

Teaching Futures Studies: From Strategy to Transformative Change

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Abstract

In this article, I outline one approach to teaching teach futures studies. It consists of three dimensions: teaching the theory of futures studies (the five pillars); teaching how the future can transform (policy futures) and teaching futures methods (practical ways to map and change the future).

Introduction

My pedagogy in futures studies is based on teaching the field in numerous countries (New Zealand, Pakistan, Australia, Ardona, Thailand, Malaysia, the United States, Taiwan, for example) in numerous settings: (government agencies, the University, non-governmental organizations, corporations, professional associations) and in short one-day courses, week long courses as well as semester long courses.

My pedagogical approach is based on teaching *about* the future (data, trends, litany, for example); teaching *for* the future (civilizational challenges, the necessity to decolonize the future, for example); teaching *about and for* alternative futures (worldviews and the future, ways of knowing and futures; different ways of learning); and teaching *in* the future (living the future one prefers, as best as possible). My theoretical framework consists of empirical, interpretive, critical and action research approaches.

What I teach is based on the following: (1) the main pillars of futures studies; (2) ways that the future can be used; and (3) mapping and change methods.¹

Pillars of Futures Studies

I see five main pillars that define the field.

1. *Macrohistory*—or the study of grand patterns of change. I tend to use the theories of macrohistorians such as Ibn Khaldun, P.R. Sarkar, Pitirim Sorokin, Johan Galtung, Arnold Toynbee and Riane Eisler to help understand what might be in the future.² However, this is not an exercise in forecasting but in understanding the contours of change. For example, Ibn Khaldun focuses on decline. Thus I ask questions such as: given that decline is likely, what can be done to create innovation? Khaldun also focuses on shifts of power from those outside the center. I thus ask: who is outside the current seat of power?

At one level, the main point of macrohistory is to search for deeper patterns of change, to understand the stages of history and the shape of the future and at another level, it is about asking questions that give us insight to the structure of the future.

2. *Anticipation*—generally focused on emerging issues and trend analysis.³ This dimension focuses on forecasting but not in a precise sense. Rather, the goal is to search for the seeds of change, to identify them before they sprout. I tend to use emerging issues analysis, as this method disturbs conventional categories of the future but as well has a predictive dimension. This method is a micro dimension of macrohistory.

3. *Alternatives*—scenarios and social design. This dimension has two parts. At one level it is constantly asking what are the alternatives. This can be expressed in scenarios but not necessarily sce-

narios designed to produce strategy. Alternatives can be deeper—about different ways of timing the world, for example, about creating new dimensions of the future, including social innovation.⁴

4. *Ways of Knowing*—depth, deconstruction, decolonizing time. Even deeper than developing alternatives is understanding how epistemes create our ontologies of the world. More authentic alternatives emerge once we shift our gaze to the ways in which we know the world. Often the future is given to us unquestioned, but by entering ways of knowing, we can begin to explore different ways of knowing. This helps us to unpack the future and to entertain and enter alternative cultures and perspectives. This shift involves a move from what we know, to what we don't know we don't know (see appendix).

5. *Transformative Knowledge*—*visioning desired futures, action learning*. This process of alternative perspectives allows the creation of knowledge that transforms. Knowledge, however, need not be vertically structured, given from above, nor based on strong hierarchical relations. Indeed, knowledge can be created through a process of democratic questioning.

I have found that students' questions often lead to methodological improvement, to theoretical insights. As well, in the action learning approach, the issue becomes not of filling the student with content but creating a process of mutual learning. This does not mean expertise is forgotten but that the future is created through iterative interaction.

Ways to Use the Future

In the last few years, as well as teaching a formal university course, I have conducted a number of short courses. The most recent have included a course for Maroochy Council (a local council in Australia); Queensland Tourism, Fair Trading and Racing; and a general workshop on Cyber-bio futures for futurists in Queensland Government. The courses aim to develop policy oriented futures studies. That is, to use the future to create better policy.

I teach courses at Tarkang University in a similar way. After discussions on theory and methodology, classes become policy teams, focused on developing policy papers for the President on issues such as Aging, Innovation, Green technology, Transport, etc. Thus, their theoretical, methodological and content knowledge is used to not only anticipate future problems but to create more effective ways to solve future problems.

However, there is far more to it than just future problems. The future can be a site for organizational transformation. The future can be used in different ways.

I generally use the future in the following six ways:

1. *Strategic*—to make better decisions, however defined, but usually profit-driven. Most recently this has included the triple bottom line—prosperity, plus social justice, plus environment (and moving beyond this to quadruple approaches focused on future generations or the learning and healing organization); or in government to meet the changing needs of citizens.

2. *Educational*—the future is about learning new ideas and methods. Thus, futures is used not necessarily to enhance policy but to increase the knowledge of students, employees, managers and directors.

3. *Capacity development*—the future is about learning to learn, about developing one's potential, individually and organizationally. Capacity development is moving away from the command and control organizational model, and creating spaces for renewal. It takes an anticipatory action learning approach wherein the goal is to empower, enabling those in the organization take charge of their future.

4. *Mimetic change*—the future is as well about finding new memes (social genes) and finding ways to have organizations select them, make them real. For example, this could mean, in the city, the move from roads, rates and rubbish to the clean and green, active and healthy, international city.

5. *Emergent*—the future is about qualitative transforming, moving an organization to the edge of chaos. At this phase, new ideas can push a system so that it undergoes a qualitative shift. By chaos, I mean ordered disorder.

6. *Microworld change*—this means that it is more than just information or knowledge but the purpose of the future is about changing who we are at a spiritual level.⁵ In colloquial language this is expressed as vibrations, or in New Age discourse, the energetic dimension. Essentially, this is about our inner lives as individuals as well as about the organization's inner life—what stage it sees itself in. It is thus more than learning to learn; it is both learning and healing, individual and collective, inner and external.

Organizational transformation and educational practice

These six stages should not however be seen as valid just for organizational courses focused on policy. They are relevant for the more traditional futures course as well.

For example, strategy is about helping students find out what careers they may wish to pursue, how best to reach their goals. Which courses they should take? What they should do when they graduate?

Education is more traditional, about understanding

generally use the future in the following six ways:

Change—to make better decisions, however defined, and usually profit-driven. Most recently this has included the triple bottom line—prosperity, plus social justice, plus environment (and moving beyond this to multiple approaches focused on future generations and the learning and healing organization); or in government to meet the changing needs of citizens.

Education—the future is about learning new ideas and books. Thus, futures is used not necessarily to inform policy but to increase the knowledge of students, employees, managers and directors.

Development—the future is about learning to develop one's potential, individually and organizationally. Capacity development is moving away from the command and control organizational model and creating spaces for renewal. It takes an experiential learning approach wherein the goal is to empower, enabling those in the organization take ownership of their future.

Design—the future is as well about finding solutions (social genes) and finding ways to have them, to build them, make them real. For example, in the city, the move from roads, highways to the dean and green, active and livable city.

Transformation—the future is about qualitative transformation of organization to the edge of chaos. At this point, chaos can push a system so that it means to be and to know.

Meaning—this means that it is more than just knowledge but the purpose of the future is to explore who we are at a spiritual level. This is expressed as vibrational frequency, the energetic dimension of our inner lives as individuals and the organization's inner life—this is thus more than learning and healing, individual and organizational.

Research and educational

has never been seen as based on policy. They are course as well, helping students find out how best to take what they understand.

understanding

theories and methods—the content of the field.

Capacity enhancement is about empowering the student to develop his or her own theory of the term future, to focus on how they personally develop their ability to maneuver in the world. Such a course is more than simply giving information. Rather, it provides a vehicle for expression, for learning about learning, for "workshopping ideas" so that they are relevant to their needs.

Memetic change can be about helping the student find new memes in their work, and as well understand that the future itself is a meme. That is, other courses generally focus on disciplinary knowledge, often specific, without interaction with other fields. Futures is transdisciplinary, indeed, a meta-approach.

Emergence is about taking a group of students to a new level in how they see the content of the course, themselves, indeed, the purpose of education. At this stage, the course in itself hopefully becomes more than the litany of getting grades or making the professor happy but essentially about transforming the nature of the course.

Finally, microvita change is, at one level, having fun, being alive. At another level, it is seeing the course itself as an experience, as more than theory building. This is essentially connecting with students at more than an intellectual level and being concerned (within certain boundaries) about who they are. Ultimately, microvita change goes beyond the transformation evoked in emergence by focusing on the inner dimension of what it means to be and to know.

I have found, here learning from Debra Robertson and Gretel Bakker of Performance Frontiers,⁶ that drama scenarios are useful to enhance pedagogy that leads to an understanding of "in the future." For example, after presenting content and then having workshop participants infer what this means for their lives, profession and workplace, they are asked to develop a skit, or piece of artwork, that exhibits this future (whether it is preferred or a possible scenario). This embodiment of the future leads to the use of another way of knowing. Individuals feel with their bodies the future they are exploring. Recently as well, Farhang Erfani of Villanova has brought to my attention the use of music to teach utopian studies.⁷ Thus, along with video clips from movies about the future, she has started to use music to better embody the future.

Mapping the Future

The third dimension of my futures pedagogy is focused on mapping the future. I use the following methods. 1. The futures triangle. 2. The futures landscape. 3. Emerging issues analysis. 4. Causal Layered Analysis. 5.

Scenarios, and 6. Visioning.

The futures triangle maps three dimensions: the push of the future (new technologies, globalization, demographic shifts such as aging and migration), the pull of the future (competing images of the future: Gaia versus global tech versus collapse versus national realism, for example) and the weight of the future (what is problematic to change, deep structures). Taken together the triangle of the future presents a way to map the competing dimensions of the future. This is useful in that with a simple diagram the dialectics of the future can be understood. The future is not seen as fixed out there but as being created by various processes (and not being created because of historical patterns or weights).

The futures landscape has four categories. The first is the jungle. At this stage, competition and short term thinking dominate. The second is the chess set. Strategy dominates here. Which future is the most appropriate is the guiding question. The third consists of mountain tops. At this level, the big picture through alternative futures is explored. The fourth consists of the Star—the vision of the future.

Emerging issues analysis seeks to identify issues before they become common knowledge. These can be opportunities as well as warning. They are traces of the future. This method is also useful in that the shape of the future can be mapped. Individuals can thus develop their own capacity to anticipate. Forecasting ceases to be framed in expert quantitative terms and more in intuitive terms. Yet, since most emerging issues identified tend to be current problems, individuals begin to see how their views of the future are just twenty minutes out into the future.

Causal layered analysis takes a depth view of the future. The litany of the future (forecasts, the most superficial part of the future) is questioned by exploring how forecasts are dependent on other dimensions—social, political, cultural, for example—the systemic level. This systemic view is, however, nested in worldviews. These are deeper paradigms of how civilizations see self, other, future, time and space. Finally, the worldview is based on a story, a myth or metaphor. Causal layered analysis explores these multiple levels of the future, ensuring that the future, first, is seen as layered; second, that it is seen as complex; third, that the future can be entered through multiple spaces and; fourth, the future is seen not as given but as constituted by various levels of reality. Causal layered analysis transforms the litany of a particular future by nesting it in systems, worldviews and myths. The deconstructed future thus can be reconstructed by switching to an alternative system, worldview or myth.

In terms of pedagogy, this is useful as individuals have certain proclivities toward particular levels. This

helps them see their own level but also to see how their take on the future relates to other perspectives. It also assists the move out of one's own box of the future, whether that be a litany, system, worldview or myth box.

Scenarios also map the future but in horizontal space. Alternative futures based on different assumptions, particularly drivers, are developed. Scenarios emerge based on different drivers: globalization can lead to one scenario; the rise of cultural creatives to another; aging to a third. Alternatively, I use archetypal scenarios: Transformation (technological or cultural); Collapse; Continued Growth; and Return to the Imagined Past.⁹ These archetypes frame the future. Scenarios are of great value in teaching in that complex alternatives can be mapped. The exploration of scenarios is done in various ways: through text, through art, through drama skits, through oral presentations. This is crucial as alternatives must be lived, they must be embedded in body and mind.

Visioning focuses less on the breadth of the future and more on the preferred future. This is the aspirational dimension of the future-what future do people want? What does it look like? What metaphor best describes the future? This is a powerful pedagogical tool as individuals become creators instead of receivers of the future.

While at first developing the details of one's vision of the future is difficult, with prodding and gentle facilitation, it becomes easier.

Significantly, all these methods have a visual analog, that is, they are easy to diagram (triangle, landscape, s-curve, ice-berg, two by two tables, and metaphors).

Taken together, the pillars of futures studies; ways to use the future; and futures methods provide a framework for teaching futures that is rigorous, empowering, productive, efficacious and engaged. It transforms.

I have thus found that teaching futures studies becomes a field and process that is (1) theoretically rigorous (satisfying the demands of the Academy); (2) empowering (satisfying the demands of social movements); (3) critical without being paralyzing (that is, productive pedagogies are created, deconstruction with reconstruction thus satisfying the demands of the oppressed and dealing with the paralyzing effects of fear of dystopias); (4) creates more efficacious strategy (and at multiple levels) and policy (that is anticipatory) thus satisfying the demands of the market and State; and (5) engaged with students be they in the university, government, market or society, thus making it fun and meaningful, and not a routine chore for teacher or student.

KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE

KNOW		DON'T KNOW	
<p>Type 1</p> <p>What you know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Day to day given reality ● Unquestioned - Accepted ● Forecasts - Data 		<p>Type 4</p> <p>What you don't know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowledge outside one's field, locale, area of expertise ● Study - emerging issues analysis ● Learning from others ● Being conscious 	
<p>Type 2</p> <p>What you know you know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflection ● Science especially learning of hypothesis ● High degree of certainty - Information 		<p>Type 5</p> <p>What you don't know you know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unconscious Understanding ● Superconsciousness ● Intuitive Foresight ● Wisdom 	
<p>Type 3</p> <p>What you know you don't know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scenarios are the most useful tool as they help contour uncertainty - frame areas of ignorance ● Emerging issues analysis ● Knowledge through questioning 		<p>Type 6</p> <p>What you don't know you don't know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Only way to approach this is by entering other ways of knowing, moving outside comfortable paradigms ● Epistemic futures ● The Problem of Consciousness - Enemy, Friend or Transcendence 	

at first developing the details of one's vision of the future is difficult. With prodding and gentle facilitation, it becomes easier.

Significantly, all these methods have a visual analog, they are easy to diagram (triangle, landscape, square, two by two tables, and metaphors). When taken together, the pillars of futures studies; ways of thinking about the future, and futures methods provide a framework for teaching futures that is rigorous, empowering, and efficacious and engaged. It transforms.

I have found that teaching futures studies is a field and process that is (1) theoretically rigorous and meets the demands of the Academy; (2) empowering and meets the demands of social movements; (3) not being paralyzing (that is, productive pedagogy); (4) deconstruction with reconstruction and meets the demands of the oppressed and dealing with the effects of fear of dystopias; (5) creating a strategy (and at multiple levels) and (6) a methodology thus satisfying the demands of the future; and (7) engaged with students being a part of the future, government, market or society, and meaningful, and not a routine academic exercise.

WHAT I DON'T KNOW

Field, Acade, area
analysis

Teaching futures studies is a process that transforms. I learn and change from every experience and I believe that those who are partners in this process, as facilitators, professors, students, do as well.

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Notes

- 1 This article is based on material in Sohail Inayatullah, *Questioning the Future: Futures Studies, Action Learning and Organizational Transformation*. Tamsui, Tamkang University Press, 2002. I would like to thank Patricia Kelly for editorial assistance.
- 2 This is based on two books. Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah, eds. *Macrohistory and Macrobistorians: Perspectives on Individual, Social and Civilizational Change*. Westport, Ct. Praeger, 1997. Sohail Inayatullah, *Understanding Sarkar: The Indian Episteme, Macrohistory and Transformative Knowledge*. Brill, Leiden, 2002.
- 3 Graham Molitor's work is exemplary here. Gtmolitor@aol.com
- 4 The late Nicholas Albery's work is exemplary. See: www.glohalideasbank.org
- 5 For more on this, see the works of P.R. Sarkar.
- 6 www.performancefrontiers.com. In one experience with this method, our group developed a skit for Global. While conceptually we had clarity on this image of the future, in the skit we failed at presenting it. This helped us realize the real tension in creating a Globalized world. Robertson as well has participants deconstruct the experience afterwards, asking participants to analyse the drama—the tensions, the meanings, the beginning, middle and end, for example.
- 7 Email, November 2, 2002
- 8 see www.culturalcreatives.org
- 9 These have been developed by James Dator. See: www.futures.hawaii.edu

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