

The Next Wave

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The Next Wave

The tradition of the seventh wave is known nearly everywhere. The seventh wave is the big one. It appears to me that Foresight and Futures Studies has experienced six waves, and the seventh is forming. Not big yet, but growing.

The first wave was conceptual and theoretical. There was a realization that throughout history, people had looked for *the* future. In the 1950s and early 1960s, think tanks and writers developed assumptions and concepts that started with one assumption. The future is *not* pre-ordained.

It followed that if the future was not pre-determined, there must be more than one future available. Alternative futures. From alternative futures, it also followed that some futures will be better than others. Preferred futures. Finally, the realization arose that individuals or groups, through actions in the present, might influence the future (Bell, 1997). These were powerful concepts.

The second wave was the methodological wave. Methods were developed by the pioneering futurists that enabled and encouraged exploration of the future. Futures organizations formed. Academic journals came into existence (Anderson, 2009). Books about the future, grounded in the present and utilizing the new methods appeared.

The third wave was the early applications of futures concepts and methods to real world situations and problems. Shell's successful development and use of scenarios to anticipate future events amounted to both a demonstration of concepts and a breakthrough for theorists (Wack, 1985).

The fourth wave was academic. Educators with an interest in Foresight and Futures Studies wrote about futures concepts and methods and several started teaching classes in universities. Eventually, degree programs were formed and individuals with an interest in thinking about the long term future could earn a graduate degree. The fourth wave produced the first generations of career and academic futurists holding graduate degrees in Foresight and Futures Studies.

The fifth wave arose with the new public awareness of futures concepts through popular books such as Toffler's *Future Shock* (1971) and *The Third Wave* (1980) and Megatrends (Naisbitt, 1982) as well as notable events. Shell's successes with scenarios (Schwartz, 1991), South Africa's peaceful transition, aided by scenarios raised the awareness of businesses, governments and the general public. This interest was furthered by the avoidance of the millennium bug, in part due to the urging of futurists to act before the event (Peterson, Wheatley, & Kellner-Rogers, 1998). Some graduates of the earliest Futures programs were now teaching futures, but at the Millennium, graduate students in Studies of the Future still faced uncertain career opportunities.

The sixth wave saw the emergence and recognition of a profession for futurists. This was paralleled by the appearance of a generation of Ph.D.s in Foresight and Futures Studies. This wave is still young and is changing as its momentum increases.

The seventh wave is just forming, but is already starting to grow. The seventh wave could, in fact, be the big one. This is the wave that is bringing knowledge and understanding of futures concepts, tools and methods to *individuals*, the general public. This wave is *beginning* to bring futures methods into schools at all levels, from primary grades through secondary schools and on into undergraduate classes in colleges and universities. In this paper, Graduate courses are considered professional training, while undergraduate courses in Futures Studies are considered part of the individual's education, often an elective.

What is the evidence that the tools and methods of Foresight and Futures Studies are being taught, learned and used by individuals in increasing numbers? The evidence is found in the expected places, Australia, Europe and the United States, but is also seen in growing numbers in Taiwan, Mexico, Iran, Turkey and many other countries. A few examples include:

Futurists

"The ability to use foresight in order to make wise or prudential choices is one of the most powerful capabilities of individuals." (Hayward, & Krishnan, 2002).

Individual futurists around the globe are offering workshops, classes and coaching in futures methods and techniques to people of all ages and backgrounds. The participants and students are individuals who want to understand and use futures concepts and methods but have no apparent intention of becoming career futurists. In addition, futurists are speaking to large and diverse audiences all over the globe about futures concepts, often related to specific industries, yet addressed to individuals. One futurist advised that he had spoken at about twenty different events over the past year. I do not speak regularly, but in 2008 spoke to about 1700 (non-futurist) individuals over several events. There appears to be a growing demand for futurist speakers. The Association of Professional Futurists (2009) provides a directory of professional speakers on a wide range of futures topics, and Shaping Tomorrow recently organized a speakers' bureau for futurists (Future Voices, 2009) with over one hundred speakers offering their services as charter members of the bureau.

Organizations and "Think Tanks"

Organizations and think tanks that focus on futures concepts have formed in many parts of the world, usually having a foundation in research, often guiding or consulting to business. Some of these organizations have been operating for years and have developed substantial bases in educating or training individuals in futures concepts and methods. A few examples include:

The World Future Society (2009) has approximately 13,000 members and subscribers to *The Futurist*. Although some emphasis is placed on the professional and academic futurist members who provide content for publications and conferences, the

large majority of members are individuals who are interested in learning about the future. The annual WFS conventions usually draw over 1000 registrants who attend classes, lectures and panel discussions led by some of the world's leading futurists.

Shaping Tomorrow (2009), based in the U.K. went live with its web site in March of 2003, offering articles by futurists and information on current trends. Shaping Tomorrow now has over 13,000 individual members. The web site also has a section for futurists, the *Foresight Network*, with over 2300 members.

Copenhagen Institute of Futures Studies is a think tank, conducting research and providing consulting services to business (CIFS, 2009). Yet there is a considerable emphasis on educating individuals within member organizations through *FO/FutureOrientation*, a magazine of high quality articles relating to all aspects of the future. *FO* is published in Danish and English. In addition, CIFS offers conferences and lectures and has organized several Futures clubs for members outside Denmark.

Futures Problem Solving Program International (2009) is a U.S. based international program involving over 250,000 primary and secondary students worldwide, and offering competitions from grades four through twelve. The focus of the program is on developing thinking and problem solving skills, and includes a strong emphasis on scenario writing.

ASEF Think Tank, Iran conducts research and leads corporate and public learning in futures concepts. ASEF offers workshops, presentations and publications, many offered free on their web site. ASEF also has a Young Futurist division that includes education in personal futures (ASEF, 2009).

Studies of the Future on Demand

Visionscentret Framtidsbygget (The Vision Center), Sweden, developed a model, which trains individuals to apply futures techniques to both their work, and their everyday lives. The model is much more than learning futurist techniques. In the spirit of Jungk (1976), the Vision Center helps individuals to be proactive in creating the future (by developing scenarios and visions for the community and themselves) while developing competence in social skills. It is also an inspiring model for adult learning, very important in view of the life-long learning in which we all must participate. (Visionscentret, 2009).

M-Gen, a young company in Istanbul offers courses and seminars in Personal Futures Planning to individuals and corporations in Turkey. M-Gen focuses on helping high school and college age individuals (the Millennial generation) develop decisions about their own futures, applying futures methods to their lives. M-Gen also organizes public events featuring local and international futurists and has been instrumental in developing futures education for students and the public at Bahcesehir University in Istanbul (M-Gen, 2009).

Scenarios+Vision (2009) conducts workshops for individuals and for business organizations in France and internationally. Individual coaching is also offered in personal and career planning based on the book *Il y a Toujours une Alternative* (*There is Always an Alternative*).

NGOs and Other Organizations

The World Futures Studies Federation (2009) "is a global NGO that was founded in the 1960s to encourage and promote the development of futures studies as a trans-disciplinary academic and professional field in all parts of the world." WFSF has a world wide membership.

ENDA (2009) based in Senegal, is a "future-oriented NGO that helps poor people to take their future in charge...they have had a long practice in 'prospective' (foresight) methods applied with illiterate people in Senegal," (Goux-Baudiment, 2009).

Other organizations are introducing futures concepts to young people at events like Live Futures 2020 (Global Youth Futures, 2009). There are widespread reports of additional efforts to educate or train individuals in futures concepts, but they remain undocumented at this time.

Undergraduates in Colleges and Universities

Tamkang University in Taiwan, with a student population of approximately 28,000 students appears to have pioneered the concept of a mandatory course in Futures Studies for all undergraduate students. The mandatory course began in 1999 (Tamkang, 2009).

There are reports that other universities have, or are considering, mandatory courses in Futures Studies for all undergraduate students, but no confirmation was available before deadline.

In the U.S., several Community Colleges (two year schools) and Universities, are offering undergraduate courses in Foresight and Futures Studies including the University of Arizona, University of Advancing Technology (Tempe), Fullerton College, Cal. State University, Dominguez Hills, Bowling Green State University - Firelands, Northern Arizona University, San Diego Community College, Rio Salado Community College and Anne Arundel Community College (Smart, 2009). This is only a partial list of undergraduate offerings, but it is indicative of substantial and growing interest in Futures Studies education at the undergraduate level.

At Notre Dame University, the Mendoza College of Business has added *Foresight in Business and Society* as a required course for all business majors, effective in 2009. This course is usually taken during the third undergraduate year and will apply to 550 to 600 students each year. (McIntosh, 2009).

The emergence of Futures courses in undergraduate schools appears significant, in part because it suggests a demand for knowledge of Futures concepts and methods, either by the students or by fields for which students are being trained. This seems logical in both cases. Students in business schools, for example, may find futures skills marketable because of the association of Futures Studies with long term thinking, which in turn is associated with leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Some businesses or industries may also recognize the value of Futures classes in the same manner in which they recognize the importance of courses in accounting, business law, marketing, finance and other staples of business schools.

Futures education emphasizing a long term perspective may also have value in dealing with social problems including vandalism, gang violence, recidivism and violence in prisons and high school drop-out rates.

All of these forms of foresight education; colleges, universities, think tanks, private schools, NGOs and individual futurists conducting workshops or speaking to groups are responding to a demand or need on the part of individuals or organizations to know more about the future.

Futures Studies in Primary and Secondary Schools

Foresight and Futures Studies education in primary and secondary schools is of considerable interest to futurists, but is a very different matter from colleges and universities. For the most part, there is no "demand" from students for Futures education. Public school systems typically decide the curriculum, then make it available to the students. Public schools often must have their curriculum approved by a local board, but curriculum committees may have a voice at the state level, and there may be influences (testing requirements, for example) even at the national level. In one sense, this is necessary to protect students from the demands of outside interests, even those with the best of intentions. This system also strives to provide some uniformity of education to all students.

Consider that in the U.S. alone, there are over 26,000 public secondary schools and more than 10,000 private secondary schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). These numbers give some indication as to what is required to bring Futures Studies into the secondary schools in the U.S. If only one teacher in each school is trained to teach Futures Studies, that is a substantial requirement. Before teachers can be trained to teach Futures Studies, states, curriculum boards and school districts must be convinced of the value of Futures Studies to their students. Before these administrative levels add Futures Studies to their curriculum, they will need to be assured that either training of their existing teachers or teachers trained in Futures Studies are available. They will also want to know that there is a standard approach to Futures Studies and that texts are available for teachers and students.

Efforts have been made by futurists and educators to introduce futures concepts and method into public school systems in several countries, but school systems are generally cautious about introducing new concepts. One organization, Future Problem Solving Program International has succeeded in introducing futures education into primary and secondary schools in the U.S., Australia and several other countries. Their success has been in part due to the fact that FPSPI provides futures-trained coaches and educational materials, relieving schools of that burden. Further, student interest is encouraged by international competitions at grade levels four through twelve, a powerful learning incentive.

Finland has a rich history in Futures Studies and launched a national "Education into the Future Project" (Finnish National Board of Education, 2007) with the goal of integrating futures thinking and concepts into the national curriculum

In Australia, several educators have earned Masters Degrees and PhDs in Futures Studies. They have conducted considerable research, provided knowledgeable support and have encouraged curriculum committees to take substantial steps toward introducing futures concepts in public schools throughout much of Australia. In 2004, Gidley, Bateman and Smith (2004) wrote,

"Yet in Australian Primary and Secondary schools explicit Futures Education, using the language, concepts and tools of Futures Studies, is currently in its infancy. It appears that few Curriculum consultants have knowledge of FE, instead seeing "futures" as implicit within particular areas of the curriculum." (p.73)

Informal email conversations with futurists and educators in Australia suggest that change is coming slowly in the public school system, but there are bright spots and recognition of the values of foresight to students (Tasmania, 2009). In the U.S. there is no apparent widespread effort to bring Futures Studies into public school systems, although faculty at the University of Houston has introduced some initiatives, including a web site for educators, the Foresight Education Project (Bishop, 2009). Recently, the Houston Independent School District held a workshop, *Futurizing Your Teaching Practice* (Strong, 2009), introducing futures concepts to K-12 teachers.

Implications of the Seventh Wave

Do these examples offer an inference, or just weak signals? Will the increase in futures education and learning among individuals continue to move slowly, or will it accelerate?

The growth of the seventh wave is not yet sufficient to establish valid quantitative data. This essay is based largely on personal observation, anecdotal data and limited examples, adding up to weak signals at this time. But, what if?

What would be some of the impacts and effects of fairly rapid growth of interest and use of Futures methods by individuals and the general public over the next ten years? Futurists would probably find an increasing demand for their services, whether consulting, speaking, writing or teaching. Consulting and business futurists would probably benefit from a clientele that is more aware of futures concepts and better educated in futures methods and how they can be used most effectively. As the wave grows, demand for consulting and advisory services of professional futurist may come increasingly from medium size and even small businesses. Speakers and workshop leaders may be the first to experience the growing interest in Futures Studies, followed by writers as a demand for articles, books and textbooks rises.

But, what will be the force that brings Futures Studies into public and private school systems? Motivation could be from the top down, driven by administration or curriculum committees. Less likely is a growing demand for futures education from students or parents. The remaining and most likely source of a driving force for futures education would be from the middle; teachers and educators who are exposed to futures concepts during their education, through continuing education or even from the Internet. This force may be accelerated by actions taken by futurists and futures-trained educators to increase awareness and training of classroom teachers in futures concepts and methods.

In the Meantime

As we wait for the wave to build, futurists and futures educators would do well to follow the advice we regularly bestow on students, clients and other listeners. Build visions now for each segment of the futures field for 2020. Anticipate where this wave might take us, then build a vision there. Develop strategies that will take each segment of the field to those visions. Identify or specify the best approaches, best practices, best texts and whatever tools are needed. Finally, each segment of the field of Foresight and Futures Studies could create and publicize their plans and how they expect to achieve their visions for 2020. Those actions would provide an example of what futures thinking and practice can accomplish.

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