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Exploring the Possibility of Future(s)

Futures Workshop as a tool for exploration and imagination

The realisation of the „grandest sociotechnical imaginary of our time" (Beck et al. 2021, 143) – sustainability – depends on the imagination and creation of a future radically different from the present. In order to achieve that, „the' future first needs to be opened up: options now presented as unavoidable and their realisation „only a matter of time" need to be problematised and scrutinised. A futures workshop can create the space for exploring how teaching and learning might happen in the future(s) and provide a starting point for seeing the future as unfixed. This is where the imaginative work of looking towards alternatives begins.

Futures literacy, imagination, futures workshop

Topic: Exploring possible futures

WHAT is it about? WHO is it about?

The prominent imaginaries of the future by dominant powers are often presented as fixed and linear, only waiting to be realised (Death 2022). However, the changes advocated by scientists to move towards sustainability require a radically different way of doing things (Mukherji et al. 2023), thus pointing to the need to open up the future to alternatives. Sadly, many education systems still follow a paradigm rooted in industrialist, linear, and reductionist thinking (Courtney & Mann 2021; Sterling & Orr 2001), making them badly equipped to address the sustainability issues we are facing today. As the belief that education can serve as an important driver towards giving rise to a more sustainable future from the unsustainable present is widespread among academics and policy-makers alike (Andersson 2017; Bianchi et al. 2022; Sterling & Orr 2001; Wiek & Redman 2022), preparing futures literate teachers, who can imagine and work to fulfil alternative ways of learning and teaching, is an important step towards sustainability.

Didactics

This learning scenario provides prospective teachers the time and space to explore and imagine (alternative) futures. Such an approach makes use of active learning methods and allows for prospective teachers to construct their own understanding of the task.

WHO is the target group? WHO are possible cooperation partners?

The learning scenario at hand is targeted to prospective teachers/teacher students of higher education institutions, or anyone interested in the possibility of exploring the future(s) of learning and teaching. The materials for the futures workshop can also be customised to explore the possible futures of other fields.

WHY is this topic relevant to *CultureNature Literacy*? WHERE is it going?

Envisioning sustainable futures makes up an important set of competences in *GreenComp* (Bianchi et al. 2022), where „learners are advised to think of a wide range of possible future outcomes and envision alternative future scenarios for sustainability" (*ibid.,* 23). This forms an important aspect for furthering prospective teachers' Futures Literacy skills (CNL & Futures Literacy) and is widely recognised as vital in the context of the polycrisis (Lawrence et al. 2022) of the Anthropocene. The learning scenario at hand turns the focus to prospective teachers' capability to recognise narratives about the future as uncertain and not fixed. Creating and comparing different scenarios of the future helps students to discuss and evaluate the desirability of various imaginaries of the future, thus building to increase their sense of agency in steering towards the more preferred options.

WHEN, in which period does this take place?

The learning scenario is designed to take place over a period of either one to three 90-minute seminars in any university course (depending on how much of the proposed workshop is planned in contact lessons). While the focus is currently on imagining alternative futures for education, teaching, and learning, the content of the futures workshop can be adapted to address any field. (Teacher) Students need sufficient time to imagine the future(s) of education, learning, and teaching, so step 1 of the workshop can be completed either in class (during a 90-minute seminar) or by students individually at home.

HOW to proceed?

Step 1: Divide (teacher) students into groups and provide each of them with one table from the material presented below. Students in one group should be given a similar table. Instruct them to individually imagine and fill the table according to instructions provided. This step can be completed in a seminar or by the students at home.

Step 2: Once students have filled out the table, divide them into groups of 3 or 4; students with similar assignments/tables should be grouped together. Have them share the futures they have imagined and direct them to evaluate the desirability of each of the alternatives they have created. Also direct their attention to what they think has influenced their imaginaries of the future: Have they drawn inspiration from the dominant narratives presented by the media or have they rather relied on fictional or imaginary influences?

This step can be completed in smaller groups. Thus, it might be preferable to provide students with the option of organising their own meeting time and place (an online discussion might be preferred by some groups).

Step 3: Have students create a „master" imaginary for how they think learning/teaching/education/the classroom will *most likely* look like based on their individual visions. Students should be ready to present their imaginary to the class at large. Using visual and/or physical aids to create a more tangible imaginary might help the students better grasp the future(s) as they imagine.

This step also can be completed in smaller groups; thus it might be preferable to provide students with the option of organising their own meeting time and place (an online discussion might be preferred by some groups).

Step 4: Have students present their group imaginaries with the whole class. Guide the class in discussion as to the desirability of the imaginaries as they are presented. Do most students feel like „things are going in the right direction"?

If so, guide them to adopt a more critical viewpoint and analyse how and where the imagined future might create or perpetuate inequalities (and how to alleviate the potential risk). This step would create a more fuller and vivid image of the imagined future, while drawing attention to the risk of further alienating disadvantaged groups.

If most students perceive the presented imaginary as a change towards the negative, have them imagine and propose changes towards more desirable outcomes. Be aware that this step can create friction between participants as evaluating the desirability of a potential future is tied to personal beliefs and values, so creating a supportive and emotionally secure learning environment is paramount.

Step 5 (optional): Have students discuss how they can increase the likelihood of the desired futures materialising, while keeping in mind „that it is impossible to know what will happen

and thus the idea of trying to control what will happen [should] be rejected" (Bianchi et al. 2022, 23).

WHAT is being worked with?

Study material created by authors (each group to receive one worksheet):

Group 1: Imagining teaching and teachers in the future

The task is to imagine teaching and the role of teachers in the future. We would ask you to discuss and then provide your answers to the following questions:

What will be the main role of teachers in the future?	
Where will teaching be taking place?	
What are the main risks that teachers will be dealing with in the future?	

Group 2: Imagining learning and learners in the future

The task is to imagine learning and learners in the future. We would ask you to discuss and then provide your answers to the following questions:

What will learners of the future be learning about? Will it still be about subjects like Math, Science, Literature, etc.?	
Where will learning be taking place in the future?	

What are the main risks that learners will be facing in the future?	

Group 3: Imagining the relationship between teachers and learners in the future

The task is to imagine the relationship between teachers and learners in the future. We would ask you to discuss and then provide your answers to the following questions:

Which aspects of the relationship between teachers and students should be changed?	
Will there still be a rigid separation between who is teaching and who is learning?	
What are the main risks that the relationship between teachers and learners will be facing in the future?	

Group 4: Imagining the future classroom

The task is to imagine the future classroom. We would ask you to discuss and then provide your answers to the following questions:

What changes would you foresee in the architecture and furniture of the classroom of the future?	
Where will the future classroom be located?	

Is there anything that should not be changed about the classroom as we know it today?	

WHERE does the learning scenario take place?

Step 1 of the learning scenario can be completed by the students either at home or in class. Steps 2 and 3 require a small group discussion and, as such, should be conducted by the students either face-to-face or online. It might be preferable for the students to choose the location according to their own needs. Steps 4 and 5 require a big group discussion, but this can also be held either online or face-to-face. As students are also asked to share their hopes and fears with the bigger group in this stage, the location should permit and encourage such sharing.

Literature

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Quality criteria | SDGs

Sustainability: Learning to see the future as uncertain and probabilistic forms the basis for imagining and creating sustainable futures.

Inclusion: Recognising the uncertainty and possible alternatives of/for the future permits and encourages including alternative viewpoints and visions of desirable futures into the prevalent discourse. Focusing on adding alternative viewpoints of desirability in the creation of possible futures encourages a policy of inclusion.

Digitality: It is possible to conduct the learning scenario fully online, thus providing the option of including different and distant voices to the conversation.

Target group correspondence: The target group of the learning scenario is first and foremost prospective teachers who are encouraged to explore alternative visions of the future. The workshop can be customised to appeal to any field, however.

SDG: SDG4, but as all of the SDGs require imagining and creating a future different from the present, the competence addressed by the learning scenario is best characterised as a meta-goal to help in realisation of the more concrete SDGs.

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