Chapter 12
Reflections on the practice and potential of futures thinking

by
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and Charles Ungerleider[1]

The rapporteurs of the 2004 Toronto Forum (two Canadians, three Europeans) were called upon both to advance general priorities for futures thinking in education and were assigned to workshops on each of the volunteer systems described in Chapters 7-11. Their contributions show how convinced they are by the value of the futures thinking approach but they are also struck by the complexity as well as the difficulty of educational change. Ungerleider focuses on value questions. Daigle asks whether much current reform is often "tinkering at the edges", so that scenarios might help in more fundamental re-definitions. Hutmacher argues the need to consolidate the evidence base for such approaches and Shapiro calls for the scope of futures thinking stakeholders and methodologies to be broadened. Bentley distinguishes between and discusses the "inward-facing" and "outward-facing" aspects to futures thinking in action.

The rapporteurs of the June 2004 Toronto Forum on "Schooling for Tomorrow" were sources of reflections and wisdom throughout the event, and they were assigned to workshops on each of the volunteer systems covered in the above chapters. Their reflections were based partly on the workshop discussions but they used their opportunities for reaction to raise more general issues about futures thinking in education. These reflections have been elaborated into the texts of this chapter.

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[1] The rapporteurs to the Toronto "Schooling for Tomorrow" Forum.

Their contributions show how impressed they are in general by the different country initiatives; but they are also struck by the complexity as well as the difficulty of educational change, especially when the reforms in question are fundamental. The structures and practices of educational systems are supported by underlying, often strongly-held values. Much current reform is often "tinkering at the edges" instead of re-defining schooling, while some of the most important changes are unintentional and forced upon the system by external developments. One theme coming through this chapter is that using scenarios offers a possibility for a more intentional and fundamental discussion on reforming the system, opening up new avenues not just rehearsing pre-existing options. One prerequisite for this is robust analytical tools. A related theme identified is the need to understand better and more systematically the trends that are driving change in educational systems. A desirable way forward is also that the futures thinking should engage a wide range of stakeholders in education in the dialogue on reform. These authors can see, if these and related conditions are met, that scenarios can be invaluable tools for strategic insight and help provide the catalyst for genuine reform.

Futures thinking to clarify value differences (Charles Ungerleider[2])

Futures thinking facilitates dialogue and fosters the consideration of policy alternatives. It does so by helping the different stakeholders engaged in it to transcend the positional politics that typically and necessarily accompany the consideration of policy alternatives intended for immediate implementation. Freed from the encapsulation that immediacy imposes, it allows participants to explore possibilities collectively, consider the consequences of various possibilities, and test the boundaries of policy options under various conditions.

One form of futures thinking involves the use of scenarios that depict conditions twenty or thirty years in the future. Such scenarios have been used in the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project conducted under the auspices of the OECD as a set of "tools" to help policy makers and practitioners respond to significant changes affecting education. The intention is to develop capacity for the management of change in education and other public policy domains on an international basis. Part of my assignment as rapporteur at the Toronto Forum was to observe the New

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Zealand "Secondary Futures" project and three dimensions they presented were particularly interesting.

The first involved the use of "Guardians", a group of four nationally recognised persons responsible for "protecting the integrity of the process" and ensuring its autonomy from government as well as from short term policy and labour relations disputes. Second, New Zealand rewrote the original scenarios developed by the OECD in language designed to make them easily understood by the various audiences of New Zealanders who would be involved in workshops. In addition, New Zealand developed "character narratives" to enable participants to view the scenario from the perspective of various positions: student, parent, teacher, etc. This particularly useful technique allows those who use the scenarios to "walk in the shoes" of fictional New Zealanders. The "character narratives" help participants to recognise that scenarios are likely to be viewed differently by persons occupying different social positions. A third element being developed by New Zealand to support its work is a "preference matrix", a device to enable participants to specify the desirable features of schooling options.

It is as true in education as in any domain that no matter how much a change is needed or wanted, if those who do the work do not want the change, it will be unlikely to occur without significant social or economic costs. Teachers, and the organisations that represent teachers, are often neglected in the consideration of policy changes in education, viewed as marginal to the change process, or seen in a negative light as obstacles to be overcome. It was refreshing to see included in the New Zealand delegation representatives of their teachers. Attention to the perspectives that teachers bring to their responsibilities is particularly important, since educational change has often neglected to see and appreciate the process from their perspectives.

An implicit and largely unexamined assumption of futures thinking is the notion that educational change is an inherent good but it is desirable only if that change is intentional. Too often, the changes that occur are a consequence of circumstance rather than conscious deliberation. It is equally important to recognise that education is an essentially conservative influence that provides a stabilising force in societies characterised by periods of rapid change in other spheres of human activity. Education helps us to locate ourselves in time and place and to understand how we are related to others. New Zealand includes indigenous peoples among the "Guardians". The Guardians ensure the integrity of the futures thinking process by recognising the potential that futures thinking has for destabilising societies contemplating changes to accommodate future conditions.

While still embryonic, futures thinking holds promise as a means for exploring policy options. As techniques are developed for bringing policy analysts and decision makers together to consider the future, it will be important to safeguard against a technical view of policy. By this I mean that some may believe that futures thinking will reveal “good” public policy. To state the obvious: What counts as “good” policy is a matter of the values one holds, not a quality of the policy itself. Nothing of value in public affairs is apolitical. In fact, it is the clash of values that gives rise to the need for politics and policy. Future scenario planning is useful for exploring the nature of value conflicts. But the technique will not yield policies that can be implemented without regard to the context in which the policies may be needed or to the values at play in those contexts.

Values are often incommensurable, making it impossible to realise the full expression of all the values held. Take five illustrative values – universality, productive efficiency, equity, accountability, and flexibility – commonly associated rhetorically with education systems in many jurisdictions:

- *Universality* is concerned with ensuring that all children of school age are able to attend and benefit from public schooling.
- *Productive efficiency* is concerned with producing the maximum benefits possible for the given expenditure of public monies.
- *Equity* is concerned that expenditures are made to reduce gaps between identifiable groups of students (boys and girls, native-born and immigrant, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, rich and poor, etc.).
- *Accountability* is concerned with reporting to the public about how resources it provided have been used to achieve the goals of public schooling.
- *Flexibility* is concerned with permitting the widest possible latitude in decisions about the expenditure of funds. Although people might prize all of these values, all five cannot be fully realised simultaneously.

We have long recognised that “change” and “structure” are in tension. Structures and practices are supported by underlying values. Proposals for change carry the implicit repudiation of the values that support the practice or structure one is proposing to change. A proposal to alter a practice or structure is also a proposal to replace the existing value or values with new ones.

One of the dimensions not fully explored in futures thinking is a specification of the values that support existing practices and structures.

Different values are discernible in the various scenarios. New Zealand's attempt to develop a "preference matrix" is a useful and promising step. Other jurisdictions and their initiatives should consider this example by devoting explicit attention to *identifying* the value differences and *comparing the ranks* attached to them in various scenarios. This process should lead to interesting insights about differences in the scenarios and a deeper understanding of the important part that values play in determining practices and structures.

I have already noted that the futures thinking process is often employed to free participants from the spatial and temporal constraints that inhibit the consideration of alternatives. This is both a benefit and a liability of the process. Freedom from such constraints is likely to help generate innovative alternatives. That same freedom can also mislead participants into believing that one can arrive at a goal or destination without an appreciation of one's starting point. Change requires an appreciation of the temporal and spatial location in which one is situated and the factors that gave rise to the structures and practices one wants to alter. Dissatisfaction with a state of affairs is insufficient for bringing about change. In order to change the prevailing state of affairs, one needs an analysis of how it came to be and the values that support its continuation.

Futures thinking can help to develop the capacity for technical analysis and the understanding of systems. This is "systems thinking", which can help to inform policy development, but cannot and should not supplant the political processes of the jurisdictions that employ the technique. The factors affecting politicians are different from those that affect policy analysts. Failure to recognise and appreciate the differences can lead to unhelpful tension and distrust between policy analysts and politicians. Such a tendency might be mitigated by making explicit the discussion and ranking of values. It might also be mitigated by accompanying futures thinking with simulation exercises that put policy analysts and politicians into situations that demand their interaction.

Do schools need to be reformed or reinvented? (Raymond Daigle[3])

For the past 15 years or so, a number of industrialised countries have been implementing sweeping and costly reforms aimed at ensuring that future generations are adequately prepared for the new knowledge-based economy. In all the OECD countries, the expression "lifelong learning" and

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[3] Former Deputy Minister, Francophone Sector, New Brunswick, Canada and Member of the Advisory Board to the Ontario *Vision 2020* initiative.

its many variants have been used to excess in all the official documents of the various bodies responsible for education at all levels. However, despite all these efforts, it must be admitted that these reforms have by and large met with only limited success. Although there was some real initial progress, these reforms have ultimately come up against a wall, or rather a ceiling, beyond which further progress seems impossible, leading increasing numbers of school administrators and educators to wonder whether schools do not need to be reformed but to be reinvented.

The fact is that reforming any public institution is a difficult task, and even more so if the institution is to be completely redefined. The task will be virtually insurmountable if the reform exercise is conducted by persons who are closely involved in the institution – which we all are as educational policy people and experts – for there are no other models available besides the one that we know. This exercise of reinventing schools and creating the necessary tools is therefore a daunting and complex task. It is for this reason that the OECD has designed scenarios in order to assist those responsible for education systems in carrying out this task. It must be pointed out that scenarios are not familiar tools for educators, as they are not widely used outside military organisations and certain business sectors. However, given the inability of school reforms to make further progress, there was justification for trying this exercise and seeing where it might lead. For example, one of the lead countries in the OECD project, the Netherlands, has in recent years adopted an innovative national policy for primary and secondary education that is currently being implemented on three fronts:

- Central government's relationship with educational institutions: deregulation and greater freedom for institutions within more general central government policies.
- Quality of education (learner-centred education, educational research, the social role of schools, their environment and setting) as a means of strengthening the economy and citizenship.
- Professional development for teachers and school management in order to develop the educational leadership role of school heads and make the teaching profession more attractive.

Under this policy, networks formed in each sector are developing a four-year action plan starting from a commonly defined vision. In the course of this initiative, it appears that the scenario approach was abandoned, those involved having found the scenarios too futuristic (too speculative and extremely long term) and at times contradictory, but chiefly because they found that these scenarios would not allow them to take action soon enough. This reaction is understandable given that the entire exercise is primarily focused on meeting the objectives set by the European Community for 2010,

which are aimed at making Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world and ensuring its social cohesion. In this context, thinking about the future becomes much more immediate. A number of the countries present in the workshop I was rapporteur for also admitted that all their energies were currently focused on the European Community's objectives. What is more, not all countries have reached the same stage in this process. Each country's background, history, traditions and values significantly affect the approaches and procedures used and have a major impact on educational reforms. For example, some countries, such as Finland, already have long-term forward-looking mechanisms integrated into their parliamentary and governmental institutions that make the exercise considerably easier to conduct.

Although the approaches and strategies under way in the Netherlands are valid, interesting, and solidly co-ordinated, they focus on the same major aspects of reform (pupil-centred education, educational research, indicators, measurement, leadership by school heads, teacher training, etc.) that several other countries have been targeting in recent years (*e.g.* the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, etc.), and may therefore come up against the same obstacles. Consequently, this exercise has yet to lead to genuine long-term "futures thinking" and, above all, it has not resulted in a real re-definition or reinvention of schools. "We are tinkering at the edges", futurologists might say.

Furthermore, listening to all the participants in the Toronto Forum gave the impression that most participating countries are encountering difficulties in actually using the scenarios, with some countries rejecting them outright as a tool, while others are content to work on the scenario or scenarios of their own preference, sometimes dismissing out of hand the other scenarios even though in some cases these are much more likely to occur – perhaps choosing to see the future through rose-tinted glasses? Maybe we should allow specialists more accustomed to working with scenarios than educators to share their expertise and experience with them. Otherwise, there is a risk that at the end of the exercise we will reject the scenario method as marginal or at best inconclusive, thereby depriving ourselves of a tool that might prove to be extremely useful.

In the meantime, serious, large-scale efforts are under way, but which run the risk of having only a temporary and limited impact on the capacity of education systems to prepare the next generation to work in the new knowledge-based economy. Cynics could ask whether those responsible for educational reform have found it in their interest to limit the scope of school reforms since they would have much to lose if the current systems were to disappear.

Consolidate the foundations of evidence-based futures thinking (Walo Hutmacher[4])

The lead countries in the recent phase of the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project have been very active and developed interesting projects and contributions. They also have quite legitimately introduced their own agendas into the programme. It is no surprise therefore that the different projects do not easily combine into a systematic pattern. This kind of futures thinking is also rather new in the education sector and there is little agreed methodology. The understanding of futures thinking may differ considerably across constituencies and among individual participants.

A common feature across the projects is nevertheless that, from the material published earlier in "What Schools for the Future?" (OECD, 2001), they have promptly adopted the scenarios and/or the scenario method. The published scenarios indeed cover a range of alternative futures: despite the fact that only two of them have consistently been considered desirable in educational circles, they were found useful to widen the intellectual horizon and the scope of futures thinking. Some constituencies have elaborated new scenarios of their own. The scenario method has been mainly used to date in this context to sketch change or innovation agendas, be it to increase leadership skills of managers and school leaders as in England, or to discuss about "what secondary schooling should be like in the future" as in New Zealand, or to meet the "threat of assimilation" on the French minority language community as in Ontario. The wide range of the themes, by the way, underlines the diversity of specific needs and interests in futures thinking in the education field.

There has been less work on and little reference to the analytical dimensions of the scenarios. With the exception of the Ontario project on teachers and teaching, there has also been little emphasis on clarifying or deepening our understanding of the major trends and forces that underpin the change of education systems, of schools and of education policies in relation with the change of society, culture and economy. Overall, the culture and practice in education systems seem to make it difficult to take the time needed for a non-normative and systematic description and analysis of different possible futures, and the considered argumentation of their likelihood in the light of societal change. The projects in the second phase seem more interested in the desirable, rather than in possible and likely,

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futures. What should or should not happen is more appealing than what might happen.

Any debate in the education field, of course, ultimately challenges values, which are often conflicting. Historically, this has been the main thrust of the debate about the future of education and schools: opinions and wishes opposing other opinions and wishes. The debate about values will also remain in the future. But the new brand of futures thinking which the OECD programme aims at developing differs from that tradition mainly by adopting a two-stage approach. The first question here is not "what future do we wish?" but "towards what future does or might the education field move, considering recent and/or likely economic, technological, cultural and societal developments?" In other words, while the desirability debate certainly must take place, it should do so at a second stage only and on the basis of a prior systematic effort to explore possible futures and their likelihood. It should do this on premises that remain as descriptive and analytical as possible.

The basic assumption is indeed that education systems and schools are actually changing and will change in the future, that they are actually heading somewhere, because their environment changes. A better knowledge of societal, demographic, cultural and/or economic trends and forces, which are in relationship with education in families, communities and schools, should help identify with better accuracy this "unplanned" or "spontaneous" but nevertheless real change. It will help to understand its likely impact on schools and their possible and likely ways of coping with what confronts them.

For the future of futures thinking, including within the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project, it seems important therefore to identify and discuss more precisely the configuration of social, cultural and economic trends and forces that contribute to change of the education field through constituencies, institutions and organisations. The original analysis of trends and driving forces in Part One and several expert contributions in Part Two of "What Schools for the Future" (OECD, 2001) gave a first flavour of such a knowledge base and they have loosely informed the dimensions that structure the scenarios. But overall, this conceptual and analytical basis has not been at the forefront during the previous phase. This CERI programme has the mission to elaborate a framework for futures thinking in the education field that will be useful across countries. The quality of this framework will depend on how much effort goes into clarifying, deepening and refining the conceptual grounds we build on. The programme should concentrate part of its efforts on developing a more robust (minimal, sufficient and arguable) conceptual framework and the related empirical knowledge base that will be able to shed light onto the

complex relationships which exist between economy, society and education in families and schools.

Broadening horizons, approaches and participants in futures thinking (Hanne Shapiro[5])

"He who never leaves his country is full of prejudices"
Carlo Goldoni (1703-1793), Pamela I, 14.

In the 1950s the United States invested heavily in order to be the leading country in transatlantic transportation. The *SS United States* was regarded as an imminent success and positive sign that the development was heading in the right direction; the speed of sea transportation was increased by a couple of miles per hour. Shortly after, the first commercial jet went in the air, and the previous so-important record for which enormous resources had been invested was suddenly reduced to only a minor role. The story can be likened to a situation where we only rely on measuring and benchmarking properties of knowledge acquisition – codifiable and viewed as important of today – and risk ignoring other components of knowledge acquisition and learning that may be vital to our societies of tomorrow.

Can we afford unilateral thinking about our schooling system which in most cases at best will lead to incremental improvements? Currently there is much policy debate about the emergence of a so-called knowledge economy or learning economy, still relatively undefined terms. Do we therefore need a much more radical, proactive, and experimenting approach to the development and governance of our learning systems with a broader involvement of actors than we traditionally see within educational policy formulation processes?

Education and the broader notion of schooling as a social system have developed over a long period of time in each country with specific sets of institutions and organisations. (Institutions can be defined as sets of common habits, routines, rules, or laws, which regulate the relations and interactions between individuals and groups. Organisations are formal structures with an explicit purpose; they are consciously created and can thus also be changed as a result of social action [Edquist and Johnson, 1997].) Governments, educational organisations, communities, business and industry, and unions, have constructed an institutional set-up for education and schooling which in many instances has undergone so little change so as

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to become ossified, deeply rooted in already existing social, cultural, and economic patterns. Because of these roots, educational institutions and practices are difficult to change, and are sometimes even obstacles to innovation of the broader system of schooling and learning.

The embedded systemic resistance to change and the uncertainties relating to changes in the outer environment and the impacts those may have on the future of schooling mean that policy-making for the future of schooling cannot be treated as a straightforward linear process. This is also why policy-making should adopt other more qualitative methods for engaging with alternative realities of the futures in a manner that can bring us out of perceived realities and urgencies of action.

The *raison d'être* for engaging in the future of the schooling voyage is not to get strategic and operational guidance on how to travel from A to B – your preferred neighbourhood destination – in the shortest period of time. Rather, through futures thinking, participants embark on a voyage of exploration into unknown areas and beyond. Like Alice in Wonderland when she falls down the rabbit hole, you soon realise that conventional wisdom and solutions are not going to be much help on this journey. Scenario analysis should be regarded as a tool for insight and a catalyst for strategic discussions and reflections on policy dilemmas, but not as an end in itself for policy implementation. The connection between the use of futures thinking for questioning and for exploring challenging policy questions, and methods relating to creative strategic policy implementation, needs to be explored further The experience from the Toronto Forum suggests that the problems-formulation phase – the questions that are to be addressed through the scenario work – should receive more attention.

A futures initiative should not be merely a comfortable ride in a relatively known local neighbourhood, but should bring participants to areas they never imagined might exist. Prerequisites for this are a consistent and wide-ranging environmental scanning, of both the outer world and the nearby environment, not merely the latter. It also asks for a structured analysis of trends, drivers, and uncertainties and forces relating to these trends. A methodology such as TAIDA is an example of how approaches to trend spotting and trend analysis can be expanded as part of the range of methods in its future developments. The methodology is based on the EPISTEL+ M framework for identifying trends and to scan in a systematic and comprehensive way. (EPISTEL+M is a way of clustering trends: E=economy; P=politics; S=social values; T=technology; E= environment, health; L=legislation + M=media and ideology.) Trends need to be apparent for a certain amount of time; otherwise they are fluctuations and may have little impact in the long run. Trends have a direction: *more, less, the same*, and they have a degree of certainty and uncertainty. Given the tendency for

futures initiatives to move too quickly to a preferred scenario, the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project could usefully identify different methods of analysis, such as cross-impact analysis, mapping trends according to the level of importance and level of certainty with regard to the question addressed in the given scenario exercise.

Changing schooling and education is not only a matter of changing the educational system, but also of innovating wider socio-economic system, cultural mindsets, and governance frameworks. This is an important observation for understanding the design and revitalisation of schooling systems. Policies for change cannot be organised top-down. Change in schooling has to be directed simultaneously at all the levels. Interactivity and consistency between the different layers are main requirements for systemic change. The government and its administration is but one of the players in a complex policy system such as schooling; so are schools, teachers, parents, unions, and other policy domains, all fighting for attention in the battle of scarce resources.

This suggests that futures thinking should not only involve educationalists within the social system of schooling, but also other actors from the broader socio-economic environment with different mindsets and backgrounds, so as to avoid being captured by conventional wisdoms about what lies ahead and to ensure a wider horizon and unconventional questions throughout the whole process.

Systems change is not a one-shot event. Change in most social systems is an on-going process of incremental development, sometimes combined with earthquakes (dissipative systems: absorbing a lot of change-impulses without any change; then disrupting in a large change; see Sanderson, 2000). Changing a system is a time-consuming endeavour, especially because of institutional embeddedness. Reasons for change can be endogenous and exogenous. Systems change is complex and chaotic because of it is multi-layered, multi-actor, and multi-purpose.

Process competencies are therefore central to facilitate a futures activity. Futures thinking initiatives within countries require a guidance and process training package as a component of the "toolbox" of approaches. In a well-facilitated process, as developed by England and demonstrated during the Toronto Forum, different actors can come into play through a futures process despite different backgrounds and mindsets. Through this process they may explore the outer galaxies (environmental scanning) and discover how they are actually part of the sun-earth interaction (the schooling system). Managing this process is like directing a large orchestra; if one player is out of tune, the whole performance is endangered.

The use of metaphors is another essential component of a successful process in order to avoid being trapped in current realities and concepts. A simple methodology to encourage participants to break with their traditional roles is the use of "hot seating" – where participants are required to take up another character role. This method is simple, efficient, and fun, as the England workshop illustrated. The concepts of *performance text* (Collins, 1990) derived from ethnographical studies and theatre may be useful in framing futures thinking processes. Through the act of co-participation these works bring the audience into and revitalise the space of action.

Futures thinking for policy change

Studies on the nature of policy change have traditionally taken their point of departure in the so-called policy cycle where the policy process is analysed as set in different distinct stages: decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. The learning approach to policy formulation as brought forward by researchers such as Lundvall criticises this assumption because it does not provide a thorough account of what happens after the decision-making phase and it tends to perceive change as something automatic that follows the political decision-making process (Lundvall, 1997). The learning approach on the other hand provides a more fluid perspective on the policy process in continuous transformation and evolution where no clear stages can be discerned.

> *"In the political environment of public management, learning processes are particular difficult to create and maintain. A critical task of public management is to build institutional learning capabilities within the system of actors. Conventional policy processes often block learning because ideology overrides evidence or vested interests resist. Therefore policy makers should be concerned with designing adaptable innovation systems - rather than producing blueprints for specific reforms." (Metcalfe, 1993, quoted by Lundvall, 2000)*

One of the advantages of using futures thinking for policy purposes is that it can create an arena where the same plot (schooling in the future) may be enacted through quite different scripts and with a stage populated by different characters and acting methods. Through narratives and dialogues that speak to both head and heart, the Toronto workshop has illustrated how the different methodologies may function as props which can further critical and creative reflection and revisualisation of a policy question ahead of us, rather than falling back on a traditional, one-dimensional and linear decisions-making process. This understanding of futures thinking as a multi-actor learning and visualisation process is central to the next stages of

project's development, where broader issues concerning governance and underlying values around the knowledge economy and learning society should be addressed.

The OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project has proved itself successful to date in involving school leaders, teachers, and parents, in envisioning change. The next stage of the project will need to address more deeply how the futures methodologies and approaches can also engage policy makers in critically and creatively exploring medium-term policy choices and dilemmas, given that policy constituencies most often will judge the success of policy makers on short-term successes which may fix a particular bolt but not lead to safer, faster, or cheaper forms of transportation. This is the challenge for the OECD "Schooling of Tomorrow" project.

Using futures thinking strategically: inward and outward-facing processes (Tom Bentley[6])

The Toronto Forum on "Schooling for Tomorrow" showed how different the emphasis of different futures projects can be, not just in context and content, but also through the variation of participants and intended audiences. One of the basic differences to emerge was that between futures processes which face primarily *inwards,* and those which face *outwards,* towards the public and practitioners. All OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" projects of course seek a broad, long term view of the issues they are addressing, but their focus and methods do vary in this way.

Inward–facing futures work seeks to think differently from a policy perspective about long-term issues which go beyond the scope of existing reform plans and implementation timetables. Their potential lies in uncovering and strengthening a more strategic view of the goals and methods of reform; helping policy makers understand the range of factors – from technological innovation to changing demographics – which will influence the success of their measures and provide new means with which to achieve their goals.

Those which face *outwards* are seeking to engage a wider set of stakeholders and participants in a dialogue which might help to uncover solutions or innovations that were previously treated as being out of bounds for political or historical reasons. They may well seek the same kind of long view and strategic analysis as inward facing processes, but their goals are

[6] Director, Demos, the London-based think-tank.

also about stimulating new forms of dialogue, creating legitimacy for change, and involving new participants in the process.

Any long-term effort at reshaping or reforming education systems depends on both inward- and outward-looking processes, and a number of OECD “Schooling for Tomorrow” projects are arguably tackling both. But the experience so far suggests that it is worth clarifying the differences and reflecting on how different elements of the process can be combined successfully.

Education and schooling systems are increasingly understood as being complex systems – efforts at reform must cope with the complexity of implementation, and schools must serve a more complex and diverse society. Developing the capacity to adapt continuously, and to differentiate according to variation in context and in student need, is a priority for reformers across the OECD, fuelling the search for innovation techniques and strategies. But many innovative solutions are potentially blocked, not by a lack of technical means to make them happen, but by a lack of legitimacy or political support among key stakeholders in the education system, such as parents, trade unions, employers, higher education and so on. In turn, schooling systems which rest on highly institutionalised structures and routines also create expectations and roles – for all of these groups and more – which are deeply entrenched and difficult to adapt. In other words, policy can get stuck, and the role of different players in the system can also get stuck; unsticking both is a necessary condition of systemic change.

Reshaping complex systems maintained by many different stakeholders requires that all such stakeholders need to participate in a shift of perspective which uncovers new solutions and affirms the value of collective adaptation. One argument is that, in order for this to happen, all those key participants must be involved in creating a new shared view of the system, its goals, and how it can work. Traditionally, this kind of task is tackled through formal consultation processes. But, in many systems, such consultation is either marginal to the process of policy formation, or treated as an extension of interest group politics – that is, different organisations and groups participate in it but with closed minds, articulating fixed positions which represent their current place in the current system, but refusing to engage with new possibilities which would require a different set of roles and relationships in order to succeed.

Using futures thinking to unlock new policy options requires a methodical process which sets long-term trends and possible changes in the operating environment against the existing policy commitments and longer-term goals of a specific system. It needs to be informed by trend data, by comparative analysis, and by examples of innovation which help to extend

the boundaries of imagination. The use of scenarios in this kind of exercise can be a trigger for thinking differently about existing policy, and can feed into planning and strategy processes in ways which enrich them.

To succeed, policy makers need two conditions to occur simultaneously. First, they need the trend and scenario analysis to be robust and relevant to their detailed operational concerns – something which requires careful, focused work and is not guaranteed by the existence of broad, impressionistic scenarios, however well grounded they are. Second, policy makers need to engage with the issues in a setting which enables them to be candid and open-minded about their existing commitments, something which is extremely difficult for both public servants and politicians in today's pressured times. These conditions imply a degree of privacy and discretion around the discussions, even if they lead to published material and public debate later on.

Aspects of this inward looking emphasis can be found in a number of the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" initiatives, from Ontario to New Zealand, England to the Netherlands, where senior policy makers have been deeply engaged in futures workshops and in discussing the value of longer term thinking to education reform more widely. But some of the conditions needed for success stand in contrast to those of outward-facing futures processes. Outward facing processes seek to address the same big questions about the form and function of our schooling systems, but to do it in a way which engages a wider range of perspectives, and enables them to shape an approach to change which could generate a wider range of solutions.

From the discussions at the Toronto Forum, it became clear that addressing concerns and anxieties among groups external to government was a crucial dimension of establishing successful futures processes, in every participating system. Thus, for example in New Zealand, the impact of a previous generation of public sector reform had left education trade unions deeply suspicious of new reform efforts, and determined to protect their members against unexpected change or policies whose impact had not been fully thought through. In Canada, new thinking about how to provide education for the Francophone community had to involve key representatives of that community, as well as other institutional stakeholders, if it was going to establish the basic legitimacy needed for new designs to be treated as possible solutions.

Establishing genuine dialogue among the different participant groups is, in fact, a challenge in itself – dialogue in which all participants positions and affiliations command respect, but in which key assumptions about change can remain suspended, or open, in order for a wider range of possible solutions to emerge. In the Futuresight process, for example, used by the

English team to work with school leaders and other practitioners, participants were engaged and motivated by the materials but found working with an agenda in which the end point was not predetermined an unfamiliar experience. Many said that if final policy destinations had been presented to them they would respond to them in "pre-programmed" ways, on the basis of their past experience. Working in a more open-ended process and being confronted with the trade-offs and conflicts between different trends and elements of different scenarios helped to equip practitioners to translate some of the difficult choices back into their own school development processes, and to engage in debate with policy makers on new terms.

Even these projects, however, faced outwards primarily towards existing education practitioners. Arguably, futures thinking projects need to go further if they are to help establish new space and legitimacy for system change – into the expectations and responses of the wider public. For example, in the Demos project Scotland 2020 (report available at *www.demos.co.uk*) a "town meeting" was held in Nairn, a small highland town, in which local residents used open space methods to generate a set of priorities for the future which could be communicated to policy makers. In the successor project, Glasgow 2020, the aim is to undertake "an exercise in mass imagination" through a range of events, art and literature projects, and other media through which people communicate ideas, aspirations and perceptions of the city and its possible future.

This kind of public engagement is essential to the prospects of long term systemic change in education. But the detailed work that it requires is quite different from that involved in building a sharper, systemic view of possible futures among policy makers struggling with the pressures of today and tomorrow. This fact suggests that we also need further discussion of the nuances of project design for futures processes – and a clearer understanding of how different elements and layers of futures thinking work can be combined and integrated to address the different groups of participants identified by the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" participant projects.

One final practice, generated by New Zealand, provides a fitting conclusion. By appointing "Guardians" – independent, respected figures from New Zealand society – as an integral part of the Secondary Futures project, the team simultaneously created a point of engagement with New Zealanders in general, and created a safer space in which education stakeholders could enter into dialogue about possible futures. The existence of Guardians, a concept itself drawn from Aboriginal New Zealand tradition, reinforced the connection between an internal space and an external set of perspectives, and has enhanced the success of the project's engagement with a range of communities. It may be that our national education dialogues

need better guardians, and that the next generation of OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" projects can help to provide them.

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