

Online futures studies pedagogical resource centre

World Futures Studies Federation

EVALUATION REPORT

I. Evaluation submitted by

World Futures Studies Federation

II. Number and title of request:

Online futures studies pedagogical resource centre; number: 375711 69ONG

III. Evaluation of the project or activity implemented:

a) Purpose and objectives

The goal of this project was to create a comprehensive, classified, systematic, adaptable and accessible pedagogical resource centre to promote, facilitate and enrich the teaching of futures studies at all levels which would capture and capitalise upon past and present futures thinking.

Our target has been both, in one hand, students and teachers attending or providing futures courses, and in the other hand prospective students and teachers that would get a glimpse of what this discipline offers, as well as autodidacts, professionals and practitioners.

The title of this project "ONLINE FUTURES STUDIES PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE CENTRE" contains the fourfold problems /solutions the WFSF wanted to address through it.

Why FUTURES STUDIES/FUTURE THINKING?

It has been widely recognised that the contemporary world is characterised by rapid change, growing uncertainty and increased complexity. The driving forces of change pervade transversely through all dimensions of society, reconstituting previous relationships between economic, political and socio-cultural systems. Changes taking place in one dimension have repercussions for all other areas. Instability, disruption, rupture, conflict, break-ups and complex and adverse effects of transformations become regular characteristics of present living. Policy and decision-makers, both in public and private bodies, as well as ordinary members of society are challenged by making decisions about the future in this highly uncertain and more complex environment.

Over recent decades, the futures studies field has been developed as a response to the growing need for a systematic examination of the future. The call for such structured future-oriented thinking has been recognised across all sectors of society. This requirement has also been

acknowledged and addressed by major international organisations, such as the UN, the European Commission, and, of course, UNESCO, which has been developing a programme in prospective studies since 1984, and has a special section (the Foresight Section within the Division of Foresight, Philosophy and Human Sciences) promoting future-oriented thinking.

Futures thinking is not just about a societal need in a time of accelerating and interrelated future change, it is also about individual choice at the present, and an awareness of the impact and consequences of current actions on future conditions. Futures thinking, therefore, is an essential cognitive quality for everyone, everywhere.

So it has been particularly important to collect and sorted two different kinds of material: material for formal courses according to scientific/academic criteria and material for self-learning.

Why PEDAGOGICAL?

One of the essential issues in promoting, supporting and spreading the concept of futures thinking is futures education. Ideally, systematic futures thinking should be embedded in the curriculum at all education levels, from primary schools to secondary schools to colleges and universities. Several major reasons can be given why this is so.

- Humans, by their behaviour, constantly shape their natural and social environments and, in doing so, shape their own future, although not always in ways that they intend or understand.
- Disciplined and valid prospective thinking can help people to shape their environments and their future effectively and responsibly.
- Explicit and objective analysis of values can help people responsibly to create desirable futures.

As human beings' responsibility increases in situations of risk, futures education is especially required for populations with the increased factor of risk, such as women, youth and developing countries. Futures education can assist these groups in the development of a greater understanding of the existing elements of their lives, such as education, peace and economic and environmental sustainability. It can also foster future-oriented policy and decisions making that impacts these fragile populations or/and operates in situations of high risk, such as conflicts, tense geopolitical circumstances, and social tensions. Futures education helps decision-makers to understand more clearly the complex and interconnected environment, in which they make decisions and anticipate possible future consequences of their choices. This, in turn, would lead to the reduction of risks and negative consequences. Future studies discipline is unique in its multidisciplinary approach that allows looking at a very broad spectrum of issues involving a wide range of people.

Futures studies, in relation to education, can be considered in two ways. It can be either treated as a new subject or as a dimension of all educational work. Teaching futures as a specific discipline is crucial for generating the necessary body of futures professionals, both educators and practitioners. However, incorporating a futures dimension to mainstream education is equally important. Firstly, because self-conscious futures thinking helps people to become more responsible for their actions. And secondly, any understanding of contemporary

change is incomplete without the insights provided by studies of possible, probable, plausible and preferable futures.

It can be argued that futures education is underpinned by four basic notions that constitute its rationale.

1. Rapid structural change tends to make any past assumptions, meanings and purposes redundant. The meanings of concepts, such as growth, progress, health, defence, have dramatically changed in the post-industrial world. The aims that were motivation in the past, such as the conquest of nature, erecting national boundaries, defending exclusive cultures, are no longer adequate. Consequently, past experiences become less reliable and less authoritative, and a desire to establish new meanings and fresh purposes to guide the future becomes stronger than ever.

2. Careful forward thinking – or foresight – is preferable to crisis management. In a world that is physically and socially interconnected, many consequences are displaced in space and time. Future-oriented thinking helps to anticipate and prepare for the negative consequences of trends and events taking place in some parts of the system that may affect its other parts.

3. Images of futures profoundly condition the present and affect what people consider to be worth doing. Individuals have their own images which help them to define their present role and future ambitions. The analysis of future images can give insights into social and cultural change. These images can be also evaluated as desirable or not desirable and be used as an inspiration or a warning.

4. Most young people are already interested in futures. All human beings are interested in the future course of their lives. Future-oriented thinking can help people to reveal and address their aspirations and fears and act about their future in a more informed and responsible way.

Why a RESOURCE CENTER?

In the emerging knowledge society, the access to information is more important than ever. A resource center is a place where this information can be brought together, sorted and ordered so that it would become easy to find it. So what is the current problem in Futures Education the WFSF is addressing with the creation of this resource center?

At present, a number of courses in futures studies are taught in universities around the world. An institutional member of the WFSF, the Australian Foresight Institute, has undertaken a study to create a database of these courses. The most up-to-date database (2005) includes 20 programmes in foresight/futures studies, 12 programmes that incorporate foresight/futures studies, 18 individual courses in foresight/futures studies, and 2 university short courses in 25 countries around the world. In some countries, futures education extends also to primary and secondary schools; however, there is not much evidence available to support this statement, with the exception of the well documented Australian experience.

The dissemination of futures education cannot be seen as satisfactory, and yet in recent years, the number of programmes and courses has been decreasing. Three main factors are responsible for the current fragility of futures education:

1. The field is not widely recognised as an ‘academic’ discipline. The existent programmes and courses are very often linked to a specific person within the university, who recognises

the importance of futures education and has the resources and power to create such a programme or course.

2. Universities around the world are under severe financial pressure and consequently forced to increase their incomes. This leads to the reduction in programmes and courses that are considered as not financially rewarding. As futures studies is a relatively new, and not widely known discipline, courses in foresight/futures studies are often first among those to be cut.

3. The generation of current futures educators is approaching the retirement age. Many of these teachers do not have guaranteed successors from the new generation of futurists, or from the university itself.

The WFSF, recognizing the pressing need for futures education and its current fragility, considers supporting futures education as one of its main priorities. Discussions among WFSF members have highlighted the genuine need for a futures pedagogical resource centre that would bring together the existing teaching resources and protect the legacy of the first generation of futures educators. Such a resource centre is strongly desired by current teachers and would prove invaluable to the prospective educators.

The creation of such a resource centre is important not only because it aims to protect the intellectual legacy of futures educators, but also, because it will provide access to futures education materials for people (teachers and 'self learners') who would not otherwise have access to these resources for a variety of reasons (lack of courses in a country of residence, financial constraints). Enabling access to education in futures studies, moreover, is very important for people in developing countries, as already outlined. The innovative teaching methods (e.g. games and collective thinking processes), developed especially for teaching futures studies, can be easily adopted into unconventional educational settings, such as teaching of illiterate people.

Why ONLINE?

The motivation for an online resource centre may seem obvious. To settle a permanent physical center would need large financial resources for renting the place, maintain it, collect the physical prints, store them, etc. while it would limit the access only to the area of the world where this place would be fixed into.

At the opposite, an online center is relatively cheap to create and maintain and it is accessible from all the parts of the world. The weakness of the web-based center is the fact not all the inhabitants of the planet have an Internet access; however they are probably more numerous, among the prospective population interested by futures studies than those who can travel to access a unique physical place in the world.

However, beyond this apparent simplicity, the situation of a web-base service is more complex than it appears. Indeed the current generation of officers in charge of the WFSF has a greater knowledge in dealing with hardcopy printings than with digital documents; and with the organisational principles of a physical library than with new generations of open source systems, such as MERLOT; not to mention the maintenance of such databases. Thus the choice of an "online" resource centre, even if obvious, has not been a so simple one to implement.

b) Benefits, major results

The results of the project are of different natures.

Creation of the online futures studies pedagogical resource center

The first and most important result is the implementation of this online resource center.

To begin (step 1), we set up a team in charge of this project, formed by three persons: a member of the Executive Board of the Federation to oversee and coordinate the project, a specialist of pedagogy with a significant experience in teaching and a specialist of new technologies (ICT) dedicated to education. The pedagogue was in charge to deal with the content of the material we collected to order it and propose a classification. This one has been submitted to the suggestions and critics of the WFSF membership according to a transparent process.

Then (step 2), we sent our members a letter asking them to send us their pedagogical material: Course Syllabi, Programs of Study, Lessons or Lesson Plans, Bibliographies (References for Books and Articles) , Games and other Learning Activities (Including Software and On-Line Technologies), Handbooks, Presentation Outlines (including PowerPoint), Papers, Other Course Material. Moreover several non-members asked to participate and were very welcome.

During the step 3, the material was ordered and classified. Questions were raised such as the place of games. We decided that a game must be considered as a pedagogical tool if it has been designed for this purpose, like the famous World Game from B. FULLER.

The step 4 was dedicated to the technical part of the project: finding suitable software that would be well known by the academic world and easily accessible for the non-academic. The specialist in charge of that spotted MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Repository for Learning and Online Teaching) as the best system fitting our requirements. MERLOT is an international cooperative (hosted by the California State University) formed for the purpose of aggregating and making freely accessible high quality online resources to improve learning and teaching within higher education. The cooperative connects systems, consortiums, and institutions of higher education, professional organizations of academic disciplines, and individual members to form a community of people who strive to enrich the teaching and learning experience. Our specialist negotiated a special agreement between MERLOT and the WFSF (see annex 1) that has allowed to use a specifically designed template to categorized our documents and linked them to the huge database of MERLOT (cf. www.merlot.org).

To achieve the last step (5), we have had to redesign the website of the WFSF in order to create a new space to host our documents and from where they are linked to the MERLOT database. We hired a webmaster to design, create and implement this new website, especially the part dedicated to the MERLOT system (see www.wfsf.org).

The online resource center being now implemented, we will dedicate our energy to make it widely known and use, by learners as well as by teachers who will continuously enrich it.

Explicitation of implicit presuppositions

1. What is a pedagogical document?

This is the second kind of result that we have gained from this project. What can be regarded as pedagogical? The questions of the content control of the provided material, of its pedagogical quality, and of its respects of academic criteria were debated. At the end, it has been decided that a teaching in FS (like in many other disciplines) was formed by different kind of information: the course itself –which is the property of its author (a 'certified' teacher) and, as such, irreproachable– supported by a text or a powerpoint, including bibliographies (which must respect the formal criteria); the pedagogical documents that are used in the course, such as games, case studies, exercises, etc. which have the same status than the course; and, finally, the "advanced readings" with both scientific papers (i.e. submitted to referees) and non-scientific readings, classified in two distinct categories.

2. The "open source" principle

During the research of the adequate system to display our pedagogical material, the question of the open source has been arisen. Through the debate, it became quickly obvious that the very purpose of the Federation makes an obligation for it to use open source systems, in order to promote futures studies as broadly as possible. This principle has never been expressed before the implementation of this project.

3. The WFSF's support to the Creative Commons

What is Creative Commons? "Too often the debate over creative control tends to the extremes. At one pole is a vision of total control — a world in which every last use of a work is regulated and in which “all rights reserved” (and then some) is the norm. At the other end is a vision of anarchy — a world in which creators enjoy a wide range of freedom but are left vulnerable to exploitation. Balance, compromise, and moderation — once the driving forces of a copyright system that valued innovation and protection equally — have become endangered species." Creative Commons is working to revive them. This charitable corporation use private rights to create public goods: creative works set free for certain uses. Like the free software and open-source movements, their ends are cooperative and community-minded, but their means are voluntary and libertarian. They work to offer creators a best-of-both-worlds way to protect their works while encouraging certain uses of them — to declare “some rights reserved.”

Thus, along the same line of ideas than the "open source" principle, it also became clear during this process of implementation that the WFSF wants to respect the Creative Commons and makes its support explicit. This is why this mention appears now on our new website.

Emergence of a new collaborative culture

Most of the futurists are disseminated all over the world and isolated; this is likely why they are rather highly individualistic. This project has promoted within the Federation the necessity to collaborate, at least from two points of view.

The first concerns academic contents: futurists were very reluctant to share their material; however the fact that some of the most preminent of them have set the good example, has

pushed others to contribute, as well as the fact that non-members spontaneously contributed. Moreover, the capitalization of such materials now shows how useful it is and thus how important to contribute. Capitalization on a permanent mode is a new feature for the WFSF.

The second concerns the team work. In order to manage this project in a professional manner, we have set up a "basecamp" project (see www.basecamp.com) with all the facilities to communicate, store the files, etc. Thus the members of the team have been used to an efficient system of project management and this should increase the quality of the cooperative work within the Federation.

This project has clearly induced what we hope will become a permanent new collaborative culture within the WFSF.

Creation of a new website

Last but not least in the daily functioning of the WFSF, the choice of MERLOT and the subsequent need to host the pedagogical material on our website, led us to rethink entirely our own website. In order to better promote our actions undertaken with the support of Unesco, we created two new features: the Online Centre for Pedagogical Resources in FS –OCPR–, directly connected to the Merlot template, and the Conferences Center, designed as a repository capitalising all information from the previous conferences organised by the WFSF with the sponsoring of Unesco.

The new website is not only more adapted to deliver better services to the WFSF's members and non-members, but it is also more efficient from a technical (and ethical) point of view, as it uses Joomla facilities (an open source) and offers better features with a relatively easy maintenance.

c) Difficulties and solutions emerged

Difficulties	Solutions
the very late information (end of April 2007) by Unesco that our request was accepted	a very tight organising process and the obtention of a prorogation until March 2008
individualist behaviour preventing educators to share their material	adoption of the Common Creatives to convince educators to share
capitalizing the material considering its heterogeneity	discussion and adoption of a first classification; a working group has been formed to improve this classification during the coming year
the choice of a system to store and spread this resource center: the time needed to explore several alternatives (none of us being an expert in this field) contributed a lot to the delay	due to the emergency, we went for MERLOT which is partly an open source and whose the staff helped us to use it
coordination of the project in an efficient way considering the volunteer-based work	a member of the Executive Board has been dedicated to the supervision of this project

d) Publicizing and UNESCO's visibility

Futures education and the UNESCO agenda

UNESCO has emphasised the importance of futures education since the early 1990s. One of the three main activities promoted under the 'future-oriented studies' programme created in 1992 involved the development of education and training with special emphasis on disseminating futures methodologies. The WFSF recognises that futures thinking, although undoubtedly useful in most disciplines and areas around the world, is more than ever required by youth, women and in less developed countries.

Futures education plays an important role in 'empowering' young people (students) through exposing and exploring the futures and providing approaches that help them to understand and address their future responsibilities. Knowledge and understanding of futures thinking is extremely useful for young people in making their life choices, both personal and professional. It generates awareness about the short- and long-term consequences of their decisions as well as helping to anticipate the opportunities and difficulties lying ahead. The intrinsic link of futures studies with the well-being of humanity directs youth's attention towards their role and place in society and encourages young people to realise their full potential within society. The understanding of the fact that peoples' futures are inherently linked to societal futures helps to develop a more 'collective' rather than 'individualistic' mindset and leads to a greater awareness about the importance of peace and dialogue between civilisations.

Futures education is also essential in 'empowering' women, especially in countries where their rights are not really recognised. Several different reasons can be listed to explain why futures education is crucial in addressing women needs and gender issues. Firstly, as in the case of young people, futures education helps women to make more informed decisions about their personal, educational and professional futures. Secondly, it helps decision-makers to recognise the importance of gender equality and assists in developing means for greater integration of women in society, education and employment. And finally, it encourages women to be more involved in futures studies and policy and decision-making. It is widely recognised that women visions of the future are somewhat different from those created by men, as they place greater emphasis on peace, inclusion, social justice and equality. Therefore, increased participation of women in futures studies can help shift the focus towards these issues.

Futures thinking and education is especially required in less developed countries. This has been recognised and addressed in the past, for example by the study *Rethinking the Future: A Manual of Futures Studies for African Planners* (1986) prepared by World Futures Studies Federation and the United Nations Development Programme. Futures education is crucial for developing long-term views, exploring alternative visions of the future that are based on a comprehensive understanding of historical context and political and cultural linkages that form the context for a given nation or community. Futures thinking is particularly useful in encouraging sustainable development, and through careful analysis of the present situation and possible future alternatives, it helps to manage limited resources (e.g. water) in a more effective and efficient way. It promotes innovative and creative thinking and action, and supports collaboration and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

UNESCO and the WFSF

In the futurists' community, the strong relationship between WFSF and UNESCO are well-known. The Federation is the unique major NGO in the field of Futures Studies with such a special link with Unesco: a formal consultative status. This dedication of the WFSF to the major goals of UNESCO (youth, women, peace, education) is part of its essence.

The WFSF's [website](#) has always advertised these links, their reasons and the benefit for the community. On the home page of the WFSF website, the OPCR is explicitly mentioned as "A joint project between UNESCO and WFSF". Already the number of hits on this [page](#) is more than 3 time the average of hits on the other pages of the website!

A special workshop will be hold during the next World Conference in Trollhättan, Sweden, from 30 June to 3 July 2008. It will be dedicated to Futures Education and the OPCR will be largely publicized there.

A special paper will also be published in the Futures Bulletin, the quaterly newspaper of the WFSF. We hope also to publish a paper about it in the Journal of FS, when some improvements will have been made.

Finally considering the very large panel of educators within the Federation, we can consider that all the universities teaching Futures Studies in the world are now aware of the existence of the OPCR.

e) UNESCO consultation

The UNESCO has been consulted through the whole organization process. Fabienne Goux Baudiment, President of the WFSF, was in direct contact with UNESCO field officers in Paris. These consultations contributed to solve the problem of the deadline thanks to a prorogation.

IV. Follow-up activites and long term plans

Short-terms activities:

- ❖ Conference and financial report to UNESCO and WFSF
- ❖ Publication of a paper concerning this project (goals, process, implementation) in an international journal (the Journal of FS).
- ❖ Creation of a partnership with a worldwide group of futures educators in order to improve the dissemination, promotion and development of the OPCR.

Long-term activities:

- ❖ In order to prepare the second version of the OPCR, the WFSF plans to dedicate a special task force to this goal. This group will have 3 goals:

- Increase the collection of material and re-organise it;
- Assess the use of the current version;
- Elaborate the 2nd version considering the results of the assesment, from both an academic and technical point of view.

Moreover, in case the request of the WFSF for the PP 2008-2009 would be accepted, we would introduce a specific section in the OCPR dedicated to Indian teaching of Futures Studies.

VI. Other funding sources:

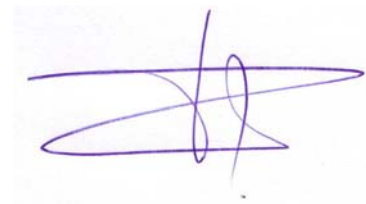
This project has only been funded by UNESCO and WFSF.

VI. Any other observations

The OCPR can be visited at the following address:

<http://teachingcommons.cdl.edu/wfsf/index.html>

Paris, March 31, 2008



Fabienne GOUX-BAUDIMENT
president and treasurer 2005-2009

Annex: home page of the OCPR

The screenshot shows the home page of the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF). At the top left, it features the CSU logo and the text "The California State University". The main header area contains the WFSF logo and the text "WORLD FUTURES STUDIES FEDERATION". To the right of the logo is a search bar with a "GO" button and links for "advanced search", "search more digital libraries", and "search tips". Below the header is a navigation bar with links for "MERLOT [COMMONS]", "Browse Materials", "Contribute Materials", "Member Directory", "Join MERLOT/", and "Login to MERLOT". A secondary navigation bar contains buttons for "Home", "Futures Networks", "Futures Studies", "Professional Lifelong Learning", "Leading-Edge Research", "Planetary Futures Projects", "Pedagogical Resources", and "Community of Practice". A "Contact Us" button is located below the navigation bar.

Welcome to
WORLD FUTURES STUDIES FEDERATION

Online Centre for Pedagogical Resources in Futures Studies

The Online Centre for Pedagogical Resources in Futures Studies is a joint project between UNESCO and the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF). It is affiliated with the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT), California State University.

Project Coordinator: Jennifer GIDLEY (Executive Board Member, WFSF)
Project Development Team: Fabienne GOUX-BAUDIMENT (President, WFSF), Jonathon RICHTER, Tom LOMBARDO, Jennifer GIDLEY

Join Our WFSF Listserv

The WFSF Listserv provides a venue to share resources, announce events, discuss issues, problem solve, and network. The Listserv is moderated to prevent spam and ensure that all postings are on-subject.

[Join WFSF...](#)

News

Announcement re WFSF Sweden Conference needed here

What is the WFSF?

McAfee