

Taking Future Generations Seriously: Hope, Literacy and Alternatives to Violence

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This paper is an invitation to widely converse on what you and I can do for future generations. In conventional approaches to education, thinking about generations is very much a neglected dimension but need is be? Are there alternatives? Is it possible to transcend fatalism and cynicism, and to begin to build cultures of practical hope? Must trends in environmental destruction and physical violence be destiny? Are there opportunities for choice and engagement in what we do as teachers, teacher educators, parents and concerned citizens? How actively do we listen to what our children are saying about the needs of future generations?

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A New Global Ethic?

'Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was lent to you by your children'. This Kenyan proverb not only offers wise insights about the need to care for our natural environment but affirms the need for building a sense of compassionate solidarity with future generations. It implies a very different way of looking at our responsibilities to future generations than has been commonplace. It is a theme that has been taken up over recent decades by movements of 'grassroots globalism' such as the peace, environmental and feminist movements, and a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Together with United Nations bodies such as UNICEF, these social change movements and NGOs have been active not only in affirming the rights of children but in seeking to extend the notion of rights and responsibilities to unborn generations.

The Idea of Intergenerational Equity

It was Gandhi who remarked that there is enough for everyone's needs but not everyone's greed. If there is to be an extension of this principle to unborn generations, what does this imply? Is a paradigm shift towards less violent and more inclusive ways of intergenerational caring likely? Are there practical contributions that our teachers and schools may make to a new global ethic? Or is this merely a pipe-dream?

As a peace educator, environmental educator and critical futurist, I am the first to admit that the obstacles to any such shift are considerable. After all, there is a powerful push of the past. Business-as-usual practices often hide the real environmental and social costs of enterprises, especially on children, women, the poor and the natural environment. Such culturally myopic practices are defined in mainstream economic theory as 'externalities'.¹ Attendant risks may be obscured as to how the futures of unborn generations are being mortgaged. Rather than attempting constructively to deal with trends in violence, such as the 2 million children who have been killed in wars over the past decade or the increased pace of environmental destruction, we may assume such trends are destiny. Rather than prudential care and applied foresight, there may be the blind pursuit of short term goals that ignores the interests of the 'two-thirds world' and of generations to come. Rather than working together to help build a better world, in which unborn generations have the possibility to live, to laugh, to play, to share, to care and to transform conflicts non-violently, we may fatalistically accept a foreclosed future. Rather than building intergenerational partnerships, the well being of children today and

of successive generations may be stolen or colonized through our lack of quality responses.

The Needs of Future Generations: a Neglected Dimension in the School Curriculum?

It has been commented that much of what happens in our schools is about driving into the future whilst looking in the rear vision mirror. This metaphor has been extended to picturing our young people as, in many cases, crash victims of ‘future shock’. Even if we question the cynical nature of this comment, we may see some truth in its claims to describe reality and potential reality. Yet, is the situation more complex and open? Even if there is taken-for-granted knowledge about ‘perpetual’ trends in direct, structural and ecological forms of violence, are there opportunities for resistance? Notwithstanding foreclosed images or guiding metaphors about our schools and other social organisations, are there site-specific opportunities for our teachers and teacher educators to become practical futurists? Are there opportunities for choice and engagement in helping to build cultures of peace and environmentally sustainable futures? Are there opportunities for civic engagement in our schools and other social organisations to challenge narrow notions of education and citizenship that fail to take seriously our children’s rights and the needs of future generations? (see Table 1).²

Table 1

Educating for Future Citizens:
Narrow and Broad Approaches

| National civics | Global civics |
|---|---|
| Axioms | Hypotheses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rights and duties as sanctioned by nation state.• Children rights narrowly defined. Children as dependents• Democracy narrowly defined. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rights and duties as sanctioned under both national law and emergent international law (e.g. UN Convention on the Rights of Children).• Children right broadly defined. Toward cultures of partnership.• Democracy broadly defined. |

Learning *about* democratic institutions. Passive rather than active citizenship.

- Literacy narrowly defined (e.g. back-to-basics).
- Sustainability narrowly defined.
- Peace narrowly defined (negative peace).
- Responsibility narrowly defined (e.g. 'national self-interest' utility values).
- Solidity narrowly defined (national citizenship' values and nationalistic solidarity).

Learning *about* and *for* democratic participation at all levels(e.g. negotiating classroom rules).

- Literacy broadly defined (e.g. environmental literacy, conflict resolution literacy, multimedia literacy, global political literacy).
- Sustainability broadly defined
- Peace broadly defined(Positive peace).
- Responsibility broadly defined (e.g. emergent ethical concerns with global responsibility and the needs of future generations).
- Solodarity broadly defined ('global citizenship' values and intergenerational solidarity).

Schools, Cultural Editing and Restrictad Images of 'the Future'

Our metaphors, images and assumptions about the world, about our schools and our children's futures and their children's are likely to play an important part in what we do or do not do in the present. Such images may not only be taken for granted but may rebound on whether we attempt to help create non-violent futures. Even if we would like a less violent future, we may assume that the task is too difficult and by our own inaction contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In this context, it is important to note that there are major traditions of thought that tend to 'edit out' schools as sites of much, if any, genuine possibility in resisting violent trends. Schools in some radical critiques may be relegated to a mechanistic reproductive function. Teachers may be seen as largely 'authoritarian dupes' or 'structural dopes'. The predominant metaphors may be ones in which teachers are little more than technicians on a factory production line unthinkingly working for agendas set elsewhere, 'quality control' on manufactured outcomes and 'a docile workforce'.

In more conservative or economic rationalist versions, there is also foreclosure of the future. The metaphors of teaching and schooling are likely to be couched in the language of 'competitive excellence', restated myths of 'the hidden hand of the market place' in a time of globalization, and of 'learning

organisations' in which schools learn from businesses how to become entrepreneurial. Rather than schools being seen as potential sites for contributing in various ways to creating non-violent futures, they may be pictured more narrowly as places for adaptation to market-place demands, the quickening pace of technological change and 'the future'.

Critical futurists use the term 'cultural editing' to describe processes both within formal and non-formal education that are likely to restrict imagination about social alternatives, including alternatives to violence, and to hamper action competence or skills in non-violent democratic participation. Cultural editing is closely related to the concept of 'cultural violence' used in peace research. The latter refers to those forms of cultural editing in which 'texts' on potential reality exclude as unrealistic the possibility of transcending the institution of war, selectively make 'invisible' or condone violent acts or structures, normalise double standards on violence in times of war and times of peace, and rationalise as 'perpetual' contemporary trends in physical, structural and ecological forms of violence. In such cases, guiding images, symbolic representations or taken-for-granted knowledge of what is and what might be edit out possibilities for practical contributions to building non-violent futures.³

Our Children's Voices on the Future: the Principles of Active Listening and Co-participation

In resisting forms of cultural violence that deny the interests of future generations, a number of working principles may be cited. These principles are by no means intended to be exhaustive but merely invitations for open-minded dialogue. If we are to enhance the prospects of moving in the twenty-first century towards more peaceful cultures and more environmental sustainable ways of living, it is important to share ideas, to learn from other cultural lifeways and to actively listen to our children's voices on the future.

As teachers, if we are to take seriously the notion that 'Our world has been lent to us by our children', is it enough to reconsider **what** we teach. Or do we need also to review **how** we teach? Are both the formal and informal curriculum crucial?

If we over-concentrate on the formal curriculum we may neglect the powerful push of educational structures and pedagogical processes that work against lessening racial intolerance, gendered violence and ageist stereotyping. With, for example, ageism there is devaluation of the contributions of both young people and the elderly. Ageist myths deny the possibility that adults can learn much of value from listening to what children are actually saying about the

future. Instead of learning environments that encourage co-participation, democratic action competence and partnership across the generations, shortsighted patterns of age-segregation, dependency and helplessness may be perpetuated:

...Given the age-segregated nature of [our] children's world, the further along they move in age, schooling, work experience, and socialisation to adulthood, the more likely they are to reject their own wisdom and accept adult "wisdom" as the price of entry into adulthood. Conventional adult wisdom at present confirms a rather violent, inequitable and increasingly polluted world. Admitting children to co-participation in social thinking, dreaming and planning while they are still free to draw on their own experiential knowledge of the world will help make the adult social order more malleable, and more open to new and more humane developments.⁴

The conventional mug-and-jug metaphor about teaching, in which the jug's contents of 'expert knowledge' are poured into empty mugs, denies any childhood wisdom and the possible value of participatory and collaborative approaches. Greatly undervalued are the potentials of co-participation and collaborative learning techniques in the classroom:

...Hundreds of research studies have been done on the relative impact of cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning experiences... The various studies of cooperative learning are quite consistent with one another... indicating very favourable effects upon students. They develop a considerably greater commitment, helpfulness and caring for each other regardless of differences in ability level, ethnic background, gender, social class, or physical disability. They develop more skill in taking the perspective of others, emotionally as well as cognitively ...⁵

With the conventional teaching model futures are foreclosed rather than opened. There is a likely foreclosure in what is meant by 'literacy' or 'the educational basics' and what are interpreted as valuable, worthwhile or valid knowledge sources about times past, times present and times future. Rather than the teacher or the teacher educator as a practical futurist, the conventional approach to schooling is very much 'business as usual'. In terms of the sociology

of knowledge, or as some feminist critics have preferred to describe it as 'the sociology of the lack of knowledge', certain sources are likely to be strongly privileged in 'the texts' of conventional pedagogies. Other sources, such as voices from the low-income or the two-thirds world, and from women and children are likely to find more difficulties in getting a serious hearing for their views about war, peace and the future.

Resisting Fatalism: the Principle of Empowerment

To recognise, however, that there are restricted 'texts' on the future in conventional pedagogies, whether as to gender relations, the institution of war or other assumed social invariances, is not the same as fatalistically accepting such 'texts' as the only true reading of potential reality. The partiality of such 'texts' is both a challenge and an opportunity. There are signs of this in non-formal educational contexts in the futures work of a range of NGOs, INGOs and social change movements as well as in varying efforts in formal educational contexts to negotiate preferable futures.

In critical futurist and peace research literature, the metaphor of the future as a fan is sometimes used to highlight the varied potentials for non-violent resistance to feared futures:

... At every present moment the future stretches out before us like a giant fan, each fold of which is a possible future. We can range these from total catastrophe on one side to the fulfillment of human potential on the other. To each segment we can assign a rough probability...

For some of us the range of decision is very small; for the prisoner in jail who has not served his term tomorrow will be very much like today - there is not much choice. For all of us, however, there is some choice and we cannot escape a moral responsibility to choose...

Every decision that any human being makes, changes, however infinitesimally, the probability of catastrophe ... or betterment...⁶

Whether as teachers or teacher educators, are there crucial challenges to become practical futurists? Are important questions raised about personal choice, professional foresight and responsibility? More Particularly, what quality responses may be made to our children's feared futures and to safeguarding the interests of posterity? Newly proposed social innovations, such as a bill of

rights for future generations and the creation of ombudsmen, guardians or spokespersons to represent future generations at the United Nations and at national levels, deserve strong support. However, consistent with the principles of active listening and co-participation should we be also encouraging at the local level and, more particularly, in our schools new ideas of 'grassroots globalism' such as 'our children as ambassadors for future generations'? The latter approach may help to more directly empower young people by seriously valuing what they have to say about the future.⁷

Learning Environments and Cultures of Peace: the Principle of Peace by Peaceful Means

To be a practical futurist implies active listening to the voices of our students on the future and the encouragement of classroom milieux congenial to futures-thinking and non-violent values and skill. Attention to the procedural values or principles of active listening and of co-operative rather than strongly competitive learning styles are likely to be important for any practical efforts in our schools to create non-violent futures. A related principle may be stated. It concerns the relationships between the images we may hold of better futures and the processes we are prepared to use in attempting to reach such a future, whether in schools or other social organisations.

Even with believed good educational goals relating to a non-violent future, it is important not to neglect questions of appropriate means. If authoritarian means are used, such means easily corrupt educational or other social policy goals, irrespective of whether the ends are worthy in themselves. To teach about the problems of violence in society or the world at large in tightly prescriptive, morally strictor authoritarian ways may be just as flawed as a laissez-faire approach that chooses to ignore such problems.

To seek to protect our children from gratuitous displays of violence, for example, whether on television or 'interactive' computer games, raises important questions for ourselves as parents and teachers. If we choose to intervene, how do we do it in ways that are not likely to be either ineffectual or self-defeating? Is there a risk that even with the best of intentions our desire to 'protect' our children may not work if we do not involve them sufficiently in what we are doing? Is there a risk that in our 'knowing best' and placing certain programs or games 'off limits' with out any real discussion, the very same programs and games acquire for some the attractions of forbidden fruits? Is there a risk of denying young people adequate opportunities in the home and school to develop critical media literacy? Especially among boys are such risks

likely to be greater if the broader culture selectively condones masculine violence?⁸

To attempt optimal forms of reconciliation between non-violent ends and non-violent means in our schools and classrooms may present major challenges but are likely to be crucial to practical beginnings of active dialogue and active hope among our students for non-violent rather than feared futures:

...The school should try to give its students optimal possibilities to express themselves as having co-influence and responsibility in real situations. The goal is to have students develop a desire and ability not only to meet the future but also to contribute to its shaping...⁹

New Literacies Valuing Future Generations: the Principles of Foresight, Hope and Action Competence

In preparing for the future, our schools have an important, if not unambiguous, part to play. The caricature of many of our schools as places for driving into the future whilst looking fixedly in the rear-vision mirror is just that - a caricature. There are institutional constraints but there are also contradictions and site-specific opportunities that may be realized to a greater or lesser extent. Opportunities may be missed in our schools to help negotiate more sustainable, less violent futures that respect the rights of future generations. Perhaps what is crucial is that less of these opportunities are missed.

Rather than organisations that must be driven blindly and take their passengers uncomprehendingly to some 'future shock' destination, there are varying opportunities in our schools to extend what might be termed 'the foresight principle'. There are varying opportunities to encourage defensive or anticipatory driving practices in our schools. There are varying opportunities for our students not only to learn from past travels or hindsight but from developing new 'maps' of potential reality, including less violent routes for would-be travellers into the early decades of a new millennium.

In this context, there are arguably important considerations for ourselves as teachers and teacher educators. In a world that is becoming more interdependent but is confronted by violent trends, is there an increasing need for ourselves to be more futures-oriented in what we do or do not do? Are there important questions relating to choice and engagement? In preparing our children for the twenty-first century, is more needed than the traditional 3Rs and the appeal of the apparent security of 'the good old days', with a 'back to ba-

sics' curriculum? Does the answer lie in adding the often proffered R or ROM of computer literacy? Or, in actively listening to our children's voices on the future, do we need to reconceptualise 'Literacy' in more optimal ways such as skills of foresight, empathy, social imagination and action competence in the non-violent resolution or transformation of conflict? (See Table 2)

Table 2

**Reconceptualising 'literacy':
what you and I can do for future generations**

| Narrow curriculum focus 'Rear vision mirror' perspective | Broad curriculum focus 'Anticipatory driving' perspective |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning conventional Rs, plus 'hidden curriculum' Rs (e.g. reductionist computer literacy, social illiteracy about alternatives) • Restriction of social imagination (image illiteracy) • Resignation to an 'inevitable' future (e.g. conflict resolution, illiteracy, political illiteracy about democratic processes). • Rigidity in thinking rather than responsible foresight (e.g. global futures illiteracy). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning beyond the conventional Rs, with active challenges to 'hidden curriculum', business-as-usual Rs (e.g. critical multimedia literacy, skills in resisting 'colonization of the future'). • Recovery of social imagination (image literacy) • Resourcefulness about alternative futures (e.g. conflict resolution literacy, action competence in global civics and democratic participation). • Responsibilities relating to foresight and respect for the (e.g. global futures literacy.) |

Beyond Impoverished Social Imagination

To begin to effectively work for more peaceful and environmentally friendly futures, how important is it for motivation that our students are able to imagine what such futures might be like? Instead of the implicit R of Resignation to a feared, violent future, do we need to encourage skills of social imagination about non-violent alternatives and an explicit futures dimension across

the curriculum? Do we need what Elise Boulding has described as ‘image literacy’? With the latter there are the Rs of Resourcefulness in envisaging peaceful futures and of Respect for the rights of future generations.¹⁰ Existing research on children’s views on the future is among the strongest endorsements of such needs.¹¹

Such broadened notions of literacy relate closely to practical consideration of whether our students at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels are primarily empowered or disempowered by their learning experiences. In what we do in our classrooms, our schools, our colleges and our universities, is hope made practical about more peaceful futures rather than despair convincing about ‘perpetual’ trends in violence? Can we make practical contributions to lessening illiteracy about cultural editing and foreclosed images or ‘texts’ on the future? For what you and I can do the challenges are great, but there are site-specific opportunities for constructive choice and engagement in helping to build cultures of peace, and in encouraging respect for the rights of future generations.¹² (Table 3).

Table 3

Hope, literacy and a dialogue on futures

| Changeview | Education (formal and informal curriculum) | Related assumptions/ narratives |
|--------------|---|--|
| Hopelessness | Young people’s voices on the future ignored | Fatalism/ disenfranchisement/ alienation/ trends as destiny |
| Passive hope | Shallow optimism political illiteracy | Business-as-usual/ short-termism/ pactive citizenship/ |
| Active hope | Active listening to young people’s voices on the future/ futures education/ multiple literacies (e.g. environmental literacy, conflict resolution literacy) | Foresight/ active citizenship/ negotiating on behalf of future generations/ skills in non-violent, democratic participation |

Notes

1. For a critical discussion of the concept of 'externalities', see John Galtung, *Peace by peaceful Means*, London: Sage, 1996, pp.154-76.
2. See K.Knutsson, 'A new vision of childhood', *Future Generations Journal*, no.21, 1996, pp.27-30, and K. Bickmore, 'Preparation for pluralism: curricular and extra curricular practice with conflict resolution' *Theory into Practice*, vol.36, no.1, 1997, pp. 3-10. Other relevant discussion is in F. Hutchinson, 'Young people's voices on the future: a neglected dimension in teaching citizenship?' *Connections 97: Education for Responsible Citizenship Conference Proceedings*, 4th International Conference, Social Education Association of Australia (SEAA) in collaboration with the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), USA, held at the University of Sydney, Australia, 6-9 July 1997. This conference paper is published on the *Connections '97* website: <http://www.edfac.usyd.edu.au/projects/conect97/index.html>
3. The concepts of 'cultural editing' and 'cultural violence' are discussed in J. Galtung, 'Cultural violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.27, no.3, pp.273-889 and F. Hutchinson, *Educating Beyond Violent Futures*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp.32-36 and 126-149.
4. Elise Boulding, 'Image and action in peace building' in E. Boulding and K. Boulding, *The Future*, London: Sage, 1995.
5. Morton Deutsch, "Educating beyond hate", in A. Bjerstedt (ed.) *Education Beyond Fatalism and Hate*, Malmo, Sweden: School of Education, Lund University, 1994, p. 8.
6. Kenneth Boulding, *Human Betterment*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985, pp.214-5.
7. Allen Tough, 'What future generations need from us', *Futures*, vol. 25, no. 10, Dec. 1993, p.p. 1041-50.
8. For useful discussions of issues of education, gendered violence and future generations, see Betty Reardon, *Sexism and the War System*, New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1985 and *Women and peace: Feminist Visions of Global security*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
9. Ake Bjerstedt, *Conceptions of the Future and Education for Responsibility*, Malmo, Sweden, Department of Educational and Psychological Research, Lund University, 1992, p. 8.
10. See Elise Boulding, *Building a Global Civic Culture: Education for an interdependent world*, New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1988, for a discussion of the need for new social literacies in educating for responsibility toward future generations.
11. See David Hicks, 'A lesson for the future: young people's hopes and fears for tomorrow', *Future*: vol.28, no.1, 1996, pp.1-14 and Hutchinson, op cit., pp.70-89. Also see F.Hutchinson, 'Young people's hopes and fears for the future', in D. Hicks & R. Slaughter(eds), *World Year book of Education 1998: futures education*, London: Kogan Page, forthcoming.
12. See, for example, Birgit Brock-Utne, 'The challenges for peace educators at the end of the millennium', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, vol.1, no.1.1996, pp.

37-55; Rupert Maclean and John Fien, *Learning for a sustainable environment : innovations in teacher education through environmental education*, Griffith University, Australia and UNESCO-ACEID, 1995; F. Hutchinson, 'Building alternatives to violence: are there needs and opportunities for teachers and teacher educators to be practical futurists?', *Peace, Environment and Education*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1996, pp. 3-18; and Richard Slaughter (ed.) *New Thinking for a New Millennium*, London: Routledge, 1996.

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