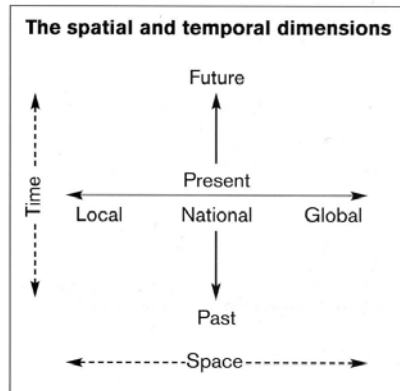***Futures Education***

David Hicks, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer, School of Education
Bath Spa University, UK

INTRODUCTION

Whilst peace education is concerned with a wide variety of issues that manifest at scales from the local to the global, such issues cannot be understood without an exploration of the interrelationships between past, present, and future. Whilst history deals with the past and most of education deals with the present, explicit exploration of the future is still often a missing dimension in education.

Internationally, educators use the term "futures education" or "futures in education" to refer to this concern. However, it is more useful to talk of the need for a "futures dimension" in the curriculum and for people to be able to take a "futures perspective" on their lives and society more widely. Put at its simplest, this refers to a form of education which *promotes the knowledge, understanding and skills that are needed in order to think more critically and creatively about the future*. Clearly, peace education needs to contain such a dimension and promote such a perspective since two of the key questions it explores in relation to self and society are "Where do we want to get to?" and "How do we get there?" (Hicks, 2004)

FUTURES STUDIES

Whilst interest in the future is as old as humanity itself, serious investigation in futures really only emerged after the Second World War in the form of strategic planning, technological forecasting, economic analysis, and the establishment of the first major think tanks. Whilst much of this endeavour focused on economic and military forecasting, there were other, largely European, initiatives which were more concerned with how such thinking could be used to help create better social futures (Masini, 2006).

Futures studies as a field of academic inquiry emerged in the 1960s. It is a broad field of concern, and Inayatullah (1993) notes that it "largely straddles two dominant modes of knowledge – the technical concerned with predicting the future and the humanist concerned with developing a good society" (p. 236). It is the latter strand which underpins the work of the World Futures Studies Federation (www.wfsf.org) set up in 1972. One of the founders of WFSF was Johan Galtung, then Director of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo.

Bell (1997) argues that the purpose of futures studies is to "discover or invent, examine, evaluate and propose possible, probable and preferable futures" (p. 73) He continues, "futurists seek to know: what can or could be (the possible), what is likely to be (the probable), and what ought to be (the preferable)" (p. 73). Dator (2005) elaborates further:

> The future cannot be studied because the future does not exist. Futures
> studies does not...pretend to study the future. It studies ideas about the
> future... (which) often serve as the basis for actions in the present...Different

groups often have very different images of the future. Men's images may differ from women's. Western images may differ from non-Western, and so on. (para. 8)

One of the main tasks of futures studies is to identify and examine the major alternative futures which exist at any given time and place. The future cannot be predicted, but preferred futures can and should be envisioned, invented, implemented, continuously evaluated, revised, and re-envisioned. Thus, another major task of futures studies is to facilitate individuals and groups in formulating, implementing, and re-envisioning their preferred futures.

Elsewhere, Dator (2002, p.10) argues that despite the variety of people's views of the future, all the images he has encountered, in whatever culture, can be grouped into four broad categories: *Continuation* – a "business as usual" scenario, generally based on notions of continuing economic growth; *Collapse* – a "catastrophe" scenario arising, for example, from economic instability, environmental disaster, terrorist attack; *Disciplined society* – based on some set of overarching values, e.g. traditional, ecological, God-given; and *Transformational society* – a break from current norms based on "high-tech" or "high spirit" values.

Futures studies should not be seen as an internally-consistent endeavor. Whilst key texts such as *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies* (Slaughter, 2005), *Advancing Futures* (Dator, 2002) and *Foundations of Futures Studies* (Bell, 1997) illustrate the breadth of concern, there are also major ideological debates within the field. Most notably, this has involved critiques of futures studies as being largely a White Western endeavor (Inayatullah, 1998; Sardar, 1999; Kapoor, 2001) and a primarily masculine discourse (Milojevic, 2004).

FUTURES IN EDUCATION

In varying degrees, educators have drawn on the academic field of futures studies in order to enrich their work in elementary and secondary school, and in teacher education. It can be argued that nine key concepts underlie the notion of a futures dimension.

1. State of the world
In the early twenty-first century, the state of the world continues to give cause for concern. Issues dealing with sustainability, gaps between wealth and poverty, peace and conflict, and violations of human rights all have a major impact both locally and globally. We need to know about the causes of such problems, how they will affect our lives now and in the future, and the action needed to help resolve them.

2. Managing change
In periods of rapid social and technological change, the past cannot provide an accurate guide to the future. Anticipation and adaptability, foresight and flexibility, innovation and intuition, become increasingly essential tools for survival. We need to develop such skills in order to become more adaptable and pro-active towards change.

3. Views of the future
People's views of the future may vary greatly depending, for example, on age, gender, class and culture, as well as their attitudes to change, the environment and technology. We need to be aware of how views of the future thus differ and the ways in which this affects people's priorities in the present.

4. Alternative futures
At any point in time, a range of different futures is possible. It is useful to distinguish between probable futures, i.e. those which seem *likely* to come about, and preferable futures, i.e. those

one feels *should* come about. We need to explore a range of probable and preferable futures, from the personal and local to the global.

5. Hopes and fears

Hopes and fears for the future often influence decision making in the present. Fears can lead to the avoidance of problems rather than their resolution. Clarifying hopes for the future can enhance motivation in the present and thus positive action for change. We need to explore our own hopes and fears for the future and learn to work creatively with them.

6. Past/present/future

Interdependence exists across both space and time. Past, present and future are inextricably connected. We are directly linked back in time by the oldest members of the community and forward into the next century by those born today. We need to explore these links and to gain a sense of both continuity and change as well as of responsibility for the future.

7. Visions for the future

The first decade of the new century provides a valuable opportunity for reviewing the state of society. What needs to be left behind and what taken forward? In particular, what visions of a better future are needed to motivate active and responsible citizenship in the present? We therefore need to develop our skills of envisioning and use of the creative imagination.

8. Future generations

Economists, philosophers, and international lawyers increasingly recognize the rights of future generations. It has been suggested that no generation should inherit less human and natural wealth than the one that preceded it. We need to discuss the rights of future generations and what the responsibility to uphold these may involve.

9. Sustainable futures

Current consumerist lifestyles on this planet are increasingly seen as unsustainable often causing more damage than benefit. A sustainable society would prioritize concern for the environment, the poorest members of the community, and the needs of future generations. We need to understand how this applies to our everyday lives and possible future employment.

One of the first writers to draw attention to the need for a futures dimension in the curriculum was Toffler (1974) in his still very relevant *Learning for Tomorrow: The Role of the Future in Education*. His key thesis remains as true now as then: "All education springs from images of the future and all education creates images of the future. Thus all education, whether so intended or not, is a preparation for the future. Unless we understand the future for which we are preparing, we may do tragic damage to those we teach'" (1974, cover). It is interesting that Toffler wrote these words in the decade that saw the rise of neoconservative and neo-liberal ideologies which dominate so much of education today (Apple, 2006).

During the 1990s, there has been a growing interest in research on young people's images of the future and the implications of these images on education (Hicks & Holden, 1995). Hutchinson (1996) has carried out exciting work in the field of secondary education (including the influences on young people's views of the future) as has Page (2000) in relation to the early childhood curriculum, and Gidley and Inayatullah (2002) in relation to youth futures. A range of case studies of futures in education, from primary to tertiary level, are to be found in Hicks and Slaughter (1998), and a variety of classroom activities can be found in Pike and Selby (1999), Hicks (2001, 2006) and Slaughter and Bussey (2006), whilst Gidley et al. (2004) have explored recent developments in Australia.

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

A number of interesting studies have explored the nature of young people's probable and preferable futures. Eckersley (1999) reported that Australian youth were particularly concerned about pollution and environmental destruction, the gulf between rich and poor, high unemployment, conflict, crime and alienation, discrimination and prejudice, and economic difficulties. Eight out of ten 15-24 year-olds said that they would prefer a greener, more stable society, with an emphasis on cooperation, community and family, more equal distribution of wealth, and greater economic self-sufficiency. He concluded:

> Young people's preferred futures are undoubtedly idealised and utopian. Their significance lies in what they reveal about fundamental human needs ... and what they expect and what is being offered to them by world and national leaders. (Eckersley, 1999, p. 95)

This echoes much of the research that has been done on envisioning futures, albeit in Western contexts. It also echoes the findings of Elise Boulding (1988a, 1988b) from the numerous envisioning workshops that she ran in which she reported a preferred "baseline future" that often emerged. One should not, however, make the mistake of thinking that clear images of preferable futures are sufficient in themselves. As Meadows et al. stress:

> We should say immediately, for the sake of sceptics, that we do not believe vision makes anything happen. Vision without action is useless. But action without vision is directionless and feeble. Vision is absolutely necessary to guide and motivate. More than that, vision when widely shared and firmly kept in sight, does bring into being new systems. (2005, p. 272)

A futures perspective is crucial to effective teaching and learning in peace education. By enabling learners to think more critically and creatively about the forces that create probable and preferable futures, they are able to engage in more purposeful and focused action for change. This fulfils one of the tasks of the progressive educator which, Freire (1994, p. 9) tells us, "is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles might be."

REFERENCES

Apple, M. (2006). *Education the 'right' way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality.* 2nd edition. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.

Bell, W. (1997). *Foundations of futures studies*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Boulding, E. (1988a). *Building a global civic culture*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

_____ (1988b). Image and action in peace building. *Journal of Social Issues, 44*(2).

Dator, J. Ed. (2002). *Advancing futures: Futures studies in higher education*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Dator, J. (2005). Foreword. In R. Slaughter (Ed.), *Knowledge base of futures studies*. [CD-ROM Professional Edition]. Retrieved November 6, 2007, from www.foresightinternational.com.au

Eckersley, R. (1999). Dreams and expectations: Young people's expected and preferred futures and their significance for education. *Futures, 31*, 73-90.

Freire, P. (1994). *A pedagogy of hope*. London, UK: Continuum.

Gidley, J. and Inayatullah, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Youth futures: Comparative research and transformative visions*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Hicks, D. (2001). *Citizenship for the future: A practical classroom guide*. Godalming, UK?: World Wide Fund for Nature UK.

_____(2004). Teaching for tomorrow: how can futures studies contribute to peace education? *Journal of Peace Education, 1*, 165-178.

_____ (2006). *Lessons for the future: The missing dimension in education*. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing.

Hicks, D. and Holden, C. (1995). *Visions of the future: Why we need to teach for tomorrow*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Hicks, D. and Slaughter, R. (Eds.) (1988). *Futures education: The world yearbook of education 1998*. London, UK: Kogan Page.

Hutchinson, F. (1996). *Educating beyond violent futures*. London, UK: Routledge.

Inayatullah, S. (1993). From 'who am I?' to 'when am I?' Framing the shape and time of the future. *Futures, 25*, 235-253.

Inayatullah, S. (1998). Listening to non-western perspectives, In: D. Hicks and R. Slaughter, (Eds.), *Futures education: The world yearbook of education 1998*. London. IL: Kogan Page.

Kapoor, R. (2001). Future as fantasy: forgetting the flaws. *Futures, 33*, 161-170.

Masini, E. (2006). Rethinking futures studies. *Futures, 38*, 1158-1168.

Meadows, D., Randers, J. and Meadows, D. (2005). *Limits to growth: The 30-year update*. London, UK: Earthscan.

Milojevic, I. (2004). *Education futures: Dominating and contesting visions*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.

Page, J. (2000). *Reframing the early childhood curriculum: Educational imperatives for the future*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.

Pike, G. and Selby, D. (1999). *In the global classroom. Vol. 1*. Toronto, Canada: Pippin Publishing.

Sardar, Z. (1999). *Rescuing all our futures: The future of futures studies*. Westport, CT: Prager.

Slaughter, R. (Ed.). (2005). *Knowledge base of futures studies. Vols. 1-5*. [CD-ROM Professional Edition]. Retrieved November 6, 2007, from www.foresightinternational.com.au

Slaughter, R. with Bussey, M. (2006). *Futures thinking for social foresight*. Taipei, Taiwan: Tamkang University Press. Retrieved November 6, 2007, from www.foresightinternational.com.au

Toffler, A. (1974). *Learning for tomorrow: The role of the future in education*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.