FUTURES STUDIES: AN INTRODUCTION

RODDY FOX
Rhodes University
‘...futurists ... cooperate across disciplinary boundaries ... adopt perspectives that are holistic, issue driven, action focused, value-relevant, and future oriented. Could futures studies help lead the way in reshaping education for the twenty-first century? the answer, I think, is yes ...’

Bell, W. 2001. Futures studies comes of age: twenty-five years after The Limits to Growth. Futures 33: 63-76
Why Futures Studies?

‘All education springs from images of the future and all education creates images of the future ... 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 ...’

... Unless we understand the powerful psychological role played by images of the future in motivating - or de-motivating - the learner, we cannot effectively overhaul our schools, colleges or universities, no matter what innovation we introduce.’

‘...what actually happens in a futures study must be determined by the goals, skills, and interests of the authors and the audience.’

Can we become the authors of our own futures or do we remain largely the audience?

• **Futures Studies**

• Academic discipline in mid 1960s, intellectual underpinnings go back much further;

• RAND (Research and Development) US ‘think tank’ 1946, military and later non-military studies of the future, developed many of the FS methodologies;

• USA FS focused on applications of systems analysis, quantitative tools;

• World Future Society founded in 1966
http://www.wfs.org
• Soviet Union (and Eastern bloc during cold war) practiced long term, goal driven national planning from 1920s onwards.

The Victory of the Five Year Plan is a Strike Against Capitalism
• Post WW II and post cold war European countries engaged in rebuilding their economies and societies, national planning for their normative futures.

• World Futures Studies Federation 1967
• Futures Studies: Nordic

• Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies 1970;

• Sweden State Secretariat 1973;

• Finnish Society for Futures Studies 1980;
• The three ‘laws’ of futures (Amara 1981)

• The future is not predetermined;

• The future is not predictable;

• Future outcomes can be influenced by our choices in the present.
• The four classes of potential alternative futures (Henchey 1978)

• Possible futures;

• Plausible futures;

• Probable futures;

• Preferable futures.
Alternative futures: possible, probable, and preferable

probable futures

preferable futures

possible futures

objective of futures studies: act to enhance the probability of our preferable futures.

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WHERE ARE WE GOING?

FORECASTING
HOW DO WE GET TO WHERE WE WOULD LIKE TO GO?

BACKCASTING