

Futures Thinking for Social Foresight

Dr. Richard A. Slaughter
with Dr. Marcus Bussey

[Futures Thinking for Social Foresight](#) is a comprehensive resource that introduces basic principles of futures studies for educators and students. The book, first published in 2005 and revised in 2012, includes a wide array of activities such as timelines and mapping techniques to help learners grasp the fundamental concepts of the discipline.

The book is divided into five categories. Part one outlines key concepts of futures studies and describes fundamental concepts; part two provides context and describes futures applications; part three explores futures concepts and related techniques, especially using time in these actions; part four introduces widely-used futures studies methods; and part five argues the necessity to employ futures thinking for creating social foresight.¹ Moreover, each of the five categories is accompanied by a series of “reflections” that provide additional context and opportunity to apply futures techniques. Numerous diagrams, visuals, cartoons, figures and worksheets are also included, with and alongside activities designed for curriculum use.²

The book contains a number of classroom and learning activities such as the following --.

- *Ways of knowing* – understanding the trajectory of a term, cultural practice, assumption or belief
- *A four-quadrant analysis* – mapping reality to provide a framework
- *Time-line of alternative futures* – establishing choice to explore what is possible and preferable

1 The argument is that, supported with a foundation of futures concepts, tools and techniques, futures proficiency will consequently fuel development of social foresight. Social foresight “embraces the integral nature of consciousness and thus allows for individual, cultural, social and environmental factors to come together in a set of relationships and contexts that approximate our human ‘reality’. For futures work to be effective it needs this breadth. Furthermore, with breadth comes a sense of ownership and responsibility for the results of our activities on this planet; this sense of responsibility is appropriate when humanity is facing some seemingly intractable problems. Social foresight enables us to rethink our situation and empowers us to act in the light of the future, for the future.” (Page 5)

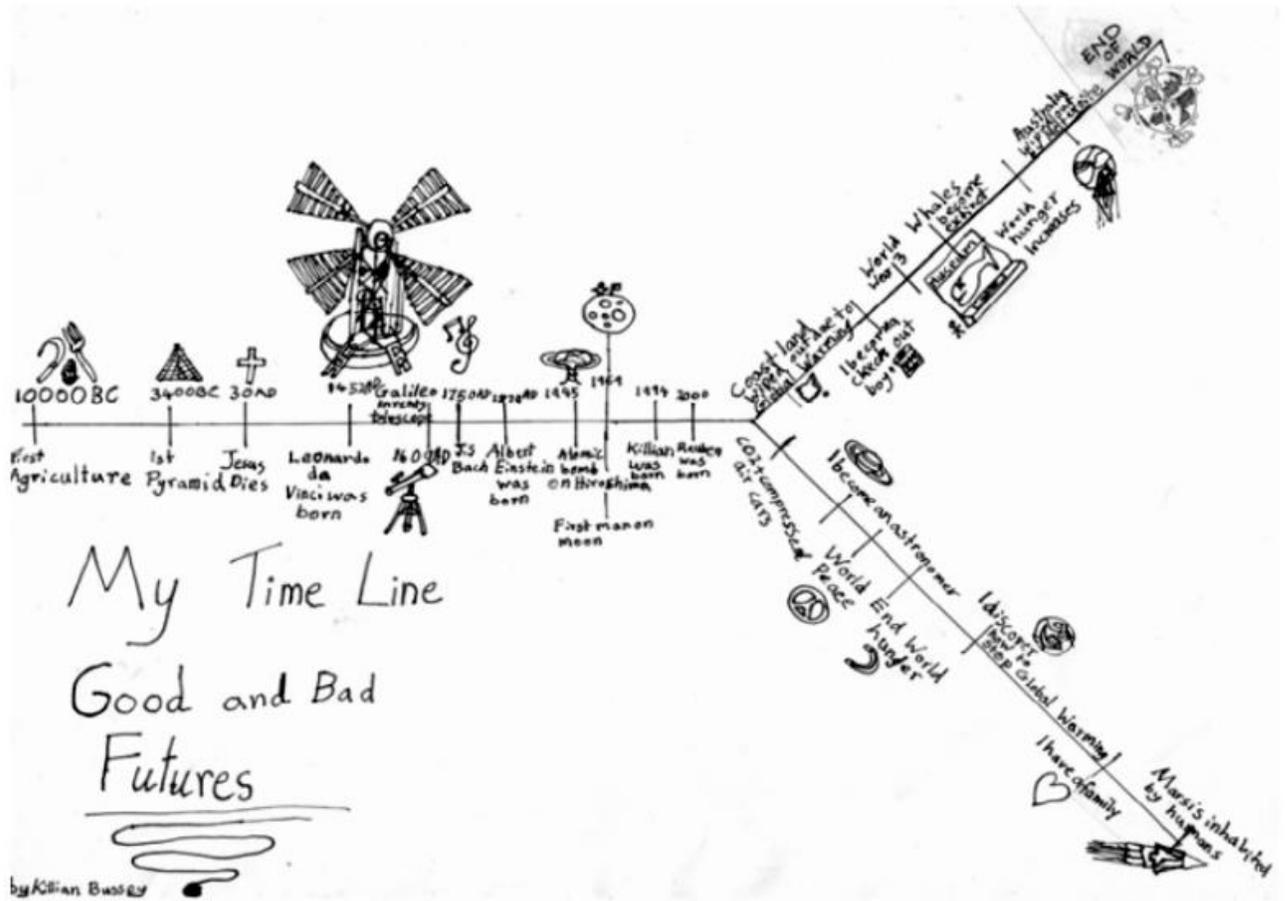
2 Detailed lists of categories, reflections and figures are presented at the end of this document.



- *Interaction of past, present and future* – exhibiting past, present and future as distinguishable yet inseparable
- *Extended present* – reframing the present to incorporate history, near-term futures and future generations
- *Logo (image) exercise* – demonstrating the power of symbols in the human psyche and as archetype visualizations

For example, here is the activity using timelines of the past, present and future.

Time-line of alternative futures





1. Have students develop timelines for the past. Choose a point to interrupt the time line with an alternative. This activity helps us understand that the present is unique, being merely one possible set of circumstances that could have arisen.
2. Have students now construct thematic timelines (focusing on an issue like land clearing, globalisation, or war) and project them into the future allowing for two contrasting futures.
3. Have students display timelines and discuss the choices involved in leading to these alternative futures.
4. Have students select a range of choices from their discussion and explore the values that underpin them.



Table of Contents in *Futures Thinking for Social Foresight*

- Part 1: Mapping futures studies—Key concepts
 - 1.1 Futures literacy and social foresight
 - 1.2 What is futures study?
 - 1.3 How can we study futures?
 - 1.4 Why study the future?
 - 1.5 Critical futures study
- Part 2: Context and applications
 - Four contexts of futures study
 - 2.1 The metaproblem
 - 2.2 Mapping reality
 - 2.3 Space and time
 - 2.4 Needs and responsibilities
 - 2.5 Empowerment practices
- Part 3: Futures concepts and related techniques
 - Working with time
 - 3.1 Metaphors of time and the future
 - 3.2 Exploring time and culture
 - 3.3 Time lines and choice
 - 3.4 Backcasting
 - 3.5 Ways to the future: the probable, possible and preferable future
 - 3.6 Thinking about the present: linking past, present and future
 - 3.7 [5.7] Extending the present
 - 3.8 Tradition / continuity / change
 - 3.9 The earth in one year
- Part 4: Methods
 - 4.1 Environmental scanning
 - 4.2 A Delphi survey
 - 4.3 Trend analysis
- Part 5: Futures thinking for social foresight
 - 5.1 Futures literacy and engaged foresight
 - 5.2 Safeguarding the sources of life
 - 5.3 Choosing limits
 - 5.4 Constraining commerce

The book also contains dozens of provocative questions for reflection and discussion as well over 100 figures that illustrate all the concepts on the book.

Dr. Richard A. Slaughter was awarded a PhD in futures studies at the University of Lancaster in the United Kingdom in 1982. He has since authored or edited numerous futures-related books and papers, was Foundation Professor of Foresight at the Australian Foresight Institute, President of the [World Futures Studies Federation](#) and Director of [Foresight International](#)



[Dr. Marcus Bussey](#) is an educator and futurist with over 30 years' experience. He teaches Futures Studies and World History at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia.