



Article

## Biographies of the Future as a Creative Method of Visioning in Education

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### Abstract

*The teaching process at all levels of education is most often focused on teaching past and present events, and very little is focused on teaching for the future. First of all, it means anticipating positive social and professional scenarios that young people may encounter in the future. By anticipating their future social and professional role, young people are more successful in preparing for the challenges that await them in the near and/or distant future. Curricula from different scientific fields are more focused on the past, to a less extent on the present, and do not leave enough space for various forms of visioning the future and projection of acquired knowledge and skills in future events with the aim of thinking and developing the future. Futures studies research methods are a recent term in pedagogical methodology (especially in the Republic of Croatia). In the Republic of Croatia, futures studies have recently been increasingly used to research the issue of upbringing and education (Dubovicki, 2017; 2018, 2019, 2020). There are many futures studies research methods, and this paper deals specifically with future biographies as a form of visioning the future. All these methods can be directly implemented in the teaching process and in all school subjects. This paper describes the methods, ways and objectives of implementing future biographies in the subject Croatian language and literature with a described example of good practice and student's work.*

### Keywords

Futures studies, Biographies of the future, Visioning, Croatian language and literature, Future, Artificial Intelligence

### Introduction

The future, as a term, names all events and activities that will happen in the near or distant future, but the future is also a concept and dimension that we think about in the present with the aim of achieving a better future. Thus, the analysis of the present becomes an important instrument in trying to create an adequate and better future and provides an opportunity to prepare for what lies ahead. Malhotra et al. (2014) claim that, from today's point of view, the future seems more complex and harder to predict than ever before, but today's people have an extraordinary need to know what awaits them (Dubovicki, 2017).

One of the ways in which we can approach the desired future as successfully as possible is to try to explore it and, based on the obtained research results, try to predict it as successfully as possible. How to explore a future that has not even begun? It was this question that helped the first futurologists to deal with the problems of the future in a more scientific way, by creating and using futures studies. In the earliest works, futures studies were mentioned. Considering that they were introduced in the Republic of Croatia very late in academic scientific and professional use (at least in papers in the field of pedagogy), the name futuristic research methods is still used for what we know today in the world under the term - futures studies (Vrcelj, & Mušanović, 2001; Suzić, 2012; Dubovicki, 2017).

Futures studies have so far been used in the areas such as technology and economics in terms of coming out to the market with a finished product which they have economic benefits. That way targeted products that will be more competitive in the market and respond to the needs of customers can be created. Unlike technical and economic professions, pedagogy does not keep pace with global trends because it does not use methods of predicting the future that can better prepare participants in the educational process by developing futuristic competencies for a globalized

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world of rapid change, which can be achieved by applying futures studies. In the Republic of Croatia, we face another challenge, and that is that the terminology of futures studies has not been officially translated into Croatian, so in papers similar, and not always the same translations for a particular method, are used (which can sometimes be confusing for those who have just encountered this area). Croatian literature certainly lacks such a study, because Croatian translations are often accompanied by English terms in scientific and professional papers (Dubovicki, 2017).

Futures studies are not focused only on predicting the future, but also exploring various alternative futures by connecting the present, worldviews, procedures and expectations, and preferences in the future. This leads us to the projection of the desired future scenarios, but also to the research of adequate and functional ways to achieve and realize these desired scenarios. Such research and study of the future takes place on two levels, the collective level and the individual level. The collective level observes societies and communities as a whole and tries to imagine and develop a quality future of the community, while shaping the desired future of the individual develops the best scenarios for personal, internal and external life, and yet for the benefit of society (Amara, 1981; Bell, 1996).

In line with the above, the aim of the paper was to research in what way primary school students think about the future, how they perceive social, economic and social circumstances, and whether they contemplate their future roles. The Croatian language was chosen as the subject because both authors completed their studies of the Croatian language at the graduate level, and one of the authors is currently teaching Croatian in primary school. In addition to the above, in the Croatian language curriculum, one of the teaching units in the sixth grade (out of 8 grades of primary school in the Republic of Croatia) is a biography and autobiography, which fully corresponds to the issues explored in this study. Also, the sixth grade was chosen because we can call it a preparatory class before the final grades in primary school, which are especially important because students choose their occupations and enrolment in high school based on grades and predictions of their profession in the future. For these reasons, it is important that students in the sixth grade think about, but also to anticipate their occupations in the future, as well as various social circumstances in which it will be more or less possible to achieve the desired scenarios. During their education, students have been introduced to various professions, but this research encourages them to think about their possible, desired futures and the professions that might be needed in the future.

### **Theoretical Framework: Futures Studies in the Educational Process**

The goal of researching pedagogical phenomena should not be to "detect" the current situation, but such research should be aimed at continuously changing and improving educational practice (Sekulić-Majurec, 2007; Bognar, 2009; Dubovicki, 2018, 2019). Most pedagogical issues cannot be explored or explained by numerical indicators and mathematical analyses. This does not mean that statistical indicators have to be avoided in pedagogical research, but it is emphasized that without any qualitative indicators not a single pedagogical phenomenon could be fully explored (Dubovicki, 2019; Topolovčan & Dubovicki, 2019). Futures studies represent an additional challenge for researchers. In addition to being insufficiently represented in all areas and fields of science, insufficiently known and inadequately applied in research of pedagogical terms, most of them still belong to the qualitative paradigm (Dubovicki, 2017). Precisely numerous futures studies can serve as a starting point for creating innovative teaching, interesting and creative teaching activities with the aim of stimulating the imagination of the future from an early age. Thus, the educational process is focused differently, and in our country is focused on the past and, in some cases, the present, and very rarely the future (Dubovicki, 2020). Students who are in schools today, especially primary schools, will become full members of the society in ten years, which is a period for which they should already be preparing in school or at least, with some visions of future needs, trying to prepare for tomorrow's challenges. Oyaid (2009) emphasizes that the current role of the teacher is not appropriate for the future. Davidson (2011) cites an example of new occupations in the future, noting that 65% of children attending primary school in 2011 will get a job that did not exist in that year. Tafel (1984a, 1984b), Ishler (1984), Henson & Balentine (1984), Wildman & Inayatullah (1996) wrote about the importance of thinking, researching, and predicting different scenarios in the future in education.

## Futures Studies in Primary School through the Subject Croatian Language

The purpose of learning and teaching the subject Croatian language is to train students for clear, accurate and appropriate communication with the Croatian standard language, acquisition of knowledge about language as a system, free expression of thoughts, feelings and attitudes and knowledge of their own, national and national linguistic and cultural identity. Students are enabled to receive, understand, evaluate, and create a variety of spoken and written texts using communication strategies. For the student, language is most often a means of self-knowledge and cognition of the world around him, and the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and their interaction contribute to his personal well-being and enable him to act on personal, social, cultural and business occasions.

(Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, Kurikulum nastavnoga predmeta Hrvatski jezik za osnovne škole i gimnazije, 2019, p. 6).

The Croatian Language Curriculum has the goal of developing the competences needed for the future, namely reading, writing, understanding and critical thinking about a particular topic or problem. The Croatian language curriculum is organized in three interconnected areas: Croatian language and communication, literature and creativity, culture and media. Starting points are the concepts of modern theory of learning and competence and the unique organization of objects whose concept stems from the National Document of the Language and Communication Area of the Curriculum (Kurikulum nastavnoga predmeta Hrvatski jezik za osnovne škole i gimnazije) The Croatian language, as the native language and subject with the highest hourly rates in primary school, becomes a subject in which futures studies can fit as creative and challenging tasks after processing individual teaching units from any of the three mentioned areas. The advantage of futures studies is their diversity, and therefore different applicability, depending on the affinities of the teacher.

This study describes the application of the futures studies of Biography of the Future, as an example of good practice, which was used as a method of visioning after the completion of teaching units Biographies and autobiographies in the sixth grade of primary school. Biography and autobiography are components of the field of literature and creativity, and are given outcomes primary school (abbreviation PS) HJ (abbreviation for subject Croatian language) B.6.1.; PS HJ B.6.2.; PS HJ B.6.4. Futures studies, more particularly, Biography of the Future was used as a teaching tool that encouraged students to envision people who, due to some of their contributions or achievements, will be important for creating and improving the future of humanity.

The research (Oyaid, 2009; Suzić, 2010; Davidson, 2011; Dubovicki, 2020) has shown how important it is to focus on the desired future in the alternatives of upbringing and education. Hideg, & Nováky (2010) believe that in the coming years, education should be oriented towards positive future orientation, and therefore recommend that teaching should be implemented with along with the content in which young people (at all levels of education) would deal with in the future, in order to strengthen their awareness of their future orientation, and aimed at predicting the future and thus accelerating related social learning processes in Hungary. Gao & Chan (2015) address education in China and points out in particular the education of adolescents who, if they consider the future to be positive, achievable and largely controlled, are expected to be devoted to activities that help them realize that vision of their future (Nurmi, 1993). Suzić (2012) emphasizes the importance and role of futures studies in future education strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Affirming storytelling as a tool for education and the future Milojević, & Izgarjan (2014) have tried to establish futures studies in Serbia.

Focusing on a positive future is important because it encompasses a number of components important for predicting future outcomes: anticipation, aspirations, planning, predicting future consequences, and the time perspective. Also, research shows that students do not sufficiently assume their personal and professional future, and when they do plan, these plans are short term, most often one school year (Nurmi, 1991; Steinberg et al., 2009; Chen, & Vazsonyi, 2013; Dubovicki, 2020).

In addition to the above reflections on the future social, professional and personal roles, the objectives of the research are: to explore the possibilities of using futures studies Biography of the Future (hereafter 'the method') as a creative research method in Croatian language and literature teaching and after the processed unit of biographies

and autobiographies; finding out if the method develops literacy, linguistic expression in Croatian language teaching and creativity, imagination and vision of the world of the future.

## **Methodology**

The research starts from the prediction of different future scenarios from the perspective of students. An analysis of different Biographies of the Future predicted by students assesses possible social and personal scenarios. These scenarios represent a vision of positive futures and help students create a desirable future.

## **Research aims and tasks**

The aim of this research is to examine the possibility of using the futures studies in the teaching of Croatian language and literature. Also, the use will prove the functionality of using it and give an example of good practice.

## **Research aims**

- Study the literature relating to the futures studies and the method
- Conduct research on the selected sample (6th graders)
- Example of good practice

In relation to these aims and tasks, the following research questions were asked:

- Can the method be used as a creative research method in Croatian language and literature teaching?
- Can the method be used as a creative method after the unit of biographies and autobiographies has been processed?
- Does the method develop literacy in Croatian language teaching?
- Does the method develop linguistic expression in Croatian language teaching?
- Does the method develop creativity, imagination and vision of the world of the future?

## **The sample of the research**

The sample of the research are 51 participants of the sixth grades of Ivan Mestrovic elementary school in Zagreb, the Republic of Croatia. Research ethics was respected in the research. Research participants were acquainted with all stages of research implementation. They were also guaranteed complete anonymity. Some of the participants deliberately put their name on the visioning of the autobiography, which they voluntarily agreed to.

## **Research Method and Procedure**

The procedure on which the research is based on the futures studies and the method aimed at predicting the future. After the lesson of biographies and autobiographies was completed, the students were given one of the areas of human activity (e.g. science, literature, painting, film, music...) in groups (or individually) within which they had to create a person from the future, who will be important in this field and write a biography of that person based on their vision or, if they are that person, write an autobiography.

The methodical template that served as an introduction to the processing of the teaching unit of the biography are famous scientists, scientists, inventors, writers and writers. In addition to templates, students use the text in the reading section to understand what biography and autobiography are as well as their importance. The research also had a formative evaluation at the end of the lesson that showed how the students accepted the task.

## **Research results**

The research found that this method was accepted by students and that students created interesting personalities from various areas of human life in the future. The conducted research can be considered very successful because the respondents, sixth grade students, demonstrated imagination and creativity in their reflections on the future. In

this way, children's imagination was used to create a future in which they would be adult members of society, and they are being prepared for that future. This proves that, despite Covid-19, young students can imagine positive future and positive development of humanity in the future. That is important because Covid-19 has influenced everyday life of people, including affecting the psychological life of a person. If students, at that age, have positive influences, and teacher’s support, it is most likely they will show their imagination, their thoughts about the future in which we can see their attitude towards the future (Inayatullah, 2013; 2018, Leahy et al., 2019; Crescenza et al., 2021; Milojević, 2021).

**Tasks given to students**

**A journey into the future – imagine the world of the future, write a future biography**

Each student drew a piece of paper with the name of an area of human activity. They were asked to imagine that area in the future and identify a person who is extremely important in that area for the future of humanity. Write a biography of that imaginary person and explain why it is important, what they did and how they did it for the improvement of humanity (Figure 1).

SCIENCE	MEDICINE	ECONOMICS
LITERATURE	PAINTING	EDUCATION
MUSIC	FILM	ECOLOGY
INVENTION	TECHNOLOGY	ARCHEOLOGY

**Fig. 1:** Areas of human activity

**Selected Children's Works: Written Biographies or Autobiographies in the future**

**Famous Future Croats**

The students readily accepted the task. Students could choose either an important future person, and thus create a biography, from Croatia or from around the world. In these examples of imagined future biographies, we see the creativity of students and their reflection on the future and the needs that the future brings.

1. Biography of the Science Professor Bernard Matijević

Bernard Matijević was born on 8/7/2023 in Vinkovci, Croatia. He graduated from elementary school in Vinkovci. After that, he moved to Zagreb, where he graduated from Tesla High School. After high school, he enrolled in FER (Faculty of electrical engineering and computing) in Zagreb. He was a great student, finishing every class with straight As. All the while, he was thinking about doing some quick way of transferring a person from one place to another. He invested years of his effort and time creating this machine and finally in 2061 he succeeded. He created a teleporting device and in just a few years each house had this machine. He was remembered as the most important inventor in the history of transport.

(P. B., 6th grade).

2. Mike “The Powerful“ Filipčić

Mike „The Powerful” was famous for his water cycling. He liked to ride a bike, but there was too much water on the planet and not enough land. It occurred to him that he should be the first to invent a water-riding bike. He was born in Split on 12/3/2030. He graduated from sports school. With his father, he liked to always invent new things. Creativity has been welcomed many times in his life. He e met a lot of people who wanted the same thing as him. With the help of several of his friends, he drew a pair of sketches that he thought might work. He told himself he had to make it and he was going to make an effort. The hardest part was getting the necessary parts. Despite a strong desire and effort, the first attempts were unsuccessful. Only after a few years did he realize where he was going wrong. After he managed to put together what he wanted and how he imagined it he went all alone to try his invention. He was overjoyed to find he had managed to make his dreams come true.

(D. F., 6th grade)

### 3. Tia Lojo – a famous writer

Tia was born in Zagreb in 2008. From a young age, she showed interest in literature and writing. At the age of 25, she wrote her first bestseller inspired by the Lords of the Rings, and the characters are the first Croatian tribes, princes and kings. As she also wrote about Slavic mythology, which has become increasingly forgotten over the years, her books have been translated into almost all languages and she has become one of the most successful women writers. At the age of 35, she won the Nobel Prize in Literature becoming one of the youngest winners.

(T. L., 6th grade)

### 4. Ivan Rimac (son of Mate Rimac)

Ivan Rimac was born in Zagreb in 2022. Ivan continued his father's journey, but went a step further, making the first electric flying car in 2050. Until then, no one would drive gasoline or diesel cars anymore, but everyone would drive electric cars. The roads were no longer just those on the ground but also those in the air where traffic would be a bit more complicated. Ivan is one of the most famous Croatian inventors.

(R. B., 6th grade)

## Future Famous Foreign Citizens

### 1. Alice Jenny Carter – physician and molecular biologist

Alice was born in Sweden in 2017. From an early age, she liked to play doctor, and later became a doctor. She was most interested in how to treat cancer because no cure had yet been found. In 2045, Alice and her team made a vaccine that makes antibodies in human system and prevents the development of any type of cancer, but also signals that something like this has started to develop in the body, so the person knows about the danger in time and adjusts the rest of the treatment to it. Alice came up with this drug very young because she was a person with autism (like Shaun on The Good Doctor) so she could focus on that. She won the Nobel Prize in Medicine.

(Z. H., 6th grade)

### 2. Leona Michigan - painter

Leona was born in the United States in 2020. At the age of 16, she made a name for herself by painting holograms that would soon become more and more in use. Her hologram 3D images would become

famous because they would be decorating the walls of houses and change as homeowners wish. Also, she will later make hologram versions of all museums so that all the world's museums can be in your houses.

(F. P., 6th grade)

### 3. John Armstrong – scientist

John was born in the United States in 2015. And he's a descendant of the famous Niel Armstrong, the astronaut. But John didn't decide to deal with the universe, he decided to do the earth. In 2038, he invented the apparatus that predicts earthquakes and their strength up to two days in advance. His invention saved many people and houses, and earthquakes would no longer be natural disasters because they will be able to be welcomed without fear.

(L. B., 6th grade)

### 4. John Jordan – scientist

John Jordan was born in the United Kingdom in 2018. His parents are originally Croats, so they told him about Nikola Tesla since he was a child. He grew to love Tesla very much and decided to continue his work. In 2030, he managed to provide wireless electricity to the whole world, thus becoming Tesla's real successor. Living standards have increased, especially in poor countries. He's won numerous awards, and the Nobel Prize, of course.

(I. M., 6th grade)

### 5. Angela Merkel II.

Angela Merkel II. was born in 2023 in Berlin. She is the granddaughter of Angela Merkel, who is now in power in Germany. Angela II. went into politics like her grandmother, but she's known for having a big spaceship made, and ordered all the nuclear missiles in the world to be put in it. She has led numerous meetings where all the world's presidents have agreed to it and so far in space all nuclear missiles have been destroyed. There were a few more wars in between, so everyone realized how dangerous nuclear weapons were. That will happen in year 2053.

(T. P., 6th grade)

### 6. Rimela – a famous actress who is famous for her charity work

Rimela was born in 2021 in the poor African country of Uganda. She grew up in a home for neglected children, but she was very beautiful and talented in acting. With the help of donations, she managed to come to America where she became a famous actress who always helped the poor. She became the most famous African actress and the most famous black actress who fought hard against racism and poverty.

(D. F., 6th grade)

This section presents imaginary biographies of people from various parts of the world which, according to students, will be important for the future of mankind. And in these examples, we see students' creativity and reflection on the future.

The results of the research give us answers to previously asked questions: Can the method be used as a creative research method in Croatian language and literature teaching? Can the method be used as a creative method after the processed unit of biographies and autobiographies? Does the method develop literacy in Croatian language

teaching? Does the method develop linguistic expression in Croatian language teaching? Does the method develop creativity, imagination and visionary of the world of the future?

We can conclude that the method is useful in teaching and that the answers to all the above questions are very positive. It is evident that students are positively oriented towards visions of the future, more precisely, biographies / autobiographies of persons in the future. This future studies method develops a sense of language in the classroom, enriches the vocabulary, develops imagination, because the precondition for creativity is just developed and stimulated imagination. This method opens the door to interdisciplinary co-operation, and it is possible to create project days where, in addition to this, other future studies methods suitable for children can be used, all with the aim of imagining a better future as the first step for development and realization of such a future.

## Evaluation

At the end of the teaching process, we used an evaluation card. The question was: How did you like the task: A journey into the future – imagine the world of the future, write a future biography (Figure 2).

<b>I REALLY LIKED IT</b> 😊	<b>I DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>I DIDN'T LIKE IT</b> 😞
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**Fig. 2:** Evaluation after visioning the future

Out of the total number of students, 51, 49 answered that they liked the task, and two students answered indecisively without additional argumentation. The subsequent oral conversation revealed that the students liked the task due to the creativity it encouraged and the innovation, and because they had not had such a task in class yet. The formative evaluation showed that the research was successful, and the task (related to predicting different scenarios of personal, social and global visions of future) was realized effortlessly and in pleasant educational climate.

Also, research (Bognar, & Dubovicki, 2012) has shown that teaching whereby pleasant emotions are present is creative, and thus suitable for creating conditions when using visioning of the future at the primary school age.

The conducted research provided answers to all the research questions. Method Biographies of the Future develops literacy, linguistic expression and creativity in Croatian language teaching. The analysis of the research has shown that the method is interesting and useful in the teaching process and that it stimulates children's imagination and creativity in the present by creating the possible future.

## Conclusion

The research proved that the method is interesting to students and as such is usable as a creative method in the course of Croatian language and literature. The futurological method biography of the future can be used as a creative method after the unit of biographies and autobiographies in the sixth grade of primary school has been processed. Thus, the method develops literacy and linguistic expression in the teaching of the Croatian language and, most importantly, develops creativity, imagination and a vision of the world of the future, which is the goal not only of this method but of all methods in the field of futures studies. The example of good practice shown is only one in a series in which the method can be used, and certainly the challenge to teachers and teachers should be to discover, study and implement other methods in class. This method also develops an ability to express thoughts and wishes, and expectations from the future in which those children, now students, can potentially have a leading role for the benefit of mankind and humanity.

The scientific contribution of the study is especially evident in bridging the gap between the terminological definitions of research methods in Croatian pedagogy from futurological research methods to futures studies. Also, the implementation of the method in Croatian language teaching is one of the first papers in which it is shown how imagining future roles can help us create activities that will direct us to positive future outcomes, which is especially



important at the end of primary education to direct them towards their future occupation. This study provides an example that can be used in other school subjects, but also opens the door to future studies in the Croatian education system as methods that develop the education system, build teacher-student relationships and improve student relationships.

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