievable how different it was for us," Alicia blurted out. "Our education was based almost exclusively on individual studies with the teacher as an adviser and a sounding board. We collected all the data we needed with the help of library books, newspaper archives, articles, databases, the telenet, job visits, and meetings with knowledgeable people. Then we compiled our own perspectives in a fruitful collaboration with other students who had the same interests"

Alicia is quoted from a discussion on education she had with her boyfriend Axel, in his semi-collective flat near a large city in Sweden in the Spring of 2021. Her comments were stimulated by Axel, who had just been talking to his father about his education in the 1960's. He told Alicia of his fathers resentment. "The image you get of school in those days was that the students were almost subjected to a type of serious abuse year in and year out. Maybe that wasn't the intention, but it had the effect that many of the students were completely broken down by the time they had left school."¹

"The Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations towards Future Generations Article 10, point 2 says that "Education is an important instrument for the development of human persons and societies." It goes on to articulate some of the areas education should foster, peace, justice, understanding, tolerance, equality and health for the benefit of present and future generations. Judging from Alicia and Axel's conversation, something radical must happen before Spring 2021 in order to realize their reality. On the

way to accomplishing these goals we must face several practical points.

Making paradigm changes while trying to consider future generations.

The education systems in former industry countries are in great turmoil. They are feeling the pressures of the change from the industrial society to something different, something we presently call the information society. Rolf Jensen, lecturing on his newly published book "The Dream Society" points out that the time line for societies is getting shorter and shorter and that the information society will be short lived. He is not alone in his thoughts. These dramatically shorter societal changes press education systems all over the world. They press both the education children receive and the education adults receive. How can countries where the education systems are non-existent, new or fragile foster peace, justice, understanding and tolerance, equality and health in this rapidly changing environment?

What does it take to change existing systems?

In the English language when we use the word education, we usually mean that learning period that children undergo as a "natural" part of their development. The Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations, Article 10, point 2 assumes that education is seen as an "important instrument for the development of human persons and societies". It does not specifically state, who should be the beneficiary of this education. Many believe that it is best to start with the young. They feel that new generation, educated in a different way, will mean a change in values and behaviors. While this strategy has worked to some degree, it is still the parents and the community who play a huge role in the development of values and attitudes in children. Change has to begin on all fronts, with children, their parents and grandparents. Who better to understand how

futures generations should be considered than a parent dreaming of being a grandparent, or a grandparent who already has a glimpse of the generation(s) to come? We need to rethink at adult education (all forms of non-university education for adults) at the same time as we look at education for their children.

What form could this adult education take? One way is to use the process inherent in *a futures study which results in community scenarios*. A group of adults are gathered. Their goal is to learn how to carry out a futures study by creating scenarios, and/or a vision for their community several years into the future. The process begins with looking at paradigms and values, continues to environmental scanning or information gathering guided by a well chosen list of variables which effect that community. By gathering information on what is new or expected for just those variables ¹a picture begins to form of the trends that signal possible future realities. By pulling all of these trends and thoughts about the future into scenarios and presenting them to the local decision makers and general citizenry one can achieve an education for each participant in the education program.

We believe there are three major factors of utmost importance to be considered as a guarantee of a future for Axel and Alicia:

1. We are moving from **linear thinking to systems thinking**.
2. Brain research is teaching us that there are **different kinds of intelligence's** and that adults and children have to be taught in accordance with their own unique combinations of intelligence.

¹ (using print media, radio, television, Internet, and experts, or in the case of a small partially literate village, by simply interviewing the citizens in the village and surrounding region having responsibility for important variables i.e. roads, education, commerce, government, aid organizations etc.)

3. We know that **most children do not have a positive experience of school and learning**. Adult education must help adults experience learning as a positive activity as they must continue to learn for the rest of their lives.

Linear vs. Systemic learning

In working with futures studies as a base, it is natural to point out the differences between the linear, reductionist thinking of the industrial world and the systems thinking we need now and in the future in order to understand complex systems. In school we are primarily taught to look for the correct answer. With systems thinking, we learn how to identify the best of many possible solutions for the problem, given the forces driving that system. In non-linear cultures where systems thinking has been an integral part of their culture it is important for them to be able to understand linear thinking countries. Just the process of defining these two (and other paradigms) helps people discover their own paradigms and the values that make them up. A helicopter perspective of the many different values systems functioning in our world, allows the individual to view many different cultures and understand that their own value system is but one of many "truths".

Multiple Intelligences

We also need to understand that in a world so dependent on reading and writing skills (although voice and pictures (symbols) are becoming ever stronger) we have lost and continue to lose between 5-10% of our population to problems related to low-self esteem due to learning disabilities. There is a growing group of educators who feel that these problems can be solved by teaching to other intelligences. Jeanette Voss and...describe this clearly in their book, "The Learning Revolution".² Howard Gardner's research

reveals eight intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalist, interpersonal and intrapersonal. ³ There is a cultural aspect to learning styles as well. The Western model has been exemplified by reading and writing as the way to knowledge. Colonialism has brought this, sit-still- and-listen model to many places all around the globe. Rural Africa has emphasized in-person meetings over written material. Robert Armstrong, is quoted by Levi Obijiofor as saying "The emphasis on meetings means that the art of rhetoric is highly developed in a great many African societies and languages...."⁴ This means that other teaching methods must be applied, including the use of "...metaphors, proverbs and analogies."⁵

Giving Learning a Positive Face

With so many years of lecture teaching behind us and new research on how the brain learns being reported daily, we have plenty of material to help us change the face of education for adults.

Industrial based learning has left us with insights:

People learn best when doing something constructive, when they see the purpose of their work.

People learn best when they can find information themselves, and when it is a subject they are already interested in.

People learn from each other as much as they can learn from a teacher.

People learn best when they see how subjects are integrated.

People learn best when they have a combination of structure and control over their learning.

People learn best when they understand their own learning style.

People learn best when information is presented to all of the senses.

People have a need to see the whole picture as well as the details.

People have a need to learn techniques that can last them their whole lifetime, not just until the next test.

Taking a group of adults through a step-by-step futures study can incorporate what we have learned from more traditional educational approaches.

People learn best when doing something constructive, when they see the purpose of their work.

When the goal of the learning is to create scenarios and visions of the future of a local community and its place in the larger world, and spread those scenarios to stimulate discussion in the community, the chances of finding and linking to an individual's inner meaning increase dramatically.

People learn best when they can find information themselves, and when it is a subject they are already interested in.

Environmental scanning, or information gathering can be adjusted to the education level of the participants and the availability of materials. Groups may use Internet and a wide array of publications, T. V. and radio monitoring, formal interviews, chats over coffee, study visits and present their findings in a variety of interesting ways, a trend dance, exposition, written descriptions, skits and artwork.

People learn from each other as much as they can learn from a teacher.

If the participants in the education program are expected to share what they have learned from their information gathering with each other they, then, also become teachers for one another. Participants are encouraged to share their information gathering and trends in a creative way, as well as documenting them on paper or tape recorder. Some methods of sharing have been, creative art work, dramatization, exhibits, poetry, written etc. These times of sharing can also help participants learn presentation techniques. The road to developing scenarios is also paved with many discussions.

Teaching discussion techniques such as physicists, David Bohm's dialogue helps people learn how to both listen and share.⁶

People learn best when they understand their own learning style.
At the present time there are a variety of tests in different forms to discover what intelligences are dominate for that individual. The adult participant is then given the responsibility to discuss his or her style with their work group. That way the group understands, for example that the bodily-kinesthetic person needs frequent pauses and is better at physically acting out his or her trends. This also contributes to tolerance of difference and a new understanding of what being "equal" means.

People learn best when information is presented to all of the senses.
The participants might need to draw designs when listening, or eat small snacks when concentrating. Many will take in information when given short pauses after twenty minutes, and others will take in more information if they have a little ball to play with at the same time as they listen. Other teaching methods must be presented, simulations, art, role plays, the use of music and story telling.

People have a need to see the whole picture as well as the details.
Understanding their community and how it fits into the local region and the pressures globalization places on them, gives citizens the kind of perspective one does not get in the reading of the daily newspaper. Weaving together the detailed information on the workings and the future possibilities for sewage systems, school systems, transportation systems, health care, new technology, housing, environment, and food production from those people in the community who work closest with those issues helps people see the details and the whole at the same time and gives a general education not obtainable in many schools. The concept of thinking about the future, thinking in terms longer than ones own lifetime, is a

way to help people to understand how thinking about the results of decisions they make today will effect quality of life for future generations.

People have a need to learn techniques that can last them their whole lifetime, not just until the next test.

By going through a futures studies process participants can learn more about themselves and how to get along with others, expand their self-image, learn more about what they believe and why others believe what they do, learn how to gather information, develop an integrated picture of their community and the world and how it changes, learn how to recognize a trend and understand how trends influence one another, learn how to write stories (scenarios) and dream of the future, a future in which their grand children or great grandchildren might live. They learn to present what they believe to people in higher authority and to participate in a democratic process. In other words, they learn what it takes to be a good citizen and how to take responsibility.

Yes, but can it work?

The European Union has granted funds to The Vision Center for Futures Creation to test two versions of the model "Building the Future". in three different versions since 1996. The first version, was funded by the Board of Education for the County of Gothenburg and Bohus and the Labor Relations Board in Gothenburg, Sweden. One hundred and seventy people have experienced this education. The responses vary with the individuals, but universal for many of the participants is the comment that they think differently now. They feel more responsible for their own lives and that of their communities. In 1996 The Vision Center trained project leaders to test the replicability of the model. Two programs for young people between 18 and 24 were held in various parts of Sweden. The project leaders have gone on to implement what they learned in teacher training courses and in the form of a book, "*Vilken*

framtid vill du ha Svensson"⁷ (What Kind of Future Do You Want Svensson?), which challenged the citizens of Sweden to take part in the changes that were occurring around them.

Summary

If we are to carry out some of our responsibilities toward future through education, we need to look at the currently state of education. We are, happily, in a fluctuating time of change which will allow us to use new knowledge and new methods. We need to rethink our assumption that educating the young of a community will bring about the changes we desire for increased peace, tolerance, equality and health. We must also educate their parents and grandparents at the same time. Futures Studies offers us a way to that. It gives adults a new positive experience of education or an intriguing first experience designed to whet the appetite for more. By guiding people through a process of environmental scanning, trend identification and analysis and scenario writing, they will gain knowledge and power in their community to make decisions today which will effect their own futures and the futures of their children and grandchildren.

¹ Dian, N., C. Nilsson, Scherlund, K., Project Participants, Project "Building the Future", (1997) *Framtidsbygget*, Göteborg, Sweden, The Vision Center for Futures Creation.

² Dryden, G., Voss, J., "The Learning Revolution", (1994) Accelerated Learning Systems, Aylesbury, UK.

³ Gardner, H., Who owns intelligence. *The Atlantic Monthly* February 1999, p.71.

⁴ Obijiofor, L., Future of communication in Africa's development. *Futures* 1998, 30(2-3), 165.

⁵ Ibid. 166.

⁶ Bohm, D., *On Dialogue*, (1990) David Bohm Seminars, Ojai, California.

⁷ Ivarsson, M., *Vilken framtid vill du ha Svensson?*, (1998) Förlaget Futurum, Linköping, Sweden