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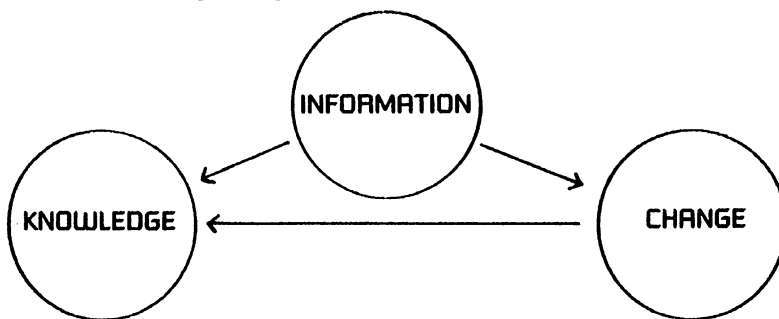
SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Changing Nature of Information, Knowledge, and Education

“Time and change. . . the more change you fit into time, the more information is generated. The more information available, the more knowledge emerges. The more information emerges, the faster change occurs. The faster the creation of information and resultant knowledge, the faster the change. . . and so it goes. This understanding goes to the heart of Toffler’s concept of ‘future shock’. The current unprecedented and accelerating rate of change is remolding many of our ideas about future possibilities. . . it is also precipitating some very fundamental shifts in our society and world. As a result, the need for skills and processes which can help us cope with change is also unprecedented.” (Whaley & Whaley, 1986)

Information, knowledge, and change. . . these three elements form a circle which turns very quickly or slowly, depending upon the quantity and quality of information being generated in a society. The rate of change is directly related to the amount of information. If the quantity and quality of information flow is low level then the amount of knowledge being recognized, and rate of resultant change, are relatively slow. On the other hand, if great amounts of high quality information is being generated, knowledge and resultant change is rapid and pervasive.



This circle does not turn only on information. As is implied above, the three elements are catalysts for each other; they are interconnected. When rapid change occurs, more information is generated about the change and more knowledge may be extracted from the increased information.

We cannot expect this process to stand still, or even slow down, while some elements of schools restructure themselves. We can however, try to promote a realistic and informed sense of ourselves and our children in possible future scenarios.

Our society is in a new era known as the Information Age. Sociologists tell us of the many changes now occurring and of even more on the horizon. They tell us the amount of change this society is undergoing is unprecedented. Never have we seen such rapid shifts in communications, sex roles and family structure, bio-technical and medical services, and employment opportunities. Never has education been challenged to provide skills and information for a time of such change. Education oriented only to the past is unacceptable. Education which focuses on past and current information is betraying the purpose of education: to prepare one for the future.

Today's schools must keep pace with the changing society, look to the future, and appropriately prepare our children for the emerging possibilities. This is not to say the past and present have no place in today's educational process, in fact, the opposite is true. We need to examine the past so we may better understand the present. By understanding the present we may be better able to speculate on future possibilities and options. . . and make more informed decisions.

Our primary charge in education today is to develop a perspective which is more future-focussed. Futures studies may exist as a perspective woven throughout the curriculum; a perspective in which teachers recognize futures studies is not content specific, but something for which we are continually preparing. It is difficult to ignore future developments in mathematics, the sciences, social studies, reading/literature. The influence of developments in all of these fields offer us an opportunity at least to open up discussions on the different possibilities, which exist on various horizons, and what they will mean to us.

Futures studies may also exist as specific courses of studies. In grades 7-12, specific courses are usually housed in the social studies, literature (futures/science-fiction) or the sciences (technological futures, applications in biology, chemistry, physics, etc.).

Futures studies may also exist as a topical focus for many independent study projects for all grade levels. The primary outcome is to get all those involved more familiar with the skills necessary for exploring possibilities

which could exist. An equally important outcome is the development of more positive and sophisticated perspectives and attitudes toward our mutual futures.

The perspective which schools promote should lead to certain changes in both the student and the faculty. These characteristics pave the way to a degree of foresight; a necessary part of personal and global futuring.

What is Futures Studies?

A new area of studies is emerging which, once understood, attracts students and faculty alike. It is an area which is interdisciplinary, topical and thematic, and open-ended. One of the reasons it is attractive is that it represents our mutual global futures.

Before indicating what Futures Studies is, perhaps it would be helpful to first indicate what it is not. Futures Studies is not:

- THE answer to all of our educational problems,
- just another course to add to an already overloaded curriculum,
- convergent and closed-ended, (and boring to students),
- a solid part of most schools' curriculum.

Perhaps THE overriding goal of Futures Studies is the development of attitudes and perspectives on the future which will help students to understand themselves better, the world in which they live, and future developments which will impact upon both.

Actually the study of alternative futures has been around for a long time. In recent history it has been used heavily in corporate planning offices, defense department strategy rooms, financial risk operations; in any situation where a need for planning, forecasting and problem-solving exists. In this context Futures Studies systematically examines factors which may influence the future and then projects possible futures based on the interaction of those factors. Careful attention is paid to the various impacts of a given action upon other elements.

Looking at a longer horizon of history, we find there has always been a need to understand the future. In the past, divining the future was accomplished with the aid of such items as tea leaves and the crystal ball. Today it involves long-range strategic planning and complex computer fore-