

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

ROSE ERIKSON

Allowing pupils to explore what might happen in the future helps them to think about, reason and evaluate the world around them. As Rose argues, through this approach we can nurture confident individuals who shape their own beliefs and are socially aware of the wider community.

If we accept that what we do as educators is to prepare pupils for the future, to become socially active and engaged in all aspects of the community, then there would appear to be a deficiency in our current curriculum. It does not provide opportunities for pupils to think prudently about the future and their role in it. However, enabling pupils to explore what might happen in the future can help them think for themselves. They can then evaluate the world around them.

The National Curriculum aims that pupils must: 'Understand the processes that give rise to key physical and human geographical features of the world, how these are interdependent and how they bring about spatial variation and change over time' (DfE, 2014). Through this, we can nurture individuals who are more socially aware of their community and of society; who understand the impact of their decisions on future generations; and who believe they can have a positive impact on society.

Many authors and researchers have focused on the potential of futures work in geography, including David Hicks and Jim Dator. The Sustainable Development Commission publication, *Every Child's Future Matters* (SDC, 2010) illustrates the importance of focusing not only on the big concepts, but also on the child's everyday geographies.

In 2008, David Hicks developed nine key concepts in futures education, which are useful to consider here:

1. State of the world – How world issues affect children's lives in the present and future and what actions they can bring about to solve them.
2. Managing change – children need to gain the skills of adapting to change.
3. Views of the future – children need to be aware of how views of the future differ and how they affect people's priorities in the present.

4. Alternative futures – exploring a range of probable and preferable futures.
5. Hopes and fears – children need to explore their own hopes and fears for the future and learn to work creatively and realistically with them.
6. Past/present/future – these are inextricably connected; thus, children need to explore the links between them and gain a sense of continuity and change as well as responsibility for the future.
7. Visions for the future – children need to develop their skills of creative imagination.
8. Future generations – children need to discuss the rights and responsibilities of future generations.
9. Sustainable futures – to understand how a sustainable society applies to children's everyday lives and future employment.

Future News

During my PGCE, I was introduced to New Economics Foundation's (NEF) Future News newspapers (see web panel) through my geography specialism. Each NEF newspaper is based on a different future scenario: including, for example, one where we have prevented a catastrophic environmental disaster, one where the waste of resources has escalated and people are closely controlled by a government that has reintroduced rationing, and one in which people are living in a more balanced and sustainable way with our environment. These scenarios were created to help readers think about how the effects of global climate change could affect communities, organisations and families and what they might do to help tackle it. The newspapers outlined in Figure 1 offer an engaging way for groups of pupils to gain an understanding of the futures dimension as they read about different scenarios and consider how they want to live in the near future.

Putting the idea into practice

Working with a year 6 class on the topic of environmental issues, I wanted to develop their approach to exploring the future in a real way. This was not about making predictions or getting lost in the fantasy of science fiction, but about finding credible and desirable futures to encourage pupils to make good decisions in the present.

The rationale behind the project was to help them to see what sort of future the class envisioned, whether they would accept it or want to change it and, therefore, ultimately 'discover or invent, examine, evaluate and propose possible, probable and preferable futures' (Bell, 2004).

The class was split into four groups; each group was given a different newspaper and the key question: 'Would you want to live in a world as portrayed by your newspaper?' (Figure 1.) The project took place over four lessons:

- in the first, groups were introduced to the newspapers, encouraged to discuss both the stories and their implications
- the next two lessons were used to plan and create an additional page to the existing newspaper (Figure 2), and
- in the final lesson groups discussed their completed newspaper with each other.

In the first lesson, we talked about what the pupils thought might happen in the future, not just in their own lives, but also in their communities. We also discussed whether they felt that they could influence what might happen in the future to bring about change in a rapidly evolving world. From the apprehensive looks on their faces, I understood how the pupils felt: helpless when confronted with some of the realities of the world and their influence upon it. However, as Freire highlights, as teachers, we should 'unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be' (Freire, 1998).

In my opinion, it is important to engage in such work with pupils to facilitate and generate discussion about issues that concern them. This helps them to consider a range of ways to address their fears through debate and discussion as a whole class, in groups and in pairs to generate possible and practical solutions.

When creating their own newspapers the groups established roles for each individual in order to ensure the process was efficient and positive. Each element had different roles for those designing the overview, creating the articles, generating images with captions and crafting the adverts. The final lesson involved the pupils asking each other questions based on their group newspaper – both within and between the groups. These included 'What would you want to read about if this was your newspaper?' and 'How would you feel if you lived in a world like this?'.



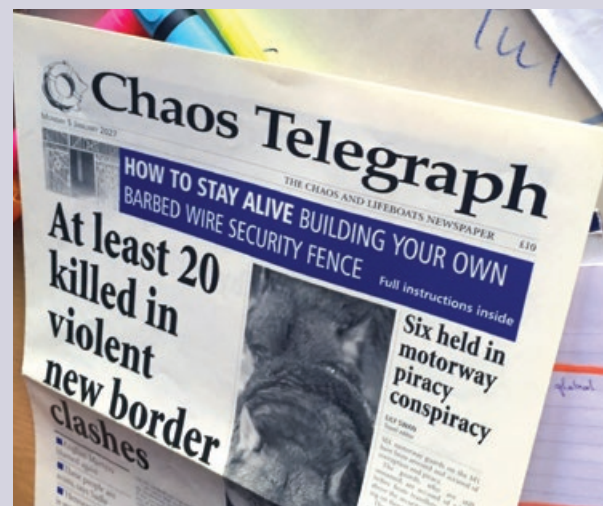
The *Interdependent* newspaper comes from a time where we have used the values of community and social solidarity to reduce our carbon emissions. While we all feel the effects of a moderate rise in global temperatures, strong social bonds have allowed us to remain happy and healthy.



The *Control Express* is a newspaper from a future in which the state has acted forcefully to control climate change. Taxation and rationing have protected the population from the worst effects of climate change, but at a cost to individual freedom.



The *Coping Standard* comes from a future where a deep sense of shared understanding was not enough to prevent catastrophic global warming. As society struggles to adapt, it draws on social bonds to protect the most vulnerable.



The *Chaos Telegraph* comes from a world in which climate change and social division have continued unabated. As the global climate becomes increasingly chaotic, those with the resources to do so seek out safe havens, while the majority of the global population faces an uncertain future.

Figure 1: Would you want to live in a world as portrayed by your newspaper?

The responses generated some highly charged exchanges between the groups. With more time, I would have encouraged further structured discussion by incorporating David Hicks' (2007) five questions to further focus the geographical learning taking place, these are:

1. Do you think people like this possible future?
2. What are some of the good things about it?
3. What are some of the difficult things about it?

4. Who will benefit and who will lose from this future?
5. Why would you/would you not like to live in this future?

These effective questioning or enquiry techniques would help the groups to analyse and evaluate the work they had done in a way that would bring about an accomplished understanding of their own futures perspective. It would also help pupils develop as socially-active citizens of the community.

The outcomes

From thinking of geography on both a global and a local community level, the class created their own interpretation of solutions to environmental issues because they were much more aware of the implications of their actions. Starting at the local level, they designed flyers to remind everyone in school to turn off the lights when leaving a room, turn the water tap off when not needed, use the recycling bins wisely and reuse paper when possible – all of which had a noticeable impact in school.

