

Images of the Future

Despite the overwhelming importance of images of the future, relatively little research has been carried out on people's views of societal futures. Most of the research has taken the form of exploratory studies. David Livingstone (1976) comments:

The general importance of images of the future as mediating factors in social action has been postulated...by several scholars. Such theoretical work has not distinguished very clearly between hopes (what people want to see) and expectations (what they think will probably happen), or between people's attitudes regarding their personal future and their views on the societal future. There has been a substantial amount of empirical research on personal hopes and expectations. Such studies typically show no interest in discerning societal contexts people hope or expect to live in, but rather take the continuation of the present institutional context for granted.

This chapter reviews a sample of the existing research on adults' and young people's views of the future. It provides a background to, and sets the scene for, the UK study described in chapters 4 to 6.

Adults' views of the future

Some early studies

Bettina Huber (1978) suggests that the rapid pace of change in society may have a significant impact on how individuals view the future. She noted, however, that 'we know relatively little about this matter because social scientists rarely investigate images of the future'.

An interesting early study was by Kurt Danziger (1963) who invited four hundred South African students to write 'histories of the future.' They were asked to imagine themselves as historians in the twenty-first century looking back on events in South Africa and to write a short essay describing the major events that had occurred between 1960 and 2010. The essays were used to identify differing orientations to the future. Thus Conservatives saw the future as being a return to the past, Catastrophists believed future events would destroy what was good in the present, whilst Liberals, Technicists and Revolutionaries all saw major improvements occurring in the future, but via different routes.

Each of the four social groups polled in the survey, Afrikaans, English, Indian and African, had a distinctively different view of South Africa's future. Not surprisingly, 46% of the African students saw the future in revolutionary terms, whilst 49% of Indians were liberal, 37% of Afrikaaners were technicist and 31% of English expected catastrophe. [NB. At that time South Africa's black and coloured majority were ruled by the white minority under the racist

apartheid regime.] The individual's orientation to the future appeared to be a function of the way in which each experienced the relationship between rulers and ruled. Unfortunately Danziger did not say which of his correspondents, if any, expected to see black majority rule in South Africa by 1994.

Hadley Cantril (1965) was responsible for another early study. His Self-Anchoring Striving Scale enabled respondents to express their thoughts about the future in a way that allowed cross-cultural comparisons to be made. The scale is based on two questions which ask participants to describe the best and the worst possible future that they can imagine in twenty years time. This is used to establish the upper and lower limits of a ten-point scale. Individuals are then asked to rate themselves and their country on this scale, their present position, their position five years ago, and their anticipated position in five years time. On a national level, hopes and fears can be compared depending on whether political, social and other concerns are expressed.

This scale was used in fourteen different countries during the 1960s and Cantril summarises the overall findings as follows:

It appears that people in the developed countries are fairly satisfied with the present and foresee limited progress in the future. In contrast, people in poorer countries are not particularly satisfied with the present and hope, as well as expect, that their situation will improve markedly in the future. This inter-country difference is reflected within nations too, in that persons of low socio-economic status are most likely to have aspirations for improving their situation in the years ahead.

Such differences were also apparent in an extensive cross-cultural study carried out in the late sixties called World Images 2000.

World Images 2000

Probably the largest and most authoritative investigation ever carried out in this field, its findings were published as *Images of the World in the Year 2000: A comparative ten nation study* (Ornauer et al. 1976). This major collaborative effort involved researchers in Britain, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, India and Japan. The questions asked of respondents were wide-ranging as the following examples indicate.

- Would you say that you think very much, much, little or not at all about the future of your country, not in a couple of years but, say, in the year 2000?
- How often would you say that you talk with somebody about the future of your country or the world?
- What do you think will be the difference between the year 2000 and today?
- What do you think will be the situation in your country by the year 2000? Do you think that people will be more happy or less happy than they are today?

In general terms the tendency to think, or to express thoughts, about the future was not very well developed amongst respondents. Images of the future often focused on likely

developments in science and technology or concern about problems to do with war and peace, rather than the more broad social future. By and large, pessimistic visions of the future were better developed than optimistic visions. In the more developed nations there was a certain scepticism about science whereas in the less developed nations scientific development in any field was generally appreciated.

Johan Galtung, in his conclusion, noted that:

For the nations in our sample the future seemed somehow synonymous with a technological future. The future is seen in technological terms, not in terms of culture, human enrichment, social equality, social justice, or in terms of international affairs ... People may also think in terms of social futures but regard it as unchangeable. But it seems more probable that they have only been trained to think technologically and have no other type of thoughts as a response to the stimulus 'future;' or at least have not been trained to express any other thoughts. And this will then become self-reinforcing since no one will be stimulated by others to think about social futures (Galtung, 1976: 57).

Particularly in the developed countries there was an association between pessimism, scientific scepticism and technological futures thinking.

Ontario Images 2000

In the early 1970s David Livingstone carried out a similar survey in Ontario, Canada. His starting point was that:

Over the past decade, professional futurists and other intellectuals, as well as many expert-dominated public and private commissions, have engaged in ... efforts to envision probable or preferable futures for advanced industrial societies. Whether extrapolating present societal trends or stating a moral position on a particular sort of future, such efforts to construct long-term social policies have generally either ignored or presumed the actual orientations to the future existing among the general public (Livingstone, 1976).

Livingstone (1983) was particularly concerned about the gap between the visions of the future held by intellectuals and the general public. His stress in the Ontario Images 2000 project was on popular images of societal and educational futures. He wanted to investigate how often people thought about the future, how clear an image of the future they had, and the extent to which popular thinking was dominated by technological extrapolation.

A majority of respondents indicated frequent thinking about the future and Livingstone suggests that this marked a shift in interest in advanced capitalist societies since the earlier World Images 2000 project. All classes indicated a high frequency of thinking about the future, especially corporate capitalists. Whilst fewer respondents claimed any great clarity about their images of the future, corporate capitalists, managers and professional employees claimed the most. The unemployed expressed the greatest future disorientation.

People were also asked how much influence they expected scientists and technologists to have in society by the year 2000. Over eighty percent of respondents expected them to have more or much more influence. Livingstone notes that this is 'only the most explicit of numerous indications of technological extrapolationist thinking' expressed in the survey. Respondents were also asked in both surveys about how much influence they themselves expected to have in public affairs. The majority of people in Ontario and the ten countries survey expected to have little or no influence.

The two main differences observable in the later Ontario research (Livingstone, 1983) are, firstly, that the frequency of thinking about the future appears to have increased and secondly that social problems are as likely to be the focus of people's images as technological issues. The most general findings from the Ontario project were felt to be in accord with the Global Images 2000 project.

[There is] a division of labour in nearly all human societies with regard to the future. All societies have elites, whose task is to be concerned with the future, and all societies have non-elites whose task is to challenge the elites but only at a superficial level and not on really fundamental issues. The fundamental issues are not presented as something wanted by the elite as a result of their vested interest – but as dictated by immutable social laws, even by natural laws ... Is it strange that populations, who are never really given a say when it comes to social future, start seeing social future as immutable and hence have a low level of future imagination? (Galtung, 1976: 581).

No similar large-scale surveys have been carried out since these two projects. How popular views of the future may have changed in the last twenty years is thus something of an open question. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that lack of imaging capacity and foreclosure around pessimistic/technological images of the future is still the rule.

Young people's views of the future

As with adults the research on how young people view the future is scattered and of variable quality. Whilst the need to 'educate for the future' was first highlighted in the late sixties and early seventies, it is not until the eighties that serious consideration of young people's views began to emerge. There are now signs that such research may be about to enter a new and more critical phase.

Some early studies

In the early fifties James Gillespie and Gordon Allport (1955) carried out a survey of what young people in ten different countries felt about their individual and collective futures. The countries were the United States, New Zealand, South Africa, Egypt, Mexico, France, Italy, Germany, Japan and Israel. The two questions that the authors wanted to answer were: How does youth in various countries view the future? Do young people in different countries view their future in essentially the same way? 'Our chief interest,' they wrote, 'is in the way the

present dark and uncertain world situation affects youth's attitudes towards their personal lives and their future careers.'

Gillespie and Allport asked students to write an autobiography of the future and to complete a questionnaire. The autobiography was entitled 'From now to 2000 AD' and participants were asked to write an essay of 1000 to 2000 words about their plans, expectations and aspirations for the future. The questionnaire included items on careers, family, travel, the best and worst things that could happen in the future, and the likelihood of war.

Amongst the similarities between countries was the importance of the family, an acceptance of moral standards, an interest in new developments in science and technology, a desire for greater racial equality, and fear of another world war. The national differences described seem very little to do with the future and more to do with the current culture and politics. Women generally wanted more freedom than most of the men correspondents thought they should have. Amongst their conclusions the authors note that: 'Most youth regard war as needless and preventable. They are, however, pessimistic as to the possibility of avoiding a third world conflict.' With hindsight one can confirm Allport and Gillespie's speculation that, 'for all we know (attitudes) may reflect chiefly the political, economic and social situation prevailing at a given time.'

In his important book *Learning for Tomorrow* Alvin Toffler (1974) describes 'an unusual and confessedly non-scientific experiment' which he carried out with a class of 15-16 year olds. He asked them to write down and date seven events that they thought were likely to occur in the future. Collectively they described a disastrous future for the United States, including revolution, natural disasters and nuclear war. What troubled Toffler was that, whilst the students clearly found the future exciting, they also saw it as something impersonal, 'out there', not something that they were involved in. By contrast, against this catalogue of disasters, students wrote of their personal lives as a simple progression through work, marriage, success, retirement and death.

No matter how turbulent a world they pictured, no matter how many new technologies might appear or what political revolutions might take place, the way of life seen for themselves as individuals seldom differed from the way of life possible in the present and actually lived by many today. It is as though they believed that everything happening outside one's life simply by-passes the individual. The respondents, in short, made no provision for change in themselves, no provision for adaptation to a world exploding with change (Toffler, 1974:11).

These findings, whilst somewhat anecdotal, still support the contention that each generation's view of the future is influenced by contemporary events. It also highlights a major dissonance between personal and global views of the future, something which was to remain an on-going theme in the literature for some time.

Studies in the 1980s

One of the first studies in the eighties was carried out by Mary Brown (1984) in the UK. It is noteworthy that this was the first piece of research to acknowledge that young people's views of the future are inextricably bound up with contemporary social change.

Brown sets the scene by comparing the values commonly expressed in the eighties with those of the seventies. In the latter decade, she notes, there was the beginning of a reaction against technological society, student revolt, the rise of the counter culture and the growth of the ecological movement. What, however, were the preoccupations of students in the eighties and what were their hopes and fears for the future?

In the first stage of the study two short essays were obtained from 250 16-18 year olds. The first was on how they would spend an ordinary day in the year 2000 and the second a description of the sort of future that they would like.

From these essays certain common themes emerged. Of life in the future as expected: violence, unemployment, high technology, boredom, inflation, poverty, pollution, material prosperity, and, mainly from secondary modern girls, a life not much different from that of today. Of the future as desired, world peace was the most frequently mentioned ideal, and came into the vast majority of essays (Brown, 1984).

Age majority of the essays envisaged a highly technological future, although many students seemed uneasy about this. Non-materialistic values were expressed far more often than materialist ones and a 'disenchantment with the modern, consumer society seemed to run through many of the essays.'

AS a result of factor analysis, twenty concerns were identified from the essays and used in the second stage of the study to create a questionnaire which was completed by over four hundred pupils. It asked them to state how likely or unlikely, on a five point scale, they thought each of the twenty concerns were to eventuate by the year 2000, and how desirable each was. Amongst the items thought very likely or likely were advances in medicines (93%), major advances in technology (87%), high levels of unemployment (77%), and a more leisured society (63%). Over half expected a nuclear disaster.

By contrast the items they thought desirable or very desirable were advances in medicine (92%), stable prices and control of inflation (92%), conservation of the environment (87%), less pollution of the environment (76%) and greater prosperity for all (79%). Further factor analysis revealed four broad preferable futures which Brown labelled: Anomie (increased disorder), Easy Life (a leisure society), Rural Paradise (countryside conservation), and Welfare (greater equality). Only a very small number wanted Anomie, mostly boys and those not taking exams. Many pupils, however, thought this future to be a likely one. Easy life is 'the super industrial materialist future that politicians of all parties assume that we all want, and is the basis of industrialism and capitalism. These are the values that we are all assumed to hold by advertisers and by industry in general.' Whilst significantly more boys than girls

wanted this, only a minority of the group overall wanted this future. Girls, more than boys, generally rejected a technological future in preferring the Rural Paradise scenario.

The most popular scenario was Welfare which, although very different from Rural Paradise, is still non-materialist. It consisted of three items: greater equality in society, assistance to Third World countries, and advances in medicine. This also was far more popular with girls. Brown points out that her samples were not representative and that any conclusions are tentative. However, even a cautious interpretation, she suggests, 'indicates that the majority of these young people are not greatly in favour of our technological society.' There was a general pessimism about the future and also distinct gender differences. 'We live in a male-dominated society and the materialistic values it proclaims seem to be endorsed by and large by young males. Young females seem to have other values and different outlooks and desires for the future.'

There are other ways of finding out about children's views of the future which can arise out of everyday classroom work. Thus Cathie Holden (1989) working with a class of 9-10 year olds, asked them to draw their probable and preferable timelines for the future. She comments:

The children's perception of a preferable future indicated preoccupations which surprised me and to which we were to return again and again in the follow-up work. Although they did want 'new toys', 'no telling off' and 'different sweets', they also showed a common concern for an end to poverty and crime ('no murders', 'no more muggings') and an end to war. Interestingly, out of all the timelines produced by the class, none expected nuclear war in their own lifetime – some saw it afterwards or in the very distant future or not at all. A sign that children are more optimistic than adults? But the fact that all the timelines featured an end to war in their preferable futures, does show children's great concerns in this area – nine year olds are not as innocent as some would have us believe (Holden, 1989).

The reference to nuclear war marks another specific change in children's perceptions of the future. As the arms race escalated during the 1980s the fear of nuclear war became a major preoccupation in many countries. A number of studies established that this fear also extended to young people (Beardslee and Mack, 1982). These studies were essentially about young people's nuclear fears, although sometimes set within the broader context of their perceptions of war and peace. Such research represents a specialised case of the wider views of the future considered in this chapter.

As discussed in chapter 2, the nuclear arms race helped to create popular images of the future which were extremely dystopian. One review of the research (Educators for Social Responsibility, 1982) suggested that most children were aware of the nuclear arms race by the end of primary school and that they felt betrayed by adults who had let this possibility come about. Adolescents felt that they had the most to lose, because they were just beginning to think about their personal futures only to be faced by images of extinction. It was suggested that this uncertainty about the future might, in some cases, affect normal

developmental processes, in helping to create a 'live for today' philosophy and a turning away from adult authority.

Lynell Johnson (1987) describes a national survey carried out in the United States. A questionnaire was completed by more than 600,000 students at primary and secondary level and findings taken from a randomly selected sample of 140,000 students. Questions were divided into three categories, those dealing with the student's own future, the future of the United States, and the future of the world. The future was defined as 'when you are as old as your parents are now.'

Most students had a conventional, but optimistic, view of their own personal futures. The great majority expected to be married with children, to own a home and a car, to be richer than their parents, and happier than they are now. Boys and girls showed an equal increase in awareness of the need for gender equity with age. Overall 'the picture that emerges is of a traditional lifestyle – with the exception of some evidence of changing sex-roles – in a bright personal future.'

Students' views of the future of the United States were less optimistic. More than half believed that drug abuse and crime would become more serious, and 40 percent felt unemployment, the national debt and poverty would get worse. When considering various economic and social problems facing the country as a whole, most predicted no improvement or a deteriorating situation. When asked which changes they would most like to see happen, sexual equality was ranked first by both boys and girls. In this case, but not in others, their probable and preferable futures were the same.

Students' views of the future of the world were even less optimistic. Sixty percent felt that the danger of nuclear war would increase and almost as many saw depletion of natural resources and pollution of air, land and water as getting worse. Half felt that there would be increasing problems over world population and food supply. The only problem area they saw hope for was an improvement in race relations.

'Perhaps the most striking finding of all,' says Johnson, is the discrepancy, or set of discrepancies, between these youngsters' views of the future of the United States and the world.' A teacher colleague who had taught futures studies courses for fifteen years, pointed out to him that this discrepancy is the one he encountered most consistently amongst his own students.

It is useful to consider comments made by Noel Gough (1988b) in his review of research on children's images of the future. In particular he queries the assumption brought by the researchers themselves to such work.

For the most part, they seek to demonstrate that children's pessimism is the product of some form of adult culpability, usually an intellectual or moral deficiency in the education system or the popular media. Moreover, like the majority of scientific investigations, the research is invariably designed to produce the desired or expected results.

Thus, he points out, some researchers feel children's anxieties about developments in science and technology are groundless and arise merely from lack of knowledge or inadequate teaching. The blame for that ignorance is directed at what they consider to be unnecessarily alarmist teachers involved in social education, environmental education, development education and peace studies. Gough also argues that many of the techniques used for eliciting information from children are very obtrusive and thus may encourage the pessimistic responses that researchers expect to find.

Kay Boyer (1989) carried out a study which attempted to draw together existing social theory on the future, images of the future in children's literature, and English teaching. She was particularly interested in whether children's literature on futures themes could be used to critically explore social and political issues. Most of the images of the future in the books she reviewed were pessimistic, focusing on the hazards of technology or ecological disaster.

She worked with four English classes of 13-14 year olds and asked them to write about 'A day in someone's life in the year 2020.' Pupils were asked to make clear which features of their scenarios they felt were good and which bad. Most commonly these descriptions portrayed an optimistic high-tech view of the future. Classroom observations showed that although the study of such texts helped to develop literacy skills it did not lead to critical questioning of the described alternative futures. Boyer claimed a cathartic role for such literature in exploring children's fears for the future but the evidence for this was limited.

Studies in the 1990s

At the beginning of this decade the Henley Centre for Forecasting (1991) published a report on children's visions of the future environment. The survey looked in detail at the attitudes of 10-14 year olds and revealed a high level of interest in environmental issues, something seen by children not as radical but rather as common sense. Three main sorts of concern were identified: global issues such as deforestation, the ozone layer, global warming; issues closer to home such as litter, pollution, car emissions; and issues related to animals, especially vivisection and endangered species.

Local issues were mentioned much less than global ones, about which children generally appeared to show a high level of understanding. Their visions of the future tended to be somewhat apocalyptic so, not surprisingly, a high degree of helplessness was expressed. The required action for the future was felt to be a modification of patterns of consumption rather than any need for major changes in Western lifestyles. The main conclusions of the study are that children take environmental problems very seriously but are generally pessimistic about the future.

When asked to draw their images of the environment in a hundred years' time, not one came up with a positive vision. There were no pictures of a sanitised sci-fi world. Almost all the applications of science (apart from the occasional solar powered car) were ones which were deliberately harsh and inhuman – robotic sheep, for example. Certainly none of them could envisage a time when all our environmental problems are

solved. At best, there was a belief that we could come to our senses just before the point of no return (Henley Centre, 1991).

Josiah Dodds and Lin Chong-de (1992) explored the future concerns held by teenagers in Beijing. Drawn from Grades 7-12, some 1800 students participated in their questionnaire. Over-population of the planet was ranked as the most serious concern, followed by environmental pollution, and personal concerns such as poor grades, not finding a satisfying job and a parent dying. Fear of nuclear war, a particular interest of the researchers, was ranked seventh.

Comparing their findings with other research, the authors note that Chinese teenagers were much more pessimistic about the likelihood of nuclear war than their American or Soviet counterparts. If this concern sounds dated it is because this research was actually carried out in the late eighties. They note that teenagers' concerns for the future probably reflect current issues and that this will change over time. 'The findings of this study suggest that teenagers' concerns can be a good index of a country's social, political, economic, and environmental problems.'

The work previously described by Gillespie and Allport (1955) has since been replicated in the United States three times. The most recent of these time-lag studies is reported by Douglas Kleiber, Wayne Major and Guy Manaster (1993). The most significant finding of the study was that students now appeared less conservative than their 1982 counterparts, although they were still more conservative than the students of 1971. An apparent increase in activism was noted amongst students, approaching the levels found in the 1970s.

Whereas the personal outlook for the future of 1992 students must be regarded as generally positive, their views of world affairs indicate a mixed picture. Attitudes towards international affairs and reduced concerns about the threats of war reflect some of the ease from previous 'cold war' tensions. But 1992 students show a continuing and disturbing trend towards lower expectations of racial equality and are in this sense less optimistic than students from the previous two decades (Kleiber et al. 1993).

A follow-up to the US survey described by Johnson (1987) was carried out by the journal *Weekly Reader* (1993) which analysed responses from 56,000 Grade 2 to 6 children. A dramatic increase was noted in the number who felt they would continue to live in their home community rather than move away. This was thought to reflect the decreasing mobility of the US population generally. Children look forward to being high-order consumers and have an optimistic view of their economic future, not necessarily consonant with current economic indicators. A majority expected to be happier in the future than today. At the same time they expected unemployment, poverty, crime and drugs to be more serious problems in the US than today.

One recent study is by Richard Eckersley (1994), who notes that whilst earlier studies focused on concerns about nuclear war, more recent research shows that 'young people's sense of futurelessness has not lessened with the end of the cold war. Rather the studies suggest a

deepening concern not only about war, but also global environmental destruction, growing violence and inequality, and an increasingly dehumanised, machine dominated world.'

Frank Hutchinson's doctoral thesis (1992) represents one of the most detailed studies so far of young people's views of the future. His study was of Australian teenagers but many of the themes that emerge resonate with similar work from North America and Europe. He used a questionnaire with 650 upper secondary school students and follow-up dialogue in small groups with a sample of the respondents.

In relation to the students' images of feared future worlds he writes:

Many of the young people in this study expressed a strong sense of negativity, helplessness, despondency and even anguish about the anticipated problems facing their society and the world at large. For a majority, negative imagery of the future ranged from perceptions of intensifying pressure and competition in schools in the twenty-first century to worsening trends in physical violence and war, joblessness and poverty, destructive technology and environmental degradation (Hutchinson, 1993).

Amongst these concerns six major themes could be identified: i) an uncompassionate world, depersonalised and caring; ii) a physically violent world, with a high likelihood of war; iii) a divided world, between the 'haves' and 'have nots'; iv) a mechanised world, of violent technological change; v) an environmentally unsustainable world, with continued degradation of the biosphere; vi) a politically corrupt and deceitful world, where voting is a waste of time.

Hutchinson was equally concerned, however, to explore young people's images of preferable futures worlds and he found that they fell into four broad categories. These were: i) technocratic dreaming, in which students uncritically accept technofix solutions for all problems (most popular amongst boys); ii) a demilitarisation and greening of science and technology, to meet genuine human needs; iii) intergenerational equity, accepting responsibilities also for the needs of future generations; iv) making peace with people and planet, via a reconceptualisation of ethics and also of lifestyles.

The value of Hutchinson's study lies in its attention to detail, its sensitivity to young people themselves, and its location within a broader body of research on the educational and cultural implications of such findings. It is this sort of research that is of most use to educators rather than simple attitude surveys.

Review of the research

Adults' views

Although the research reviewed here has been somewhat limited, it has improved over the years in depth and quality. Several useful techniques have been evolved, such as essays on future history as used by Danziger, Cantril's Self-Striving Anchoring Scale, or the detailed questionnaires used in the ten-nation study. Certainly there has been an increase in

sophistication and the World 2000 and Ontario projects represent a high watermark in this research. They also came at a time when futures studies was in the ascendant. Perhaps the absence of comparable studies since then reflects the decline of serious interest in futures noted in chapter 2.

Generally the tendency to think about the broader future seems poorly developed amongst adults and, when it does occur, is often locked by default into a narrowly scientific and technological focus. It is as if the only conceivable future is one controlled by science and technology, whether for good or bad. It is not surprising that people often feel they have little control over the future and are more likely to envisage pessimistic futures than optimistic ones.

Young people's views

More research has been carried out on young people's views of the future than those of adults. One wonders if this is a convenient distancing of the problem from the adult mind, i.e. it matters more what children think about the future of the planet than what adults think. The issue is thus conveniently placed on the shoulders of the future rather than the present generation.

It is clear from the studies described here that perceptions of the future vary in several significant ways over time, while also expressing increasingly common concerns. Images of the future come across as far less concrete in Gillespie and Allport's study in the 50s. Toffler, reporting on the late 60s and early 70s, was one of the first to note the dissonance between personal future optimism and global pessimism. Brown, in the 80s, is able to see more clearly how students' attitudes and values vary with the confronting issues of the time; the research on nuclear fears is a prime example. Johnson picks up again the need to differentiate between personal, national and global futures. In the 90s the Henley Centre and others note the primacy of environmental concerns.

There is also a difference between the time-lag studies of Kleiber and those of researchers such as Hutchinson. The former focus on student attitudes and values via their concerns for the future, whereas the latter focuses more directly on the notion of futures itself. Hutchinson's work not only acts as a summation of much that has gone before, with its emphasis on young people's anguish, but also points the way forward in highlighting the need to explore more explicitly images of both feared and desired futures.

Summary

This chapter reviewed a representative sample of the research on both adults' and young people's views of the future. Such views relate strongly to the social and political issues of the time. Whilst these have varied somewhat in detail, the general trend since the 1960s has been towards an increasing concern about the future of society and the planet. Images have become increasingly pessimistic and now embrace a wide range of issues. The research thus supports the broad picture, set out in the previous chapter, of the changing nature of such images during the course of the twentieth century.

Images of the future in the western world often hinge narrowly around scientific and technological developments, sometimes seen as beneficial but more often as dystopian. It is as if science and technology have a life of their own over which the ordinary citizen feels she/he can neither understand nor control. In the face of such fears it is increasingly important to focus on people's images of preferred futures. If they can be elaborated and envisioned more clearly then perhaps they can provide the basis for creating a more just and sustainable future.

Endnote

The findings of post-1995 research on images of the future (when *Visions of the Future* was published) can be found in: Hutchinson, F. (1996) *Educating Beyond Violent Futures*, Routledge; Page, J. (2000) *Reframing the Early Childhood Curriculum*, RoutledgeFalmer; Hicks, D. (2006) *Lessons for the Future*, Trafford Publishing; Holden, C. (2007) Young people's concerns, in: D. Hicks & C. Holden (eds) *Teaching the Global Dimension*, Routledge; and Hicks, D. & Holden, C. (2007) Remembering the future: what do children think? *Environmental Education Research*, 13 (4). [Download](#)

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