Report

Linking Health Promoting Schools and Futures Studies: a Critical Agenda

Eric Dommers*   Sue M. Cooke   Julie M. Davis
Queensland Health, Australia   QUT, Australia

This paper proposes that the achievement of healthy, just and sustainable futures may be supported by shifting the emphasis in our education systems from acceptance of current ecologically unsustainable and socially inequitable patterns and structures, towards the creation and acceptance of more sustainable practices and systems. This paper describes two recent educational innovations (Health Promoting Schools, and Futures Studies) which offer frameworks for social change which can assist educators, parents, futurists and community groups to conceptualise and implement the socially-critical stances necessary for achieving alternative futures. This paper describes areas of correspondence and potential synergy between these innovations, and proposes that educators interested in social-critical stances consider supporting and adopting both approaches in their educational systems and school communities.

Keywords : socially-critical approach, Health Promoting Schools, Futures Studies, participatory action

* **Correspondence:** DipPE, HDTS, Cert. Assoc. M'ment, Cert. Health Program Evaluation, Health Outcomes Unit, Queensland Health, GPO Box 48, Brisbane, 4001, Australia.
  Email: edommers@optusnet.com.au

Introduction

In 1992, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a 'Warning to Humanity' which stated that "If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know (Union of Concerned Scientists 1992)." Today, both children and adults are increasingly aware that our present ways of living on the planet are environmentally and socially destructive and are currently unsustainable. Given that the world's children, and future generations, will bear the consequences of economic, social, health and environmental actions of past and current decision makers, one of the most urgent tasks we face is to refocus our various social structures and systems in light of these dangers. The education system is no exception to this need. Moreover, school education offers a unique opportunity to develop in students the capacity to critique social and ecological approaches which are unsustainable, and to consider, and help to create alternative futures. In order to effect this change, schools as institutions, will themselves need to continue to develop the understanding, skills, values and community networks which will lead to the widespread social and environmental actions required for positive change towards sustainable practices and systems.

Two educational innovations which offer potentially radical frameworks for social change are attracting increasing international interest and participation. These frameworks, emerging from the Health Promoting School (HPS) movement and the developing field of Futures Studies (FS), may be useful for facilitating both the conceptualisation and implementation of the proactive and socially-critical stances necessary for achieving socio-ecologically sustainable futures.

Whilst there are various models of, and approaches to these innovations (eg conservative or radical views of Health Promoting Schools (Cooke 1994) and Futures Studies(Inayatulla 1996)), the authors argue that the most powerful models combine a socially critical perspective and empowerment ethic with a strong action orientation. Several themes and processes are common to both Health Promoting Schools and Futures Studies, suggesting their potential for synergy. It is the authors' contention that those Health Promoting School initiatives which consciously adopt a 'futures' orientation will enhance their potential for social transformation and the achievement of desirable and sustainable futures. We further suggest that the Health Promoting School concept should be reconceptualised

to incorporate an emergent Futures Studies stance, and we urge that both innovations continue to challenge our patterns of thought and action in order to enable us to identify practices which are counterproductive, and to develop creative new paths to healthy, just and sustainable futures.

Health Promotion and Health Promoting Schools

The concept of Health Promoting Schools, as opposed to traditional health education in schools, is relatively new. The Health Promoting Schools approach, like the Healthy Cities movement, is derived from the broader, and still evolving field of health promotion - described in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO 1986) as the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health.

In the Ottawa Charter, the World Health Organisation (WHO) called for actions in the following broad areas to enact this empowering process:

- Building healthy public policy - to make healthy choices the easy choices
- Creating supportive environments - adopting a socio-ecological approach to health
- Strengthening community action - empowering communities to own and control their own destinies
- Developing personal skills - enhancing life skills and increasing options available to people
- Reorienting health services - beyond clinical and curative services, and recognising the shared responsibility of individuals, groups, institutions and governments to promote health

The health promoting schools approach adopts a similar framework to that described by the Ottawa Charter, and by applying it within the setting of the school community, enables 'health development' within schools to become a more structured, powerful and comprehensive process.

Generally a health promoting school (HPS) acknowledges the influence and inter-relatedness of three main components: formal curriculum; school environment; and school-community links which can act to promote health (Young & William 1989; Healthy Schools). The HPS approach argues that the health effects are strongest when these three act in concert to reinforce and support each other. Recent models (Dommers, et al. 1996; Davis & Cooke 1998; Jensen 1993) also explicitly highlight

the importance of linking these elements using a collaborative, participatory decision-making and action process.

The Socio-ecological Approach to Health

Over the last decade, there has been considerable development of the socio-ecological approach to public health. This emergent approach recognises the interdependence of human health and the ecological context in which we live (WCED 1987; Kickbusch 1989; UNEP 1991; Healthy Schools) and acknowledges the important interplay between physical, social and natural environments, and health beliefs, values, attitudes, opportunities and behaviours. The authors' preferred approach to the HPS embraces this socio-ecological paradigm, and regards schools as one of a number of settings or environments which both influence health directly, and which act to shape health beliefs, values, confidence and behaviours for personal and community health. The key assumptions which support the socio-ecological approach to health are:

1. The goal of 'Health for All' cannot be achieved without securing a sustainable planetary environment, and sharing resources more equitably between people (McMichael & Hales 1997; Catford 1991)
2. Achieving this goal will depend on widespread increases in critical consciousness (Cooke 1994; Brookfield 1987), and more active individual and community participation, or social action, to bring about the necessary changes (WHO 1986; UNEP 1991).

These assumptions are shaped by the following:

- the recognition of a direct relationship between health and social equity (Healthy Schools)
- the concept of education for critical consciousness (Freire 1973), exemplified in health discourse about social empowerment, community development, and active participation for health (Labonte 1990; Fahlberg, et al. 1991)
- the capacity for healthy public policy to empower individuals and communities to participate actively in shaping their destinies (Ashgrove State School 1993)
- the imperative for health of 'sustainable development'(Kickbusch 1989; UNEP 1991; McMichael 1997)

Approaches to Health Promoting Schools: Matching "Means" and "Ends"

In practice there are varying interpretations of, and approaches to, health promoting schools. Analysis of HPS activities described in contemporary literature (Cooke 1994) indicates that they fall along a continuum: from those which take a conservative, incremental and reactive approach which does not threaten the status quo; to those which take a socially-critical approach, and which propose more radical alternatives or fundamental changes to common school practices.

The authors' preferred approach to Health Promoting Schools has the following characteristics:-

- it is based on a wholistic view of health as multidimensional (including physical, ecological, emotional, spiritual, cognitive and social aspects). Particular issues (e.g. heart health, sun-safety, suicide prevention) may be entry points or priorities for action for particular school communities, ideally within the context of a wider HPS approach
- allied to the notion of student/school-community ownership and control, the preferred approach embraces learning strategies which promote both individual and community empowerment, essential to social action for change
- it also includes opportunities to put learning into action in the child's immediate context and environment (e.g. the classroom, school grounds, local community).

The 'means' by which a school attempts to *become* a Health Promoting School are just as important as the 'ends' it *achieves*. Unless the process of change is empowering, and actively contributes to the development of individual involvement and ownership, the full potential of the HPS approach will not be realised. In this context, the notion of a negotiated curriculum which is student centred and based on student defined concerns becomes an essential element.

A Health Promoting School modelled on the approach described here is one which strives to enable students, staff and wider school community members to act, individually and collectively, for their own good health, and for that of their communities and environments (WHO 1988), over both the short and the longer term. Action strategies which emerge from such approaches are typically multiple, addressing environmental (including struc-

tural and organisational), as well as individual and social learning factors (Davis & Cooke 1998; Jensen 1991; Ferreira & Welsh 1997).

To recapitulate, we argue that a Health Promoting School adopts practices informed by the key health promotion values of critical consciousness, social justice and equity, participation and ecological sustainability. A Health Promoting School should empower students (and adult school community members) to increase control over and improve their health through action strategies such as those articulated in the Ottawa Charter. In other words, the key processes entailed in HPS aproaches include:

- reflection and action (for change)
- ownership and direction by the participants themselves
- the aim of creating and moving towards shared visions and common goals
- acknowledgement of both short and long term needs and responsibilities

HPS approaches which model the socially critical values and processes described above offer health educators and school communities an innovative framework for conceptualising health, and a process for facilitating change to promote improvements to those local and community contexts which shape and support health, present and future.

The most powerful HPS approaches explicitly recognise the importance of inclusive, collaborative, democratic processes, developing skills and networks for personal and social action through processes such as action research and the five step 'Healthy Schools' process (Davis & Cooke 1998; British Columbia Ministry of Healthy Schools 1991).

What is Futures Studies?

Futures Studies has been described as a 'field of disciplined enquiry' (Slaughter 1999) in which the main practitioners are either academics, research officers, or 'communities of interest' in alternative futures. Futures Studies is also however a curriculum area or subject which is finding its place in both tertiary and school based education. Futures Studies commences with the assumption that the future is neither an 'empty space' nor a predetermined and fixed reality, but rather, is in a constant state of creation. The future, therefore, is something we can shape and determine,

and indeed there are many alternative futures. The skills of Futures Studies assist individuals, organisations and communities to develop a deeper and more critical understanding of the factors and forces which drive change, and offer participants in the 'futures process' a sense of control and ownership over their own lives.

Broadly speaking, the tools employed within Futures Studies can enable individuals and groups to identify possible and probable futures, and then from among these, to select or develop preferred futures. The aim and purpose of creating visions of preferred futures is to set in place tasks, behaviours, plans and activities which will in turn assist individuals and communities to work towards bringing about these preferred futures. Futures Studies offers a range of techniques (for example: scenario building, causal layered analysis, visualisations, and 'what if' questions), through which participants can be encouraged to consider the advantages and disadvantages of various possible futures. Critical analysis of the 'possible future' scenarios in turn supports the identification and refinement of 'preferred futures'.

Although Futures Studies techniques are being increasingly applied across a wide range of spheres of activity, several futurists (Slaughter 1999 ; Slaughter 1995; Hutchinson 1996) argue that the application of a futures or 'foresight' approach is particularly vital in the area of education. Slaughter (Slaughter 1995) suggests that whilst national foresight strategies are needed to give all countries a sense of purpose and direction, they are particularly important for young people, whose sense of the future is perceived to be both uncertain and a source of considerable angst. Hicks (Hicks 1996) similarly reports that both international and Australian research into young people's views of the future suggests that they are well aware of the turbulence and hazards of the times. Noting that it should be of critical concern to all educators if children have mainly negative images of the future, Hicks maintains that school education offers a critical opportunity to develop and shape young people's sense of control and optimism about the possibilities of the future (Hicks 1996).

Futures Studies Curriculum

Futures Studies curriculum is the educational application of Futures Studies, and is increasingly being seen as an important component of school education for the twenty-first century. In Australia, for example, the

Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) conducted a pilot program to assess the merits of optional Futures Studies courses for years 11 and 12 students. In 1999, the QSCC described Futures as a "variety of methodologies that aid the development of insights and knowledge about the past and the present, leading to the consideration of the consequences of personal and collective actions. The promotion of a futures perspective assists students to identify possible and preferred individual and communal futures" (Queensland School Curriculum Council 1999:5). The Queensland Education Department (Education Queensland) has also adopted a strong futures orientation within its New Basics curriculum for students in years 1-10 (Education Queensland).

Whilst a starting point for Futures Studies may be the creation of visions of preferred futures, (as in the Canadian 'Healthy Schools' process), at the school level, Futures Studies often begin with the study of continuity and change in the past and the present. This latter process helps students to recognise the causal factors and forces which create present realities, and which drive both continuity and change. Building on this foundation, Futures Studies then asks students to critique various social conditions, and to consider a range of preferred alternative futures. Students may then be asked to consider which approaches or 'drivers of change' would be required to bring about such preferred futures. Students may also become involved in processes of planning, acting and reflecting on their efforts to enact these preferred futures at the local level.

Although the focus of futures work is often about the development and implementation of preferred futures, probable (or 'most likely') futures outcomes must also be taken into account. This is because the factors that drive or underpin probable futures will also play a role in determining whether preferred futures could ever eventuate. At the macro or big picture level, Futures Studies can begin with multilevel analyses to identify the likely drivers of change (for example, the economic forces shaping emerging economies such as South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore; the bio-technological complexes driving the development of nanotechnologies and bio-genetic engineering; the social and political forces driving the collapse of 'old style communist blocs' and regimes). The identification of such drivers of change in turn provides the foundations for a framework within which to consider possible or probable future scenarios. Within this global framework, studies of 'micro' drivers of change at the local level in the areas of health and the environment can be used to help develop local programs or 'visions' of preferred futures. The consideration

of probable futures can be used to both help students to identify and prepare for likely social change, but it can also be used as a set of steps towards considering and developing those strategies necessary to exert influence over identified drivers of change, and so bring about preferred future outcomes.

The more open process of envisioning possible futures, on the other hand, can provide the necessary creative environment for the development of alternative 'future visions'. This opens up the future, not simply to that which is likely, but allows us a glimpse of what may well become possible. Important outcomes of the Futures Studies curriculum for students include an improved appreciation of how present actions shape future outcomes; understanding that individual actions can make a difference; and the development of a robust sense of optimism for the future based on enhanced personal and group efficacy for understanding and instigating change processes.

Approaches to Futures Studies

As with Health Promoting Schools, there are also differing approaches to Futures Studies. Inayatullah (Inayatulla 1996) proposes that there are three approaches to Futures Studies. The 'predictive' or technical approach essentially employs data to identify cause and effect relationships between people and events and focuses on trend analysis as a means of planning for the future. The second or 'cultural' approach, is based on the assumption that truth is a construction of both culture and language, and the focus of the cultural approach is therefore on cultural narratives such as those found in myth, symbol, and ritual for the creation of alternative visions of the future.

The third approach to Futures Studies involves a socially-critical examination of and response to current social conditions. Understanding the role of governments, bureaucracy and other forms of social power is central to the socially critical approach to Futures Studies. The goal of action in this Futures Studies arena is to mount challenges to current power relations in order to create the opportunity for considering and moving towards alternative realities. Key strategies for disrupting existing power relationships include deconstruction and 'problematising' - the identification and articulation of problems where none have previously been recognised or acknowledged. The movements towards gender and racial equality, and the growing environmental movement are (obvious) examples of such counter hegemonic and problematising stances.

As with the continuum of Health Promoting Schools approaches, the various approaches to Futures Studies are not mutually exclusive, and can indeed be used together. Inayatullah (Inayatulla 1996) notes that the common elements of the Futures Studies approaches, by way of contrast with strategic planning approaches, are as follows:

- a longer term focus: from five to fifty years (or longer), instead of one to five years
- a concern with creating the future, rather than with predicting the future
- a commitment to multiple interpretations of reality
- the participation and inclusion of all types of stakeholders (instead of only powerbrokers)
- is less instrumentalist, and less concerned with profit and localised power
- is both action oriented (in terms of real social change), as well as being a theoretical field of study and research
- is more vision oriented, than goal oriented

Finding Common Ground, and Some Preferred Future Directions

This brief overview suggests a number of important differences and commonalities between the HPS and FS curriculum movements. One major difference between the HPS and FS curriculum movements is that the HPS approach is ostensibly about health, albeit within a very broad definition: whereas FS is typically about broader social issues which may include health. Another important difference is that the HPS is about the adoption of a 'whole school' (and preferably 'whole community') approach, whereas FS curriculum is more commonly undertaken as a discrete course of study designed to develop class or individual perspectives about probable and preferred futures, but which may fall well short of a broader school-community approach.

There are also some strong areas of overlap or correspondence between the two movements. Within the continuum of conservative and radical models of HPS and FS, both approaches explicitly:

- aim towards a commonly created and preferred vision
- build activities on democratic social processes of participation and decision-making
- count personal and social empowerment as key educational processes and outcomes

- focus on action or praxis within a local community
- share the goal of achieving equitable relationships between people, both within, and between generations
- recognise the interdependence of people and environments and the responsibility humans share for ensuring healthy sustainable futures

From the socially critical perspective, the HPS and FS approaches appear to share the following themes and processes:

- a focus on raising individual and community critical consciousness (reflection)
- an emphasis on participatory decision-making and praxis (action)
- a focus on personal and social empowerment as a key educational process and outcome
- the incorporation of a longer term view (including inter-generational concerns)
- the recognition of the interdependence of human health and environment, ie. that healthy people depend on viable and sustainable ecological and social support systems

The notion of 'empowerment' is a particularly important feature and objective of both the HPS and FS movements, and the explicit aim of both movements is to foster empowerment through active participation in collaborative decision-making and action. This interactive process aims to develop the skills of critiquing, problematising and reconceptualising current or dominant types of thought and practice, and to develop the personal and group confidence and networks required for personal and social action.

This paper argues, however, that there is more than just correspondence between two movements, and proposes that the HPS and FS movements can derive effective synergies not just from their similarities, but also from their differences.

Whilst the HPS approach offers a powerful framework and systematic process for considering and taking action about the socio-ecological determinants of health, FS brings together knowledge, ideas and processes from numerous fields of enquiry to enable participants to better understand their past and present behaviours, and to empower them to create new opportunities and visions for their common future. Thus, the HPS approach can 'borrow' FS tools and techniques to both analyse broader social issues and forces which may impact on health, and also to

develop or design alternative or preferred futures. Similarly, the FS curriculum can utilise the HPS or healthy schools concept to provide a school community forum for addressing and implementing a broader change agenda around health issues.

Practitioners of Futures Studies can also derive considerable value from the numerous practical HPS examples of schools and communities actually 'making a difference'. HPS models offer effective, systematic processes for students and school communities to create shared visions, to select their own priorities, to work together to achieve them, and to continue the necessary community renewal processes. In doing so they are modelling the collaborative change processes which will help bring about the shifts necessary to secure the social and ecological support systems for any sort of just, healthy, and sustainable living. These practical approaches offer hope and inspiration that such changes can and do happen.

For those schools and communities which have already commenced the process of introducing the HPS approach, and which seek to empower their students to effect real change within their local and broader communities, are urged to strengthen their socially-critical approach. The authors encourage them to look to the developing field of Futures Studies to help them envision and act within a longer term horizon. For many health promoting schools, the incorporation of Futures Studies curricula, and the adoption of a socially-critical stance will enhance the school community's potential to educate for healthy, just and sustainable futures. These are logical and desirable developments in the evolving conceptualisation and implementation of the Health Promoting School concept.

Finally, policy makers in the areas of health and education are urged to consider the potential advantages value of integrating HPS and FS approaches, particularly in respect of accelerating the capacity of schools to contribute to social debate, cultural creation, and socio-ecological change.

Conclusion

Educators and other stakeholders in education who have an interest in facilitating the achievement of ecologically and socially sustainable futures should consider the merits of innovations such as the Health Promoting Schools and Futures Studies movements. These approaches may help to build capacity for social critique and action for better health and

social outcomes. Further, the HPS and FS approaches share important overlaps, and when used together, should generate considerable synergy from one another.

Finally, it is argued that HPS and FS curricula, which combine socially-critical perspectives and an empowerment ethic with a strong action orientation, will be more effective than traditional schooling in educating for healthy, just and sustainable futures. 'Futures Studies' offers a range of processes or techniques to assist schools to envision preferred healthy futures, and the Health Promoting School approach provides powerful, systematic processes and supportive settings in which to think about, and take action on, the socio-ecological determinants of health.

The future is not some place we are going to,
but one we are creating.
The paths to it are not found, but made,
and the activity of making them changes both
the maker and the destination.

(Commission for the Future, Australia, 1989)

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