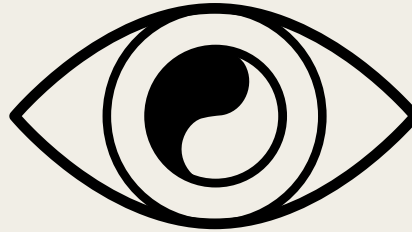


SEEING THE UNSEEN

Uncovering personal journeys in futures literacy



Seeing the Unseen: Uncovering Personal
Journeys in futures literacy

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Seeing the Unseen: Uncovering Personal Journeys in Futures Literacy

For 15 years, UNESCO has organized Futures Literacy Labs across the globe, raising new questions about global challenges and providing new directions for policy and decision-making. Since 2018, the Hanze UNESCO Chair on Futures Literacy in Higher Education has contributed to these labs and has trained hundreds of professionals and students in this capability through cutting-edge programs and courses, building a sustainable community of practitioners and facilitators. Many alumni and partners have embarked on their own futures literacy journeys, applying its principles in both personal and professional contexts. While the labs frequently inspire new policies and strategies, the broader impact of futures literacy as a capability remains largely unexplored.

At its core, futures literacy is the capability to be aware of how and why we anticipate in different contexts. It involves recognizing the assumptions we make about what lies ahead, exploring alternative futures, and using these insights to make better informed decisions in the present. The title of this book, *Seeing the Unseen*, reflects this capability—highlighting how futures literacy helps us move beyond familiar narratives, uncovering new perspectives and reimagine both our personal and collective futures.

This book holds a unique collection of 20 stories of people whose lives have been impacted by futures

literacy. They share their struggles, doubts, victories and insights. The interviewees come from many different parts of the world, but we are well aware that even so, the diversity of futures literacy practitioners and learners is much greater than presented in this book. We hope this is just the beginning of a larger story and that more voices from all over the globe will feel invited and inspired to share their journeys too.

Many people have made this book and our own journey as UNESCO Chair possible, but our special thanks go out to the 20 incredible voices in this book for sharing their wisdom, to Petra Cremers for designing and

conducting the insightful interviews, to Raul Corrêa-Smith who turned all of the data into stories worth reading, and of course to Riel Miller, who has guided and inspired us from the very beginning.

We wish you a joyful read!

Ramila Khafaji Zadeh,
Jitske Gulmans, Loes Damhof

UNESCO Chair Futures Literacy in Higher Education

Preface, by Riel Miller



What is there to say? The testimonials in this book, recounted with such eloquence and passion by an amazingly diverse and reflective group of people, are powerful and inspiring. Each one stands on its own. Each one invites respect and admiration for the authenticity and dedication, skill and perseverance that nourished such profusely multi-faceted and fluidly dynamic experiences.

Taken together, rather than one by one, there may be a suggestion that something worth remarking, drawing attention to, is happening. Could it be, as the stories told in this book appear to celebrate, that futures literacy has the potential to unleash, reveal, cultivate not only different perceptions of the world, but a different relationship between what it means to be human and the animate/inanimate ‘others’ that surround us? Might futures literacy offer one way, amongst others, to change how humans – as inherently social entities – live time?

Yes but, yes but... I hesitate, I worry, I doubt. Could what I’ve written in the previous paragraph actually be a betrayal of the spirit or promise of futures literacy? Am I asking the wrong question? Am I being incoherent – in contradiction with my own premises, when I evoke the future consequences of the world becoming futures literate? Am I falling prey to the pre-occupations and metrics of the hierarchical, linear, causal, solutionist monoculture that serves those who have and want to remain in power? Is there a way to ‘walk-the-talk’ of what is not yet without pulling the emergent back into the grave of what is dying or gone?

I pose these questions because I am convinced that if humanity's explicit, inter-generationally conveyed relationship to time is to become more 'mature', more futures literate, one of the pre-requisites is to redress the grotesque imbalance in our conception of human agency. To stop collapsing our 'natural' temporal pluri-dexterity because of some reductionist obsession with the grandiosity of the delusion that we can actually colonize the future, achieve immortality, play (small g) 'god'. I imagine a time when we can dispense with this ridiculous, mental illness inducing battle that pushes humans to rail against uncertainty, emergence, improvisation, ephemerality. I

imagine changes in the conditions of change – not as a way to achieve a goal I can articulate now, but as an experiment in not-knowing what could happen if everyone becomes more futures literate.

To me such an open aspiration seems threaded throughout the intricate tapestries that crisscross the infinity space so generously gifted by the contributors to this volume. And their vitality speaks not only of a desire to transcend, transgress the confines of the past, but find ways to speak to backlash that is currently washing across the world. There is no mistaking the reek of anger, resentment, fear that spills off of not only the Taliban,

intent on keeping men in power, but the multitude of hierarchical fiefdoms that are straining to restore and reinforce any collapse in the higher echelon's control over people on lower echelons. No need to even mention the 'natural' world or other living organisms, exploitation without any consideration, is a given.

These reactionaries believe that now is the time for people to go back to sleep. Now is when we must restore subservience. People must forget or ignore or repress the ways in which they are different from others and erase the specific desires arising from their personal life-stories. Generality, conformity, continuity, preservation,

standardization, homogeneity are all the order of the day – literally orders being issued by men. Reinstate unequal relationships, preserve hierarchy, perpetuate the past.

This is a contest. But I do not want to set it up as a conflict between the progressives and reactionaries. Not only because it is the progressive's promise of making things better that is the psychological counterpart to the reactionary's use of fear and danger. Carrot and stick. Sharing the same vision but from different ends of the dualism. The trouble for me, and I do want to stay with it, is that neither view corresponds to the actual characteristics of this

universe – in other words, both are delusional. Certainly, very useful and constantly practiced delusions, that may one day become less toxic (I'm imagining futures, 'scenarios'). Only right now these delusions get expressed through constant performances of violent cruelty.

Convinced, indeed clinging to notions of superiority, most human communities erase and obscure, insist on denial – on pain of ostracism, of our inescapable connectedness and shared embeddedness in an emergent universe of difference. Disrespect, to the point of rampant degradation of others and the psychotic cold of being killers, is baked into the

hierarchical promise that certainty can prevail. Comforted by the imperatives arising from the belief that we can colonize the future, we nevertheless suffer from the anxieties of failure and the pressures arising from the need to always be more intelligent, more powerful.

And, of course, we do lose, are disappointed, frustrated, furious and terrified. Because the simple fact is that no matter how hard we may huff and puff, our universe is not deterministic, cannot be conquered, and will perpetually confront us with difference, change, surprise. (Not to mention that the meaning of life is in the ephemeral, because life itself is ephemeral).

Is there an alternative to living the pain caused by practicing and sustaining delusions of continuity or perfectibility?

Can we dance to difference? Yes, that is what is recounted so powerfully in this book. We can become better and more at ease with difference, not-knowing, not-doing – as the ephemeral takes on new dimensions and being gets easier to plunge into over the noise of becoming. Learning how to play and hear futures literacy's tunes is part of this transition – and the testimonials in this book show that it is happening. But there are obstacles. One is a legacy issue. Today time and attention, the marrow of

being, is crushed by the necessity of maintaining a zillion tons of legacy conquest systems. Restore, repair, improve or else catastrophe. The ants must tend to the needs of the 'colony', one subway ride or traffic jam at a time. Life evaporates in the tick tock and boredom of, I've got no choice. Aldous Huxley's 'soma' (drugs) can mollify, dull our senses so we patiently wait for the pain to end.

The other obstacle is more subtle, it has to do with 'walking the talk' or not reproducing the same colonizing formulas, despite the call to achieve a different outcome. Crucially, at least for me, I do not think the point is to eschew all

goals or somehow eliminate the fact that we have to make bets all the time. Rather, the challenge is to find ways to live the simultaneity of doing and not-doing, of taking closed choices that cast irrevocable bets and getting lost in the open not-knowing that invites invention and conjugates novelty's emergence.

In other words, I'm not arguing for zero intentionality or planning, but for a different kind of goal – a competency. Aiming to set up the conditions that are more conducive to living the simultaneity of open and closed. Consistently, gifting the learning that nourishes the ability of human perception to oscillate, with intent and volition, between

what is indivisible in each moment (open and closed), but can be separated (collapsed, one way or the other) by taking distinct points of view.

As far as I am concerned, the case for setting up the conditions that enable people to appreciate the diversity of reasons and methods they use when imagining the future – and comprehending the implications – that is, becoming more futures literate, is not because I think it will make the future ‘better’. At least not better in ways that are familiar from the goal-based promises of ideology – like less poverty, more wealth, less pollution, etc. No, the promises of futures literacy are both ‘big’ and ‘small’.

‘Big’ in the sense that by becoming more futures literate it is easier to be comfortable, have more fun in our creative universe – again, read the chapters in this book. What happens, by being better able to move from one point-of-view to the other (from open to closed and

back again), is a reduction in the terror and cognitive dissonance that arise from the monoculture of certainty and hierarchy. Note, this also requires planning a transition away from millennia of extractivism – which won’t happen overnight.

The ‘small’ change that is part of the intention and volition required to transmit the conditions for cultivating futures literacy boils down to inter-generational knowledge transfer. The why and how of FL go together and are rooted in the proposition that wisdom (as the capacity to learn from experience) can be explicitly nourished. But that means grasping the ascendent (inexperienced to experienced) and descending (experienced to unexperienced) power gradients of maturity.

The vulnerability, dependency, and imposed limits of the very young child need to give way to ever greater awareness of not-knowing and not-telling. The

experiences of the experienced need to give way to the birth of new, non-legacy conditions. Experiences are experienced, and so the acquired wisdom is unique to each life path. And the greatest gift of a parent or an older generation that has experience and wisdom is to not impose, but to exemplify without telling, to invite in subtle, caring, listening ways, the often difficult voyage of comprehending the diversity of humanity's relationships to time and power. Our constantly upwelling variety.

Which is why the voices in this book and the work of UNESCO Chairs, like the one at Hanze University, tell such powerful stories of generosity and hope, of an emergent evolutionary change that is underway right now. Of a time when humanity wakes up from a long sleep, the oblivion of ignoring the multiplicities of time and repressing our ability to imagine what does not exist. Such changes, as chronicled in this book, are not signs of some imperial tribute signaling a victory over tomorrow. No, the voices in this book are dancing with joy to the infinite tunes of the now.

Not Everything That Shines is Gold

Abril Chimal,
Futures & foresight designer, researcher.
Mexico City, Mexico.

Futures literacy is relevant to both my work and personal life. I am neurodivergent—I have ADHD and chronic anxiety, which are often referred to as the “*diseases of the 21st century*.” Anxiety, especially, is called the disease of the future because it’s tied to constantly thinking about what’s ahead. When I began exploring futures literacy tools and processes during my future studies, I gained invaluable methods for managing my anxiety. One key insight was focusing on what I can do today, understanding what I can and can’t control, and considering the balance between individual and communal responsibility.

This approach has been incredibly helpful for my mental health, even more so than meditation or any other tools I’ve tried.

My journey with futures literacy began in 2020, during Covid. At that time, I began working with the Journal of Futures Studies, where one of my first projects in the Journal was managing the episode releases for my colleague Mattia Vettorelo’s podcast, The Briefing Today. In the fifth episode, Loes Damhof was featured. When I listened to what she said and how she communicated, it immediately resonated with me. It was love at first sight. That podcast had a



profound impact on me. What caught my attention was how Loes spoke about sense and sensemaking and how we move through the world. She shared a metaphor about climbing a mountain: You need to anticipate where your next step is going. That idea resonated deeply with me.

I got deeply interested in the topic. I started researching, learning, and reading—mainly through the work of others in the field—but it didn't feel the same as my connection with Loes. One or two months after listening to that podcast, Loes posted about a futures literacy training on LinkedIn. I reached out to her and said, *"Hey, I'd like to be*

part of this. Let me know what I need to do." And that's how my journey with futures literacy began.

The training was great. Besides Loes, I made two amazing friends during that training. I realized during that time that access to the future is a privilege. I mentioned this a lot during the training—because of factors like cost, for example. I'm based in Mexico City, and, as in most parts of the Global South, prices are very different compared to Europe. The price is a challenge, as is access to reliable internet. Of course, COVID-19 opened many doors globally, and I was fortunate to have good internet bandwidth. Another challenge was

that the training sessions were held at 2:00 a.m. my time! To this day, I haven't seen many training sessions scheduled to accommodate the Americas, except for Loes' work.

BARRIERS

Also, during the training, I was the only person of color. That experience made me aware of the complexity and barriers to accessing futures literacy.

It highlighted the importance of addressing these issues. This realization shaped my thoughts about my work and the direction I wanted to take.

I started implementing what I learned during the training into my work. Learning this process of accessing the future is complex. Often, people are shocked when they experience futures literacy for the first time, especially if they haven't had prior preparation, and that's a big responsibility. I recognized my responsibility to help others to think about the future. I joined a team in Mexico City working on establishing a UNESCO Chair focused on democratizing access to futures literacy through design. This meant creating less complex and less academic tools so that more people could develop these capabilities without going through an extensive academic process.

The first group I worked with to implement futures literacy was high school students around 13 to 15 years old. It was interesting because working with teenagers differs greatly from working with adults. At that age, their brains are still developing, and they're navigating a lot of contradictions in their lives. They're evolving—not just their personalities but also their bodies and everything else. It was fascinating to see how they approached the future at that moment of transition. Nothing is set in stone for them. Teenagers are constantly in flux, unlike adults, who know they won't grow any taller or their voices won't change. One day, they might have one voice;

the next, it's completely different. It's a unique perspective. The experience left them feeling that this chaotic time might not be as overwhelming as they thought.

For this specific group, I needed to take a trauma-informed approach because many of them had experienced abuse or domestic violence. For them, the future often seemed chaotic and not a good place to be. But it was very powerful when they were introduced to a vision of the future that included alternatives—where they could build something they liked. They started to realize their agency, the ability to make decisions and to see beyond the everyday bubble they

were stuck in. That realization can be transformative.

I facilitated a series of training courses alongside other colleagues that blended futures literacy with creative coding. The goal was to develop their critical thinking skills, instill a future-oriented mindset, and provide the tools necessary to envision and shape their future. With a strong artistic focus, the students were eager to explore music, sound creation, and songwriting.

PERSPECTIVES

My university experience provided two perspectives. My background is in graphic design, and I worked in the creative industry for a long time

before shifting my career toward futures. That dual experience shaped my approach. It's not an "*either-or*" situation. You have to imagine, but you also have to take action and have the tools to create. For me, it's about combining both—imagining and doing. Everything is always changing. You get feedback, identify flaws, and adjust your design or creation. Part of the process is accepting that nothing is ever perfect. We change, too.

The university where I studied focused on the creative industries.

My dream was to become an editorial designer. I was obsessed with books and magazines and dreamed of designing publications

for Condé Nast or Penguin Random House. I planned meticulously—I went to university, focused on relevant courses, attended training programs, and aimed to win awards to build my career. But along the way, I found new interests. This shift partly comes from my neurodivergence and tendency to pursue diverse interests. While following my plan, winning awards, and completing training, I realized I was preparing for something completely different: a future in Futures.

Futures literacy helped me embrace uncertainty more than before. It was about finally putting a name and framework to it. I had

already embraced uncertainty, but I couldn't name it before. It was something I felt and lived, but it didn't have a formal name. Naming it gives it more meaning. It's no longer just a random feeling or experience—it becomes a concept, a construct, or a framework. It's like saying, "*Oh, so that's what this has been all along.*" It connects the dots and gives structure to what was previously abstract.

opening a Pandora's box

Futures literacy plays a key role in my life right now. I love exploring different ideas and bringing people together to create meaningful change. This often happens in community, and futures literacy has helped me navigate the complexity

of our world and see uncertainty as an opportunity for creativity. It influences how I approach projects, and I particularly love how it helps uncover the biases and patterns in how we think about the future. One of my favorite aspects is the "*aha*" moment when you realize you can imagine alternative futures. That's where my creativity sparks. Futures literacy also serves as a friendly reminder that the only place to act on the future is in the present. This perspective has had a significant impact on my life.

For many people, the biggest impact of futures literacy happens on a personal level.

Some people I know broke up with partners, moved to new cities, or even changed careers—like I did. It's like opening Pandora's box. Once it's open, you can't close it again and never see the world the same way. While it has professional applications, the most noticeable changes happen personally for those involved in the futures literacy experience.

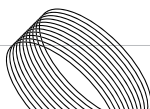
From what I've observed, the biggest impact has been personal. For me, the biggest example is how I deal with anxiety. It has significantly impacted the way I approach things. Futures literacy hasn't removed uncertainty but



has helped me feel comfortable. I've learned to accept that uncertainty exists and to manage how I feel about it. It's also made me more aware of my body—when I'm feeling anxiety, I can now recognize it. I'll think, "*No, I'm not dying; it's just anxiety.*" That awareness has been transformative for me.

Looking ahead, I dream of more people accessing these tools and learning their proper use—not just as an ambiguous concept. Becoming a certified practitioner comes with a lot of responsibility. Facilitators must be conscious of their biases and worldviews and how they influence their work. One thing I admire about Loes is her awareness of privilege and power dynamics. When reframing, she always takes these factors into account. Not everyone can acknowledge their privilege or the impact of their worldviews on their reframing processes, and I think that's crucial.

The essence of futures literacy is sensing and making sense of the future. For me, that is its core. I want futures literacy integrated into broader societal contexts, even as part of school curricula. Teaching history without teaching the future seems incomplete. Futures literacy can be combined with creativity, encouraging people to imagine futures with their existing resources. Imagining the future is a deeply creative act, and I hope it inspires others to embrace uncertainty and see potential within it.



Broadening and Reconnecting

Alex Lambie, artist.
Isle of Wight, UK.

My work with futures literacy involves a lot of sensing and sensemaking, and it has become core to the practices I share through the Emergence Academy and my inquiries at large. It has given me an additional leg, so to speak. We often talk about having one leg for anticipation—focused on planning and preparation—and another for emergence. For a long time, I was hopping quite comfortably on the leg of emergence, and I was happy with it. But now, futures literacy has allowed me to balance the two. That doesn't mean I'm relying entirely on planning and preparation, but rather that both approaches complement each other. A key part of this shift has been my regular practice with Loes

Damhof. This collaboration has been pivotal.

It allows me to integrate what I offer with the more established practices of futures literacy.

Together, these approaches work seamlessly, and

this integration has provided a far more impactful and meaningful way to share what I have to offer. It's truly been life-changing.

In Futures Literacy Labs, as in my work, I can gather people—often strangers to each other and the concepts we explore—and create an environment where they engage deeply. Very quickly, they open up in



conversations that might otherwise feel uncomfortable or impossible to approach directly. What's remarkable is how deeply people are willing to share, often revealing things they would normally keep guarded.

Even more impactful is the self-realization that happens in these settings. People uncover their assumptions, and that moment of realization is incredibly powerful. It's unlike other forms of learning because no one tells them what to think or do—it's their revelation. You can't argue with it. It's yours, and you must face it and explore its meaning. That's where the real power lies: in the ability to guide people toward those

moments of personal insight, creating a shared language

LAYER AFTER LAYER

The entry point for me ties back to Loes. I'm not entirely sure how much of it stems from her natural way of being or how much comes from her futures literacy practice, but she was remarkably open to trying something new. At some point we both suggested: *"Hey, let's do something together. Let's see what happens if we bring our work together."* And she was fully up for it. Loes brought the planning and preparation skills of a Futures Literacy Lab, deeply understanding the process and creating a sense of stability in the

room. That stability provided a structure where I could bring in a process that invited—or even required—people to let go and open themselves up. Combining these two approaches—being held while letting go—created something truly powerful. It allowed people to feel safe enough to open up and engage deeply. Through this process we also started finding and creating a shared language. What we now share through the Emergence Academy has grown from this ongoing practice. Although rooted in the work and ideas we brought to the collaboration, it evolved through inquiry: What happens if we try this? How do we show up authentically in this way?

And how does the process respond? This way of working is regenerative, not rigid or top-down. Every time we practice, we deepen our understanding of what we're doing, how we share it, and even what it means. It's similar to a Futures Literacy Lab, where you uncover layer after layer of understanding—a continuous unveiling of insights.

EXPLORING THE UNEXPECTED

Futures literacy isn't something you learn once and then “*know*” forever. It's a continuous process of learning and evolving. There's no point where you can definitively say, “*I've mastered futures literacy.*”

Instead, it's a practice, something you engage with and allow to grow within you over time.

The focus on both the present and the future is what makes it so compelling. The term futures provides an excellent entry point because of the cultural fascination and noise surrounding the topic. People are naturally drawn to it—it sparks their curiosity. But asking people to focus on the present is often more challenging.

There's resistance, a tendency to dismiss it. They might label it as hippy nonsense or say, “*I already meditate*” or “*I do yoga—I'm fine.*” Truly engaging with the present can

feel intimidating or unnecessary to many.

What also makes futures literacy so powerful is its accessibility. A wealth of material is written about it, particularly by Riel Miller. His work is deeply articulate and inspiring, often framed in an academic tone. This framing is crucial because it invites people in—especially those who might be skeptical. It provides credibility and structure, which helps people feel comfortable engaging with it. They think, “*Oh, this is academic. This is structured. I understand this.*” But what's brilliant is how it works on multiple levels simultaneously. People enter expecting a purely

intellectual or academic process but often find themselves in deeply personal and unexpected places. The process reveals insights they didn't anticipate, touching on something much deeper than they initially imagined. Futures literacy is accessible yet transformative, structured yet open-ended. It's designed to guide people toward profound self-discovery, and that's part of its genius.

FUTURES LITERACY EMPOWERING CHILDREN

I'd love to see futures literacy applied on larger scales—within communities, across cities, and even at regional levels. Starting with

education at a very early stage would be transformative. This isn't about teaching young children futures literacy in its entirety but rather using its principles to shape the structure and delivery of early education.

Futures literacy's emphasis on sensing and sensemaking could radically change how children relate to education. It could give them a sense of independence, ownership, and pride in their learning journey. Applying these principles in early education could create a genuinely inclusive experience where every child's perspective is valued and integrated. It would foster collective knowledge, empowering children to see their unique views as vital

contributions. This approach is the opposite of what traditional education systems often do. While there are regional differences, the dominant model tends to push toward homogeneity. It molds individuals into standardized perspectives, suppressing differences in favor of conformity. Futures literacy, on the other hand, celebrates diversity and draws on the power of collective intelligence. It recognizes and embraces differences, creating a liberating and transformative experience. You see how liberating this shift can be in Futures Literacy Labs or processes. Traditional schools often teach children that their unique perceptions and expressions

are unwelcome. Futures literacy flips this dynamic, welcoming all perspectives and treating them as valuable. This fosters a sense of ownership in the outcomes of any process or lab. When people feel their input is relevant and valued, they develop a shared investment in the results. It's no longer about excluding some perspectives or labeling others *"wrong."* Instead, it becomes a collective journey of understanding. Another powerful aspect of this collective process is its ability to move away from binary thinking—the idea that there's a right answer and a wrong answer. Futures literacy doesn't focus on blame or fault-finding. Instead, it invites participants to explore

possibilities and reach a shared understanding. If the outcomes don't meet expectations, the group starts the process again. It's about continual learning and growth.

The true value of this collective approach lies in shared responsibility, iterative progress, and a deep sense of inclusion. By embracing this process, we can create a world where everyone feels their contributions matter and diversity becomes our greatest strength.

SENSING AND SENSEMAKING

Enki offers a deep experience (a multi-sensory immersive experience: www.withenki.org). However,

when paired with futures literacy, it shifts from being a standalone moment to becoming part of a larger, connected process. Futures literacy adds the recognition that this isn't separate from life. It's not just, *"Oh, I had this lovely experience, and now I go back to my life."*

Instead, it's the realization, *"Wait, this is all part of the same thing."* We often talk about being the compost of doing. Futures literacy helps people see that experiences like enki aren't just a break, a holiday, or something nice to have—they're fundamental to how we live, choose to be, and engage with daily life. When sensing and sensemaking are combined, participants start to see the broader value of their

experiences, connecting the dots between these moments and their larger life processes. Even with no direct content connection, deep listening, like immersing oneself in enki, can make participants more open to recognizing their assumptions and relationship to the world. A Futures Literacy Lab is mentally demanding as it keeps the mind busy, an essential part of the experience. The mind isn't tired in the sense that it can't function. It's more that the guards are dropped. That's intentional—there's a thoughtfulness built into the timing and structure of the futures literacy process. This is where exercises like listening to enki are timed intentionally. When

participants engage with them, they're more likely to submit to the process fully. By "*submit*," I mean they allow themselves to engage in an open-ended experience without a clear or predetermined purpose. This openness is where transformative shifts begin.

This integration is so powerful that it's worth repeating: sensing and sensemaking together create a process that helps participants navigate uncertainty and move from resistance to a state of openness and curiosity—a transformation that can be life-changing. They leave with a clear shift in how they approach the future, think about it, and use it

in the present. They also gain a deeper cognitive and, perhaps most importantly, sensory awareness and a willingness to remain open. One of the roots of our modern obsession with certainty is the story we're told from an early age: you can be right, and you can be wrong, and if you're wrong, it's a problem. This story reinforces the belief that someone else—a teacher, a guru, a religious leader, or an authority figure—knows better and will tell you what's right and wrong. While there's value in learning from others, especially collectively, we've lost the willingness to trust our innate capacity to understand. And understanding is very different from knowing.

GIVING SPACE TO PAUSE

The word “pause” has become central to my work, and this came directly from my experiences with futures literacy. Although my work already revolved around this idea, futures literacy helped me articulate it more clearly and emphasize its importance. Futures literacy itself is a pause. It creates a space where it’s safe to pause, rethink, and even change our minds. It allows us to reflect and recognize that we may no longer believe what we thought

Where else does it happen? In individual settings like therapy or psychiatry, the process is often

filtered through the disciplines’ assumptions. In group settings, it’s almost unheard of. Most group discussions reinforce existing opinions, with participants solidifying their positions.

Even in debates, people often dig deeper into their views rather than examining them critically. While propaganda or brainwashing might change opinions, those methods are coercive, not exploratory. Futures literacy offers something unique. It creates a space where a group can genuinely investigate their thinking and allow themselves to change their minds. This transformation happens collectively in a secure environment where

participants control the process. It’s not dictated to them, and that’s incredibly rare. This collective experience of transformation deserves more attention. People, including myself, sometimes shy away from emphasizing it too much, but it’s an aspect of futures literacy that’s profoundly important. When participants leave a Futures Literacy Lab, most of them carry a clear sense that something has shifted. It’s not just an individual change—the collective intelligence generated through the process is powerful and deeply impactful. If you asked participants whether they’d ever had a similar experience, many wouldn’t be able to think of one.

Futures literacy is unique because it permits a pause. It provides an opportunity for individuals and groups to rethink and transform together. It's a rare and valuable space for exploring and broadening our understanding of ourselves and the world.



No matter the problem, **community** is the answer.

Cameron Trimble, reverend and CEO.
Atlanta, USA.

I'm a Christian minister in the United Church of Christ. I also run a consultancy that collaborates with congregations from various faith traditions, including Christian, Jewish, and Unitarian Universalist. My work includes strategy development, visioning, and strategic planning, and I work with individual congregations, regions, and denominations.

Most of the congregations I work with are progressive, deeply committed to social justice, and focused on improving the quality of life within their communities. However, they're navigating a significant challenge:

church attendance is declining across the Western world, and many congregations are struggling to sustain themselves. This reality raises critical questions about institutional sustainability. One of our most compelling questions is: How can we leverage what we have to make a difference in the world today and for future generations?

Some congregations strive to balance self-preservation with serving their communities. Others, however, have progressed beyond mere self-preservation, adopting a more profound and forward-looking perspective: Given



our current resources, what can we do that will serve as a meaningful gift to people 50 years from now? Over the last 25 years in this field, I've faced a persistent challenge: a *"poverty of imagination."* Regardless of the tools, facilitation methods, or approaches we used, we frequently found ourselves up against a creative wall. Our visions of the future often mirrored the present or the past, allowing little room for imagination.

Futures literacy is the only capability that breaks through this barrier. It provides participants with a tangible, embodied sense of the future.

This shift in experience significantly alters how individuals approach decisions in the present. Instead of fixating on surface-level questions like changing the carpet color in the sanctuary, whether to keep or sell the building, or which demographics to target, futures literacy reframes the conversation. It fosters creativity and encourages freedom, opening entirely new possibilities. The impact has been remarkable. Through hundreds of futures literacy workshops, I've witnessed firsthand how it unlocks innovative thinking for congregations. It empowers them to reimagine their current role

and create visions that serve as meaningful legacies for future generations.

FROM SURVIVAL TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

I was working with a congregation of 300 members in Minneapolis. Initially, they believed that their best option was to merge with another congregation, a common path for many churches today. We respected that instinct and began the futures literacy process. As we progressed, they came to a profound realization: the specific form of their congregation didn't matter to them. Whether they merged, established a shared ministry, sold their building and

moved elsewhere, or remained in their current location, their core values stayed the same. What mattered most was staying connected as a community, living together, and making a difference in the world.

This reframing completely shifted their perspective. With a clear understanding of their priorities, they determined that merging wasn't the right path. Instead, they envisioned transforming their resources into a social justice center—a nonprofit that could collaborate with other organizations to enhance the quality of life in their Minneapolis neighborhood. This idea wouldn't have emerged without the futures literacy process,

which helped clarify their priority: meaningful connection and impact. I've witnessed this kind of transformation countless times — I could share 30 more stories like it!

A TOOL OF PROFOUND CAPABILITY

The first seed for my journey with futures literacy was planted during a training session led by Loes Damhof for FutureWomenX, an organization I'm affiliated with. I didn't know much about it back then, but I signed up anyway. Honestly, futures literacy isn't the most intuitive name! It doesn't immediately convey what it's about, so I had no idea what I was getting into. The training was lengthy, but as

Loes unpacked it layer by layer, I remember sitting at my desk, placing my hands on it, and saying, "*This changes everything.*" I immediately recognized how it could revolutionize my work. From that moment on, I dove in wholeheartedly. I read every paper available, connected with the futures literacy community in the U.S., and essentially became a "*puppy dog*," following Loes and asking her to teach me more. The more I engaged with it, the clearer it became that this wasn't just a tool but a profound capability. I wanted to ensure I fully understood it, so I brought a researcher onto my team to help us collect data from the hundreds of futures

literacy processes we conducted. We are committed to contributing something meaningful back to the futures literacy ecosystem.

Eventually, I completed a second, more comprehensive training session with Loes and even traveled to Knoxville to work with her as she engaged with a group on food systems. That experience reaffirmed that my instincts aligned with her approach, giving me the confidence to fully incorporate futures literacy into my organization. Since then, I've actively experimented with it, tested new theories, and applied it in ways I never imagined before.

LISTENING ON MULTIPLE LEVELS

In those early labs, I discovered that while the process is simple, the theory behind it is much more complex. The real value lies in the facilitator's ability to listen on multiple levels, which is something I continue to refine. Much of the skill involved is instinctual—an intuitive sense for listening that you either possess or cultivate over time. For instance, when Loes and I collaborated in Knoxville, we trained a group, and they later invited us back. Victoria and I returned to replicate Loes' original training almost verbatim. However, after the training, I felt uneasy about the participants' ability to

facilitate with integrity—not in a moral sense, but in remaining true to the discipline of the process.

Even after completing a day and a half of training and participating in two futures labs, I didn't observe evidence that they could listen at the multiple levels required. This underscored a key challenge: nurturing a person's ability to listen deeply and intuitively during facilitation. It's not something that can be easily taught—it's more about enhancing a capacity that must be present beforehand.

To explain these listening levels, I use an analogy from computer programming. At the user level, you

interact with a device by pressing buttons without knowing how it works. At the programming level, you understand the language and structure behind the interface. Finally, you grasp the deepest foundations at the source code level—the ones and zeros.

I currently work at the programming level, aiming for a source code-level understanding of futures literacy. However, many facilitators, like the group in Knoxville, are still at the user level. This creates challenges because they can't listen deeply while facilitating at the surface. Consequently, they find it hard to help participants meaningfully apply the insights and wisdom from the lab.

Consider the example of the Minneapolis congregation that chose not to merge. Their realization—prioritizing connection and community over institutional survival—emerged at both programmatic and deeper levels. On the programmatic level, they opted to remain together and positively impact the world. However, beneath this decision was a theological or mythological narrative—a deeper story they told themselves about what truly mattered. A congregation's structure becomes adaptable when such a deeper story becomes clear. Their ultimate choice to establish a social justice center wasn't what they initially anticipated,

but it aligned with the deeper understanding they discovered. This capacity to uncover and hold space for such profound realizations makes futures literacy transformative and highlights the significance of skilled facilitation.

BREAKING THROUGH THE POVERTY OF IMAGINATION

Through my experience leading countless futures literacy sessions, I've observed that many groups initially feel a sense of anticipatory dread, envisioning worst-case scenarios. In the faith communities I collaborate with, this often manifests as a shared cultural anxiety. While people may diagnose this feeling in various ways—

citing political divisions, climate challenges, or social unrest—the common thread remains: a collective worry about potential collapse or disaster.

When we begin to envision a desirable future, people often retreat into nostalgia, yearning for an idealized version of the past. This inclination to look backward is deeply ingrained. The reframing is where the essential shift occurs. It compels individuals to recognize that they cannot return to the past and motivates them to think more broadly about the future.

I use a specific reframe that asks them to imagine a world where

the global population has been drastically reduced to 1 billion. Most institutions have collapsed, and climate change has triggered mass migrations. They must envision what spirituality or community would look like in this new world. I don't specify why the population decreased—this is left to their interpretation—but the exercise consistently reveals one answer: community.

Margaret Wheatley has said, *"No matter the problem, community is the answer,"* and this often proves true. It's fascinating to see how people instinctively turn to building and sustaining connections even in extreme scenarios.

The most important lesson I've learned about futures literacy is that it enables us to overcome our poverty of imagination. It's incredibly effective at pushing people beyond their assumptions, but this demands honesty and courage. In groups, we must openly surface and question our assumptions—especially those rooted in anticipatory dread. Doing so is an act of bravery, compelling us to confront the hard truths of our probable futures while daring to dream of better worlds. As a facilitator, nurturing this courage is essential. There's a tension between acknowledging the despair of the present and fostering hope for the future. With challenges like climate change,

it's critical to avoid promoting false or shallow hope. Instead, we must honor the hard truths while responsibly dreaming of desirable futures. This balance—facing despair honestly while holding space for hope—is the essence of futures literacy.

IS THIS THE STORY I WANT?

Futures literacy has profoundly impacted me personally, and it's one of the reasons I love this work so much. While futures literacy is often applied at organizational, national, or even global levels, it has an equally powerful role on an individual scale. It allows us to question the stories we tell ourselves about our lives. This awareness

fosters a unique kind of agency. Once a story is brought to the surface, you can ask yourself: Is this the story I want? Is this my desired future?

Because I work with futures literacy so much, this practice has become second nature. Initially, I approached it consciously, almost as a spiritual discipline. I'd wake up in the morning and conduct a kind of mini Futures Lab in my mind. Over time, it became automatic. I now constantly ask myself: What's the story I'm telling myself about this situation? Is that the story I want to choose? If not, what's a better one?

This practice encourages a sense of openness and agility. It's not about

choosing one story and holding onto it, waiting for another to arrive. Instead, it's about remaining open to the emergence of new stories—stories you might not even be able to envision yet. This openness aligns with my natural tendency to go with the flow. However, I believe that a significant aspect of the current interest in futures literacy stems from the anxiety many people experience about the present. They long for the illusion of predicting or controlling what will come next.

Futures literacy helps alleviate that anxiety by showing us many possible futures. It doesn't lock us into one narrative but instead

creates the agility to adapt as new possibilities emerge. I've also explored foresight and forecasting, which offer valuable tools for architecting futures, though their approach differs from futures literacy. Foresight often focuses on imagining and selecting one future to work toward, whereas futures literacy emphasizes the ability to navigate multiple futures flexibly.

This difference highlights a tension I often encounter in my work. When leading a congregation or organization through a Futures Literacy Lab, the question is always: So what? They need to land somewhere because I've invited them into the process with the promise of

actionable insights. While the lab clarifies the contours of a future they want to invest in, it doesn't always provide a clear pathway. My role as a facilitator is to guide them through this space, helping to translate the clarity of values they've uncovered into actionable steps.

Futures literacy thrives in complexity. It anchors us in our values while allowing our actions to remain flexible. In complex systems, where change is constant and unpredictable, this clarity of values acts like a compass. You may not know exactly where the path will lead, but you have a guiding principle by which to navigate. For me, that's the real gift of futures

literacy. It doesn't just help people imagine the future—it helps them act with integrity and adaptability in the face of uncertainty. It clarifies what truly matters and the courage to move forward without knowing the outcome. That compass of values makes futures literacy not just a tool but a transformational capability.

WE KNOW HOW TO EXIST IN THE WILDERNESS

The impact of futures literacy on participants is profound. People leave these labs feeling liberation, joy, and agency. There's something inherently powerful about coming together to talk,

listen, and collectively explore the future. It's not just about the process being fun—though it often is—but about the emotional and visionary breakthroughs people achieve.

For instance, I was the keynote presenter for the Union for Reform Judaism, addressing progressive Jewish congregations across the U.S. and Canada. Together, we explored the question, What is the future of Jewish congregational life? At the start, like most groups, they approached the question with anticipatory dread, fearing decline or loss. But when we reached the reframe—imagining a world with only 1 billion people— they had a

remarkable realization: we've been here before.

As a people, they reflected, *"We know how to exist in the wilderness, to unburden ourselves of buildings and other material trappings, and to keep moving forward."* This understanding was liberating for them. It reinforced the idea that Judaism is not confined to a physical temple; it's a dynamic, traveling faith that can adapt and thrive in different contexts. That insight wasn't just freeing for them as Jewish congregations—it carried a message for all of us about resilience and adaptability.

These are people's experiences in

Futures Labs, and the outcomes often amaze me. A seminary professor once said, *"The faithful thing we do is show up, give it everything we've got, and don't get married to the outcome."* That's how I approach facilitation. I focus on creating the best possible work environment and celebrating wherever it leads. What's fascinating about reframes is how they can resonate with something familiar, something rooted in lived experience. For example, the Jewish congregations in that lab connected the reframe to their historical and cultural resilience. It's not just an abstract exercise—it touches something deep and meaningful.

FUTURES LITERACY ROCKS!

I'm at a pivotal moment in my career. After 25 years in this field, I'm reflecting on my next steps and feel a responsibility to contribute to the development of futures literacy, particularly in research. Loes has encouraged me to take this on, and with hundreds of Futures Labs conducted, we have valuable data to share. Our work in the spiritual space is unique, and if that distinct perspective can enhance futures literacy as a whole, I want to ensure it's included in the broader conversation.

We've started organizing the raw data we've collected—everything from participant reflections to their

words during sessions. We're also beginning to survey participants before and after labs to understand the changes they experience. This kind of research is new for us, but it's exciting to see how futures literacy impacts people on a deeper level.

If I had to summarize this journey in a phrase, it would be Futures Literacy Rocks! This capability has profoundly shaped my work and life. It's not just a tool—it's a way of thinking, and I'm grateful to be part of this evolving field. I look forward to contributing more, learning from others, and continuing to expand futures literacy's horizons.



Futures Literacy Through the Eyes of a Student

Casper van Ommen, student MBA.
Groningen, The Netherlands

My name is Casper van Ommen. I'm 20 years old, and I am studying Business Administration at Hanze University in Groningen. Alongside my studies, I recently became an Honours Ambassador, which is an extracurricular program that helps students develop themselves further. Futures literacy was a key part of that program—it provided tools I now use.

I first encountered futures literacy through my studies at Hanze University. There was a teacher who suggested I join a Futures Literacy Lab, which sounded interesting. That's how I got involved, through what you might call a

research lab. I find that futures literacy gives me a much more open perspective. It makes me more aware of my assumptions and helps me distinguish between facts and opinions. For example, I recently worked on a completely different project in Selwerd (neighborhood in Groningen, ed.). Before starting, I spoke with a few people and formed some initial impressions of the neighborhood. But after spending six months working there, I began questioning those preconceptions. Futures literacy helped me recognize my biases and reset my perspective. Looking back now, I see how much that



awareness shaped my experience.

That project in Selwerd was about making a positive impact in the community. Our main focus was organizing a community meeting on safety, though it evolved into a broader conversation about livability. We spoke with neighborhood police officers and residents to understand what they wanted to improve and how they felt about their neighborhood. It was eye-opening to see how much our own biases influence these kinds of discussions.

Overall, futures literacy has helped me see more possibilities
Overall, futures literacy has

helped me see more possibilities for my future. It made me realize that my path isn't set in stone—there are many different directions I could take. There was a moment during the program when my imagination expanded, and suddenly, I could see so many more options. That shift in perspective influenced not just my studies but also the additional activities I've taken on—things I hadn't even considered before.

STAYING OPEN-MINDED

Now, I'm involved in different labs and extracurricular activities. I'm also part of a youth advisory board and organize meetings in and

around my school for new projects. I've started seeing more opportunities beyond my studies, realizing I can contribute differently, with the help of others and my knowledge of futures literacy.

Over six months, we had weekly lab sessions where we learned different futures literacy skills. Eventually, we ran a lab ourselves with teachers and fellow students. I'm planning to work with the teachers who originally introduced it, as I'd like to bring it back to my own program—Business Administration—so that other students can benefit from it as well.

I hadn't originally planned to do that neighborhood project, but futures literacy made me realize I could apply these concepts directly through my own experiences. It also influenced how I approached the project itself. When working with local residents, I became much more conscious of my own biases. Futures literacy helped me stay open-minded and genuinely listen to other perspectives. That, in turn, made it easier to organize meaningful discussions and more effective meetings.

Futures literacy helps me reflect on my own perspectives. In projects, I often stop and ask: Where am I in this? What frames of reference am I relying on?

Are they true? By questioning whether my assumptions are accurate or realistic, I can flip my perspective. Sometimes I realize, Wait, this isn't realistic—I've built this assumption entirely in my head. This helps me stay more open and approach projects with a fresh perspective.

Beyond extracurricular projects, futures literacy has also influenced how I approach my Business Administration studies, which are very project-based. For instance, in one of our recent study blocks, we focused on agility—how companies can better adapt to future changes.

Initially, it started with my own

reflection. I asked myself, What are all the possibilities? Then, I brought those ideas into group discussions. I'd present a scenario in broad terms—This is how we see the company in five years—but then challenge it by asking, What if things change completely? What if the entire operational structure needs to be reworked? I noticed that once we started asking those kinds of questions, our ideas became much broader. We began considering factors we had previously taken for granted. Essentially, it was about reframing our thinking—gathering new perspectives by shifting the frame. It worked well.

EXPERIENCING IS KEY

In that sense, I'm not running a traditional Futures Literacy Lab but applying its principles in different settings. By introducing these ideas, I'm helping others start to think differently, imagine alternative possibilities, and see beyond their usual assumptions. It's like inflating a balloon. At first, everything is compact inside. But the moment you allow people to explore new ideas, the balloon expands, creating more space for imagination and experimentation.

Since completing the Honours Lab, the biggest impact on me has been my increased awareness of biases—how quickly we fall into assumptions without realizing them. Beyond

that, I've actively used the tools I learned in the lab. I wouldn't say I've necessarily learned completely new lessons since then, but I've deepened my understanding by applying what I already know.

I think the key is experiencing a lab firsthand. When you go through the process, you become aware of your preconceptions and realize how many possibilities you hadn't considered before. Often, when you're stuck in your own thoughts, it's hard to move forward with ideas. But even a brief futures literacy exercise can completely shift your perspective and open up much more.

For me, the most valuable method has been starting with a topic or problem and writing down all my initial thoughts about it. Then, introducing a reframe—either by having someone else challenge my assumptions or, these days, even using AI to suggest an alternative future scenario. For example, I might ask myself, What if, ten years from now, the situation is completely different—either entirely unrelated to what I first imagined or only partially connected? That shift, from thinking this is how things are to suddenly generating three times as many possibilities, was incredibly valuable. That's probably the most useful tool I took away from the lab.

Without futures literacy, I think I would be far less engaged in thinking about the future. It's a skill that encourages you to reflect on where things are headed and to consider different factors that might shape outcomes. It has also given me a more nuanced perspective—both positive and negative—on the future. Before, I had a more passive attitude: Things will go how they go, and I'll see what happens. But through futures literacy, I've realized that I have much more agency in shaping the future. This has also reinforced my focus on self-development. I now see that if I continue learning new skills and expanding my abilities, I'll be better prepared for the long run.

That sense of intentional growth is something I might not have had otherwise.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Because of futures literacy—and also my studies—I've developed a broader perspective on how things work. I do notice that it influences people around me as well—especially in conversations with my brother or friends. It happens often in those late-night conversations—like 1 or 2 a.m. talks with friends. More than once, people told me afterward I hadn't thought about it like that before, but it made me reconsider my perspective. That's always interesting to see. Sometimes, when

someone makes a strong statement or assumption, I instinctively ask, Okay, but why do you think that? What's shaping your view? It can be about anything—social issues, personal opinions—but I've found that asking those questions often leads to deeper discussions.

I'd like to become more proficient in futures literacy and learn additional tools—there are probably many I haven't encountered yet. For example, I'm planning to run a futures literacy activity at my school, which will expose other students to these ideas. Facilitating a lab in a professional setting will help make it more tangible for me.

Looking ahead, I'd love to reach a point where, in five years or so, if I'm working somewhere, I could run a futures literacy training. I want to make sure I can apply it effectively. I already have some tools, but expanding my "toolbox" will help me connect better with different audiences.

Ideally, I'd combine practical experience with some structured training. I learn fairly quickly, and usually, hands-on experience works best for me. But I also think learning from someone highly experienced in futures literacy—who actively works with it and shares insights—can be valuable. For example, I know Loes gave

a TED Talk on the topic. Once you've participated in a Futures Literacy Lab, it becomes much more tangible, but even just hearing or seeing it explained once makes a big difference. A combination of both approaches—workshops and practical application—would be the most effective.

That said, I don't think most people have six months to commit to building up a lab from scratch. But even with just three sessions, you can make significant progress. Personally, I'd like to participate in follow-up training, especially since I aim to facilitate activities or run trainings myself. A refresher or an intensive one-day session would

be very helpful. It would allow me to refine my approach and provide more guidance on structuring these activities effectively.

Honours students, in particular, tend to be more proactive and open to exploring new things, especially compared to the general student population—particularly in Business Administration. If Hanze University promoted futures literacy as a central opportunity, I'm sure more students would be interested. It would spark curiosity and encourage more people to engage with it.

Overall, I think futures literacy is an extremely valuable tool for teachers and students. It's something worth exploring further. In Business Administration, there's a strong emphasis on professional development—preparing students for the workplace rather than just academic theory. Futures literacy fits perfectly within that framework. If integrated into different courses, even in a small way, it would reach many more people.



Rest, Play, and Disability

Craig Slee,
disabled writer and consultant,
specialising in disability, myth & culture.
Lancaster, UK.

I am a disabled person who has spent a lot of time reflecting on disability, culture, and related topics. Over the years, I've written several articles and pieces exploring these ideas.

My introduction to futures literacy came through Loes Damhof. Meeting her opened the door to a new way of thinking, and I began incorporating some of the techniques from futures literacy into how I conceptualize disability—particularly the metaphors we use to frame it. I started questioning the imaginarium surrounding disability and began exploring what our

relationships with it could look like in various futures. This perspective also extends to how disability is perceived within society and in broader contexts. futures literacy amplifies

something I've always been obsessed with—the realization that humans often operate through metaphors and images. When I consider a situation, I think deeply about how to communicate the reality that everyone, if they live long enough, will likely experience some form of disablement or impairment due to aging or circumstance. It's essential to encourage people to think about these futures and, crucially, to



challenge the assumption that they are inherently negative. For someone like me, born disabled, this isn't a "*future reality*"—it's an ever-present one.

Traditional concepts of the future position it as something ahead of us, something out there. Futures literacy disrupts that notion by showing that the future isn't just what lies ahead; it's deeply intertwined with how we think about it. These perceptions shape time, and we can approach it in many ways.

FUTURES LITERACY IS NOT JUST A METHODOLOGY, IT'S AN ATTITUDE

My journey with futures literacy began in 2020 during the

COVID-19 pandemic when I participated in one of Loes's online labs. That experience was transformative. Working with others in the lab and seeing the diversity of futures and perspectives people brought to the process made me think, "*Oh, this is interesting.*" We all carry assumptions, and while we may be aware of them, teasing them out, playing with them, and seeing what happens in collaboration with others is profound. During that process, I realized the power of anticipation—not as a rigid framework but as a way to embrace emergence. It was almost like queering my assumptions about the future, and that shift made me think, "*This is important.*"

And it is important—because how we think about the world shapes how we behave, and how we behave shapes how we think. Expanding that feedback loop and opening it to include more diverse inputs is essential. Too often, we are stuck in an impulse to seek immediate solutions, which can limit us. Futures literacy offers a different path. It's not just a methodology; it's an attitude. It's about stepping away from the need to make sense of everything and engaging in a sensing process instead.

This mindset is crucial in today's increasingly complex world, where people often default to linear, direct solutions. We've relied on

that approach for centuries, and the results are evident. Futures literacy doesn't dismiss linear thinking but offers an alternative. It's about teaching and working with people to explore imaginative processes many have forgotten or abandoned, often for good reasons. Still, imagination is one of the most vital things we can engage in. Collectively imagining and playing with the stories we tell each other and ourselves isn't just meaningful—it's essential.

TIME MOVING FROM SIDE TO SIDE

I've always been a bit of a nerd when it comes to etymology—digging into the roots of words,

where they come from, and how their meanings shift over time. Futures literacy highlights the importance of this exploration. For instance, when we talk about "*the future*" or "*a future*," there's often an unspoken assumption that it's something projected forward in time. I remember being in a session where someone said, "*The future is going to happen*," and someone else immediately challenged that assumption. They questioned why we think of time as moving only forward, from front to back.

What if time moves differently—side to side, for instance? That simple reframing blew people's minds during the session. It

forced us to reflect on how our bodily experiences of moving through the world influence our thinking and information processing. People often dismiss metaphors as "*just metaphors*," but research shows they're deeply rooted in experiential realities. These realities are passed down and shaped by cultural contexts, creating patterns of thought that feel natural but are constructed.

For me, futures literacy is brilliant at unpacking metaphors—not through a colonial lens that imposes ideas, but through an experiential one that seeks to understand them. Metaphors aren't just words; they're deeply intertwined with lived

experiences and shared cultural ideas. They don't just describe the world—they actively shape how we perceive and interact with it. In that sense, metaphors are world-making.

Take the notion of “*disability*,” for example. The prefix “*dis-*” automatically carries an association of impairment or something undesirable. This linguistic framing reinforces the assumption that the goal should be to be as “*able*” as possible. Metaphors of ability are tied to concepts like freedom, skill, and agency—hierarchical ideas that suggest the more able or free you are, the better or more moral you are. This way of thinking fuels societal resistance to limitation. We're

taught to “*push back*” against limits—another metaphor embedded in our language. Loes, myself, and others have explored an alternative approach: leaning into limitation. What does it mean to sense or experience limitations differently? How might that shift our understanding of agency and freedom?

This exploration invites us to challenge and rethink metaphors and their associations. It confronts the societal narratives that label certain ways of being—disability, queerness, being Black, being a woman—as undesirable. These hierarchical

metaphors underpin power dynamics and societal relations. Futures literacy encourages us to experiment with these metaphors, not frivolously, but as a serious exercise in curiosity and imagination. It's akin to how a child plays with something unfamiliar, crafting narratives from a place of openness.

By playing with metaphors, we can uncover deep truths about how they've shaped our lives. Much of our behavior is grounded in ideas about freedom, agency, and other assumptions we rarely question. Futures literacy helps us recognize that we don't have to follow these ingrained metaphors.

There are other ways to live, think, and act. For example, instead of striving endlessly for freedom or agency, we might slow down and consider alternatives. Starting with a single metaphor often reveals an interconnected system of ideas, showing how pervasive and expansive their influence is.

QUESTIONING CHOICE & EFFORT

Even when you're disabled, even if you were paralyzed, you're still doing something. Even if it appears as though nothing is happening, there's always processing going on. You're always part of a process. Sensing and processing are constant, but it goes beyond that—

you're also being processed. That's key for me.

For example, I'm not paralyzed, but when I'm sitting in my wheelchair, seemingly doing nothing, the room around me is still processing and relating to me. For me, the process is inherently relational. There's always a dynamic of relating happening. Everything we do is part of a process of relating to other things, and this fundamentally changes how I think about agency—who or what has agency. Take my wheelchair as an example. It's not alive, but it plays an essential role in a relational process with me and the room. Thinking about this process expands both my sense of

self and my sense of the room. The way the wheelchair holds my body influences how I think and what I do. In that sense, it increases my sensing. It makes me consider that other things in the room might also be sensing in their way. They don't have to be alive to be responsive. There's a certain responsivity inherent in processes.

This perspective shifts the idea of response away from big gestures or measurable outcomes—like flipping a switch or achieving a goal. Instead, it's about relational processes. From a futures literacy perspective, this isn't just about projecting into the future; it's about understanding that everything is

part of a process of sensing and responding. I wouldn't call it storytelling because that feels too human-centered, but it's a kind of relational responsivity through which emergence happens.

For example, in exercises where we ask people to notice the processes happening in their bodies while sitting in a room, many experience genuine emergence. They often realize they were doing things even when they thought they were doing nothing, which can shift the entire conversation. People start questioning their assumptions about choice and effort. Some might reflect, *"I was taught to give 100% in everything, and while I've achieved a lot,*

I'm constantly exhausted." Then, they realize that even when they thought they were doing nothing, they were still *"doing."* This often leads them to consider that when they think they're giving 100%, they might actually be giving 150%, and perhaps they don't need to push that hard all the time.

These emergent discussions aren't planned—they just happen. They unfold when we start asking, *"What else is here? Who else is here? What are they doing?"* This inquiry reframes our perspective, moving us out of our heads and individual experiences. It opens the door to ask, *"What else is ongoing? What are we in the middle of?"*

RESTING AS A FORM OF ANTICIPATION

For me, futures literacy hasn't led to something externally concrete but rather a deeper internal development. I've discovered—or maybe rediscovered—that feeling stuck isn't the end of the road. It's simply a signal to anticipate for emergence. When I get frustrated because I can't achieve a goal, I remind myself, "Stop. Sense. Anticipate for emergence. See what happens." Sometimes, the outcome might even be rejecting the goal you've been exhausting yourself trying to achieve, and that's okay.

This capability has strengthened my understanding that rest isn't just possible—it's necessary. Resting allows you to anticipate in different ways, and it means you can show up more fully for the people you care about because you're not constantly burning yourself out chasing goals. Futures literacy has enhanced my ability to pause, play, and rest as essential parts of sensing.

It's also helped me be less hard on myself when I don't meet goals. The world is incredibly complex, and futures literacy reminds us of multiple possibilities. It encourages us to explore them, take our time, and avoid rushing into thinking,

"This is the future that should be."
Instead, it invites us to consider as many futures as possible and find what emerges.

As a disabled person, there are days when my body tells me, *"You're not going to be able to do that today."* I'm faced with a choice: do I quit or keep going? Sometimes, it's as simple as drinking tea. If I have muscle spasms while trying to lift a mug, do I give up and wait for the spasms to pass, or do I keep trying because I'm thirsty or need to take medication? Growing up, I was always taught to keep trying despite how hard it was. The message was always, *"You have to frame it as 'I can do this.'"*

Futures literacy has helped me rethink that mindset. Maybe I can't do it right now, but I might be able to do something similar later. I've learned to think about when that might be and whether the effort is worth it. I've also realized that quitting isn't inherently bad. Sometimes, it makes sense to stop. Instead of deciding to quit outright, you can play with the idea of quitting. It could mean doing less work in certain areas or focusing more on the parts of your job you're good at. Could those strengths be applied to the areas where you're struggling? Is it necessary to meet your goals in a specific way, or could you approach them differently, in a way that

aligns better with your strengths? What if I play with my weakness? What if I lean into it instead of discarding it as something unworthy? Not to solve it but to explore it and ask: In what ways am I weak? Are these weaknesses, or have I misunderstood them? Perhaps they're not strengths in the conventional sense, but they're not weaknesses in how I've been framing them. Sometimes, what we perceive as a weakness is a signal of something else in the system that isn't working.

This exploration also ties into playing with the values underneath. Resting, for example, is a process. Think about sleeping—it doesn't

happen instantaneously. For me, it's a whole sequence: I go to bed, lie down, close my eyes, and feel my body gradually relaxing, my breathing shifting. It's an active process. But there are times when my body doesn't relax, whether because of pain or muscle issues, and I can't sleep. In those moments, I ask myself, *"Okay, I can't relax. What else in the process can I focus on?"* Maybe I can deliberately change my breathing to mimic how I breathe when I'm asleep. These processes are interconnected, and by focusing on one, like breathing, my body might begin to relax.

A SPACE WHERE THINGS CAN BE DIFFERENT

There's a common idea that the future is something a lone genius predicts, but futures literacy reveals it as a collective sensing process. Accepting this means embracing the unknown and being curious about what might emerge. This openness to uncertainty, combined with curiosity and play, is at the core of futures literacy. That's why I keep emphasizing play, curiosity, and sensing as the guiding frameworks for this practice.

For me, the future has a unique quality. Despite the increasing prevalence of dystopian visions, the future still holds this sense of *not*

this. It's not the present, and that distinction creates a mental and emotional space where people can think and feel differently. When people encounter the concept of the future, they see it as a space where things can be different. This is incredibly powerful because it sensitizes them to difference and possibility, which they can carry back into their daily lives. Without this imaginative leap into a future frame, it can be challenging for people to see how things might shift or how to explore alternatives.

Futures literacy also fosters a sense of "*beyondness*." Imagining a year like 2050 or 2100 inherently carries

the recognition that these futures extend beyond our lives. That sense of beyond is deeply important—it reminds us that futures aren't just about us; they're about others and the world.

THE AGENCY OF RIVERS

I've also seen how futures literacy impacts others. For example, in the disability community, where independence is often emphasized—"You have to be as independent as possible"—futures literacy has helped some reframe this narrative. They've realized that interdependence, rather than independence, feels more empowering and aligned with their lived experiences.

One person shared how futures literacy completely transformed their understanding of agency. It wasn't just about their agency anymore; they began to see agency in other things—environments, objects, systems. This shift opened up a new way of relating to the world.

A particularly striking example came from a woman with an ecology background. She initially saw her work with rivers as a moral obligation: "*I need to save the river. I need to clean it up because humans have poisoned it.*" Through futures literacy, she started to see the river as an active participant with its agency. It wasn't a passive entity waiting to be

saved; it was already engaging in self-stabilizing processes.

She even joked that she'd been approaching it with a "*white savior*" mindset, imposing solutions instead of noticing what was already working. Revisiting the data, she began asking, "What is the river already doing to recover? How can I enhance those processes rather than disrupt them?" This realization freed her from guilt and allowed her to collaborate with the river more meaningfully.

Futures literacy encourages people to see themselves and their environments differently. It teaches us to sense before we try to make

sense. Sensemaking requires a foundation of observation and openness, but we often skip that step. We can't make sense of everything because everything is so complex and constantly changing. The moment we think we understand something, it's probably already shifted.

AWAKENING AN ABUNDANCE OF IMAGINATION

As for my dreams or ambitions for futures literacy, I want more people to experience it in diverse contexts. Although it often comes across as academic or business-focused, I'd love to bring it to communities that wouldn't typically engage with it—

like overworked moms or groups facing systemic challenges. The idea is to show that these tools aren't just theoretical but are practical and transformative.

Futures literacy awakens an abundance of imagination where there might have been a poverty of imagination. I often ask people, "What if there's nothing we can do?" At first, the question might seem depressing, but it's also liberating. If there's nothing we can do, what do we do instead? That's where play and creativity begin. People often realize they've been stuck in rigid habits or assumptions.

Futures literacy encourages them to pause, rest,
and explore alternatives, even for just a few hours.
Ultimately, this approach could transform communities
beyond traditional frameworks. It's about giving people
the tools to imagine and play, even in uncertainty.



Giving People a Compass

Eric van Gennip,
lecturer Entrepreneurship & Business Innovation
at Avans University of Applied Sciences.
's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands.

Futures literacy came into my life when I was looking to shake up my teaching. I was working as a business innovation teacher, and the usual methods didn't feel sufficient anymore. We had a trend-watching module, but it didn't align with what we were aiming for. Scenario planning was being phased out. I started searching for something to help students see the future with a broader perspective.

That's when I came across futures literacy. I didn't know what to expect, but it looked worth exploring. There was even a Ministry of Education report encouraging

us to work with it more. So I signed up. I came in fresh, having never done a lab before. I assumed it would be about exploring the future—which it was—but what surprised me was how personal

it became. It brought me back to my own assumptions and worldview, which made it feel very different from traditional teaching.

The whole lab felt like an experience. In the middle of it, you're not always sure what's happening. Sometimes, Loes would zoom out and explain where we were in the process, but it still needed time to sink in. At first, it



even felt addictive. I thought, I need to do another lab like this.

Every time, new conversations and insights emerged from the group. That's what kept me coming back. I encouraged colleagues to try it, too. For example, Linda Croon at Saxion was exploring similar ideas. I told her, "*The only way to understand it is to join a Master's program.*" She did. I also connected a colleague from Den Bosch to a program in England—she ended up diving into the more artistic side of futures literacy .

LEARNING TO ANTICIPATE DIFFERENTLY

It's elusive and instructive at once. Each lab gives you something different: new perspectives, tools to anticipate more consciously, and a better understanding of yourself. One big shift for me: I now use the word anticipate constantly. I've become more aware that there are always other ways to look at things. You start seeing intentions, assumptions, and interests—and begin communicating on that level.

It helps you ask, Are we locking ourselves into something too quickly? Instead of planning

everything, maybe we need to leave space—ask what's needed and where other directions might emerge. That kind of lightness resonates with me. It also leads to great conversations. When someone's seeking certainty, you can offer another perspective: Can we stay with the uncertainty a bit longer? That tension often sparks the richest dialogue.

After those early labs, I stayed in touch with Loes and Ramila. Eventually, I co-facilitated a lab near Amersfoort for a general practitioners' association. That was the first time we combined the lab with LEGO. Later, I got certified in LEGO Serious Play. It all connected and confirmed the potential these

tools have to help people think differently about the future.

PLAYING SERIOUSLY: LEGO AND THE RESPONSIBLE MINDSET

We also brought futures literacy into the Avans Excellence Program, integrating it into several Master's and Honors tracks. In Business Innovation, we apply it in the third year. It works fairly well, but students come from the same background, so it's not interdisciplinary. They all think they're innovating—but often from the same frame of reference. From this, we developed a practical tool: a value-driven innovation compass. It helps students identify their values and carry them into

their careers. In mixed, non-academic groups, you see even deeper shifts. In structured classrooms, the framing limits things. However, in open labs, the process can unfold more organically.

One success was an elective on gamification with computer science students. That's when things clicked. But organizing that wasn't easy. Institutional structures don't always support interdisciplinary work. The Excellence Program has been the exception—students join freely, regardless of background.

There are strong parallels between LEGO Serious Play and futures literacy. I even wrote a book on using LEGO in teaching. Within

Business Innovation, I developed a concept called The Responsible Mindset—a future skill inspired by OECD's Project 2030. It includes ethics, empathy, leadership, and long-term thinking. That last one—long-term thinking—draws heavily from futures literacy. LEGO Serious Play complements it perfectly. You build. You don't just think or talk. Everyone participates. There are no silent observers, which is one of the principles behind Futures Literacy Labs.

With LEGO, people build from their expectations about the future. The models make ideas visible. You talk about what you've built and why. That reveals assumptions. In

meetings, 20% of people usually do 80% of the talking. But with LEGO or a Futures Literacy Lab, everyone contributes. Everyone matters—from the cleaner to the CEO.

People often think LEGO is just fun. But it's not about the bricks—it's about the reasoning, the conversation. The method is powerful. Like futures literacy, it's about opening things up. But people often want conclusions too quickly—and they skip the depth.

BECOMING COMFORTABLE WITH UNCERTAINTY

Spreading futures literacy among colleagues has been a slow but steady process, like spreading oil. We host knowledge-sharing sessions, send people to training, and build a core team. Curriculum development was key. That's how we embedded futures literacy under the responsible mindset. It also led to things like a podcast series. I interviewed Roman Krznaric, author of *The Good Ancestor*, and now students engage with that through assignments. Futures literacy is embedded in mindset development. The labs remain electives, which is more fragile. Electives change, but curriculum revisions stick.

We included core skills: resilience, agility, and anticipation.

Every school talks about training “adaptive professionals.” We’ve tried to make that tangible. Students explore multiple perspectives and recognize their role in shaping the future. The innovation compass helps. Some initially resist volunteering. But afterward, they reflect: That was eye-opening. They begin to see: The future isn’t fixed. My choices matter.

Sometimes, I start class with “*five minutes into the future*”—a near-future scenario like a data breach exposing all of their Tinder or Snapchat history. Reactions range

from panic to indifference. But it gets them thinking: Disruptions happen. Futures can surprise you. Our students—mostly from design thinking backgrounds—are comfortable with uncertainty. They're used to open-ended challenges. So, applying futures literacy with them is rewarding since they're already looking for space to explore. There's always one student focused on graduating exactly on time. If you can help them see that a delay isn't failure—that other paths exist—that's meaningful.

A LIFELONG PROCESS

As Loes used to say, are you ever fully futures literate? No. It's a lifelong process. When we finally understood

that mindset, it was a revelation. We want students to develop that mindset so they're not afraid when things go off course, so they can take feedback, grow, and stay open. That's what we call the responsible mindset. Yes, they'll make mistakes, but that's where the value lies.

Avans is a big institution with 35,000 students. I've talked to many programs, often just out of curiosity. In some fields, like accountancy, the responsible mindset doesn't land as easily. But I keep sharing. Keep planting seeds. I'm not pushing a format. What worked for us may look different elsewhere. I just want to ask: Do you see the value? Could this fit your context? The form can

stay open. But always ask: What's the relevance for our students?

Ideally, all academies at Avans would think about that together. That we share an understanding; this is something we value. We're training future-oriented professionals. That's my approach. I share my book and explain the ideas. Sometimes, it clicks. Other times, it doesn't. That's okay. Bit by bit, I bring it into the world.

A while ago, I developed a serious game on sustainable tactics. It started in one course. Then, another program heard about it. Now, it's played by 600 first-years. It takes time. But if the timing's right, it can take off. You can't pass this on



if you haven't experienced it yourself. I gave a futures literacy workshop at the Associate Degree Academy. The reactions were positive. Once people experience it, you can build on that. Remember how that felt? That's what we want students to feel.

I've developed several serious games. And I've learned that if a teacher hasn't played the game themselves, it's hard to implement. They fall back on PowerPoint. Because they don't feel it. They don't know where the value is. That's true for futures literacy, too. You have to experience it first. That makes all the difference.



Memory, Attention, and Anticipation

Fabio Scarano,
curator, UNESCO Chair, professor of Ecology
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

I've been the curator of the Museum of Tomorrow for about two years. I initially joined the museum to work on our UNESCO Chair proposal. However, my primary role is as a Professor at the Federal University of Rio, where I've taught for 31 years. My area of expertise is plant ecology, and my academic background is in forestry. Much of my research has focused on botany, particularly photosynthesis.

Interestingly, my introduction to futures literacy came through my work with plants. I've always been fascinated by how plants, as sessile beings—organisms that do not move about their environment—acclimate to and

interact with their surroundings, while dealing with unpredictability. My research has explored relatively straightforward photosynthesis in the field and the more complex relationships

between different plants. I focused specifically on facilitation, studying how one plant can favor survival and growth of other plants from different species.

During my PhD in Scotland, my supervisor (Prof. Robert Crawford) had a colleague (Prof. Anthony Trewavas) who was researching plant intelligence—a term not widely used then. Plants have memory,



attention, and anticipation as components of their intelligence. Initially, I saw these concepts as metaphorical, but later, in the 1990's, already back in Brazil, our research team came across an interesting phenomenon. We found plant species within subfamilies of cacti and bromeliads performing the ancient (and to-date most common) photosynthetic mode (C3), whereas all their relatives perform the most recent photosynthetic mode (the so-called crassulacean acid metabolism, CAM) from an evolutionary point of view. In other words, they “*evolved*” from the latest mode to the ancient one, which granted them survival and fitness

in cold, high-altitude habitats. Evolution is not progress: it is not linear. We then learnt, from the photosynthetic evolution of plants, that one must “*remember*” forgotten pasts (memory) to thrive in the present (attention) and anticipate futures (anticipation).

However, it was only much later that I encountered the discipline of anticipation. One of the foundational works in this field was written by a biologist, Robert Rosen, whose ideas deeply intrigued me. I realized that some of what I had observed in plants could also be applied to people—particularly the interconnected relationship between memory, attention, and anticipation.

While these three processes are often associated with the past, present, and future, they don't operate in isolation; instead, they occur simultaneously and constantly influence one another. Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector once said that we are “*concomitant beings*” – we are past, present and future at the same time. I couldn't agree more.

I also spent about a decade (2011-2019) working on climate change and biodiversity as part of the United Nations' scientific panels IPCC (climate change) and IPBES (biodiversity and ecosystem services). These experiences involved collaborating with hundreds of scientists to make projections about

the future of climate and biodiversity. However, I became increasingly frustrated by the disconnect between understanding and action. Despite decades of accurate projections, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and society often fails to act until crises unfold.

This realization deepened during COVID-19. Since 2012, scientists had warned of the approaching of a pandemic event. Yet, meaningful action only began after the worst occurred. This gap between rational understanding and emotional engagement is a significant challenge, and reflects our fragmented relationship with memory, attention, and anticipation.

We've become disconnected—from nature, others, and even ourselves. Despite (or due to) technological advancements, our attention spans are short, and we've lost much ancestral memory, including knowledge passed down within families. For example, my grandmother used to treat us with plants, but much of that knowledge has been forgotten. Without memory and attention, we anticipate poorly. What I've learned from plants about these interconnected processes can be applied to people, helping us address this disconnection and move toward more intentional futures.

Over time, I began to understand anticipation differently from projection. This realization didn't happen all at once—it took me a couple of years to fully grasp. Let me share an example that illustrates how this understanding took shape.

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

In those days, I hadn't heard of futures literacy. It was only later that I connected it with my experience with plants and people. I remember coming across a paper written by Ziauddin Sardar, an Iranian scholar at the University of Bergen in Norway. This was a turning point. The paper presented the concepts of

“post-normal times” and *“post-normal science.”* He described post-normal times as complex, contradictory, and chaotic, emphasizing that the future emerges from these periods based on how we navigate them. The paper also highlighted the importance of imagination, arguing that we must expand our capacity to imagine futures to take meaningful action in the present. This struck me—I had never thought about the future in that way before. Moreover, it significantly impacted my scientific approach, particularly as I began considering how post-normal times might influence scientific research and knowledge production. Later, I learnt that the term *“post-normal science”*

was first coined in 1993, nearly in parallel to when I was finishing my PhD. How did it take me some two decades to first hear this?

My deeper engagement with Futures Studies began around 2005 or 2006, but my familiarity with *“futures literacy”* only came around 2015 or 2016. futures literacy added a shift in perspective for me. It’s not just about what’s happening in society—it’s also about oneself. My initial approach to Futures Studies was rooted in a typical scientific mindset, viewing the phenomena of the world as objects to be studied. Futures literacy helped me realize that the process is as much about understanding myself as it is about

understanding society and the world. It encouraged me to reflect on my mindset and actions.

Applying futures literacy to myself made me more honest in approaching my work and engaging with others. It’s not something that someone *“knows”* while others don’t—it’s a process we are all learning and discovering together. This realization made me see that I needed to internalize and practice futures literacy personally before I could talk about it or share it with others. It’s about working on oneself first and being transparent in that process.

RECONNECTING WITH NATURE

Futures literacy has heightened my attention in ways I hadn't expected. Retirement, for example, is something I never looked forward to, but now I find myself excited about its prospects. I've always worked with plants and spent much of my life in nature, particularly in Brazilian biomes, such as the Amazon and the Atlantic rainforest. Over time, though, I started writing more and spending less time in the field. While I've grown to love writing, I now feel a strong call to return to nature—to visit and reconnect.

I have a small house in the mountains nearby Rio, and I can't wait to spend more time there. Being in nature helps me pay closer attention to things in a way that feels impossible in the big city. Cities are full of distractions, and I find them increasingly exhausting as I get older. But in the forest, the mountains, or by the sea, I feel reconnected, lighter, and more at ease. Futures literacy has transformed my mindset about the places I live and the environments where I spend my time.

This shift in mindset hasn't been easy. There's a lot of inertia in us—habits, routines, and ways of thinking that are hard to break.

Futures literacy has made me confront that inertia on many fronts: where I live, my relationships with people, my work, and even my relationship with myself. It has prompted me to revisit questions I hadn't considered since I was a teenager, questions like, "*What do I want to do?*" or, perhaps more importantly, "*What don't I want to do?*" These reflections have been both surprising and fascinating. Thus, as my understanding of futures literacy deepens, it becomes less and less an object of research "out there", but increasingly a subject of exploration applied to myself as part of a wholeness.

ALIGNING BEHAVIORS WITH BELIEFS

One of the frameworks that shaped my thinking is Gaia theory, introduced by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in the 1970s. This theory views the planet as a supraorganism[FS1] we are a part of. Lately, I've been wondering if the planet, as an organism, might have some form of consciousness. If so, does it also anticipate in some way? These questions have reignited my scientific curiosity. I'm now considering how to explore these ideas further. In many ways, my futures literacy journey has gone from focusing on the external to the internal, and now I feel I'm moving

outward again, building on what I've learned.

Futures literacy has a double effect that I've always wrestled with. On one hand, it has a psychoanalytic capacity—it helps navigate the inner world. On the other hand, it's subversive in a social sense. It pushes you to ask questions you wouldn't normally ask about society, relationships, nature, politics, or democracy. It applies to everything.

For instance, during my career in government, I worked extensively in policy—science policy, environmental policy, and educational policy. Through that work, I developed

relationships with people in politics. Some of my colleagues from those days now joke, "*Fabio, you don't care about politics anymore; you've become a hippie.*" But it's not quite like that. I've realized that you can't expect transformation for the planet or the country if you don't align your behavior with those beliefs. It's about coherence. Gandhi said, "*Be the change you want to see in the world.*" Futures literacy helps with that. While it's easy to say, it's incredibly difficult to live up to. Futures literacy helps you work toward that coherence.

It has shown me that for the world to change, one must change. It's about harmonizing one's desires with those of others, ensuring that

one's aspirations don't suppress anyone else's and vice-versa. This was a profound shift because I used to think of society and personal behavior as if they were separate and somewhat mutually independent. My political convictions were in the party I voted for, and that was one world. My behavior was another. Futures literacy showed me that these are interconnected—they are all part of the same whole.

CONNECTING SCIENCE WITH NON-MODERN WORLDVIEWS

Looking back, I realize how much my approach to science has changed. When I was younger, I thought research was about confirming what

was already known. I remember spending an entire year conducting experiments during my PhD, only to find that the results contradicted everything I read in the literature. I told my supervisor, *"I'm sorry, I spent a year on this, and the results are all wrong."* He looked at me and said, *"How can they be wrong? Show me."* When I explained why I thought the data was wrong, he challenged me: *"If you already knew what would be the results, why did you do the experiment in the first place? What you've found is fantastic—it's completely new. Now you need to explain how it relates to others' findings."* That was a revelation. Science isn't just about confirmation; it's about

testing, falsifying, and discovering something new.

If I were to deep dive into scientific research again, I'd integrate more of what I've learned since then. My past work with Brazilian indigenous communities and other non-modern worldviews, as well as my dialogues and collaborations with artists and religious peoples, have profoundly influenced my current outlook on science. When I think about how to bring all these learning into my botany, I often feel like going back to the field immediately! Sometime I will and perhaps investigate more deeply the connections between plants and spirituality, sensation,

and alternative ways of knowing.

EDUCATION AND TEACHING

Futures literacy has made me think deeply about education. It should be integrated into schools and universities, starting as early as elementary school. Children are naturally open to speculative ideas and could even teach us in some ways. As adults, we've often lost the openness we had in childhood. Teaching futures literacy would help young people let go of the need to control everything, appreciate the beauty in emergence, and understand the power of sincere dialogue. Incorporating children into Futures Literacy Labs could also bring fresh

energy. We often bring together people from diverse backgrounds but rarely include different age groups. It would be wonderful to explore intergenerational connections further. At the Museum of Tomorrow, for instance, we see generations visiting together, and our education team does beautiful and extensive work with children. I wonder how this would look like if we meaningfully mix generations in this type of work. There's an opportunity to deepen those interactions.

SPIRIT AND TERRITORY

There is a perception of the Amazon as an untouched wilderness while in fact recent scientific evidence shows that it has been managed by

indigenous peoples for thousands of years. They selectively planted and cut down trees, creating what we now perceive as native pristine forests. This interplay between people and nature imbues the forest with a certain spirit, a presence that comes from intentional interaction. But for that spirit to exist, presence is essential. When things become automatic or purely mechanical, the spirit fades. Being present and paying attention can reconnect us to that deeper connection to ourselves and the world.

Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian people often describe the connection between spirit and land as deeply rooted. They believe there's a strong link between spirit and territory, with specific spots within that territory where the spirit manifests itself. It's like a place within a place. Sitting under a tree, for example, can be one of those spots—a point of connection. Everyone has such a place where they feel that deep link. The idea that the spirit doesn't travel is closely tied to this belief. The spirit remains rooted in the land. It took me a long time to understand this because, in Western thinking, the spirit is often imagined as

something untethered or free-floating. But this concept of it being deeply connected to the land is fascinating.

Whenever I travel, I feel almost misplaced at first. I sleep badly for a few nights. But if I pay attention to the surroundings, I reconnect. I'm unsure whether it's about connecting to local spirits or adjusting my mind and body, or both. Either way, I find it intriguing. Presence and attention seem to reestablish that sense of belonging. At the same time, there are specific places within the larger context of the planet where one might feel a stronger sense of presence—like a particular tree or a meaningful location. It's as though there are layers of connection, some deeper than others.



The Many Paths of Futures Literacy

Felipe Koch, senior lecturer in Societal Innovation.
Créteil, France.

Futures literacy plays a role in both my professional and personal life. I have always engaged in it, but I wasn't aware of it. I use it in a more structured way now, recognizing this process as futures literacy when practicing it. I often ask myself a quick, ongoing question: Could it be different? Which path or imaginary am I following? Are there other options? In my professional life, I might ask whether I should prepare for a competition or open new doors to explore other perspectives. This reflective process happens continuously and is the same in my personal life. Being Brazilian and living in France for nearly 18 years, I often question what seems settled. Life constantly prompts me to ask: What could I do differently? Could I go back

to Brazil? How would that affect my daughters and me? These perspectives are never entirely closed, and that's how futures literacy feels to me—a constant, reflective process.



I am an associate professor at the University of Paris-East Créteil and the vice dean of the AEI International School. I am also involved in a Master's degree program focused on societal innovation and broader societal issues, particularly in Latin America. In the second year of the Master's program, we concentrate on futures studies. We offer a full-semester course on futures literacy and another on Social Foresight. Additionally, we host

a summer course in June. This year marks our second edition of “*Emerging Futures: Societal Innovation Meets Futures Studies*.”

The course spans two weeks.

During the first week, we conduct a Futures Literacy Lab and provide an introduction to foresight tools. The second week brings various lecturers to explore futures literacy and broader futures studies topics.

I organize the summer course, coordinating the second week and teaching during the first. Additionally, I teach in a program in Brazil at the Brazilian College of Higher Studies, part of the Federal University of Rio. They offer a program called “*Formation*

and Transformation in Futures”, open to students, professionals, and companies. I teach the introductory course on Social Foresight there.

In the futures literacy semester, we begin with a Futures Literacy Lab and follow the steps I learned in the Hanze FLIP courses I took in May and September 2021. My first futures literacy experience was in late 2020 during a short lab on the future of food organized by One Resilient Earth. In that lab, I suggested that we might eat pills in the future. Someone challenged me by asking, “*Is that all you can imagine?*” That question made me realize the limitations of my thinking. It pushed me to

expand my imagination, and from that moment, I experienced a transformation—like being bitten by the “*blue fly*.”

In 2022, I attended the Winter School in Trento with Roberto Poli. By then, I had completed my PhD in sociology, exploring the anthropological structures of the imaginary, which explain how societal imaginaries are organized. When combined with Social Foresight and futures literacy, this concept provides a powerful analytical framework for envisioning and analyzing images of the future. Since then, I have incorporated these imaginaries and tools developed during my PhD

into every Futures Literacy Lab I conduct, even with undergraduates.

NARRATIVES AS SEMANTIC BASINS

As I describe it, the imaginary is like a grammar of images—a framework that helps us make sense of reality. This understanding is key to futures literacy as it aids in navigating and comprehending the world. My academic journey—from journalism in Brazil to sociology—has always been about helping to make sense of reality for myself, for others, and society. Imaginaries help us

cope with time, aging, and even the inevitability of death. By understanding these structures, we gain a powerful analytical tool.

For example, in Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), when delving into deeper layers, one can apply the concept of “*semantic basins*.” Gilbert Durand introduced this term to describe how an imaginary forms. Much like a river, it begins as small springs, grows with banks, and eventually forms a delta before disappearing—while another river emerges elsewhere. This metaphor illustrates how dominant narratives rise and fall. These societal creations cannot be directly controlled but can be uncovered and understood.

For me, this is a vital tool in Futures Literacy Labs, especially when analyzing the origins of future images.

My PhD focused on the imaginary of wine consumption in Brazil, specifically how the images and metaphors associated with wine consumption influence whether people drink it. During the pandemic, wine consumption in Brazil rose from about two liters per person to three liters, while consumption of other alcoholic beverages remained unchanged. I explored how this increase aligned with the synchronization between the imaginary and actual practices of wine consumption, helping to

explain why wine, in particular, gained popularity.

I developed a framework to analyze these imaginaries. One set of images I labeled “*Eros*,” which connects to sensuality and the sensory aspects of wine. In Brazil, wine is often considered a “*couples’ drink*.” It is not typically consumed during meals like lunch or dinner but is enjoyed at night, after dinner, and before bed. There’s a symbolic connection between wine, relaxation, and sleep, with mythological references like Morpheus adding to this imaginary. Another set of imagery, which I called “*Agape*,” has a more Promethean tone, viewing wine

as an intellectual pursuit. This perspective involves learning about wine, tasting, and studying it, and it appeals to a smaller group of enthusiasts. However, this group’s normative discourse about wine often alienates broader consumers who engage with it more emotionally and not aesthetically. This tension between aesthetic judgment and shared cultural codes sometimes discourages wider engagement with wine.

These imaginaries encompass many elements. For instance, during my research, a young woman told me that when she sees a bottle of wine, she thinks of Netflix. This example highlights how wine’s imaginary varies

across cultures. In France, wine is traditionally seen as a father’s drink, shared during Sunday family lunches. In the U.S., wine is often associated with women, with images like “*Desperate Housewives*” and a glass of Chardonnay. In Brazil, the dominant imagery depicts couples sharing wine before bed. These cultural differences significantly shape how wine is perceived and consumed.

This research helped me refine my ability to spot images and understand their underlying structures. In the study of imaginaries, we often work with myths—stories that make sense and evolve into narratives. Myths are composed of smaller elements

called “*mythemes*.” For example, the hero archetype—a figure of fearlessness—is a recurring element across various stories. I can quickly discern which narrative is at play when listening to people. Later, I expanded on this understanding by studying frameworks like Riel Miller’s anticipatory assumptions (AA). I even taught a course on identifying different frames. These tools offer two complementary ways of listening: one based on the framework of the imaginary and another that applies anticipatory assumptions to analyze deeper meanings. Together, they help create reframes or shape the phases of Futures Literacy Labs.

TAKING STUDENTS TO THE KITCHEN

Teaching people to become more sensitive to imagery, assumptions, metaphors, and language is possible. When given the right tools, people embrace them and use them to make sense of reality. That’s the power of sensemaking. However, it’s crucial not to remain in the individual realm. While personal reflection is essential, collaboratively imagining futures is the real strength. Reality is a social construct. Engaging in discussions allows for a shared understanding and a stronger sense of reality. This collective process is incredibly powerful and often leaves participants wanting more.

Active listening is one of the hardest skills to develop, especially for those facilitating labs. It requires deep, focused attention and the ability to relate what is heard to a broader framework. I often draw inspiration from Fabio Scarano, an academic from Rio de Janeiro who studies regenerative systems. He applies his framework to reading and interpreting things like I do. This diversity of perspectives is essential. However, frameworks like UNESCO’s should not be rigidly applied as fixed rules. Frameworks are tools that must adapt to the context in which they are used.

In a Futures Literacy Lab with a university community, we explored the future of education. Students shared that education is often viewed as a bridge to the workplace or an instrument for life rather than something valuable in itself. They felt that learning is rarely seen as an activity for its own sake—it always needs a specific goal or function. Initially, discussions focused on creating more market-related courses or functional approaches. However, deeper listening revealed a profound frustration: education is not appreciated as a standalone process but is tied to external purposes.

Faculty and staff also began to recognize this perspective. Even

professors reflected on how universities often frame their purpose as serving external goals rather than fostering knowledge for its own sake. This collective realization became a turning point in the discussion. Together, we explored reframing the trajectory of education and work. Instead of starting education first and working later, we imagined an alternative: beginning work at 16 to gain life and professional experience, then pursuing university education later with greater reflection and purpose. This reframe sparked meaningful discussions among participants.

Time constraints often limit how deeply such ideas can be explored. In

some labs, sessions last only three hours, making it challenging to develop deeper analyses or transitions between phases fully. In more extended settings—such as the master’s program, summer schools, or collaborative projects with universities in Brazil—we can dedicate a full week to these processes. This allows for a richer and more thorough exploration of ideas.

The approach becomes more in-depth when expanding futures literacy into a half-year program. I often liken the process to a restaurant—most people experience the dining room service, but our program takes students back into the kitchen to see how it’s all prepared. This allows them to

pause during the lab and delve into what's behind it: the readings, the reflections, and the connections that lead to that moment.

Incorporating the structures of the imaginary into the course, we encourage thorough reflection before returning to the lab. This depth ensures that participants integrate insights they might otherwise overlook. Without this additional time, the process would feel incomplete—more like merely doing something without deeply engaging with its significance.

MAPPING IMAGINARIES

The Master's program, focused on societal innovation, incorporates

a futures literacy semester in the second year. The primary goal is to train facilitators and develop students' analytical and critical capabilities—specifically, their ability to make sense of reality, uncover hidden assumptions, and critically analyze problems. By the end of the semester, students are trained to facilitate Futures Literacy Labs. They even organize and grade labs for undergraduates as part of their coursework. However, the focus extends beyond facilitation. The semester equips students with broader competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and understanding complex systems—skills that prepare them for diverse challenges and professions.

Currently, I'm working on embedding futures literacy into change processes, particularly in projects involving municipalities and communities. A recent example is a collaboration with researchers from Fiocruz in Rio and community members in the Favela da Maré. Over three months, we conducted a Futures Literacy Lab, working with an NGO and residents. To ensure accessibility, we avoided typical futures literacy terminology, using simpler language like, *"What do you hope for?"* and *"Let's think about imagination."* This approach fostered engagement and allowed participants to connect with the process more deeply.

Building on this, we held a structured online training between April and May, engaging three groups in three sessions each. In July, we returned for a week-long workshop. The goal was to help participants understand how images of the future influence their perceptions and actions in the present. By the end, they co-created an agenda for transformation—what we call “*phase four*.” This included proposals for change inspired by their collective visions. We also introduced concepts from anticipatory governance. These frameworks enabled participants to translate the future from an overwhelming concept into an actionable and inspiring vision.

In the next phase, we focus on training facilitators from within these communities. The aim is to map the imaginaries emerging from their desirable futures and explore how they connect to broader patterns of collective imagination. This ensures that futures literacy becomes embedded within the community’s fabric, fostering ongoing transformation.

WITHOUT HOPE, CHANGE IS IMPOSSIBLE

Futures literacy is both a mental model and a way of seeing things. Reflecting on my childhood, sociology often highlights determinism. I grew up in a small

town in Brazil, and by deterministic logic, it would have been almost impossible for me to become a professor at a French university. However, I always imagined different futures, even though I didn’t reach as far as I dreamed as a child—I wanted to go further.

This mental model of imagining and projecting possibilities can be trained, but it also intersects with structural realities.

In places like favelas, enhancing imagination fosters freedom—helping people recognize that imagining something different is possible. Through imagination, transformation becomes conceivable. Drawing on

Heidegger's philosophy, I interpret that we are not solely defined by our environment but are also projections of ourselves.

Some argue that offering hope is risky when the outcomes may seem unattainable, but without hope, change is impossible. Futures literacy training is a powerful entry point for this shift, but it's not a one-time event. It's a process people can return to and deepen. At the same time, many already practice these thinking methods without framing them in the terms we use.

We have already embedded futures literacy into processes such as phase four of our work in the Favela da Maré, which we completed in July. During the online training, we emphasized the importance of retaining the images of desirable futures developed in the sessions. When developing the agenda for transformation, we encouraged participants to let those images guide their thinking about short-term actions and policies.

IMAGINING FUTURES IN LIMINAL SPACES

The most important lesson I've learned about futures literacy is the realization that the future can

be anything. Truly anything. It's such a powerful realization—it sparks creativity and imagination in a way that can fill your mind. At the same time, it reduces anxiety and gives you the energy to engage with people, think more freely, and even approach work differently. Considering that the future can take any shape, it shifts your perspective entirely.

Practicing futures literacy influences the people around me, both professionally and personally. Before practicing it, I was more focused and goal-oriented at work and home. For example, in the faculty, when working on a project, the mindset was often, “*Don't*

open it up too much; stay focused on the deliverable.” Now, I encourage others to leave room for exploration alongside the exploitative side. I often say, *“Let’s not just focus on outcomes—let’s explore as well.”* At first, people are resistant, but planting those seeds often leads to new ideas emerging over time.

In my personal life, I see this with my two daughters. Before, I might have focused too much on what I thought was the *“perfect path”* for them—what schools they should attend, their grades, and so on. However, futures literacy has helped me realize that things can be completely different. For example, if one of them gets a grade that’s

not so great, I ask myself: *“Is this a problem, or is it just part of the system we’re in? Does it truly matter at their age?”* This perspective has helped me approach their growth and learning more openly and less rigidly.

My dreams or ambitions with futures literacy include expanding it further within our faculty. I’d love to see it embedded more deeply, perhaps as a minor program or as small modules for undergraduates to introduce them to these concepts early on. Additionally, I’m working with my researcher friends in Brazil, the ones we collaborated with in the favela. In February, we’re heading to a traditional community reserve near the Amazon—not quite in

the forest, but at its edge. This community is in a liminal space between agricultural lands and the forest. Like favelas, it is not fully integrated into the city but not completely excluded. These *“in-between”* spaces interest me deeply. These are vulnerable communities, not because of who they are but because of how we, as a society, make them vulnerable. I want to investigate which images of the future dominate their imaginaries and how these futures connect to their realities. This is a research focus for this year and likely next year. I hope to develop a meaningful study on the futures we can imagine in these liminal spaces.

A MAJOR TURNING POINT

Futures literacy has been a major turning point for me. I wouldn't call it a "*discovery*," but encountering it has been transformative—both for my career and personal life. Before, my ambitions and projects felt much narrower. Futures literacy, as both a mental model and a field of study, has opened up countless possibilities for me as a professor and researcher. It's been a vital part of my life over the past five years.

Reflecting on everything I've done since coming to France—from starting to teach to eventually securing my position—it's clear I've been open to emergence. For a long time, I focused intensely on getting

a tenured position. But at one point, I realized it could take years, and I didn't want to set aside everything else in life for that one goal. Instead, I began working on various projects simultaneously, and it's been incredibly rewarding. I've had so many meaningful encounters with futures literate people worldwide. There have been exchanges and collaborations I wouldn't have experienced if I'd focused solely on one path.

Looking back on how I came to France, I embraced emergence without realizing it. Reflecting on the moments when I embraced imagination has helped me see how that shaped the outcomes. Futures literacy enables you to reflect on your past through this lens, recognizing when you were goal-oriented versus open to emergence.



Bringing Hope into Action

Kris Tuinier, director in higher education.
Groningen, The Netherlands.

I am deeply connected to Hanze University. My academic journey began in 1997 when I studied at the ALO, after which I pursued a degree in Sports Management. By 2003, I had completed both programs, earning diplomas in ALO and Sports Management. Following my studies, I started working at Hanze as a teacher, a role I held for seven or eight years before transitioning into management for a similar period. Afterward, I served as the Director of Sports Studies for another seven years. Currently, I'm the Director of Education and Research, and Director of the Center for Talent and Learning (CTL), where I've been for about two years. Futures literacy (FL) has become an integral part of this role.

My first encounter with futures literacy was during my tenure on the executive team at Hanze. At that time, Loes Damhof had been recognized as Teacher of the Year, and Rob Verhofstad emphasized the importance of highlighting her work. Around this period, I participated in a futures literacy workshop alongside the Hanze Management Team—a transformative experience. The workshop encouraged us to step outside the “*here and now*” and imagine ourselves 50 years into the future. This exercise sparked entirely new conversations within our group of about 30 leaders.



Typically, discussions within a management team are shaped by organizational interests, each representing their specific unit. During the workshop, however, we managed to detach from those dynamics and look at things from an entirely different perspective. What stayed with me the most was the ability to play with time. Futures literacy encouraged us to explore future possibilities while asking critical questions: What do you want to stand for? What actions can you take now to unlock those possibilities you value in the future? That first experience with futures literacy was positive and left a lasting impression on me.

At the Center for Talent and Learning, futures literacy became a central responsibility. We've dedicated time to embedding it meaningfully within the center. This process is not straightforward; building mutual understanding and integration takes effort. However, futures literacy has proven invaluable, particularly in addressing the uncertainty of Hanze's ongoing transformations. Unlike other departments or faculties, CTL is unique in that it doesn't fit neatly into the categories of education or research. Instead, we serve the entire organization, creating opportunities and ambiguities. Futures literacy offers tools and methodologies to navigate

this complexity, helping us explore collaborative ways forward amidst these uncertainties.

CREATING SHARED NARRATIVES

Futures literacy has been valuable on a personal level. I've always struggled with the idea of victimization—when people feel powerless in the face of larger systems. I can't fully explain why, but I instinctively want to avoid that mindset, both for myself and in my work areas. Futures literacy helps with this by shifting the focus from feeling like a small, powerless part of a larger system to recognizing even small areas of influence and acting thoughtfully.

This approach encourages taking responsibility and thinking collectively rather than feeling trapped by uncertainty. That's how futures literacy returned to my path, and it's now an important part of my responsibilities at CTL.

The most important lesson from futures literacy is that futures are always uncertain. In fact, over time, uncertainty grows even more. For example, the weather was more predictable a hundred years ago than it is now. Uncertainty has become a fact of life, but the key is learning to deal with it. You can develop competencies and become proficient in navigating

transitions—whatever terms people prefer to use for it. That realization can bring peace of mind if you can accept it, and that's something I've taken from futures literacy .

It's also deeply connected to what you stand for in your work and life. What kind of future do you want to build? What do you want to stand for and strive toward? Reflecting on those questions gives a sense that you're not defenseless. However small your role might be, you can still participate in the field, contributing to a future that feels meaningful to you. In education, of course, our role is anything but

small. With more than 30,000 students here, the stories we share and the discussions we facilitate are always value-driven and normative. At the same time, it's crucial to give students the space to craft their own stories. We can create a shared narrative and have meaningful conversations about it. In doing so, our influence is far from small. These reflections stayed with me after the futures literacy session I attended.

For me, the opposite of victimhood is hope—choosing to pursue something rather than giving up or thinking it doesn't matter. That's a very hopeful perspective that has influenced how I approach my

work. However, I find the current situation at Hanze quite unsettling. External factors, such as the reorganization and the uncertainty around the center location, are at play. We'll likely see a significant reduction in the number of directors, which will also impact my role.

RE-ORIENTING OUR SHARED VALUES

Education is inherently value-driven. It's not about prescribing how students should think politically or how they should vote. Instead, it's about creating space for them to discuss important social issues and reflect on where they want to add value and what they want to contribute to the world.

We've focused enormously on growth for the past 200–300 years. Growth, growth, growth—it's so ingrained in our thinking that anything not growing is seen as wrong. But this planet has limits, and we must start rethinking what is truly valuable in life. It's not just about growth.

Futures literacy allows us to have these conversations, especially when imagining scenarios 50 years into the future. I recently visited Japan, where I found it fascinating how much further ahead they think. Sometimes, they consider the impact of decisions 250 years from now, asking what it will mean for the next seven generations. That kind of perspective changes how you see things. Here,

we're so focused on the present—on profit maximization and often on competition, on “*winning*.” But what are we really talking about?

One thing that struck me in Japan was during a visit to an accounting firm. It was a very commercial company operating in a tight labor market. Instead of trying to attract “*the best people*” at the expense of others, they focused on finding people who fit their values, and on building something together. Their approach wasn't about winning and losing. They said, “*If we insist on having the best people, someone else won't have them. What good does that do for society?*” It was a completely different value orientation, one I

appreciated. The constant focus on competition and “*being the best*” seemed less dominant.

The trip was part of a Lean Leadership program. In the Netherlands, Lean often focuses on reducing waste and techniques, but in Japan, it’s more about meaning—putting people first and thinking long-term. Twelve of us from the Netherlands had completed a Lean Leadership training, and the company organizing the trip planned it. We visited various places to see how things are done in Japan.

Of course, the experience was somewhat biased. The places we visited aligned with the philosophy

we were there to learn about, and there are other sides to Japan—for example, the issue of people working themselves to death, which we didn’t see. Still, the trip was incredibly inspiring. It showed me how leadership can be about putting people first and focusing on values and long-term perspectives rather than just efficiency or competition.

TAKING TIME AND SPACE FOR DECISIONS

Futures literacy has impacted me personally. It’s part of a sum of experiences but plays an important role. I’ve started to feel a greater sense of inner peace. I’ve accepted that everything is unpredictable, but we can deal with that. Not

everything is fixable, but we’re not victims, either. That realization has brought me peace, and I try to bring that same sense of peace into my work at CTL, R&D, and with the Hanze Management Team.

It has influenced my leadership, although it’s hard to pinpoint specific decisions where I’ve acted differently. It feels more like an underlying shift. I reflect on what suits me and take things from futures literacy that resonate with me. I’ve learned to rest while still addressing issues. Futures literacy has helped me resist the urge to be forced into a decision or always to aim to “win.” Instead, I’ve learned to take time and space for decisions.

It's not about doing nothing and expecting solutions to come naturally but about giving yourself enough room to approach problems thoughtfully. That creates a sense of peace—not just for me but also for the people around me. It doesn't mean avoiding answers or processes, as that would create chaos. But it does mean recognizing that you don't have to provide an immediate solution or make a snap decision. You can say, *"This is a complicated issue. How will we approach it, and how long should we take?"* I don't know if you'd call those transition skills, but I've taken them from futures literacy. They bring a lot of peace to both the organization and me.

My first introduction to futures literacy connects to this idea of a *"window of opportunity."* If you have some sense of the direction you want to go and what's important to you regarding values and norms, then it's about recognizing those moments when the window opens. You cannot predict it, but you can seize the opportunity or let it pass when it happens. If you don't act, it moves on.

It often doesn't go as planned, or you don't find exactly what you want. None of us are perfect, and I certainly am not. But over the last few years, I've learned to be more open to those moments when they arise. That's been a significant part of my learning curve. Some of that

openness comes from the people I've worked with and the environments I've been in, which have influenced my growth.

I hope this mindset fosters a sense of self-awareness and self-confidence in the here and now—not only in myself but also in others. Even though everything is unpredictable, we can rely on each other, our framework of values, and our individual and collective qualities. When we're at peace with those, we can better see what's coming at us, deal with it, and even influence it.

As a manager at Sports Studies, where I worked for seven years, I always felt like we were running around,

tackling many things at once. Over time, I learned to bring a sense of calm and self-awareness to the team. I've tried to apply the same approach at the Center for Talent and Learning (CTL) and in Education and Research (O&O), even though I've been in those roles for a much shorter period. I've learned not to rush things anymore.

FUTURES LITERACY FOR ALL

At the Hanze Leadership Center (HLC), we often discuss what it means to be “*transition proficient*.” That term can mean many things, but I am excited about providing students with capabilities such as futures literacy. Perhaps my biggest dream is to educate a generation proficient in these skills. And I believe futures literacy’s impact and potential within the Hanseatic League is smaller than it could be. Even though student numbers are shrinking, imagine reaching 26,000 students with this knowledge. Isn't that the greatest thing we could do? To educate

people who act on hope and work together to build the world they want?

For the Hanseatic League, that's my dream. But I think the dream could be even bigger for futures literacy. Imagine embedding it not just within the Hanseatic League but in institutions and communities worldwide. That's a vision I find incredibly meaningful.

In Japan, I was asked to share my “*number one declaration*”—to articulate what I stand for or strive toward. My declaration was to inspire young people to make the world a better place, and that's what I want to stand for. By “*better*,” I mean a values-driven world, not one where profit maximization takes precedence. Ultimately, I hope we can inspire a generation to improve the world—not just for humans but for the planet we share.



Reimagining Climate Resilience

Laureline Simon, founder and executive director.
Berlin, Germany.

I run a nonprofit organization based in Germany called One Resilient Earth. Our mission is to help build the resilience of individuals, communities, and ecosystems to the impacts of climate change. To achieve this, we engage in transdisciplinary projects that integrate art, science—both modern science and Indigenous knowledge systems—and collaborative practices. These projects emphasize processes of collective intelligence, focusing more on mutual learning than on traditional education. We strive to co-create transformative and regenerative learning experiences that address the root causes of climate instability and vulnerability.

At the same time, we aim to enhance the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and ecosystems. This approach ensures that we do not solve one ecological issue by creating new ecological, social, or political crises.

As part of this work on resilience, we have explored methods, tools, and approaches to best support our learners. Futures literacy is one of these key components. Whether viewed as a tool, skill, or capability, it provides immense value for participants in our learning journeys and workshops. It enables them to think about climate



resilience in new ways and prepares them to navigate the volatility, instability, and uncertainty inherent in a future shaped by climate change.

Futures literacy is fundamentally about understanding how our perceptions of the future influence our actions in the present. It allows us to rethink climate adaptation and resilience by incorporating uncertainty and embracing emergence rather than relying solely on planning. While planning continues to be the dominant approach for many large organizations, futures literacy encourages us to examine its limitations and discover the

advantages of integrating emergence into our strategies.

Equally important is fostering imagination and creativity during this pivotal time, transforming how we live, work, and organize. We are in the process of co-creating new worlds without a linear trajectory. The goal isn't to craft a perfect future vision but to develop the capacity to collectively work and experiment with multiple visions. This is a critical aspect of futures literacy that greatly enhances our work.

As a result, we integrate futures literacy into all our climate resilience and regeneration workshops series. Each workshop

series typically includes approaches, frameworks, and methods that introduce new perspectives, with at least one session dedicated to futures literacy. Furthermore, we have partnered with organizations such as the United Nations, museums like the Museum of Anchorage, universities, and private sector entities to develop tailor-made futures literacy workshops. Together, we have developed Futures Literacy Labs, often collaborating with artists and skilled facilitators. Artists add a unique dimension to these labs by helping to expand imagination and open new avenues for thought.

We have also organized several futures literacy and Arts training sessions, including three-day, in-depth workshops for professionals already engaged in sustainability and climate work. These sessions provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of futures literacy and the tools needed to lead their own Futures Literacy Labs within their communities or organizations. Through this combination of practice and creativity, we continue to advance our mission of building resilience and fostering transformation in the face of climate change.

This “*train the trainer*” approach is essential for building transformative

climate resilience. Participants play a key role in futures and climate change activities. Our futures literacy workshops attract a diverse range of participants, as they are connected to various projects. Many of our larger workshop series are funded through the Erasmus+ program and primarily target young people. As a result, our main audiences include young adults, sustainability professionals, and sometimes curious individuals looking to explore these topics. For example, during our collaboration with the Museum of Anchorage, participants specifically registered for the workshop. In other situations, we attract individuals already involved in climate change

work or aspiring to enter the field. The artists we work with add more depth to our process. While they don’t necessarily need prior experience in climate change work, they typically resonate with our mission. For instance, the theater artists we collaborated with in Germany were simply curious and excited to engage with our work. This collaboration allowed us to explore new ways of incorporating movement and emotional expression into the futures literacy process, as these workshops can evoke strong emotions in participants.

A significant aspect of our work at One Resilient Earth focuses on emotional and mental well-

being. To support participants' wellbeing, we actively seek diverse modalities to help them navigate emotions while engaging in our workshops. We collaborate with climate psychologists and artists, as their approaches complement our work beautifully. I am particularly interested in actively engaging the body for in-person futures literacy workshops. Theater artists helped us explore the emotions tied to futures literacy and allow participants to play and perform small scenes or dialogues within reframed scenarios. Participants might have conversations with the future or experiment with different ways of walking to connect with probable or desirable futures.

These theater-based practices bring a new and exciting dynamic to our workshops, enhancing imagination and creativity through bodily engagement. This method has proven to be a fun, enriching way to deepen the experience and bring futures to life in a tangible, embodied way.

A POWERFUL ALTERNATIVE

Futures literacy wasn't something I sought out—it found me. At the time, I was working with the UN Climate Change Secretariat in Bonn, organizing a one-week brainstorming conference called Resilience Frontiers. The goal was to explore what resilience could look like beyond 2030. It was meant to be a

pioneering format, bringing together around 100 experts from various sectors worldwide to collaborate on reimagining resilience.

My superior suggested we learn more about futures literacy during the preparation, so we traveled to Paris to meet with Riel Miller at UNESCO. We spent five hours delving deeply into the concept and methodology, which was transformative for me. We then applied the futures literacy framework to design the conference, which eventually took place in Korea in 2019. For me, this marked the beginning of a massive paradigm shift.

I had worked on climate change for over a decade, focusing on adaptation and resilience. My work revolved around comprehensive risk management—developing detailed future scenarios to assess risks and creating plans to address them. Much of it involved advocating for long-term planning at the national level. Yet, over time, I became acutely aware of the limitations of this approach. The sheer volume of data required to create “*perfect*” models made it impossible to gather everything needed. Moreover, the systems we rely on are filled with interconnected risks that lead to unpredictable, compounding effects.

My mind was trapped in an endless cycle of risks, data, and plans, constantly overwhelmed by new research that only seemed to complicate matters further. The futures literacy meeting changed everything. It introduced me to the idea of embracing uncertainty and working with emergence rather than striving for unattainable precision. Acknowledging what we don't know and exploring futures in a way that integrates this uncertainty was a revelation. It offered a powerful alternative to questioning traditional tools like projections and scenarios, which felt increasingly inadequate.

That meeting in Paris was both a relief and a challenge. On one hand, it was liberating to discuss these limitations openly and recognize I wasn't alone in seeing them. On the other hand, it unsettled me, forcing me to question the foundation of my previous work. It made me deeply curious about how to move from theory to practice: How could futures literacy transform my approach to climate resilience? Was it practical? Could it be integrated into climate negotiations and policy advice?

The lead-up to the conference in Korea was intense. That's also when I met people like Loes

and began exploring the futures literacy framework alongside other methodologies. The event wasn't a traditional Futures Literacy Lab but incorporated framework elements. For such a large in-person gathering, it was an incredible introduction, and it left me eager to delve deeper into futures literacy and its potential applications.

The one-week workshop in Korea was a major effort involving a team of about 10 to 15 futures literacy facilitators. Riel Miller played a key role in helping us assemble this group, which included Ramila Khafaji Zadeh and many others from the network. It was an impressive

collaboration, but organizing such a large-scale and experimental event within the UN system came with challenges.

Among organizers and participants, there was a mix of curiosity and skepticism. While some were open to working with a different framework, others were unsure where this approach would lead. The event felt experimental because it pushed for innovation and change, quite different from our usual methodologies. As one of the main organizers, I needed to fully believe in what we were doing, or the effort would have faltered. I had been warned that some participants might

feel uncomfortable at certain stages of the process, but I didn't anticipate the scale of discomfort we encountered. As experts in their fields, many participants were unaccustomed to pausing and imagining futures playfully or reflectively. Some strongly resisted having their assumptions questioned.

Midway through the week, a few participants threatened to leave, expressing frustration: "You're wasting my time! We have so much expertise in the room; we should be doing more useful work." I remained convinced of the process's value and encouraged them to stick with it, explaining that discomfort was a normal part

of the journey. I assured them they could judge the process only once it was completed. The small group of dissatisfied participants agreed to give it another chance. By the end of the week, the results were remarkable. Some of the participants who had been the most resistant came to us with a change of heart. It was a powerful reminder of how transformative the experience could be, even for those initially resistant.

Although I left the UN a few months after the workshop, the methodology continued to be used within the organization. Participants from the event, such as the team at EIT Climate-KIC,

began integrating futures literacy into their projects. While I'm not fully aware of all the long-term impacts, I know the approach gained traction and continued to shape new initiatives.

A NEW FOUNDATION

About six months after leaving Resilience Frontiers, I founded my organization, which fully integrates futures literacy. After years of working to make decisions grounded in rigorous scientific frameworks despite their limitations, I became curious about what it would mean to focus on exploration and experimentation. My first year with the organization felt like an experiment in embracing

emergence. I asked myself, *“What if, instead of planning everything, I stayed open to emergence and simply observed what unfolded?”*

Admittedly, I swung the pendulum too far the other way at first, completely ruling out planning. I had wonderful creative breakthroughs and deep existential questions. Eventually, I realized some planning was inevitable when running an organization. Still, experimenting, exploring, and embracing the unknown brought so much aliveness to the process. This openness created new possibilities for our work, enabling us to develop frameworks and integrate imaginative, experimental, and

creative elements into our learning journeys—elements I might not have dared to consider before.

This approach also led us to work extensively with co-creative processes. I've come to value co-creation and the openness to emergence it requires deeply. The dimensions of collective intelligence, co-creation, and emergence are now central to how we work at every level. Futures literacy remains a foundational influence, shaping the design and execution of our projects. While our team is not large, it shares this connection with futures literacy. Many team members are already familiar with futures literacy or become familiar with it while working with us. Either way, it

becomes a point of connection and shared understanding, enriching our collaborative efforts.

REGENERATION

The resilience we pursue in our work inherently includes regeneration. As you may know, climate resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and cope with the impacts of climate change. However, when we consider resilience in the long term—not just as a reaction to immediate extreme weather events—regeneration becomes essential in two critical ways.

First, we want to avoid irreversible changes to the Earth's climate

systems by limiting global warming as much as possible. This means regenerating soils and ecosystems to ensure the Earth can continue to sequester carbon and that thriving ecosystems help curb the rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Second, healthy ecosystems play a vital role in helping us cope with the impacts of climate change. For example, living forests store water in the ground, lower temperatures, and support biodiversity, while even smaller ecosystems, such as urban green spaces, contribute to maintaining resilience. Thus, the health of ecosystems is crucial for both mitigation and resilience.

Beyond ecosystems, we also need to address vulnerabilities in human societies. Climate change doesn't affect everyone equally; during floods, for example, elderly people, infants, and those with limited mobility are at higher risk. Tackling these vulnerabilities requires deeper societal changes. Building closer-knit communities with stronger intergenerational support and care is one way to reduce sensitivity to climate impacts. It also involves fostering a culture where people are willing to help each other and think long-term about reducing vulnerability. This might mean redesigning cities or reshaping our ways of life to better prepare for future challenges.

Preparing for, limiting, and coping with climate change impacts requires ecological regeneration and societal transformation. Regeneration extends beyond restoring ecosystems; it includes strengthening relationships between people and fostering emotional and mental wellbeing at an individual level to deal with new relationships. Addressing stress, cultivating the capacity to engage, and building supportive communities are all part of this regenerative process.

In this context, resilience is not just about resisting, adapting, or recovering. It's about transformation. Given the scale of the climate crisis, resilience must go beyond merely

bouncing back or incrementally rebuilding. Long-term resilience involves transforming systems and fostering regeneration. Futures literacy plays a vital role in this. It contributes to resilience, regeneration, and hope by opening up possibilities and helping us envision different futures. It allows us to explore probable and desirable futures, and when we focus on the desirable, there's often a palpable shift. People experience increased joy and excitement as they realize they can push their imagination further and question more assumptions than they thought possible.

Even when participants encounter the initial shock of a reframe

scenario—thinking, “*What’s happening now?*”—they begin to see opportunities for going beyond the limits of their current thinking. This process introduces a new dimension of hope by imagining inspiring futures and enhancing our sense of agency. Futures literacy helps us understand that we have more power and influence in our work and lives than we often assume.

SHIFTING IDENTITIES

I’ve found that futures literacy has become a mindset—a way of being—that I’ve integrated into my regular practices. At one point, I started playing with “what if” questions in my daily life just for fun. Whenever I think about a new project, I now

explore multiple scenarios, whether on my own or with my team.

I’ve also created conditions that make this thinking meaningful in our work. Because we work with imagination, creativity, artists, and storytelling, we’re in an environment that nurtures this approach. Innovation and unconventional ideas are welcomed and often necessary for designing our interdisciplinary projects. This space allows more exploratory and “*out-there*” ideas to thrive, which has allowed futures literacy to integrate seamlessly into our processes.

I recognize, though, that this isn’t always the case in larger or more

structured organizations. Futures literacy can be disruptive in such environments, challenging the established plans and structures. While disruption is often needed, it can also meet resistance. Integrating futures literacy into spaces where planning dominates is more challenging. In many contexts, it’s still seen as an intriguing but peripheral activity—a “*cool thing on the side*” rather than a core practice. I’m curious about what it would take to make it more central in these settings, enabling people to combine planning with openness to emergence.

When people leave a lab and return to their usual environments, they might think or act differently—

perhaps more imaginatively—only to feel a sense of disconnection from their peers who haven't experienced the same shift. This can place them in a liminal zone, where they've changed internally, but their external environment remains unchanged. Our organization addresses this by maintaining a transnational community. We've developed an online platform for everyone participating in our training, learning journeys, or workshops. This platform connects them with like-minded individuals who are also undergoing similar transformations. It provides a support layer for those whose relationships with their existing communities may be

shifting. This space offers a sense of belonging while we navigate the transformation process and renegotiate our connections.

These transient communities play a vital role during identity shifts. Over time, people tend to develop new ties with others or renegotiate their existing relationships as those around them also begin to adapt. Identities are always evolving, and a sense of belonging can be renewed or transformed—it doesn't vanish simply because we change. However, having a supportive community at the beginning of the process is crucial, and that's exactly what our online platform is designed to provide.

WHAT'S NEXT...

One of our current projects is Clarity, a European initiative focused on transformative climate resilience education. The project aims to help children and youth move from feelings of climate anxiety to resilience, connection, creativity, and regeneration. To this end, we're developing pedagogical tools and teacher training materials that integrate futures literacy, Futures Thinking, and Emergence.

The goal is to ensure these tools are accessible to teachers and educators working on climate change education. Futures literacy is a critical component of this project, as it equips educators with the

mindset and tools needed to inspire resilience and creativity in young people. One of my dreams is to see futures literacy widely adopted in educational settings used by teachers and educators at various levels and with different age groups. I believe it could yield incredible results, which we're actively working toward.

I'm also passionate about expanding the possibilities of Futures Literacy Labs. Since moving to Berlin last year, I've considered deepening the connection between futures literacy and the arts, particularly through collaboration with various artists. I would love to turn labs into artistic residencies or longer explorations beyond the typical lab format. This could open up new ways of working with futures literacy, blending it with transdisciplinary artistic practices. Of course, funding will be essential to bring this vision to life, but I'm excited for collaborations to pursue this vision.



Designing with Future Consciousness

Linda Hofman,
PhD Candidate, moral futures researcher,
education designer.
's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands.

I've been thinking about futures and future consciousness since around 2014. At the time, I was part of a research group focused on futures thinking and trend research. I worked as a teacher-researcher at Fontys Academy for Creative Economy, exploring the topic of future consciousness. I had already spoken with some people in Finland, as other researchers were also engaged with the concept. At some point, I came across futures literacy, and it struck me as incredibly interesting because it felt like a missing piece of a puzzle I couldn't yet grasp or articulate. I sensed that future consciousness was connected to systems thinking and ownership, but I kept asking myself: what exactly is the future?

At symposiums,
I had heard
about
*“anticipatory
assumptions”*
but hadn't
fully grasped
their meaning.
However, when
I spoke with
Loes Damhof
about futures

literacy, she described anticipatory assumptions as the essential building blocks we use to explore futures, and everything started to click. Suddenly, I thought: *“Oh yes, this makes sense. This is something you can research. Of course!”* That realization opened up a new world for me. What I had been investigating wasn't vague—it was tangible. It could be expressed in words and images. Everything we contemplate regarding the



future is something that can be examined. That insight was truly an eye-opener for me.

I worked as a teacher-researcher for thirteen years but recently became a researcher at the Moral Design Strategy research group. Over the next four years, I'll work on a project to integrate futures thinking into a methodology developed by the Moral Design Strategy called Moral Data City Hunt. This method involves presenting new technologies to people and asking them, "*What do you think? How do you envision the future?*" We are currently examining the underlying values within people's narratives by analyzing their stories. I've been

fully immersed in this work, and futures literacy remains key, especially regarding foundational elements like anticipatory assumptions.

Looking back, I realize that "*the future*" is not a singular concept—multiple futures exist. I was exploring the idea of plurality and how different possible futures exist. However, everything still felt somewhat vague then, and I struggled with the predictive approaches used by many trend researchers and futures researchers. For instance, many focus on forecasting the future, and I kept thinking, "*That's not entirely accurate. Something is missing here.*"

At the same time, I saw how researchers studying climate change often base their work on extrapolating current trends, which is undeniably valuable. But it's impossible to truly predict how the future will look beyond small fragments, such as a timeline or temperature projections. You can't predict the future as a complete system with all its interconnections. At most, you can imagine or envision it. I strongly felt this but couldn't find the right words until futures literacy gave me the tools to articulate these ideas. Now, I use this understanding extensively in everything I do.

SIMPLIFYING THE LANGUAGE OF FUTURES

For me, the seed of futures literacy was planted around 2015 or 2016. At the time, I had been giving lectures on future consciousness and had just taught a large masterclass on food systems. In that class, I presented various future scenarios and had already started using the term futures literacy. Then, in 2016 or 2017, I connected with Loes through a SURF project where we worked on envisioning the future of digital learning tools. That process unfolded very organically. We started creating workshops together, realizing

we shared a similar vision: it's not about predicting the future but about engaging people with it—encouraging dialogue. That conversation is far more important than the scenarios themselves.

I immediately implemented everything I learned. One of the first lessons I taught was about the future of neurodiversity. At that time, the concept of neurodiversity wasn't widely known, so I began by explaining what it meant. Now, it's much more common knowledge. I also ran Futures Literacy Labs in the Dance minor program, where I had previously focused on trend research. However, I found that the literacy labs were

far more engaging and enjoyable to facilitate, especially since they could be done effectively within a short time frame.

In almost all my lessons, I incorporated elements of futures literacy while adding my personal touch. I always started by gathering insights from participants: What are your fears? What are you looking forward to? What do you think will happen? Based on their responses, I would identify missing perspectives or images and design a reframing process to explore those areas further. This guiding framework became central to my approach.

Beyond my classes, I collaborated with other programs and schools. I worked with the art school and gave a masterclass to the ICT program. Much of this work was disrupted during the pandemic, but I continued teaching lessons and courses. I also collaborated with Merlijn Twaalfhoven on a project related to the municipal elections. In this project, we collected people's opinions on the future of the Netherlands and simplified futures literacy into everyday language. We posed basic questions like, "*What do you like about your neighborhood? If you had a million euros, what would you invest it in?*" We aimed to make futures literacy more accessible, avoiding technical terms like

"*futures literacy*" or even the word "*future*" itself. It was about bringing the concepts closer to people's lived experiences, making them feel relevant and actionable.

I learned a lot during that time, but the most important lesson was articulating things better. That clarity in communication became a key takeaway for me. The second lesson was realizing how many complicated terms are used in futures research, which often makes the field unnecessarily complex. In reality, it can be simplified significantly. To reach more people, it's essential to think carefully about how you frame your questions. I've continued to focus on that in my

work with Moral Design. I'm always looking for ways to simplify the language we use. But I've noticed that as soon as there's a scientific layer involved, there's a tendency to revert to complex terminology.

For example, I worked with many students on their graduation projects, and they often developed extensive surveys about what the future should look like—whether the focus was on gender or another topic. But the essence of those surveys often boiled down to a few core questions: What are people afraid of? What are they looking forward to? And what do they want to preserve? Simplifying things to that level often gets to the heart

of the matter much faster. This approach is also less exhausting for participants and creates space for freer, more meaningful conversations, ultimately leading to better results. When you know the core of your question, it becomes much easier to have significant conversations with people.

The conversation itself is more important than the future. When you ask people about the future—whether they describe it or draw it—they remain within their perspective and often reinforce their existing assumptions. What doesn't become apparent are the underlying assumptions shaping their vision. That's where the

value of conversation comes in. When people engage in dialogue with others, those assumptions begin to surface. It's almost impossible to uncover them any other way. If challenged or presented with an opposing view, they reflect: “I think this is true, but is it? Does it hold up?”

This is why conversation is so significant. When I started this work in 2016-2017, I often had students work individually to create a vision or narrative about the future. It was fun, but it only reflected their personal thoughts. After taking the futures literacy course, I changed my approach. I still began by asking students their

thoughts on a topic, but I always followed up with group work. The group setting allowed those underlying assumptions to emerge through dialogue, a crucial part of the process.

TECHNOLOGY EMBEDDED WITH DILEMMAS

In my research, I identify what works to help people think more broadly, what doesn't, and which techniques should be applied. At Fontys Academy for the Creative Economy, I learned about design. During my PhD at Fontys Business and the Institute of Logic, Language and Computation at the University of Amsterdam, we have been developing something similar to design fiction. In this

approach, we create a prototype of future technology embedded with dilemmas. People can interact with sliders to adjust variables, which generates projections of future scenarios that then serve as a basis for discussion.

I assume many people have little idea about technology and its consequences or don't care. Yet cities and democracies must consult their citizens about whether they want certain technologies. Ideally, people should be able to vote or express preferences, but technology often doesn't feature on political agendas. Our research seeks to give municipalities insights into their residents' views on technology,

enabling better decision-making about implementing technologies in urban contexts.

In this research, technology refers broadly to emergent technologies within the city—tools used to manage or govern urban systems. These might include drones, for example, which are not purely digital but often have a layer of digitization behind them.

The software, agents, and architecture supporting these technologies are less tangible but crucial for understanding how cities use them. Defining exactly what I mean by “technology” remains important for this research.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

The future doesn't necessarily have to be human-centered, and I find that idea fascinating. For instance, what if whales domesticated the world? What would happen then? Imagining such scenarios opens up entirely new perspectives and possibilities.

In one project with Merlijn Twaalfhoven, we developed three or four key questions to explore futures literacy. Artists and others ventured into cities to ask questions like, “What do you like about your neighborhood?” Based on the responses, we gathered stories and created future scenarios inspired by them. People were then invited

to vote on their preferred scenario. While it was a beautiful concept, many people found engaging fully with the process challenging. Eventually, I stepped back from the project, and Merlijn continued with initiatives like the Ministry of the Future, focusing more on its creative aspects.

Many techniques used in those projects align with futures literacy principles. For example, the dialogues mirrored the structure of futures literacy, although they were too complicated for citizens to engage with. Understanding what benefits them is essential to include in the research. Nevertheless, it's evident that the arts, futures literacy,

and design are strongly connected, even though they complement each other in different ways.

Artists, for example, often excel at extracting creativity and unusual ideas from speculative, expected, or desired futures. However, they sometimes stop at creating an artwork or translate their ideas directly into products or services.

One recurring question I've encountered—and had myself after completing the futures literacy course—is: “Now that we've uncovered these assumptions, what do we do with them?” Identifying assumptions is essential, but understanding how to act on them is equally important.

This question relates to my work with students and workshops. My method, Prototyping for Sustainable Futures, involves building prototypes based on expected and desired futures rooted in core values. When I was part of the development team of the Master Strategic Communication, constructing and implementing the domain of Futures research in the program, I wrote this approach while teaching. One student, Willem van de Plas, applied it to designing a new environment at an institution and reached a compelling conclusion: shared visions often result in dull, compromise-driven outcomes. The result can feel

uninspired and repetitive even when the process is creative.

This student proposed making visions more flexible and fluid by building them around shared values derived from Futures Literacy Labs. His articulation of this idea was powerful. I had already been experimenting with similar concepts, but he demonstrated how these values could guide innovative design. The spaces created might look completely different, but the underlying values remain consistent—a beautiful approach that moves beyond fixed results.

WE ARE NOT THAT IMPORTANT AS INDIVIDUALS

I plan to complete my PhD in three years, integrating futures literacy into its design. I want to encourage students and beyond to think more consciously about the future. This broader awareness can reveal new possibilities for addressing today's challenges differently. My dream is for us to think more flexibly and long-term, adopting an ecosystem mindset rather than one centered on individual egos. Creating new narratives is essential to make this shift possible.

The greatest value of futures literacy is the realization that we are not that important as

individuals. Everything can unfold in countless directions, and there are always possibilities. By acknowledging and creating those possibilities, we also take on a responsibility for them.

What sets futures literacy apart from other approaches is its scientific foundation. It allows you to document, compare, and analyze assumptions in measurable ways. While trend researchers and artists do fantastic work, they don't necessarily approach futures from this research-driven perspective. This scientific rigor makes futures literacy powerful—it's a framework for actual investigation, grounded in evidence and analysis. I'm excited about the potential for

embedding futures literacy more deeply into transition processes and complex challenges.

It's not just a one-time exercise—it's a way of thinking that can be integrated into the process, helping us navigate complexity with greater awareness. Looking back, I feel deeply grateful that I met Loes and had the opportunity to work with her on this journey. Futures literacy has profoundly impacted how I approach my work and has become an integral part of my thinking.



Sincerely Curious

Maikel Eikenboom, senior innovation advisor.
Utrecht, Netherlands

I started my career in healthcare in 1999, working in disability care as a supervisor. From the very beginning, I had an eye for innovation—always looking for ways to improve things or try something different. Over the years, that curiosity led me from one layer of insight to another. It's a bit like peeling an onion. You begin with a surface-level issue, only to discover a deeper, more important question underneath. If you don't address that deeper layer, you might do something useful—but only briefly and mostly on the surface.

In 2015, I shifted my focus even more intentionally toward innovation. Together with some colleagues, I founded an innovation lab. We wanted to make technology more meaningful in disability care. That goal led us to explore agile methodologies, design and design

thinking, and eventually, the world of change management. Each step revealed yet another layer.

Then, in 2019, I joined the Health Innovation

School in Nijmegen. That was a turning point. Loes gave a lecture there that completely captivated me. It was like I had been moving around in a room, trying various things, and suddenly several doors opened—doors I hadn't even known were there. I had thought I was being innovative, but in truth, I was mostly optimizing the present. I wasn't thinking about what could be possible beyond the here and now. That realization hit me: if we only focus on



improving current systems, we risk missing out on what's truly possible. It felt like such a waste.

Six months later, I signed up for an online training course. It was during COVID-19, which was, of course, a highly disruptive time. That period laid bare so many structural issues in our systems. And I began to feel that the work I was doing no longer aligned with what felt necessary. I was a process supervisor for technology and innovation across thirteen healthcare organizations. However, within that strategic framework, there was no space to discuss the future. Not even as a side note on the agenda. It was seen as vague, irrelevant, and ineffective.

Around that time, I reconnected with a colleague from the Innovation School who worked at Vilans. We decided to run a course together because we believed that if you want different outcomes, you need to do different things. To do things differently, you have to look at things differently. If you keep seeing the same reality, you identify the same priorities. You stick to the same patterns. That's when I knew my previous job wasn't the right fit. I wanted to spend my time elsewhere, on the things I believe truly need and deserve our attention. That shift wasn't really because of COVID-19. It was because of futures literacy.

BEYOND MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

I realized that so many people around me—especially in corporate settings—approached everything from a management and control perspective. They focused solely on optimizing the present, labeling it innovation. But it wasn't. Not really. Looking at how rapidly the world is changing, that thinking is no longer enough. We weren't asking: What could truly make things better for all of us?

So I moved to Vilans, where there was a team working with futures thinking and transition methodologies. Now, I work as

a Senior Innovation Advisor in the Innovation and Process Improvement Department, though honestly, I think we should rename it Innovation and Transformation. The current title feels outdated. We need to give it new meaning.

Vilans is a knowledge organization for care and support. We combine experiences with research knowledge and create practical knowledge products that you can use immediately. In this way, we use knowledge to make care even better, and people who need care and support can live the way they want.

We have a large team of researchers and advisors and, among other

things, run major programs for the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport. These include everything from support for implementing legislation on care to transitions in elderly care, innovation in disability care, and the development and distribution of knowledge products and care protocols. Within the long-term care sector, we play a nationally significant role.

My first real encounter with futures literacy was through a training course. It included a session with Bayo Akomolafe that stayed with me. On the final day, we organized a small self-run Futures Literacy Lab online with a few colleagues. That was the beginning.

A SHIFT IN MINDSET

My futures literacy practice has deepened. It's not about using a tool to reach a goal. It's about the process itself. Especially when you're working together on a shared topic, it opens up more than you expect. There's a kind of creative richness that strengthens the outcome. Whatever you're working on becomes more solid and meaningful.

But there's also a shift in mindset. It's about starting with questions that resonate on a human level. If I come in convinced of what needs to be done, I often meet resistance. But when someone recognizes themselves in the issue—when it

connects to their own experience—something opens up. That’s where the power lies: connecting with what’s alive in the environment and helping to move it a step forward.

One particular moment crystallized things for me. I worked on an innovation strategy for a large disability care organization with 5,000 employees. We used McKinsey’s Three Horizons model. The first horizon is the current paradigm—the “Voice of the Manager.” The second is about renewal: improving what exists or shifting toward a new paradigm. The third concerns fundamentally different ways of working together, grounded in new values.

It was difficult to bring attention to that third horizon. Of course, you need to keep your organization strong in the present, but if you don’t intentionally focus on alternative thinking, you miss real opportunities. And that’s exactly what I saw happening. The dominant narrative was that everything must be digital. We need more technology. People must be more digitally literate. It became a tug-of-war—as if the human side was being sidelined. That was incredibly disappointing.

BUILDING MOMENTUM AROUND FUTURES LITERACY

People need a sense of the future—even if they don’t yet realize they

do. So, part of the work becomes developing that demand. However, traditional care organizations often don’t offer the space needed. Still, I’ve found ways to apply futures literacy in my work. Even before I joined Vilans, I helped create what we now call the Futures Compass. It’s more of a transition tool than a compass, but it helps people visualize their assumptions and identify where change is possible and wanted. We’re now expanding it beyond one program. The mindset is starting to spread. People are seeing its value. They’re applying it to relevant topics and producing results. That’s incredibly rewarding. Momentum is building. A few colleagues already had some

background—one did a PhD at DRIFT, and another took a futures course in Copenhagen—but no one had worked with futures literacy before. Then, I had the chance to organize a departmental day for 25 colleagues in innovation and renewal. Ramila facilitated the session, and of course, you can talk about futures literacy all you want, but doing it is what shifts something. That's when people feel it.

Since then, some colleagues have become real “partners in crime.” There's a buzz developing. Just recently, I ran a scaled-down lab with colleagues working on a project called Citizens with Care Responsibilities. We gathered a

mix of professionals and informal caregivers—just ten people—for a try-out. Ideally, I'd love to distill this lab into something that fits an hour. That way, we can offer it at conferences or events and invite more people to explore it.

We're also experimenting with facilitation. I think we're still learning what it takes to do that well. In a recent lab, we used dynamic reframing. We brainstormed potential assumptions and designed four possible reframes. Right before the reframing part of the session, we took a break to focus and reflect on what we'd heard. Crafting a good reframe is delicate work—it takes tinkering. It should stretch

people but not push them so far that they shut down.

We prepare these sessions collaboratively, always asking: What does it mean to do this work? And then we try things out. It's a shared process. That's the strength. You need someone to reflect with—to ask: Are you picking up on this? Did you feel that shift? Sometimes, it feels like we're in a desert, and then suddenly, a new perspective emerges. A door opens. You catch that spark in someone's eye, that very human moment. That's why I do this work.

Loes's exercise with the cube was one of those door-opening moments

for me. It made me realize how deeply our assumptions guide our actions. Often, these assumptions remain unspoken, and that's where friction comes from. Once you treat assumptions as something you can actively engage with, you gain much more to work with. That insight added a level of intellectual depth to my work. I felt a space I hadn't even seen before.

At one point, we hired a company at Vilans to help with foresight work. But they focused on forecasting, and futures literacy wasn't part of the conversation. I kept trying to bring it in, but they couldn't connect with it. Structuring what we already know is valuable, but the part about seeing

differently was still untouched.

That's why I find Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) so brilliant. It helps build a systemic picture—what's happening and why. Then, it connects those layers to people's identities and values. I've used CLA in several projects. In one, we implemented a new electronic patient record. Usually, the quality department would decide what that system should look like.

But we took a different approach. We started with the people using the system—care recipients and care workers—and optimized it from their perspective. Then, we brought in the support departments to align. In that project, the metaphor for the old situation was Barabapa—

we shape-shift endlessly to do whatever's needed. For the new situation, it was Simba—own the good, show your pride, and grow into it. These metaphors helped keep us aligned and helped the collective narrative for change, and because they're familiar, they resonated. It's not strictly futures literacy, but it shares that layered, meaning-driven quality.

KNOWLEDGE IS ENTANGLED WITH VALUES

I've learned that real impact happens when people explore values themselves. You're not the one implementing the outcome, but you create the space for others to see differently. We recently held

a departmental session, and several participants wanted to join the futures literacy Master modules. That's how it spreads. We're planning a longer lab soon with 25 people from across the organization. The goal is to revisit our guiding questions and use the imagination phase to build stories and scenarios. That process will help bring new perspectives to the surface.

Knowledge usage is never just about knowledge. It's always entangled with values. Working this way naturally invites different perspectives. We often expect research or projects to deliver fixed outcomes, but life isn't that neat.

I see most of the challenges we work on as inherently complex. That means short-cycle learning is best. The exploration phase usually takes about six months. You produce something, and then you loop it back in. Ideally, it becomes a continuous process. But even if I can apply it at the beginning of a project to nudge the framework, that's already a win.

The Futures Literacy Lab is uniquely powerful. Its structure—divergence and convergence—creates transformation. You always just take a slice of it, and that's a bit of a shame. But it stays with people. Even if they seem unsure at first, six months later, something clicks.

They've integrated a piece of it.

I strongly believe in embedding futures literacy more centrally in our work. Right now, we're still in a positioning phase, but I want us to be involved from the beginning of assignments—especially during the exploration phase. I'd love to see this mindset adopted more broadly and take our client along in that process. It's not about changing political winds but giving people more flexibility in how they think and work.

Frameworks like Cynefin are becoming more well-known. People are realizing that their challenges don't always match the

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tools they're using. Futures literacy is part of that same shift. It creates space for action perspectives. But we're still writing project plans in a waterfall style—with a bullet point that says “future-aware.” Then the question becomes: What does that mean? Sometimes, people push back. That's not our role, they say. But then I ask: Don't you want to be future-proof? And if you're just reinforcing what already exists, is that the future?

Still, I've noticed that some people are naturally more drawn to this work than others. Some find it hard because it feels like they're giving up control. But was there ever true control to begin with? Once you

understand the nature of your relationship to what's happening, you can anticipate and act more effectively. I've seen people retreat initially, unsure how to use this approach. But then later, something shifts. It's about recognizing where the pieces start to click.

If I had to name this story, I'd probably call it Sincerely Curious. Because in the end, it doesn't matter where you start. If you have curiosity and intrinsic motivation, you'll always find the right questions to explore. That's what drives me. That's what keeps me going.



Beyond Linear Paths: **Adapting** to the Unknown

Ben M. Nafaji, founder & head of community.
Groningen, The Netherlands

When I moved to the Netherlands about 15 months ago, I applied to two programs at Hanze University: International Business and Management (MIBM) and International Communication (MIC). At the last second, I decided to start with MIBM. However, after a month, I realized that International Communication was a better fit for me, so I switched to MIC and officially started in Block 2. This decision sparked a journey that pushed me to confront uncertainty, adapt to unfamiliar circumstances, and rethink my approach to the future.

At 40, I found myself amid a major life transition—moving to a new country with my family, navigating an unfamiliar culture, and stepping into a professional and academic

environment in English, a language I had only recently started communicating with. Everything felt uncertain. I didn't know the language, the culture, or anyone. It was overwhelming, like stepping off a cliff—a terrifying yet exhilarating experience that reminded me of bungee jumping. Despite the challenges, I embraced the opportunity to reimagine my life and focused



on transformation—connecting ideas, creating opportunities, and embracing the unfamiliar.

DISCOVERING FUTURES LITERACY: A NEW WAY TO THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE

During this period of change, I encountered futures literacy in a workshop. I had no prior knowledge of the concept, but it struck me as a powerful new way of thinking about the future. It resonated deeply, especially as I reflected on the unpredictability of my journey. Two years ago, I couldn't have imagined studying at Hanze University or living in the Netherlands. My plans had been entirely different, and this

unpredictability made futures literacy feel both timely and transformative.

Futures literacy taught me that the future isn't singular—many possible futures exist. One of its most profound lessons is the distinction between transition and transformation. Transition is linear, moving from point A (the present) to point B (a specific goal) with careful planning. Conversely, transformation starts at point A but embraces an open-ended, undefined future filled with possibilities. This shift in perspective fosters imagination and helps us fundamentally rethink our circumstances, enabling us to adapt creatively to life's complexities.

In a world of uncertainty, where traditional plans often fall short, we need skills like resilience, flexibility, and problem-solving to create opportunities rather than merely searching for them. Futures literacy provides a framework for navigating this uncertainty, even when it feels like we're exploring everything and nothing at once. It has been an invaluable tool for cultivating flexibility and even antifragility, turning the unknown into a source of growth and self-discovery. By embracing this mindset, I've navigated life's challenges and redefined how I engage with the world and its endless possibilities.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND EMBRACING NEW POSSIBILITIES

Engaging in the FLIP 2024 program, led by Riel Miller, Loes Damhof, Martin Calnan, Ramila Khafaji Zadeh, and others, was fascinating. I was part of the group that organized the last workshop. Being a future-oriented person, I naturally connected with the program. I've always been drawn to possibilities and had prior experience with workshops and training on scenario planning and other future-oriented concepts. My philosophy and human sciences background, combined with my interest in community building, soft skills,

and empowerment, made futures literacy particularly meaningful.

After the program, I began engaging more deeply. For example, Riel told me about a group in Iran—my home country—who translated his book *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century* into Persian. He encouraged me to connect with them. I also started incorporating it into my university projects and assignments. At the same time, I was working on a community-driven initiative to help international students and knowledge workers navigate career challenges through the Bennu Community. I organized online

events on various topics, such as the future of jobs and education.

However, a few months ago, the focus of the Bennu Community shifted. Instead of concentrating solely on career navigation for international students and knowledge workers, we began empowering professionals and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Netherlands. We now focus on future-ready skills by applying futures thinking, specifically using the futures literacy framework to help professionals and SMEs navigate the rapidly changing job market and adapt to emerging trends. Futures literacy is central to

this work, providing a framework to help people think differently—outside the box. Rather than focusing on the past or attempting to predict the future based on previous trends, it encourages using the future as a resource for present actions. It's about taking agency and imagining new possibilities.

One of the best examples of how futures literacy helped me think outside the box is developing my idea for the Bennu Community. Initially, I focused on B2C solutions, building a platform for international students. It was all about creating communities and offering resources directly to individuals. However, after

engaging with futures literacy concepts and incorporating advice from various coaches and mentors, I began to think differently. Instead of staying within that box, I started exploring new possibilities. This led me to pivot the concept into more of a B2B solution rather than a purely B2C approach. That shift has been transformative for the project.

Another example happened recently when I began collaborating with a tech school called Ironhack. They focus on helping people develop new skills for the digital era, such as cybersecurity, AI, programming, and UI/UX. Together, we organized an online session for their students, focusing on the future of

jobs. A key part of the discussion was how to think differently about the future. Many participants initially viewed the future as being dominated by fancy technology, gadgets, and digitalization. During the session, we worked to break those boundaries. I encouraged them to reframe their thinking and consider alternative solutions. Although it's early to measure the impact, the feedback was positive, and just today, the Ironhack team expressed interest in further exploring these concepts.

A third example comes from my work as a coach and mentor, where I use futures literacy principles to help younger people navigate their career paths. I guide them to approach

problems differently, encouraging them to reframe their challenges and explore creative solutions.

Joining the VentureLab North business development program further reinforced this approach. There, I participated in weekly workshops that helped me apply my ideas practically. Unlike traditional research programs, VentureLab focuses on solving real-world problems for real clients. While many of my peers at university sought internships, I proposed an alternative path: working on a community-building strategy as my graduation project. This approach allowed me to integrate my studies with my

community-building passion, creating unique opportunities.

LOOKING AHEAD: EMERGENCE AND THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

My dreams and ambitions with futures literacy are still unfolding. I've applied it in education, business, and other aspects of my work and want to explore it further. I'm currently searching for career opportunities related to futures literacy while also considering ways to develop my own business in this field. I'm open to partnerships with professionals and organizations to collaborate on projects.

The truth is, I don't fully know what

the future holds yet, but I'm open to seeing what emerges. Emergence is key. While I have a direction in mind, I don't feel the need to follow a strict A-to-B path. Staying open to new possibilities allows things to emerge that I might not have anticipated. Transformation and futures literacy encourages us to move beyond linear approaches to time, the future, and life.

Months can pass with little visible progress, and suddenly, everything shifts. That unpredictability is why I focus on values, imagination, and dreams rather than rigid plans. I like to follow what's known as "*rolling wave planning*." Instead of a detailed five-year plan, I consider

my values and dreams and plan incrementally. I map out the next week, the next month, and, loosely, the next year. Each week, my experiences and observations inform my next steps. It's a continuous cycle of learning and adapting.

For example, my immediate plans include organizing an event with Ironhack, recording an episode for my new community podcast with a student who worked with Riel Miller in Paris, and participating in a boot camp to help managers cope with organizational changes. I have clarity for the next two weeks; when that time comes, I'll reevaluate and plan for the weeks ahead. This iterative process keeps

me flexible, focused, and open to new opportunities.

Futures literacy is internationally applicable, but context matters significantly. Different cultures and contexts shape how people approach concepts like the future. For instance, in countries where systems run smoothly, and daily life isn't fraught with crises, it's easier to focus on long-term planning. However, in environments where volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) are constants, and every day brings a new crisis—economically, socially, or politically—many of which are completely out of your control, it's difficult for people to consider

taking agency for their future. A saying reflects this sentiment: *“Smile—tomorrow is worse than today, and today is worse than yesterday.”*

When I first encountered futures literacy, I questioned its relevance. I wondered, *“What’s the point of thinking about agency when so many factors are beyond my control?”*

Over time, however, I realized that opportunities exist even in such challenging contexts. Futures literacy helped me understand that while I may not control everything, I can still take meaningful actions within my sphere of influence. It taught me that agency doesn't

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mean controlling every outcome—it's about identifying and acting on what you can influence instead of surrendering to external circumstances.

The program I joined with Riel Miller focused heavily on agency and transformed my understanding of what agency truly means. Before learning about futures literacy, I unknowingly applied some of its principles. However, conceptualizing, framing, and actively reflecting on these ideas clarified my understanding. Now, I can articulate these concepts, share them with others, and apply them more effectively. It's like seeing the world through a clearer lens.

This clarity also extends to communication. Explaining these ideas to others isn't just about teaching—it's a two-way process that helps refine your understanding. For example, I used to conflate the concepts of transition and transformation, but futures literacy forced me to think more clearly and structure my thoughts. Transition involves moving from one predefined point to another, while transformation is about reimagining and reshaping the path. Conceptualizing these differences has been crucial for me, both personally and professionally. Futures literacy also operates in cycles. You apply its theories in real-life situations, gain insights from

those experiences, and then use those insights to refine the theories. It's a continuous process of learning and adaptation. This cycle has been pivotal in helping me connect the dots between theory and practice.

Looking ahead, I've started thinking about how to adapt the futures literacy framework for different contexts and settings. My experiences have turned me into an evangelist for this concept. It has changed how I think, and I feel a strong drive to share it with others and engage more actively in this field.



A Personal Reflection on Foresight Experience

Nok Boonmavichit, post-doctoral researcher.
Bangkok, Thailand

I was born into a Thai-Chinese business family, feeling like I lived in a “*golden cage*” for much of my life. Raised in a very protective environment, I was indoctrinated with the traditional Chinese values where obedience was seen as a virtue. I was taught that my parent knew what was best for me, and my role was to respect and care for them. This belief shaped much of my life until I attended the Asia Pacific Leadership Program in Hawaii in 2010. The experience opened my eyes to the world far beyond the business community I knew. I began to see social issues that had never come up in my family or

social circles, and my perspective shifted. However, I remained tied to the family business.

A decade later, I found myself at the 2019 Asia-Pacific Futures Conference in

Thailand by chance. I had initially accompanied a friend to the event, expecting to learn about business trends, but the public policy presentation is what inspired me. It made me realize that working at a systemic level could have a much greater impact than my previous efforts. At that time, I was volunteering at remote schools, but I questioned whether painting and renovating buildings was the best use of my time. This pivotal moment led me to pursue a PhD in



futures thinking, not just as a tool but as a profound philosophy. This journey reshaped how I saw the world and prompted deep self-reflection.

INTEGRATING FUTURES LITERACY WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

My first real encounter with futures literacy was at an intensive workshop in Groningen, where I was invited to experience futures thinking rather than its theoretical concept. The shift from thinking to sensing was transformative. The diversity of speakers—ranging from a biologist to a disabled philosopher—broadened my understanding of “futures”. It planted the seed for both my

academic and personal growth. Upon returning home, I wrote a newspaper article reflecting on the experience, focusing on mental frameworks—those hidden assumptions that either limit or expand our thinking.

In my subsequent work with the Karen community in northern Thailand, I adapted FL to fit their context. The Karen people, often marginalized, are viewed as less sophisticated in Thai society, but their indigenous heritage and connection to the land are invaluable. Using FL, I guided the community through the three phases: Reveal, Reframe, and Rethink. In the Reveal

phase, we explored the hopes and fears of different generations, fostering empathy and mutual understanding. The Reframe phase used the Three Horizon model to challenge linear thinking, opening space for multiple futures. Finally, in the Rethink phase, I applied my framework to help the community assess the forces shaping their lives and identify actions within their current agency to move toward a preferred future.

This workshop confirmed my belief that Indigenous knowledge, if nurtured, could offer valuable solutions for the future. Yet, there's a risk: if younger generations don't return

to their villages, this wisdom may be lost in a single generation. So, futures literacy is a vital skill for them to navigate their strategies to maintain their culture, livelihood, and heritage.

REFLECTION ON MENTAL HEALTH, SELF-AWARENESS, AND FUTURES LITERACY

Futures literacy became more than just a tool for social transformation—it also became a personal tool for managing mental stress. Whenever I feel overwhelmed, I remind myself that the future is open and not just a continuation of today. This perspective shifts my mindset, making me feel less trapped and embrace uncertainty. I've also

recognized that emotions, like thoughts, are shaped by complex, visible, and invisible forces. Understanding this complexity helps me avoid oversimplifying my emotional responses.

This realization led me to work with social workers in the Global South, where many face burnout and despair. In difficult contexts, such as conflict zones, imagining a better future can seem impossible. Through FL, I help them explore their assumptions and expand their sense of possibility. While we can't control everything, we do have agency—even if it's limited. Understanding this, I want to empower others to recognize

their own agency, which, even if quiet and collective, can lead to meaningful change.

THE FUTURE AS A NORTH STAR: A LIGHT, NOT A DESTINATION

When we think about our future in a leadership program or a manifestation workshop, we are encouraged to imagine a future version of ourselves. Over time, this becomes a fixed image—something solid, unmoving, a version of ourselves that we strive to become. This image shapes our plans, our efforts, and our choices. We may feel that if we just reach this image, our journey will be complete. But is this true?

Imagine your dream is to become a doctor because you want to care for others and bring healing and kindness into the world. You study hard, overcome many obstacles, and one day, you arrive. You are a doctor. But the work is heavy, your time is scarce, and the system's pressures make it difficult to be fully present with your patients. You can heal their illnesses, but where is the kindness you once wished to share?

If we hold too tightly to a fixed future, we may forget why we wanted it in the first place. Alternatively, we can see the future like the North Star—a steady light in the sky, guiding our way but never demanding that we reach it.

The North Star does not ask us to arrive at its place in the heavens; it simply offers direction, helping us stay aligned with what matters most. When we mistake a title for our true aspiration, we may find ourselves lost, even after we arrive. But if we walk with awareness, we remember that the North Star is not the position itself but the deep intention behind it. If your true longing is to bring healing, then being a doctor is just one path. There are many ways to offer healing, through community work, teaching, or a holistic lifestyle, where your original intention can breathe more freely. A future that breathes is not a rigid plan. It is a living practice. Every step

is an opportunity to ask, Am I still walking in the direction of kindness? Of healing? Of understanding? If we listen deeply, we will know when the path needs to shift—not as a failure, but as an act of mindfulness.

We do not need to force ourselves toward a future that no longer holds life. Instead, we can trust that as long as we walk with presence, as long as we stay in touch with our deepest values, we are not lost. The future is not a destination we must rush to. It is the next moment we meet with each step. It is a way of walking. And with each breath, we can choose to walk in freedom, kindness, and love.

THE PATH FORWARD: INTEGRATING SELF- AWARENESS AND FUTURES LITERACY

As I move forward, I aim to deepen the integration of self-awareness within futures literacy. I'm developing a mental well-being workshop for women, helping them reflect on their mental health and understand the assumptions behind their thinking. Drawing from personality models like the Enneagram and Myers-Briggs, I've learned to recognize my own tendencies, which has helped reduce stress and improved my communication with others. For me, this kind of reflection is key to both personal and collective transformation.

Ironically, as someone who wants control, I've learned to embrace uncertainty and emergence. Futures literacy has shown me that the future is not something to plan in every detail but something to trust in as it unfolds. I'm still discovering my spot in the futures field, but I know that mental health and well-being are at the heart of my work. They connect all the threads—self-awareness, complexity, wisdom, and futures literacy—into a cohesive vision for the future.



Performance, Futures and Everyday Life

Pedro de Senna, futurist, theatre maker, educator.
High Wycombe, UK.

I'm currently in flux—an “*in-between*” phase. After 20 years of working as a teacher and employee in higher education, I now find myself outside that structure, trying to figure out what I'm doing and what I'll be doing in the future. Futures literacy has given me an understanding of the value and potential in moments of uncertainty, instability, and undoing. This resonates with the idea from Bayo Akomolafe, working within these transitional spaces, the cracks between things, and learning to be more comfortable with them.

Futures literacy has also provided a practical vocabulary for describing and understanding my experiences.

Recently, I've been reflecting on the “*Futures Triangle*,” a framework used in futures literacy to examine our relationship with time. It considers three forces: the weight of the past, the push of the present, and the pull of the future.

For example, after 20 years as an employee in higher education, my past asserts itself with a strong identity—this is who I've been and what I've done. The present pushes me with immediate needs, like earning a living without the stability I once had. Then there's the pull of the future, which, at this moment, feels very open. By



applying the Futures Triangle, I can explore various potential images of the future, analyzing where I'm being pulled to and the strength of each pull. It's a useful analytical tool.

Futures literacy operates on two levels for me. On the one hand, it provides comfort during moments of doubt or fear, especially regarding making a living. On the other hand, it offers a cognitive, analytical, strategic, and practical side. It plays a significant role in shaping my professional thinking and projects. Part of the pull of my future is directly tied to continuing to work in this field and deepening my involvement with futures literacy .

THE EMERGENCE

The seed for futures literacy was planted in 2018. I vividly remember the moment. While scrolling through Twitter—back when it was still Twitter—I came across a post by Epaminondas Christophilopoulos, the UNESCO Chair for Futures Research at the Foundation for Research and Technology in Greece (FORTH). At the time, they were translating the game *The Thing* from the Future into Greek. I even have the Greek version of the card game here.

The post caught my attention because I knew Epaminondas from years ago—we were flatmates as students—but we hadn't been in

close contact since. I reached out to him, saying, "*Hey, this looks interesting. Can we talk about it?*" Initially, I thought the game could be a valuable tool for dramaturgy and creating narratives in theatre. However, I soon realized that theatre and performance practices could also be incredibly useful for futures thinking.

That random encounter—a mix of emergence, complexity, and serendipity—led to what has now become my overarching project over the past six to seven years: bridging the fields of futures studies and theatre and performance. Whenever I'm in a futures environment, I try to incorporate as much performance

into it as possible, and when I'm in a performance environment, I incorporate futures thinking.

By 2019, we had what I'd call the "*proof of concept*." This test came through a project led by the UNESCO Chair in Futures Research in Greece called the Futures Literacy Theatre Lab. In this project, we adapted the traditional Futures Literacy Lab framework to integrate performance. Instead of using tables, post-it notes, and flip charts, we used human bodies in an environment—a very challenging one, as we worked with unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors in Greece. These

were underage boys who had traveled alone by boat from Turkey to Greece, coming from conflict zones like Syria, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa.

This first attempt to merge theatre and futures thinking was remarkably successful, even in such a difficult context. It demonstrated the potential of theatre as a tool to encourage futures literacy, validating my belief that we had something valuable to offer. Since then, I've been developing various futures-related tools—some focused on futures literacy, others on foresight—that draw from theatre ideas and practices. This approach continues to evolve and shape my work in both fields.

When I say it was successful, I mean that we demonstrated something crucial: these tools and approaches can work. Not only can they substitute for certain elements in futures work and Futures Literacy Labs, but they can also achieve outcomes that other methods might not. One of these outcomes relates to what Stuart Candy has theorized as bridging the "*experiential gulf*." We're good at imagining futures at a cognitive level, but creating a tangible experience of those futures is something else entirely. Without such experiences, futures work often remains abstract and fails to fully resonate, which Candy and Dunagan argue is why it hasn't become mainstream. Theatre, however, helps

bridge that gap by offering people an embodied, lived experience of a future.

But for me, it's more than that. Often, people think of performance as something that comes after—a way to illustrate or communicate an already imagined future. This is valuable, of course, but I believe performance is far more powerful when used as a methodology for imagination. Performance allows us to think through the body to imagine in an embodied way. In this sense, performance isn't just a medium for communicating ideas; it's a way to generate, reflect on, and even experience them. It enables us to explore how we relate to those images of the future.

Performance, at its core, involves bodies in space, and the dynamics of those bodies—their movements and relationships—tell stories. If participants are attuned to this process during a workshop, it becomes a tool for sensemaking. Performance training, particularly actor training, cultivates this awareness in participants, helping them become more attuned to these relational dynamics.

THE POWER OF APPLIED THEATRE

In the specific context of working with asylum-seeking minors, performance also addressed another significant challenge: bridging linguistic barriers. We had participants speaking nine languages, with limited access to interpreters. Performance enables us to communicate visually and physically, expressing difficult or impossible ideas to convey through words. This was especially valuable because of the language differences and because some concepts are hard to articulate, even in one's native tongue. Performance provided a shared medium for expression and understanding. It is worth

remembering, though, that images and gestures can also be culturally specific, so no approach is universal.

It's also about discovering emotions and ideas you can't quite describe and becoming more conscious of how you feel about futures. That awareness can serve as an entry point for sensemaking: Why am I feeling this? What is it that I feel? And what assumptions underlie those feelings? Much of this work builds on a tradition called applied theatre practices. Specifically, the Brazilian theatre maker Augusto Boal has significantly influenced it with his Theatre of the Oppressed methodology. Boal's approach uses theatre and performance as tools

for social change. Many of the techniques and exercises I've been using and adapting draw directly from his work, while different sources inspire others. But that foundation—the use of theatre to foster dialogue, reflection, and change—remains central.

PERFORMANCE FOR FUTURES (PFF)

Since that initial workshop with the young people in Greece, I've developed various tools, games, and approaches. Part of this development came through a research project, a three-year Erasmus+ funded initiative involving international partners from five countries and six

institutions across the European Union and the United Kingdom.

This project focused on using futures thinking for personal and professional development, with young people as the primary target audience. In this context, I worked closely with my colleague, Dr. Tómei June Bacon, who co-developed some of these tools. Since then, I've facilitated numerous workshops and talks with different groups. Some have been Futures Literacy Labs, others have been Futures Literacy Theatre Labs, and others have been futures literacy workshops that don't necessarily follow the traditional Futures Literacy Lab structure. In many cases—but not always—I've

worked with a methodology Dr. Bacon and I named Performance for Futures. It's a way of thinking, a methodology, and a set of tools that bring performance into futures thinking. It's been fascinating to see the effects of this approach on the diverse groups we've worked with. That's how things have developed since those early days.

APPLYING PFF AS A DECOLONIAL TOOL

Another example was a futures literacy -inspired workshop on decolonizing learning and teaching practices. The session began with the classic Rip Van Winkle exercise, in which participants imagined waking up in a new world. I framed

this future as one in which the university was fully decolonized—an intentionally provocative scenario, as decolonization is an ongoing process, not a final state.

Participants collaboratively created a composite image of this decolonized future using a whiteboard, adding words, drawings, and ideas. This tangible representation became the basis for further exploration. Drawing from theatre, I introduced the concept of status, which refers to power hierarchies—not just between people but also between objects or spaces. Through physical exercises, participants explored how to raise or lower their status in relation to

others and the imagined future.

This embodiment exercise deepened their engagement with the whiteboard representation. How did they approach this future—with curiosity, confidence, or hesitation? What was their status relative to this future? These physical explorations fostered a deeper discussion about the kind of university they wanted to create. The process connected participants emotionally and cognitively, helping them relate to the future in transformative ways.

These exercises had two effects. First, they engaged participants' imagination in new ways, addressing

what's often called a "*poverty of imagination*." Before moving into the physical aspects, participants had already begun thinking more creatively about the future. Second, the physical, embodied work allowed participants to experience their reactions and feelings about the future more deeply. This emotional engagement enriched the subsequent discussions. Participants reflected more clearly on their responses—whether they felt scared, intrigued, or skeptical—and these insights informed their exploration of what decolonizing the university might entail.

Introducing a taxonomy of futures—preposterous, impossible,

plausible, and preferable—provided a useful framework for these conversations. Participants began to see that decolonizing learning wasn't just about changing reading lists; it was about rethinking spaces, how people enter a room, who they see, and how they feel in that environment. These insights likely wouldn't have emerged without combining imaginative and embodied approaches, expanding the scope of their conversations beyond what they initially anticipated.

THE FUTURE OF FUTURES

One of my dreams for futures literacy is to see it become

universally understood and applied, particularly in education. It could transform how we engage with the present, even at a basic level, like learning the ABCs of futures. To achieve this, I see two key areas of focus. First, I aim to develop further Performance for Futures—embodied, experiential, and participatory ways of working with futures. Second, I hope futures literacy becomes more inclusive, drawing from and being led by voices outside Europe, particularly from the Global South and Indigenous communities. Colleagues like Carolina Pucu, a Brazilian anthropologist with deep knowledge of indigenous thought, inspire me. Her work aligns with

futures literacy, even if it isn't explicitly labeled as such. Together, we've explored how indigenous perspectives, performance, and futures intersect, presenting a paper on these themes in Italy recently.

Futures literacy should start early—perhaps as early as age six. This idea comes from observing my own children's education. In my youngest child's primary school, students present on current affairs weekly, encouraging engagement with the world beyond the classroom. I imagine expanding this to include a "*future affairs*" week, where students could present their images of the future. Teachers would need training to facilitate

this in an age-appropriate way, but it could start planting the seeds of futures literacy early, connecting it to their everyday lives.

FELLOW TRAVELERS

I want to acknowledge Irianna Lianaki-Dedouli, who has been instrumental in my journey. Irianna worked at FORTH and UNESCO and was key in co-designing the first Futures Literacy Theatre Lab. From the very start, she was a vital collaborator. When this idea was still forming—when I was merely wondering if futures literacy and theatre could come together—Irianna believed in its potential. She recognized early on, especially after our initial lab, that this was

valuable and worth pursuing. Her support and encouragement have been profoundly meaningful, both personally and professionally. She championed my work, helping to validate and amplify it in ways I couldn't have achieved alone. I truly cannot talk about my journey into the world of futures literacy and its intersection with performance without mentioning her and expressing my deep gratitude.

Another individual who has played a pivotal role is Tōmei June Bacon. Tōmei's journey reminds me of something both exciting and meaningful. Like me, she experienced redundancy in the past year. However, she has since



taken a part-time position at a research center leading an incredible initiative: the Trans+ Virtual Center of Excellence. This is part of a broader inquiry called Queer Acts of Hope, which focuses on the lived experiences of Trans+ people. As a deeply futures-oriented concept, hope makes this work a natural fit for futures literacy .

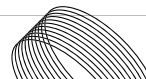
Tōmei invited me to join this virtual center, and I now facilitate a working group called Trans+ Futures. This group explores ways to envision and shape futures for trans and gender-nonconforming individuals. One of our activities was a Futures Literacy Lab that took place in January 2025,

aimed at members of the center. Participants included university colleagues worldwide, and the lab focused on imagining and discussing Trans+ futures.

The lab sparked conversations about how futures literacy and performance methodologies can be applied to activism, education, and practical solutions. As a result, for example, we'll now explore how these methods can be used in working with medical professionals , advocacy efforts, and broader systemic change. The goal is to make the world safer and more inclusive for gender-nonconforming people, especially

at a time when Trans+ people and rights are under sustained attack around the world.

This initiative, led by Tōmei and supported by the center, is incredibly inspiring. It feels like a convergence of futures literacy, activism, and the transformative power of performance to drive meaningful societal change. I'm deeply grateful to be part of it and excited about its potential.



Futures Literacy Washes Up

Rob Verhofstad, chair executive board.
Beek-Ubbergen, The Netherlands.

I have been the president of HAN University of Applied Sciences since 2020. Before that, I was a member of the Executive Board at Hanze University of Applied Sciences, where I first encountered futures literacy. It all started when Loes Damhof became Teacher of the Year and used the resources from the Comenius grant to explore the possibility of establishing a futures literacy Chair. That was my introduction to futures literacy and how I became connected.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to experience futures literacy sessions firsthand. I even traveled to Paris with Loes to meet Riel Miller during its early

development stages to explore how futures literacy could take shape at Hanze. These experiences left a strong impression on me, and since then, I've been actively

connecting others to futures literacy. This includes colleagues, teachers, and even institutions outside of HAN. Soon, for instance, we'll be conducting a session with a college in Germany. I also find myself discussing it in various contexts outside of higher education, sharing what futures literacy can bring to different challenges.



What futures literacy has taught me is the value of agility in thinking. It helps to break away from the incremental mindset, where progress is seen as a series of small steps leading to a predictable outcome. Instead, it encourages a more flexible, open-ended approach. This mindset is incredibly versatile and applicable in many areas. I often suggest it in conversations, highlighting how it could offer value to whatever issue.

A pivotal moment for me came during a 24-hour retreat we organized in Paterswolde. It was a unique gathering—a carefully selected group of individuals,

including a student, a philosopher, a teacher, an administrator, a former minister, and Loes and her team. We explored the future of higher education, a topic that naturally resonated with the group. One insight that stood out was the enduring importance of the campus. It became clear that you can't envision the future of higher education without considering the campus's role. The discussions reminded me of the metaphor of the car as a carriage without a horse—how difficult it is to break away from entrenched ideas and imagine something entirely new. Sure enough, not long afterward, all college campuses had to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

and we had to continue education without a campus. Having explored scenarios without a campus during the Lab, made us reflect on the importance of a physical space, something we felt we couldn't ignore navigating the pandemic.

Lifelong development is another area where futures literacy plays a significant role in my thinking. It's a transformative concept and, if implemented correctly, represents a fundamental shift for colleges. It's not just about expanding the portfolio or targeting different age groups. It's about reimagining what a college could be when it embraces lifelong development as a core mission. This involves questioning

whether our current approaches are too incremental or too cautious. Are we still stuck seeing the car as a carriage without a horse?

I draw on futures literacy to ask challenging questions to push this forward. For example, how do we approach lifelong development in a way that truly breaks free from traditional thinking? This ties into the concept of fourth-generation universities—rethinking colleges’ role within a broader knowledge ecosystem. It’s about more than just adapting; it’s about redefining how colleges interact with their environment and contribute to their region and society.

EDUCATION AS A SANCTUARY

Futures literacy has helped me realize how often I get stuck in assumptions that stem from being in a bubble, whether I want to acknowledge it or not. Even now, I recognize that I’m still in that bubble, but I’ve become more conscious of its presence. It’s a kind of recognition, almost a reality check. I’d like to think I’m freer from those assumptions, but I know I’m not. At least now, I’m more aware of them.

A memorable example of this awareness occurred during futures literacy sessions. These sessions have

a way of revealing assumptions by introducing disruptive images that challenge your thinking. There’s often a moment when you realize, *“This future—I don’t want that at all!”* That clarity doesn’t necessarily come from envisioning what you want but from recognizing what you want to avoid. It brings deeper motives to the surface and exposes what truly drives you.

These insights aren’t limited to the sessions themselves. They begin to surface in everyday life after you’ve participated in a few. I’ve found myself reflecting on why I react so strongly to certain situations. For instance, when I feel particularly passionate or resistant about

something, I now understand that it touches on a deeper driving force within me. This reflection has helped me understand what's truly important to me.

One clear example is my view on education and its future. If education were to become purely instrumental or research overly commercialized and transactional, I'd feel deeply uncomfortable. Education, to me, holds intrinsic value and should remain a sanctuary—a safe space for exchanging ideas, forming attitudes, learning, and even making mistakes. It's a place where innovation can occur, where failure is a part of growth.

When education becomes too transactional—reduced to a mere exchange of services—it risks losing that sanctuary. While some transactional elements are unavoidable, they shouldn't overshadow the fundamental purpose of education. futures literacy sessions helped me articulate why this issue resonates deeply and strengthened my resolve to address it.

Understanding these drivers has also influenced how I act. Awareness of my motivations allows me to explain myself to others better. For instance, if I resist a particular direction, I can now clearly articulate why. This

clarity helps others understand my perspective and brings them along in my reasoning. It's not just about managing resistance—it's about making it explicit and constructive.

I've also seen how futures literacy influences others. I've introduced many people to the concept and its practices, often suggesting how it might be valuable in various contexts. A recent example is with a college in Germany that we work closely with. They were dealing with complex issues, and I proposed exploring them together through a futures literacy session, not just as separate Dutch and German perspectives but as a

shared exercise. They found the idea compelling, and we're moving forward with it.

INTEGRATING REFLECTION INTO DAILY PRACTICES

Futures literacy makes people more capable of thinking and acting differently. Many of us are in positions where we can make a difference, and this awareness shapes how we see our role. For instance, at HAN, one of our main goals is to develop reflective global citizens. That means students who think critically about their education, profession, and societal role. It's not just about accepting, "*This is how my sector works,*" but asking, "*Why am I in this profession?*

What can I contribute to the world?" To cultivate this mindset in students, teachers must also embody it. It's not a simple skill you can teach—it's a way of thinking and acting that institutions and educators must adopt themselves.

My ambition for futures literacy aligns closely with this vision. It should become a broader understanding of who we are and how we engage with the world. It's not just about scheduling time to do "*some futures literacy*" on a specific day—it's about integrating reflection into daily practices and big questions. What is my role? What do I want my contribution to be? This reflection helps individuals

and institutions step into their roles as actors in shaping change.

At HAN, we've been incorporating this approach into the curriculum, and similar efforts are underway elsewhere, such as at Hanze University. Programs like the Masters in Sustainable Transition and Healthy Aging Professional focus on transitions, encouraging students to ask: "*What should this change look like? How can I contribute?*" These programs go beyond traditional professional training by critically understanding larger societal transitions. They aim to foster active participation, with expectations tailored to students' developmental stages—from first-years to master's students.

This isn't limited to higher education. Futures literacy also works well with younger individuals, as their assumptions are often less ingrained. The depth of reflection may differ, but the seeds can be planted at any stage. Reflection is central to futures literacy—it's not about predicting the future but about using it as a lens to examine assumptions and act in the present. Just as one can learn from history to make better decisions now, one can similarly learn from the future. Futures literacy provides the tools to reflect, challenge assumptions, and embrace change with clarity and purpose.

LEARNING FROM THE FUTURE

In my role as Chair of the Board, reflection is central to everything I do. Questions like *"What are we doing? Where are we going? How do we shape our vision of the future?"* are always part of the process. Futures literacy is present in these reflections, but it's not always explicitly recognizable as such. Perhaps that's the point—when it becomes embedded in your approach to decision-making, you no longer need to label it. It just becomes part of how you operate. This embeddedness feels like a maturation of futures literacy itself—a sign that it's evolving into a phase

where it is more integrated and less tied to its name or framework. It's no longer just a method—it's a mindset that fosters nimbleness in thinking and reflection.

This shift is particularly valuable because future literacy goes beyond being a single tool or approach; it cultivates a way of thinking that influences how we approach challenges and transitions. For some, labeling it as a method can feel limiting as if it's just one option among many. But as it becomes embedded into practice, it enables moments of recalibration and reflection—pausing to ask, *"Where are we now? What's next?"* For example, we once ran a workshop

for Master Sales students who weren't immersed in futures literacy but actively engaged with its principles in their own way.

It is remarkable how futures literacy has developed over time. It was highly academic, deeply intellectual, and stimulating when I first encountered it in Paris. That phase was essential for refining the methods and language. However, what Loes and her team at Hanze University have done in Groningen is equally significant. Futures literacy has “*washed up*” in a way—it has taken shape and become tangible. Academic debates are necessary, but grounding those ideas so they

spark new ways of thinking and impact people's lives is where it becomes meaningful. It's no longer just a concept or method; it's a tool embedded in practice, influencing how people think and act.

The metaphor of futures literacy “*washing up*” captures this shift beautifully. When something washes up, it's unexpected, like a gift. One moment, it's not there, and the next, it's in front of you, sparking curiosity: “*What is this? Can I use it?*” It's not lofty or abstract—it's earthy and tangible. This groundedness makes it powerful, inviting exploration and application. For instance, after attending a futures literacy session,

you might pause and say, “*There's an assumption here—this is a moment to reflect.*” It's about embedding reflective practice into daily life beyond the structured format of a session.

I find it fascinating that we accept learning from history as entirely normal, even though it deals with something “*not there*” for us. The future is similarly intangible, yet we often view learning from it as a fantastical notion. It's not. Learning from the future is just as legitimate as learning from history—it provides a lens to challenge assumptions and navigate complexity. Looking at futures literacy today, it's clear that its strength lies in how it has taken shape—not just



as an academic concept but as something tangible and impactful. It's about embedding the principles into how we think, reflect, and act, making futures literacy a method and a way of engaging with the world.



The Future You Have to Do

Saar van der Spek,
futurist, programme manager.
Zwolle, The Netherlands.

Futures literacy is very prominent in my work. I worked in the cultural sector until 2014, when my passion for tackling complex social issues—and how artists engage with them—was sparked. I started as a cultural programmer and later freelanced in various roles, often working at the intersection of art, culture, and the environment. Over time, I became increasingly fascinated by how artists approach future-oriented thinking. In 2013, I took a one-year course in trend analysis at the Trend Academy of Rozenbrood in Amsterdam. It was intense, but at that time, trend analysis offered the most practical framework for

thinking about the future. In 2014, drastic budget cuts to cultural subsidies made my work in the sector nearly impossible.

That's when I transitioned into education, becoming a lecturer at Fontys Academy for Creative Industries. I initially taught trend analysis, later expanding into courses on urban living environments and their impact on people. That was where I built my foundation in futures thinking.

As a lecturer, I needed to stay current with developments, which allowed me to learn and expand



my network. During those years, I deepened my knowledge of foresight methodologies, developing courses on approaches like backcasting and “*intuitive forecasting*.” I also became more interested in speculative thinking.

I worked at Fontys for about six and a half years. When COVID-19 hit, it disrupted everything and gave me new insights. By then, I had moved from Utrecht to Zwolle, and I started questioning whether commuting to Tilburg—a two-hour single trip—was sustainable. If I was teaching students about quality of life, shouldn’t I also consider my own? So, I resigned and, as of January 1, 2021, started working independently.

Returning to freelancing, I focused on futures exploration and consultancy for (semi-)government organizations—an unexpected but natural fit. Over time, I started feeling a growing frustration. Many assignments revolved around trend analysis or scenario planning, and the common question was, “*Can you prove it?*” I always answered, “*No, because the future doesn’t exist yet.*”

It was frustrating to see futures thinking treated as a checkbox activity—rarely integrated or followed up—making sustained engagement difficult. Many futures researchers struggle with this, not just financially but because continuous futures thinking is necessary.

After three years, I started questioning my approach. I was familiar with futures literacy through colleagues who encouraged me to connect with the futures literacy Chair at Hanze, seeing parallels in my search for a more meaningful way to engage with futures thinking. Eventually, I took the Mastering Futures Literacy course to deepen my understanding. Initially, it was challenging—it pushed against my structured mindset—but I knew it was necessary. I needed more tools than just planning and preparation.

In the same period, I took a job at the Urban Innovation lectureship at Windesheim University of Applied Science. I assumed the future

would be central to innovation, but acknowledging its importance wasn't enough. Having meaningful conversations about how we think about the future is even more critical.

At Fontys, I was used to deep discussions about futures thinking. In other contexts, those conversations required different kinds of engagement. I missed the depth of dialogue about why futures literacy matters.

ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

When a vacancy opened at Trendbureau Overijssel—where I'd already done two assignments—I saw a truly compelling opportunity. The director, Annemarth Idenburg,

had shifted the organization's focus from planning and preparation to embracing uncertainty, which aligned perfectly with my background in futures literacy.

Trendbureau Overijssel is an independent organization within the province of Overijssel. Formally, the province is my employer, but unlike most government employees, we don't provide direct policy recommendations. Our work has to be relevant to all political perspectives, so we focus on how to think about the future meaningfully. Government bodies often ask us for trend forecasts. Our answer is: we can't predict the future, but we can help ask better

questions. We acknowledge today's trends but avoid presenting them as fixed projections. Tomorrow, things may look very different.

Our role is to help governments think about the future in a nuanced way. We conduct exploratory studies, travel throughout the province to facilitate discussions, and support debate about Overijssel's future. A big part of our work is fostering conversations, networking, and sharing knowledge, and I enjoy that.

We've already integrated many futures literacy practices into our work. We frequently use what-if questions to reframe perspectives. While that's not a full Futures

Literacy Lab, it opens space for exploring alternatives. The key is not to rank futures as good or bad but to engage with them as possibilities.

A major part of our work reinforces the idea that the future doesn't exist yet and that dealing with uncertainty is essential. While formal Labs have a step-by-step structure, advisory meetings rarely allow for that. Still, the underlying principles—embracing uncertainty, expanding perspectives, and challenging assumptions—are embedded in our approach.

We recently began a new exploration. Initially, we considered mapping beckoning prospects

but realized it wasn't our role to define visions. Instead, we want to concentrate on how people think about the future. This ties into the concept of mental time travel—our ability to switch between past, present, and future. It's powerful but flawed. We tend to recall existing images rather than truly imagine alternatives. Our assumptions dominate, blinding us to new possibilities. But through practice and reframing, we can gain a more embodied understanding of what different futures might feel like.

HOW CAN WE LEAD?

Futures literacy is a mindset. There's growing awareness of it, even though it's not widely

practiced. Some are familiar with the term but misunderstandings persist. Riel's theory describes two "*legs*" of futures thinking—one well-developed, the other underdeveloped.

Futures literacy focuses on strengthening the latter, expanding our capacity to engage differently. Many researchers still operate from the more developed side of the framework, relying on established methods. But there's a growing recognition that we need broader, more diverse approaches.

Even in official speeches and publications, themes of future generations are emerging. National

planning agencies and governmental organizations are starting to see that traditional methods are insufficient. There's a vague recognition that change is needed, but organizations struggle to make space for it.

So we're asking: How can we lead? We want to help municipalities and provincial bodies engage more deeply with futures thinking. We work with all levels of government in Overijssel, including water boards and social organizations. There's a lot of potential.

The shift begins by moving from control to embracing uncertainty. Most studies aim for control, but we need to explore how to engage

with uncertainty thoughtfully. That means examining our assumptions and asking what might unfold differently. This is where futures literacy plays a major role. I'd love to see it gain more traction in the province. There's already some momentum, but these discussions still need better framing.

I believe in pushing further—exploring people's dreams and fears, letting go of expected futures, and allowing ourselves to think differently. Some resonate immediately with this approach. For instance, someone in the Nature and Environment department is rethinking our relationship with nature. That's

part of a broader movement. When you speak with the right people at the right time, the opening for futures literacy is there.

My own frustration stemmed from the need for certainty and from inspiring visions that ended up shelved. Scenario planning can be powerful, but it often becomes a box-checking exercise. When you're not part of the process, reports can feel uninspiring. In futures literacy, that's the "*use of the future*" at play.

There's an underlying fear of straying from the familiar. The mindset is often: We already know a lot, so let's build from that. But

that reinforces the status quo. That's why I want to do more with speculative thinking. I'm lucky to work at Trendbureau Overijssel with people who share this vision. I don't know of another organization so committed to this perspective. It feels like a privilege.

Futures literacy isn't just a skill—it's a shift in how we engage with uncertainty. It prepares us to face unexpected changes with flexibility. I remember an exercise in the futures literacy course where we embodied an alternative future—one full of floods and disruptions. Surprisingly, we became attached to that scenario. When another group challenged it, we instinctively

defended it. It showed how deeply we crave control, even over futures we don't want.

ACTIVE HOPE

There was a time when I believed I could “do” something for the future. Now, I see it differently. Thinking about the future is about making better-informed decisions in the present. Some of my peers find that message hard to hear. Many still wait for scenarios to materialize rather than engaging with the discomfort of questioning assumptions. Dystopian projections often emerge from extending current trends. That's telling: the status quo isn't sustainable.

Futures literacy has made me more aware of my assumptions about people, politics, and the future. Different narratives shape political discussions, and while we may share desires, our expectations vary widely.

The concept of active hope, that hope is something we can cultivate, resonates deeply. Our director is highly knowledgeable on complexity and how the mind works. What I bring is a practical application. Futures thinking and futures literacy complement each other. That synergy creates buy-in. In education, futures literacy teaches new ways of seeing complex issues. The challenge in government or commercial settings

is embedding it within goal-oriented structures. My aspiration is to see futures literacy play a much bigger role in public administration. It's needed, especially in a system bound by four-year political cycles. Policymakers often aren't comfortable with uncertainty.

We need constructive spaces for speculative questioning—not just asking where we're headed but where we want to go. Our inability to envision dramatic change is a barrier. How can we help people engage with radical possibilities?

Futures literacy must be accessible to everyone—not just artists or strategists. This inclusiveness is one thing I admire in how futures literacy Labs are practiced internationally, especially in Africa, as Loes has shared.

I'd love to see this mindset reach residents and communities, not just policymakers. Too often, public engagement means collecting wish lists. We need richer conversations. How amazing would it be if Overijssel became the first truly Futures Literate province? It's a big ambition. But I've got twenty years left in my career to pursue it.



Illiteracy on the Horizon

Sebastian Plate,
futures literacy practitioner, project
manager, futurist.
Munster, Germany.

I don't have as much time for futures literacy these days, but I'm still working to integrate it into my current job. I work in international politics, focusing on transformation, democracy, economic performance, and governance across different countries. A key part of my role involves producing an index that measures the quality of democracy, economic performance, and governance. As a concept, transformation is central to this work, and it drew me to this job in the first place. It's not just about where the future might lead but how to approach it in the present. The connection between

transformation
and the future
feels deeply
aligned with my
international
relations
background and
my engagement
with the field of
futures.



Before this role,
I worked in Berlin at a company centralizing Futures
Studies and foresight. Earlier, when I worked at the
UNESCO Chair, collaborating with Loes Damhof and
engaging with futures literacy daily, it became a real
passion. Looking back, I see how much I carry from
those experiences. It's like a "*backpack*" of insights that
have shaped what futures literacy means to me and how
it fits into my life.

My relationship with futures literacy has evolved over the years. At first, I was incredibly curious and eager to explore it as a valuable tool and framework. But over time, I started questioning: Is there more? Can I go deeper? Is there more substance to uncover? I remember feeling frustrated—not because there was nothing there, but because I felt I couldn't fully grasp or access its depth.

Now, I've made peace with those questions. For me, the value of futures literacy lies in two things. First, it brings people together through labs—creating shared exploration and dialogue spaces. And second, it's about learning,

both as a participant and as someone who moderates and facilitates those labs. No matter the context, there's always something new to learn every time. That learning is invaluable. It's something I've always cherished and continue to hold close.

FUTURES WHAT!?

The seed for futures literacy was planted during my bachelor's program. I was fortunate to have Loes as my mentor in the Honors College at Hanze, and she introduced me to it. At the time, I thought, Literacy? What's that about? The future? I'd never heard of anything related to Futures Studies before. It might sound a bit cheesy, but Loes pushed me

out there. She had this way of saying, Do your thing and see what happens. She's done that many times, and I'm incredibly thankful.

One moment that stands out was when Loes sent me to Marrakesh, Morocco, for a workshop. It was my first time engaging with all these UNESCO people discussing big topics like the future of mobility in Africa. I was in awe because of the people I met, the knowledge I gained, and the opportunities I had. But also because of the concept itself. Futures literacy created this space where, as someone with no background in the field, I could engage with these people on the same level. That still resonates with me.

Futures literacy is inherently inclusive. The future is uncertain, so it brings everyone to the same level, whether it's a kindergarten child or a CEO. It's not about expertise or hierarchy; none of us knows the future. This dynamic fosters dialogue, mediation, and connection in ways that benefit everyone. That workshop in Marrakesh was my starting point. I realized there was so much to explore, but even at that stage, I could participate because I was curious, eager to listen, and loved to debate. I was incredibly lucky, and I still cherish that experience deeply.

One of the key values of futures literacy is bringing people together. It's not just about gathering people in a room but creating a space where meaningful conversations can happen. These conversations can be about anything—the future of cities, love, forests, or anything else. Discussions about the future often remain surface-level, but futures literacy takes the wind out of the sails. It creates a calm, open space where people can talk without being overwhelmed by emotion or trapped by ideology. Instead, it invites meaningful emotions and reflections—what you think might happen, what you want to happen, or what could happen.

That leveling effect is incredibly powerful. It allows people to explore futures together without preconceived hierarchies. This approach could be applied more broadly, especially in political science or democratic processes. Often, people don't talk to each other because of ideological differences or competing mindsets, but democracies rely on dialogue and finding common ground. Futures literacy can help mediate those differences and bring people to the same table, fostering the dialogue necessary for compromise.

In my previous job, I worked at an agency focused on foresight. We designed foresight processes for

companies and political contexts to increase participation, enhance mutual understanding, and achieve various business objectives. Foresight in consulting often centers around workshops to identify desirable futures and determine how to achieve them. When I joined, the agency had heard of futures literacy but didn't know much about it or have experience in the field. I was fortunate to bring in the knowledge I had gained from working with Loes, the UNESCO Chair, and others.

My challenge was pushing the idea that foresight isn't just about identifying and working towards a desirable future. Futures literacy takes a broader approach, exploring

alternative, hopeful, ridiculous, possible, and probable futures. It doesn't necessarily direct you to build those futures right away. Instead, it focuses on the present—uncovering and reflecting on the assumptions shaping our actions.

I embedded that perspective into the formats we created. It was fun but also frustrating at times. Cultural differences played a role—some people were more open to these ideas, while others expected concrete results. When money is involved, people expect tangible outcomes, not just new questions or insights like you might find in a UNESCO setting. Despite the challenges,

I enjoyed combining foresight methods—like the futures wheel, backcasting, or timelines—with Futures Literacy Labs. Learning to merge those approaches was incredibly rewarding.

LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS...

Combining planning and preparation with the emergent aspects of futures literacy has been an interesting approach I've developed. Sometimes, it's necessary to lean more toward planning and preparation, especially when concrete outcomes are required. Other times, there's space to explore more uncertain and emergent possibilities. My approach blends these methods, allowing me to

move between abstraction and practicality. Futures literacy leans more toward emergence, but I've found ways to complement it with more structured methods to adapt to different contexts. This combination has given me a broad spectrum of tools to engage with futures work—whether diving into exploration to yield tangible results or simply creating space for open-ended exploration.

In my current job, futures literacy remains present, even if it's not as central as it once was. The transformation aspect continues to be key for me. However, my work now is very different—the organization's processes were well-

established long before I joined. That contrasts with my previous job, where I had more freedom to shape how futures literacy was integrated. I've found ways to bring those approaches into my current role.

For example, I recently introduced a futures literacy element into a seminar. We started with the Democracy Index, exploring how democratic processes are organized across different countries, how they've transformed over time, and whether they're consolidating democracies or transitioning into autocracies. We delved into topics like why there are more autocracies than democracies. From there, I transitioned into

a futures literacy workshop. We focused on democracy in specific regions, such as Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, applying the typical futures literacy phases—choosing a year, working through phases one, two, and three, and occasionally touching on phase four. It worked well, though it still felt like two separate components. In the future, I hope to combine them more seamlessly. Fortunately, my colleagues and superiors value this approach—they even recognized its potential during my job application process. I aspire to weave futures literacy more effectively into international politics. It's not just a professional interest; it's a personal one, and I

have no intention of letting it go.

A PINCH OF FUTURES LITERACY...

I work in an NGO—a foundation and think tank independent of political parties. Our mission is to educate, consult government agencies, and contribute to society. It's not solely about research; we don't just declare, "This or that country isn't performing well democratically." Instead, our Democracy Index is based on the extensive input of experts from over 137 countries. These experts provide valuable insights, and we engage in ongoing consultations and debates with them to understand how democratic issues are organized

in their respective contexts.

What fascinates me most is the ability to gain insights into different countries while also identifying the assumptions embedded in the reports we receive. Although I haven't had much time to fully explore how futures literacy could be applied to this work, the index includes a strategic outlook every two years. In the interim, we gather data, consult with experts—primarily university academics—and aim for objectivity in assessing the current state of democracy.

The exciting part is how these insights reveal the present state and

underlying assumptions shaping people's actions. That's where the potential to combine this work with futures literacy becomes most compelling. Futures literacy can offer unique value at the intersection of these elements.

Futures Literacy Labs or activities can be incredibly valuable, and I've seen this firsthand. A recent example comes to mind from about a month ago. I was facilitating a lab with participants from a provincial ministry in Germany. The group was challenging—they came from different ministries, held different ranks, and included individuals not accustomed to being questioned. Some were more the "*I talk, and*

people listen” type. It was a tough audience.

We began with a presentation on the Democracy Index, focusing on how democracy operates in places like Georgia or Burkina Faso. As expected, there was criticism. Participants raised valid concerns about the balance of who defines democracy, critiqued the methodology, and questioned the process. I explained that we rely on local experts and manage the process regionally, emphasizing that it’s not just “*us*” dictating the outcomes. The conversations were intense, and I was overwhelmed by addressing all the criticism. But then we transitioned into

the Futures Literacy Lab, and everything shifted. The lab completely changed the tone, taking the wind out of the sails of earlier critiques. Participants adopted a different mindset, allowing them to think more openly, assess potential outcomes, voice their desires, discuss alternatives, and examine their assumptions. As we discussed assumptions and reflected on their work, the conversations became more profound.

The most striking aspect was how the lab created a level playing field. People began letting go of their emotional attachments and ideological preconceptions that

might otherwise have blocked meaningful dialogue. Suddenly, those who had started the session with crossed arms, signaling disagreement, began to open up. They commented, “*Oh, that’s a really good idea,*” and engaged more constructively.

I acted as facilitator and moderator in that session since I ran it alone. It was incredible to jump into those conversations and witness the transformation from resistance to openness. It’s just one small, isolated story, but I’ve repeatedly seen this shift happen. It’s not a coincidence—futures literacy is an incredibly powerful tool for fostering

meaningful and productive conversations.

SPICING UP THE PRESENT WITH FUTURES LITERACY

Our Western and Middle European cultures are deeply oriented toward safety, individualism, certainty, routines, planning, and linearity. In other cultures, uncertainty is more embedded in daily life. Things change constantly, and people don't necessarily believe everything they hear or feel the need to respond similarly. Futures literacy has helped me navigate those cultural tendencies and question them. For example, when stepping off a well-worn path, the

I find moments of self-reflection when I tell myself, “*This decision was wrong.*” Thanks to futures literacy, I’ve become much better at coping with uncertainty. I’ve learned that life will continue, and I have agency in the present, even if I can’t predict or control the future.

When I make a decision that feels “*wrong*” or leads to negative consequences, I focus on two key reflections: First, what did I do in the present that led me here? Second, how can I cope with this uncertainty now? It’s not about fixing or undoing the mistake but about handling it in a way that allows me to move forward, even without knowing the outcome.

Most often, a misstep isn’t the end of the road. I’ve learned not to frame these moments as things to “*fix*” but as opportunities to explore my illiteracy. The process is about agency in the present—figuring out what steps I can take to move closer to where I want to be. It’s hard to articulate fully, but it’s less about dwelling on mistakes or trying to control the future and more about finding the capacity to act meaningfully in the moment.



A Love for Futures Literacy

Shedrach Maisamari, programme manager.
Lagos, Nigeria.

My name is Shedrac, and I work with Poise in Nigeria as the Head of Programmes and Faculty, overseeing the organization's activities. Futures literacy is an integral part of our programming, and through my department, I'm deeply involved in its implementation.

I first encountered futures literacy in May 2019 when Loes Damhof and Anet de Greef, through Oxfam, visited Lagos, Nigeria. That experience remains vivid in my memory. We were introduced to the methodology during a Futures Literacy Laboratory, which was a completely new approach for us. We were about 15 participants, all trainers, seated

in circles, which was quite an unfamiliar setup. The process challenged us because we weren't accustomed to thinking for ourselves in such an exploratory way; our usual dynamic involved being directed or told what to do.



We had anticipated a traditional program with slides and lectures, where our role would be passive—listening and taking notes. Instead, this session was entirely different. The participants did 80% of the work while the facilitators guided us. It was a hands-on, immersive experience, and that week-long session from Monday

to Friday left a profound impact. Many of my colleagues began to alter how they facilitated their classes. They adopted circular seating arrangements, encouraged participants to close their eyes, envision the future, and consider issues from a futuristic perspective. Through this, I realized that futures literacy is not just a concept—it's a capability. It empowers both facilitators and participants. The methodology was transformative for us; since then, we've incorporated it into our programs to enrich how we train others.

That May 2019 session was a train-the-trainer program. The 15 participants were trainers in various

fields. Some have moved to Europe, some remain in Lagos, and others are employed elsewhere.

That May 2019 session was a train-the-trainer program. The 15 participants were trainers in various fields. Some have moved to Europe, some remain in Lagos, and others are employed elsewhere. Their LinkedIn and Instagram profiles are inspiring as they share their experiences, certifications, and reflections on how futures literacy has changed their perspectives. Many of these facilitators continue to integrate futures literacy into their methodologies today. While their core expertise lies in corporate management, banking, finance,

oil and gas, insurance, fintech, and academia, they use futures literacy as part of their toolkit. We've also applied it in undergraduate programs, weaving it into training across diverse fields. It's remarkable to witness the lasting influence of that experience and how it continues to shape practices in various industries.

Futures literacy has proven to be a critical capability, particularly for employees, decision-makers, and policymakers. It equips them to approach decisions with a more informed and strategic perspective, leading to better outcomes. A striking example of this was during a retreat for an NGO in Akwa

Ibom, an oil-rich state in Nigeria. The retreat incorporated futures literacy into their session as they planned their 2022 implementation strategies. We carefully designed the methodology to emphasize the importance of futures literacy in helping them think ahead and build a more robust strategic framework.

EMPOWERING PARTICIPATION

Futures literacy has had a transformative impact on my approach to teaching and facilitation. Before encountering it, my methods were conventional—relying heavily on slide decks, videos, case studies, scenarios, and

focus group discussions centered on industry-relevant topics. However, discovering futures literacy shifted my perspective entirely. In Nigeria, our systems often dictate what people should do, and participants in a classroom setting typically expect to be told what to do. Embracing futures literacy has changed that dynamic for me. Now, I no longer dictate; I guide. This shift has allowed me to embrace the role of a facilitator fully.

My reliance on traditional tools like slide decks has significantly decreased. If you visit my office today, you'll find futures literacy resources prominently featured—

prints, artifacts, and tools that encourage critical thinking. These resources help me design sessions where participants are active contributors rather than passive receivers of information. The focus has shifted toward using collective intelligence. I've come to understand that I am not an island of knowledge; instead, the collective insights of participants enrich the learning experience. Participants now do 80% of the talking in my sessions, while I handle just 20%. This allows me to better understand their processes, structures, and needs, enabling me to guide them more effectively.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. I recently facilitated a two-day session where participants took center stage while I guided the process. The response was incredible, affirming the value of this approach. This methodology has changed how I design and deliver programs and empowered participants to engage with the subject matter from a position of strength.

Sometimes, I apply futures literacy principles directly, and other times, I do so indirectly, but they are always woven into my facilitation methods. This shift has been instrumental in my work and is something I deeply value. Futures literacy has allowed me to foster

more engaging, meaningful, and impactful learning experiences; I'm truly grateful.

BROADENING PERSPECTIVES

Futures literacy has fundamentally changed how I approach guiding participants, especially in the context of management and strategy. The focus often shifts toward expanding understanding—what I describe as “*increasing the core.*” This involves reframing ideas, asking new questions, and critically examining existing assumptions. Our programs emphasize this across key areas like the School of Management, the School of Communication, and Business

Image Consulting. Depending on the program's objectives, we might explore the future of business image consulting or the future of communication, tying these concepts back to futures thinking.

Even if we're not explicitly working through the three layers of futures literacy or using specific tools, the mindset is woven into the sessions. For instance, in a strategic course, we might prompt participants to consider the sustainability of their business over different timeframes—one year, three years, or even four. Given the current market volatility and the business environment, we sometimes shorten that timeframe to six months or

a year to make it more relevant. Questions like, “*What if there’s a war, such as the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Israel or Ukraine and Russia? How might that affect your business?*” or, “*How would a political shift, like Trump’s presidency, impact your operations?*” encourage participants to think beyond their immediate plans.

These exercises broaden perspectives and prepare participants to embrace uncertainty, an essential skill. We challenge them to think critically: even with a solid plan and meticulous preparation, what happens if things don’t go as expected? What’s the backup plan?

EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY

Reflecting on my journey with futures literacy, from when I first encountered it, I’ve realized that its essence lies in two fundamental principles. First and foremost is embracing uncertainty. This, to me, is the soul of futures literacy. Learning to accept that anything can happen at any time has been transformative. The second key element is collective intelligence. Futures literacy has taught me humility. It has opened my mind to welcome new ideas, embrace other people’s imaginations, and avoid the pitfall of thinking I know everything.

These two principles have become central to my work and personal growth. Embracing uncertainty has reshaped my approach to life. It has reduced my stress and even helped me manage my blood pressure by shifting my expectations. While I still plan and prepare for various outcomes, I now always leave room for uncertainties. When the unexpected happens, I’m better equipped to handle it without feeling overwhelmed.

The second principle, collective intelligence, has deepened my ability to connect with others. Futures literacy has sharpened my listening skills and enhanced my patience. I’ve learned to ask

meaningful questions, truly hear what others are saying, and understand their perspectives. This ability to connect and remain open to what others bring is the essence of human existence. It's about building relationships, fostering understanding, and growing together through shared imagination and learning.

DISSOLVING BARRIERS OF STATUS AND HIERARCHY

One of my most memorable experiences with futures literacy involved a workshop with professors and doctors. Initially, I didn't even realize some of them held such esteemed titles—it only became apparent later. The opportunity

arose after our initial training in May 2019. Later that same year, in October, we hosted another training. The room was full, with participants from Nigerian universities like Babcock University and Mountain Top University. Among them were professors, doctors, senior lecturers, and members of research departments.

As the futures literacy experts, we guided them through the workshop. Realizing that we, as trainers, were teaching senior lecturers and professors this methodology was an exhilarating experience. There was a certain gravity and an overwhelming sense of excitement. Knowing that we were their guides in this process

felt deeply rewarding. After the training, we created a WhatsApp group to foster ongoing knowledge sharing and stay connected. This group became a platform where they addressed us—their trainers—with so much respect, asking questions like, *"What should we do next?"* Seeing their eagerness to learn despite their accomplishments and status was heartening. Many expressed interest in bringing futures literacy to their universities, planning to train their students and principal officers. Their enthusiasm and valuable contributions during the sessions left a lasting impression on me. It was a humbling and unforgettable experience.

What stood out most to me was how futures literacy dissolves barriers of status and hierarchy. Whether someone is a professor, a wealthy individual, or holds a prestigious title, the future is a shared space where everyone is equal. This is one of the most humbling aspects of futures literacy. It allows us to connect as people first rather than focusing on titles or societal status. No one holds ultimate authority when imagining the future—it's an open and collective process that values every perspective equally.

FUTURES LITERACY ACROSS THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

I want to see the Nigerian government incorporate futures literacy into the school system, starting as early as primary education. I'm optimistic because the presidential cabinet was recently reshuffled, and we have a new Minister of Education. Last week, the minister announced plans to make our educational system 80% practical across primary, secondary, and university levels. This opens a window of opportunity to integrate futures literacy into that framework.

For this vision to become a reality, we need support from organizations like UNESCO and Oxfam to

demonstrate the value of futures literacy to policymakers. Educational institutions are critical in shaping how people think, behave, and engage with society. If futures literacy can be integrated at all levels of education—basic, intermediate, and tertiary—it could lead to transformative change in Nigeria and across Africa. It's an ambitious goal, but I dream of futures literacy becoming a cornerstone of education across the continent.

We are already taking steps toward this. For instance, we actively engage with federal, state, and private universities, many of which have tens of thousands of students. We're discussing with a university

We are already taking steps toward this. For instance, we actively engage with federal, state, and private universities, many of which have tens of thousands of students. We're discussing with a university in northern Nigeria to train its principal officers and academic directors to embed futures literacy into their curriculum. This way, students will become futures literate during their university education. With the right support and encouragement, we hope this dream will extend beyond Nigeria to Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania, and Rwanda.

In addition to educational institutions, we also work with

commercial organizations and companies. Our focus spans both the working realm and the educational sector. The founder of Poise, the organization I work with, is the chairman of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Education Group, which facilitates collaborations with universities and schools. We also work closely with secondary and primary schools to influence young people early in their development.

However, expanding futures literacy to more institutions and organizations presents logistical challenges. It requires significant resources. For example, when we visited a university in Zaria,

northern Nigeria, the process required repeated discussions and in-person meetings to effectively convey the value of futures literacy. While virtual sessions are helpful, physical gatherings where people can experience the methodology firsthand have a greater impact.

To address these challenges, we've embedded futures literacy into our existing programs, which has been a successful strategy, but we know there is much more to be done. Support from organizations like Oxfam has been invaluable, and we hope to build more partnerships like this to expand our reach.

Conferences on futures literacy are also crucial. The last major conference we heard about was in Hanze, Netherlands, where Riel Miller was present. Attending such events would allow us to share our stories from Nigeria and Africa with others while gaining insights to enhance our work. Securing external support to attend conferences and similar initiatives would significantly enhance our ability to understand and deliver futures literacy effectively. These efforts are critical to scaling the impact of futures literacy in the region, and I am hopeful we can achieve them.

In closing, I am grateful for this opportunity. Everyone at Poise sends their regards and appreciation. We are optimistic about the future and look forward to more opportunities to collaborate and share our journey.



It's a Sin Not to Use Futures Literacy When It Could Be So **Helpful**

Wouter Kerdijk,
programme manager, educationalist.
Groningen, The Netherlands

I have always loved patterns. I enjoy taking a broad perspective and connecting things. Futures literacy aligns naturally with that disposition. It's a way—perhaps I'm simplifying it—to help a large group of people quickly discard assumptions and reexamine a topic with fresh eyes. In a world where people rely heavily on heuristics, taking shortcuts in their thinking and following familiar paths, futures literacy is a powerful tool for improving how we think about the topics we discuss.

The more you practice futures literacy, the more it becomes second nature to question your assumptions. As a project leader or programme manager, encouraging people to

engage with a topic in new and stimulating ways is invaluable. Many of the exercises in Futures Literacy Labs reveal the patterns in people's thinking and shift conversations toward translating big ideas into concrete expressions, behaviors, or technologies. Futures literacy challenges us to explore connections—asking, “If this is true or might be the future, what does it mean for smaller, simpler things?”



What implicit larger ideas underly our truths and assumptions?"

This approach exposes a coherence often missing in everyday thinking. In fields like education, for example, college teachers focus on organizing education, team leaders on managing it, and consultants on designing it. But when challenged to explore with a broad worldview or concrete examples and to consider what lies underneath their assumptions, they gain a much deeper awareness of the internal coherence of things—patterns not only in their thinking but also in the systems and subjects they're addressing.

In our day-to-day work, switching between systemic, organizational, and personal levels is often avoided because it requires explicit energy and attention. Futures Literacy Labs, on the other hand, actively encourages this thinking. From the beginning, I've felt at home in futures literacy. It resonates deeply with me, sharpening my thinking in ways that go beyond daily practice.

RETHINKING OLD PATTERNS

I have been a consultant and programme manager at Hanzé University for eight years. My first real experience with futures literacy came when I began running a program at the request of our then-director of Finance.

We organized a two-day Futures Literacy Lab in a hotel, inviting a diverse group of participants, and it was incredibly valuable.

This lab set a new course for the organization, even though such shifts take years to integrate fully. Reframing, for example, proved to be an effective way to help people rethink old patterns. While it may sometimes feel manipulative, having forward-thinkers and pioneers in the room helped shift the collective mindset. The lab created momentum, making it easier to translate abstract ideas into meaningful steps forward.

Our challenge stemmed from relatively high spatial costs for administering written tests, coupled with an ongoing push in education to rethink the role of knowledge testing. The Futures Literacy Lab helped us converge two seemingly unrelated goals: reducing costs and redefining the role and shape of assessment in education. Futures literacy helped us transform a relatively uninspired assignment to cut costs into a quality-oriented design perspective. We asked, “If knowledge tests in their current form don’t add much but still serve a function, how do we reshape and integrate them collaboratively?”. The two-day session wasn’t just about policy change—it had far-

reaching effects. It strengthened relationships across departments and contributed to personal development. Participants stepped away from everyday roles and experienced a constructive and positive atmosphere.

Over time, futures literacy has helped me develop a greater ease with the future. I worry less about what’s coming because I’ve practiced reflecting on different possibilities and what they might mean for the world and our collective behaviors. After experiencing this process several times, I’ve realized how adaptable we can be as a group. It’s a reassuring realization that fosters a sense of confidence in navigating

the uncertainties ahead.

One session stands out in my memory, though I don’t recall the exact topic—it was focused on looking at the world from a dystopian perspective. The idea was to imagine the world’s future if everything completely collapsed. It was fascinating to see the creativity of a group of people, many of whom didn’t know each other well, coming together to find beautiful solutions within unfavorable circumstances. Together, we discovered ways to connect and support one another, which gave me renewed confidence in people—a point of view that often seems absent, especially when you look at the news.

Exercises like these train your mind to avoid making too many assumptions about single solutions or singular futures. It's an important skill that makes life more enjoyable. Many worries stem from fear of doomsday scenarios or the belief that a particular issue won't be solved. Developing flexibility allows you to adapt and enjoy life more—even when things don't go as planned or outcomes differ from expectations.

This mindset ties closely to how we've traditionally approached problem-solving, where systems often demand exactness. For instance, grant applications or education systems often require

predefined solutions or outcomes. Students are often taught to solve problems with a fixed destination in mind, and deviations from that are seen as failures. But we're slowly moving away from that rigidity. I remember my PhD advisor saying, *"If the question is relevant, then the outcome is always relevant—even if it's nothing or if the experiment fails—because you've learned something."* Futures literacy echoes that mindset by emphasizing intent and value-driven thinking.

VALUES-DRIVEN THINKING

I recall commissioning a Futures Literacy Lab focused on education in 2021. One of the key questions it raised was, *"Is there time to*

learn? Are things allowed to fail?"

This kind of inquiry encourages value-driven thinking grounded in human experience. When you strip away today's barriers and norms, what remains is the commonality of being human. At that level, we're more alike than we realize, sharing a desire for inclusive, safe, and meaningful systems.

However, extrinsic incentives often creep in when systems are created, sometimes overshadowing the original intent. For example, we are trying to reduce dropout rates in our institution to benefit our student population. While it's valid to care about dropout rates, the deeper conversation about why they matter

is often skipped. Futures literacy disrupts that tendency by bringing the conversation back to intent, one of its most beautiful aspects.

Futures literacy has also significantly impacted my work approach. It has sharpened my ability to challenge assumptions non-confrontationally, focusing instead on asking questions and steering conversations toward shared intent. One of the key lessons I've learned is that assumptions are not about being '*right*' but rather about choosing them consciously and collectively. This awareness has become integral to my work, whether contributing to institutional policies, small projects, or informal conversations.

I've noticed that futures literacy also enhances how others engage with transitions. It's most powerful for creating a shared vision, free from self-defeating beliefs and assumptions. However, maintaining that shared vision over time is a challenge. For example, keeping the original lab participants together in large-scale transitions is often impossible. One solution is to develop smaller follow-up sessions—mini-labs—that build on the insights from the initial lab. These sessions would need to connect to the original outcomes in order to maintain coherence. Without that, there's a risk of diverging too far in different directions.

The structure of these smaller sessions would be crucial. They should allow participants to explore and expand on previous insights without losing alignment. While I've primarily focused on initiating processes and scoping labs, developing formats for ongoing engagement is key. Such an approach would ensure the process remains grounded in a shared vision, even as it evolves and adapts to new contexts.

Futures literacy beautifully builds on existing shared values. One of its strengths is that everyone often agrees on universal values and principles. Using those shared values as a foundation in follow-up

sessions with smaller groups helps steer efforts in a shared direction. When mixed with the specific context of the group you're working with, those values become even more impactful.

I believe the world would benefit if more people became proficient in futures literacy. Like many transformative practices, it might resonate deeply with some, while others only engage with it briefly. But even small, regular practices can gradually shift how people think and act. I hope many people come into contact with futures literacy and practice it, even briefly, as it can create meaningful change.

People sometimes underestimate futures literacy when they first hear about it, but its versatility makes it useful for tackling nearly any challenge—especially when things aren't going well. Its open, growth-focused, and people-centered approach helps loosen group relationships and move topics forward. While I deeply value its intrinsic qualities, its greatest potential lies in its ability to facilitate collaboration and uncover better solutions.

FOSTERING ADAPTABILITY AND COLLABORATION

Futures literacy is part of a larger transition. Initially, the focus was on understanding what it is and

isn't. Then came teaching it to others. Now, the emphasis is on creating real-world impact. While many techniques were already part of modern intervention practices, futures literacy combines them with a strong future orientation, making it unique. It also incorporates practices from the arts, creating a more cohesive and fitting whole. It reveals unspoken and unconscious assumptions about the future—what it should look like, what people fear, or what they desire. These deeply ingrained assumptions often go unexamined, and uncovering and challenging them is invaluable.

In my experience, change is rarely about a single “*right*” way forward. There are usually many viable paths, but people often perceive only one as attractive and dismiss the others as undesirable. That’s unfortunate when trying to create or develop change together. Futures literacy helps expand those possibilities, fostering a mindset where adaptability and collaboration come more easily.

The essence of futures literacy lies in its ability to connect content, values, and discussions—always with a strong orientation toward the future. It’s a value-driven, people-centered approach that even incorporates the non-human into the conversation. What I find most fascinating is how readily people come together in this process. While some might initially resist, saying they can’t engage with it, I’ve often seen those people have a breakthrough later as the insights click unexpectedly. It’s a testament to the power of this approach and its potential to create meaningful connections and transformative outcomes.



“Futures literacy itself is a pause. It creates a space where it’s safe to pause, rethink, and even change our minds. It allows us to reflect and recognize that we may no longer believe what we thought we believed. This is more than just changing opinions—it’s about fundamentally altering how we think.”

Alex Lambie, artist

Futures literacy is the capability to be aware of how and why we anticipate in different contexts and for different purposes.

This book holds a unique collection of 20 stories of people whose lives have been impacted by futures literacy. Through deeply personal and inspiring stories they share their struggles, doubts, victories and insights.