



# BOOK REVIEW

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## From foreboding to foresight: chipping away at modernity

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**Preparing for the Future: Notes and Queries for Concerned Educators**

David Hicks (editor)  
Adamantine Press Limited, London, 1994, pp. 132.

**Educating for the Future: A Practical Classroom Guide**

David Hicks  
World Wildlife Fund, Godalming, UK, 1994, pp. 106.

**Futures: Tools and Techniques**

Richard A. Slaughter  
Futures Study Centre and DDM Media Group, Melbourne, 1995.

**Futures: Concepts and Powerful Ideas**

Richard A. Slaughter  
Futures Study Centre and DDM Media Group, Melbourne: 1996.

**The Foresight Principle: Cultural Recovery in the 21st Century**

Richard A. Slaughter  
Adamantine Press Limited, London, 1995, pp. 232.

Recently I had the pleasure of working with a student teacher for three weeks. I learnt a lot from being with her and watching her with the children at our parent-run community school.<sup>1</sup>

She was bright, clear and industrious with a solid grasp of curriculum and a sense of surer with the children. But what struck me was how structured and restrictive the curricular approach to learning was. Her security was

gained from control over curricular knowledge which she used to sustain her authority over the children. This authority was benevolent but still, in the children's eyes and in mine, suspect. It took us three weeks to guide her gently into letting some of this go and relating to the kids in a non-authoritarian way.

This experience made me realize how little our teacher education institutions have learnt and absorbed from the past 30 years of reflection and critique. It is not that I'm expecting great things, but just a glimmer of uncertainty in this young woman would have encouraged me to hope that some healthy doubt is being sown amongst the next generation of teachers.

I am not advocating that student teachers be made to read Foucault, Marcuse, Illich, Habermas, or any of the other heavyweight thinkers on knowledge, power, schooling and authority in Western civilization. But it would be encouraging if teacher educators, being aware of this vast and exciting body of thought, were communicating it to their students. Whatever the level of awareness there is certainly a gap in communication.

It seems that few challenges are issued to the existing regime and that all teacher education courses focus in practical ways on how to make the best of the here and now. Furthermore, what seeds of doubt are sown fall mostly on deaf ears as students read the dominant structure as supportive of current educational practice.

My conversations with this young teacher and her friend, who was working with my colleague, made me realize that both were open to alternatives but had not been exposed to

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any in the four years they had spent at college. They had chosen to come to our school to try and redress this omission.

For my part I offered them some reading to supplement the experience of our school. I turned to a new book edited by David Hicks. There are in *Preparing for the Future: Notes and Queries for Concerned Educators*,<sup>2</sup> a group of essays which are accessible and challenging. I had used Hicks' essay 'Reclaiming the Future' with parents to great advantage and these two teachers both enjoyed it. It read easily and had an inspirational effect.

This is because it draws on our sense of being alive at a critical time. 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness ...',<sup>3</sup> says Hicks quoting Dickens' opening lines to his *A Tale of Two Cities*. The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the third millennium is rich with symbolic significance.

The Earth's and our survival hangs in the balance yet, Hicks believes, it is not too late. Hicks argues that the future is a rich source of study and that children can be taught to be positive and proactive about their future. He argues that the future has been lost to us because we feel it to be obscure: there are no facts about the future. Drawing on Toffler he asserts that '(a)ll education springs from images of the future and ... creates images of the future'.<sup>4</sup>

He offers a rationale for a futures-oriented curriculum and follows this with an overview of possible future trends. By laying emphasis on our images of the future and their importance in the framing of our responses to change and cultural and environmental crisis he advocates that teachers involve themselves in helping children generate positive images of their future. In this way he sees us all turning away from the negative images that currently dominate the Western psyche.

This is a hopeful essay and makes a good introduction to people investigating futures for the first time. As such it was the best thing I could give the student teachers at our school.

The other essays in *Preparing for the Future* are similar in tone but more specific in nature. The essays by Slaughter<sup>5</sup> and Boulding<sup>6</sup> promote the building of positive images as a key part to generating responses and actions that are likely to ensure a healthy world for future generations. Brown's essay, 'A sustainable future',<sup>7</sup> details the problems we face as we go beyond sustainable limits and

have to deal with fundamental changes in the way we live. His message is that such changes are not possible without 'corresponding shifts in the social, economic and moral character of human societies'.<sup>8</sup>

Hicks' book is ideal for teacher education institutions as they currently operate. This is not surprising as Hicks has a long-standing association with Bath College of Higher Education in the UK. Of course, given that these institutions are in fact failing to challenge current educational practice, preferring to produce teachers that fit the current educational setting, the work has a weakness. It fails to look deeply at how education is linked with power, preferring to operate within the power structures that are in fact largely responsible for the civilisational and environmental crises that are casting a pall over all future generations.

### A critique of power is needed

In this context Hicks misses an opportunity to inform and warn people of the dangerous link between our schools and the continued high levels of denial regarding issues central to our creating a more positive set of circumstances to bequeath to future generations. The emphasis on developing positive images of the future is commendable but could have been strengthened a lot by a short critique of power, and schools' and teachers' complicity in its maintenance.

Recently I bought a copy of another book by David Hicks called *Educating for the Future: A Practical Classroom Guide*<sup>9</sup> (1994). It is a pity that I got it after my student teacher had been with me because it would have been an ideal supplement to our discussions and would have generated some healthy teaching. The book is a rich source of ideas and activities and is designed to fit snugly into current educational boundaries.

As a learning tool, the work is healthily seditious of the current dichotomy between the learner-centred and the social justice traditions. It breaks down the barriers between the disciplines that determine curricular practice and, even though it is at pains to place itself within current curricular practice, it ultimately goes beyond these as Hicks explores issues, that if dealt with thoroughly, will develop what Heshusius has called 'a participatory mode of consciousness'.<sup>10</sup>

What is central to the work is an emphasis

on exploration of the possible. This exploration is largely the student's business, with the teacher and the student's peers working together collectively to generate outcomes. In this sense the children are more in control and able to know the future through a sense of their place within it. This is an act of possession which is neither simply subjective nor objective, it is arrived at through 'a direct participatory nature one cannot account for'.<sup>11</sup>

In political terms the book is attractive and accessible to the educational bureaucrats who determine inclusion in mainstream education systems. Its thorough rationale, written for the British National Curriculum, places it comfortably within what are in fact quite narrow and draconian parameters. Thus its political correctness makes it accessible to planners who would otherwise be suspicious of its validity within strictly controlled classrooms.

Yet the work is only as strong an agent of change as the teacher who applies it. Hicks' introductory comments to each section need to be read thought about and discussed by teachers, both amongst themselves and amongst students, as this will broaden the context of application and make of each activity the real success it could be.

### Transformative educational practice

Hicks' focus in both books is on consciousness raising within the boundaries of conservative institutions. But his works go beyond these boundaries by inviting people to enter into what Rundle, following Freire, called 'the dialectical relationship between action and reflection'.<sup>12</sup> This could become a praxis of the future in which the social practices of the learner come under scrutiny and become the basic content of the learning experience. This takes futures education out of the confines of schools and into the community and allows the possibility of a redefinition of education, learning and the school.

Futures education is in the business of generating ideas that have a transformative impact on people. So, as transformative educational practice goes, Hicks's books are a good start. To go further will be to look at how ideas, to use Thompson's phrase, 'circulate in the social world as utterances, as expressions, as words which are spoken or inscribed'.<sup>13</sup> In doing this we will find, as Berman<sup>14</sup> argues, that ideology has a direct impact on both our body and psyche.

To transform people is to go beyond what we have previously considered the safety of what we know. Historically in the west what we know has been held to be the domain of the empirical sciences. Knowledge being identified with facticity and the observable; inscribed with concrete and reliably visible/predictable characteristics. The future within this paradigm has always been left to look after itself as empirically we cannot really know a great deal that is certain about it.

### Futures has methodology of change

Richard Slaughter recently made this point: 'Reason, rationality and analysis only carry us a certain distance before they fade out into the irreducible uncertainty of the future. But imaginative and creative approaches are not limited in this way. They can leap ahead of the present, make seemingly outrageous assumptions and overturn the conventional wisdom of the day. In so doing they help to free our minds from the limitations of the present—thereby opening up new ideas, new options, new lines of enquiry and aspiration'.<sup>15</sup>

Thus in two new books called *Futures: Tools and Techniques* and its sequel, *Futures: Concepts and Powerful Ideas*,<sup>16</sup> Slaughter squarely situates the transformative within a new episteme, beyond 'the desert of empiricism',<sup>17</sup> that makes full use of a broader array of tools than were previously available to those who sought to know their world through the traditional, credible and scientific ways.

Rather than displace or cast aside the positivist tradition Slaughter argues for an integrative worldview which allows empiricism to be one of a number of valid ways of knowing. The current world crisis is due to an unnatural dominance of this one way of knowing over the many that are possible once we allow ourselves to see the human being, situated in the world, as a unified consciousness which Slaughter characterizes, following the work of transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber, as the great chain of being.<sup>18</sup>

Slaughter is working to redress or reverse what he describes as the 'ancient reversal'. Thus he seeks to 'de-centre the machine and the technocrat'<sup>19</sup> and return to individuals and groups the autonomy and vision that will allow them to build user-friendly futures.

Because both these books are rich in material and ideas that make explicit the prin-

ciples and practices that underpin futures work they are useful to anyone desiring to go beyond the introductory nature of Hicks's books. Yet Slaughter's work, although it has wider parameters, falls within the same pedagogical arena occupied by Hicks. He is writing to effect change. By breaking issues down into bite-size pieces Slaughter shows that it is possible to create positive futures. This is clever because the reader ceases to feel overwhelmed by the ominous and inchoate mess that the future so often appears and really gains a sense of their own ability to effect change.

This confidence is further sustained by the deep conviction of Slaughter himself. His writing goes beyond a superficial enthusiasm for new techniques suitable for teachers and organizational change agents. The *Futures* books are a systematic and cohesive exposition of futures practices and principles. And although the passion for this work is kept discretely in the background it still infuses his work with considerable strength.

### The foresight principle

Slaughter has a teacher's eye for finding structurally simple yet readily understood concepts to develop futures methodology. Foresight is such a concept. In the notion of foresight he locates the essence of all futures practices and principles. He argues forcefully that 'the systematic use of foresight methods can help organizations and societies to deal with emerging issues and steer towards preferred futures with confidence and skill'.<sup>20</sup>

This argument he fully develops in another new work, *The Foresight Principle: Cultural Recovery in the 21st Century*.<sup>21</sup> Here we find that Slaughter has taken the tools, techniques, concepts and powerful ideas of his *Futures* books and reworked them within an argument for the adoption of foresight as a principle of action. His concern is to show how it is possible to focus these ideas within institutions of foresight in order to bring about societal and cultural change.

He carefully develops his argument by first situating futures work historically and socially and then by arguing for a methodology for change. Slaughter then argues that what we lack at present is foresight. This humble human attribute is elevated to the level of *principle* and held out as a key element in any positive solution to present global problems.

It is this ingredient that makes his work more visionary than Hicks'. Slaughter's main point is that we need to mobilise and institutionalize foresight in order to develop a wise culture.

This makes *The Foresight Principle* an important book because it grows out of current social science practice and moves beyond this to offer a vision for a better future which is suffused with the immanence of a transpersonal mysticism. Fortunately Slaughter avoids the oversentimentality that such a vision might fall into. He draws on the writings of Ken Wilber to define a wise culture and I get the feeling that he has worked back from there, via the foresight principle, to our present in order to map a way of achieving his best case scenario. What I like about the book is that it is not prescriptive and avoids painting pictures of either a utopian or dystopian kind.

### Real progress is essentially spiritual

Slaughter recognizes that progress cannot be simply material, or measured in terms of the GNP. This materialist fallacy is a corner stone of modernity. To equate progress with something as narrow as prosperity fails to take into account the hearts and minds of people who yearn for something more far-reaching, more ineffable than a VCR and a flash car.

The restlessness and unhappiness endemic in Western societies has caused writers from many different persuasions to note that the current definition of progress is inadequate. The Indian philosopher P. R. Sarkar has argued that progress must begin with the spiritual<sup>22</sup> and this sentiment is echoed by the neo-Marxist feminist writer Patti Lather who despairs at the loss of the transcendent in our culture and brings angels into her writing on women with HIV/AIDS.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Slaughter has identified the spiritual as a way of knowing and included it in his vision of a wisdom culture and of homo gestalt, human beings with an integrative and spiritual worldview.<sup>24</sup> He uses Wilber's map of knowledge to describe three ways of knowing which are endowed with theological and cultural mystique by being given Latin titles: *sensibilia* (empirical fact), *intelligibilia* (philosophical and psychological insight) and *transcendelia* (spiritual wisdom).<sup>25</sup>

Mostly Slaughter has confined his argument for a methodology of foresight to the empirical and the philosophical. This is natural because not only is he writing as a scholar

immersed in the empirical and the philosophical spheres of the academic world but he is also writing for a broad audience of pragmatic organisational and educational leaders for whom the transcendent is probably a little too confronting. But as he argues for a wisdom culture he is at risk of assuming that if we follow the foresight methodology we will somehow become more spiritual.

### In search of a spiritual methodology

Slaughter does not suggest processes that actually establish people in the state of knowing which Wilber called *transcendelia*. This is possibly due to current diffidence when we talk about spirituality because of the popular conflation of spirituality with religion. Slaughter would be aware that in this climate it is easy to be seen as preachy or prescriptive. Ever since the reformation, when Queen Elizabeth 1 made it politic not to make windows into the souls of her subjects, people have become increasingly likely to refrain from any judgement or prescription in this regard. But religion and spirituality are separate phenomena.

If we are using Wilber's transpersonal categories religion, being essentially a social and theological enterprise, is part of *intelligibilia* while spirituality, representing an individual's quest for and experience of the transcendent, falls within the domain of *transcendelia*. Consequently Slaughter's work would be strengthened by stronger references to the need of people seeking to develop positive futures to adopt some form of serious and active spiritual practice.

The *homo gestalt* and a wisdom culture will never be reached without a direct attempt to draw a clear distinction between religion and spirituality. To fail to recognize such a distinction is to be guilty of what Slaughter calls 'category errors' because these two forms of knowing are ontologically distinct.<sup>26</sup> It is for this reason that Sarkar has emphasized that real progress must be based on the spiritual and that the spiritual is in fact a practice that is both meditative and practical.<sup>27</sup> It is this 'category error' that also underpins Lather's despairing in the face of HIV/AIDS. Neo-Marxism does not allow for the epistemic categories that Slaughter advocates, yet the heart is not respectful of categories when faced with the mystery that is death. Hence Lather's introduction of angels into her work can be seen as an

attempt to break out of the category of *intelligibilia* usually occupied by neo-Marxism.

Furthermore, the problem with a hierarchy of knowledge as represented by the pyramid<sup>28</sup> is that the higher-order meanings and purposes that constitute a wisdom culture are seen as relevant there, in the future, as opposed to now in the present. But as Sarkar would have it, if real progress is to be effected, then the spiritual is the base not the pinnacle.<sup>29</sup> This is so because it is the only way we can arrive at an integrative intelligence that will transform our actions and allow for the possibility of wisdom to emerge in our lives.

This realization is implicit in Slaughter's work. Perhaps it is his reliance on transpersonal visions of the future that leads him not to stress this practical aspect of *transcendelia*. Despite the transpersonal emphasis on wisdom this approach still emphasizes the individual over the collective and is attracted towards models that are hierarchies, which tend to emphasize the linear at the expense of the integrative. The old Socratic cliché, know thyself, is the clue; contemplation is the way; and wisdom is the goal. Without this we are at risk of simply dreaming of a bright future.

### Futures' expansive epistemology

Overall however, Slaughter's good scholarship makes his argument convincing. He links futures thinking and processes with what he calls interpretive, or provisional, as opposed to empirical, knowledge. 'What futures people do is to look back and to derive insights, data and knowledge about the past. They interpret that knowledge and use it to approach their understanding of the present. Within the present they look carefully at structures and processes. On the basis of these observations they look forward and create provisional knowledge about futures. They are helped with the study of processes in the present by the work of many other people. In other words, futurists are habitual skimmers'.<sup>30</sup>

I like the simplicity of this definition. I also like it because it underscores futures' rootedness in an epistemology that embraces not just the disciplines, but also what lies beyond them in terms of other ways of knowing. Thus a holistic approach to understanding the world is arrived at which gives equal worth to the academic and rational as well as to the intuitive, the cultural, the somatic and the spiritual.

The richness of this approach is made

explicit by Wildman and Inayatullah<sup>31</sup> as they examine ways of knowing and the pedagogies of the future. Here they argue that the future must not just be seen in the horizontal terms of past, present and alternative futures. They argue that the future also needs to be constituted in terms of depth, by looking at the layers of reality experienced by individuals and societies and in terms of civilization by acknowledging how the real is differently and similarly constituted by the world's peoples. The thrust of their analysis is borne out by Slaughter's work which, particularly in his advocacy for a wise culture, offers a map of knowledge which moves from empirical fact to spiritual wisdom.<sup>32</sup>

Such a worldview is integrative as it is what Sarkar has described as 'a happy blending of occidental extroversial science and oriental introversial philosophy'.<sup>33</sup> Slaughter is offering such a blend by stepping beyond the empiricist tradition and supplementing it with the concept of wisdom which is rich in the cross cultural resonances of indigenous law and propriety.

### Culture and pedagogy

Culture and the multicultural are important agents in making us receptive to this blending. Wildman and Inayatullah emphasize the different approaches of cultures to meaning making, knowledge and thus behaviour as they describe futures studies courses in which participants not only represent nearly two dozen nations, but different mindscapes and knowledge frames as well.<sup>34</sup>

Biggs's work<sup>35</sup> on Confucian-heritage schools in Asia illustrates this point. He notes that according to Western criteria these schools are overcrowded, authoritarian and poorly resourced but produce unusually high levels of academically able students. Reasons for this, he suggests, lie in the cultural mores in which these schools are situated. Put simply, there is a tension in the West between the individualism promoted by popular culture and the authoritarian structures predominant in educational facilities. This tension does not exist in Confucian-heritage cultures, thus resistance to learning is reduced.

In short, the Confucian-heritage approach to knowledge, which emphasizes rote learning, repetition, and obedience to authority, has enabled them to master much of Western technical expertise in a way that Westerners find

disturbing. There is also a broader lesson to be gained from this digression and that is that as Biggs put it, the classroom and learning 'should be seen as part of a total interactive system, which embraces not only the school and the community but the whole culture as well'.<sup>36</sup>

Because Slaughter is promoting cultural recovery through *The Foresight Principle* it is in fact very necessary for him to include as broad a definition of knowledge and meaning making as he can. The issue, as he sees it, is that today's culture is 'technically powerful but humanly weak and spiritually desolate'.<sup>37</sup> Priority needs to be given to the less tangible but essential aspects of individuals and society.

By arguing for an inclusive epistemology Slaughter is attempting to create the framework for dealing with what Rainer Maria Rilke called the 'Too Big'. This is, according to Lather, 'about confronting the central problem of modernity: the loss of transcendence, whether through god or the proletariat or science'.<sup>38</sup> Slaughter confronts this problem by acknowledging that there is 'a world brimming with immanent meaning . . . [and] rich in hierarchical truths'.<sup>39</sup>

### Chipping away at modernity

It may seem odd to expect schools and institutions of higher education to try to include a sense of the transcendent as a practical outcome of their programmes. And it may seem even more wistful to hope that business and government agencies may also be driven by the foresight principle. To ensure such outcomes we need to develop qualitatively different organizations, peopled by people with a sense of their embeddedness in a world vibrant with meaning. Certainly such a world is a far cry from that built and driven by modernity.

For such a shift to occur we need a methodology rich in ideas and processes that will chip away at the modernist myths and ultimately create an environment conducive to such a world.

It is this need that Slaughter is seeking to meet. His books are a call to people to act, to renegotiate their view of the world to allow for a broader range of future outcomes. His advocacy for institutions of foresight gives some social and institutional form to his argument, but given the preoccupations of the powerful

it seems unlikely that these will greatly alter current thinking and practice in the short term. In fact the suggestion fills me with the sense of the loneliness of the prophet and I am reminded of the wonderful early French socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837) who waited for years in a Parisian cafe to talk to anyone interested in his ideas. No one came. Now of course if Fourier had been on the World Wide Web things may have turned out differently for him.

This leads me to a final thought. Hicks' books are clearly directed at educators but Slaughter's work has broader applicability. Both authors are chipping away at modernity but I feel that Slaughter is aiming to influence policy makers and others with control over the social structures that maintain and perpetuate power.

Herein lies an irony as Hicks' books have a market ready-made by the institutions in which he and his work are embedded, yet Slaughter's books have no such comfortable niche. Thus, in the short term at least, it is within the institutions that maintain power that sedition is more likely to flourish, and although Slaughter's *Futures: Tools and Techniques* and *Futures: Concepts and Powerful Ideas* have a place in educational institutions, a work of considerable creativity, such as *The Foresight Principle*, may have to wait for us to be a little closer to a wise culture to be fully appreciated.

## Notes and references

1. *Pine Community School*, Brisbane, Australia was established in 1982 by a group of parents dissatisfied by State and denominational schools. Since the outset the school has been through many phases but it has always held as a central 'act of faith' that children, parents and teachers need to work cooperatively to generate learning.
2. Hicks, David, ed., *Preparing for the Future: Notes and Queries for Concerned Educators*. Adamantine Press Limited, London, 1994.
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16. Slaughter, Richard A, *Futures: Concepts and Powerful Ideas*. Futures Study Centre and DDM Media Group, Melbourne, 1996.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
21. Slaughter, Richard A, *The Foresight Principle: Cultural Recovery in the 21st Century*. Adamantine Press Limited, London, 1995.
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25. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–159.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
27. Sarkar, Prabhat Rainjan, *The Liberation of Intellect: Neo-Humanism*. AM Press, Calcutta, 1982, pp. 89–99.
28. Slaughter, *The Foresight Principle*, p. 151.
29. Sarkar, The human search for real progress.
30. Slaughter, *The Foresight Principle*, p. 32.
31. Wildman, Paul and Inayatullah, Sohail, Ways of knowing, communication, culture and the pedagogies of the future. *Futures*, forthcoming, 1996.
32. Slaughter, *The Foresight Principle*, p. 158.
33. Sarkar, Prabhat Rainjan, *Neo-Humanist Education: The Vision Statement*. AM Publications, Calcutta, 1992, p. 12.
34. Wildman and Inayatullah, *op. cit.*, See also Inayatullah, Sohail, The multicultural challenge to education. In *New Renaissance*, Vol 6, No. 3, pp. 12–13, Winter 1996, Special issue on Holistic Education, available from Weisenauer weg 4, 55129 Mainz, Germany.
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36. Biggs, p. 33.
37. Slaughter, *The Foresight Principle*, p. 118.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
39. Slaughter, *Futures: Concepts and Powerful Ideas*, p. 151.