



WFS Learning Section
Bulletin
Summer 2007

FUTUREtakes publishes the *WFS Learning Section Bulletin* by special arrangement with the World Future Society (WFS) Learning Section Steering Team. Issues of the *WFS Learning Section Bulletin* typically include foresight education exercises, an educator spotlight column, and synopses of the annual WFS Education Summit.

Launching the WFS Futures Learning Section.....

by Peter Bishop, Steve Steele, and Dave Stein

In the late nineties, futurist Jim Dator pointed out with some concern that while the study of futures had existed many years, futures learning had not found a toehold in academic departments and training programs in the world's colleges and corporations. Perhaps one reason for this is the lack of a concentrated effort to organize and promote futures learning. While several organizations have produced a long history of futures investigation, a longstanding, transcending, group exclusively focused on futures learning has failed to find traction.

Attendees at two organizational sessions at the Toronto and Minneapolis World Future Society annual meetings in 2006 and 2007 showed interest in establishing a futures learning group. To this end, an *ad hoc* steering committee created the **futures learning section** as part of the World Future Society. The fundamental objective is for schools, colleges, and universities to promote futures learning at all levels from academic environments to corporate boardrooms, from citizen groups to preschoolers. By the end of August 2007, action teams were formed, a listserv was launched, and a Web page on the World Future Society's Web site was opened.

Looking forward, several objectives emerged that can easily be accomplished before the 2008 World Future Society meeting in Washington DC. Surely for the sake of discussion our objectives for DC next year can be –

1. Establish the section framework
2. Schedule a professional day to kick off the Learning Section

To these objectives, let me add –

3. Set up and test a repository of a few materials to support futures learning (a small repository at first)
4. Develop the section connection with the WFS
5. Manage the network we've created
6. Ensure continuity of leadership

Let's examine these in turn.

Section framework. Just having a Web site, a listserv and several groups of people who say they are willing to contribute their energy does not an active group make! Throughout the remainder of 2007 and the first half of 2008, a constructive framework for the section must be established and maintained. Insight into the structure suggests a 21st century notion of flexibility, adaptability, and morphing into a constant new reality.

Professional day. Tim Mack, President of the World Future Society, has agreed that the WFS will provide one day at the 2008 annual meeting for the futures learning summit meeting. While the final say on the annual meetings rests with the society's leadership, a team of interested futurists led by Yvonne Andres (Global School Net) has begun the process of creating a list of recommendations for that summit. As a rough overview of the summit's content, one might envision two major themes. One theme would address the nature of education and learning itself on a global basis. The other theme would address the nature of futures studies and learning. Suggestions for the meeting are encouraged and should be sent to Yvonne at yvonne@gsn.org.

Ensure continuity of leadership. Within the next twelve months, at least two important leadership issues need to be resolved if the section is to be viable. First, organizational leadership needs to be established within the WFS. This means that the association must take responsibility for providing organization linkage and basic resources (most likely leased) to maintain the section. Secondly, the steering committee must create a structure for leadership continuity and eventual transfer. Perhaps in the first year, section facilitators can serve as interim directors or other leaders.

As Professor Peter Bishop points out, the group's mission is to help teachers introduce studies about the future into all levels of education, to include secondary schools, community colleges, and universities. To this end, what would be helpful? As of now, our initial list is as follows:

1. Presentation material
2. Activities
3. Lessons, classes
4. Course modules (more than one lesson/class but less than an entire course)
5. Course syllabi
6. Degree programs and certifications

Also useful would be a set of "teaching points" – that is, big ideas, major topics, enduring understandings, and provocative questions, according to a curriculum development process called Understanding by Design. Teachers could develop their own lessons and materials against those points.

Interaction with others who are trying to do the same things is essential. Unfortunately, teachers rarely "talk shop," particularly in regard to what they are teaching in specific modules or classes. The challenge: how can we stimulate that process and thereby promote a cross-pollination of ideas?

All in all, it appears that some type of materials repository (open courseware material for example) along with a method of interaction – online and face-to-face WFS meetings – would be beneficial. Futures educators might benefit from a completely separate track for teachers during the WFS Professional Day.

Of course, we'll need to advertise the existence of the group, the repository, and the interaction through teacher's organizations and other academic professional societies. Perhaps section funds can flow through the WFS to the Learning Section through separate nominal dues. This will provide funds to the section – and with them, a sense of helping grow the next generation of futurists and a future-aware public.

For further information, or to get involved with any of the action teams, please contact the members of the steering team:

- Professor Steve Steele, Institute for the Future at Anne Arundel Community College, sfstele@aacc.edu
- Professor Peter Bishop, University of Houston, pbishop@uh.edu
- Dave Stein, **FUTUREtakes**, editorinchief@futuretakes.org