

PREPARING FOR LEARNING IN TODAY'S WORLD: CHALLENGES AT THE HORIZON OF 2026

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ABSTRACT

The logic behind choosing 2026 is that it's 20 years (one generation) ahead of where we are right now. It's a foreseeable time span. Politicians, planners and policy makers should be able and willing to look that much ahead and realize that they are not dealing with utopia, but with a reality in the making. In 2026 the world population will have grown to eight billion (eight times ten to the power of nine) people, 33% more than the six billion we had at the turn of the millennium and well on our way to what forecasters believe will be a more or less stable "nine billion plus" around the year 2050. We will be more interconnected than ever before, quite intimately exposed to each other's ideas, ways of expression and styles of life, and should all be aware of the need to sustain human life on a planet with limited resources that can't be sacrificed in dissipative conflicts and through the irresponsible spending by some to the detriment of others. We must care for diversity in the different ways in which different cultures view, appreciate, and act within the world in which they live, rising above the divisions that keep us apart, standing in awe of the beautiful complexity we have been able to generate while our species evolved. This requires members of the generations to come to be prepared – in terms of values adopted, attitudes acquired and skills shaped while they learn – to face, and interact constructively with, an environment that is complex as well as in constant and rapid change. Facing the challenge to be prepared for such a future, we must be willing to engage in a serious rethinking of the societal conditions that allow all of us to learn, from infancy to late adulthood.

PRESENTATION

A link to the PowerPoint slides of the above presentation can be found on the following Web page:
<http://www.learndev.org/RediscoveringChildhood.html>.

REFERENCES

The following references relate to the presentation. They are worth exploring:

- 1) Edgar Morin: *Seven complex lessons in education for the future* [UNESCO] - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001177/117740eo.pdf>. The original of this document was in French and is available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001177/117740fo.pdf>. An Arabic translation can be found at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001177/117740ab.pdf>.
- 2) Gopnik, A., Meltzoff, A. N. & Kuhl, P. K. (1999). *The scientist in the crib: Minds, brains, and how children learn*. New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc.
- 3) *Becoming human*: <http://www.becominghuman.org>. This is an interactive Web-based video.
- 4) Templeton, A.R. (2002). Out of Africa again and again. *Nature*, 416, 45-51. For the really interested.
- 5) Images of the social and economic world – Mark Newman <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/cartograms/>.
- 6) Ecological footprint: <http://ecofoot.org>. Respond to the quiz to find out what *your* footprint is.

Not referenced in the presentation, but equally worth reading is:

- 7) Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.) (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Report of the Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. (Also available online at <http://darwin.nap.edu/books/0309070368/html/R1.html>.)

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

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Three key slides included in my presentation are the following ones:

1) Some challenges at the horizon of 2026

- ❑ Sharing a small planet and its resources among at least nine billion people by 2050 (almost eight billion by 2026).
- ❑ Doing the above in a sustainable manner, living in harmony with ourselves and our environment,
 - avoiding/minimizing dissipative conflict
 - nurturing our creative diversity
 - accommodating inventiveness
 - staying ahead in reflective power of our ability to innovate
 - rediscovering wisdom and elevating its place as an ingredient of our humanity to the next higher level.

2) Pedagogical implications (among other concerns, from the perspective of the rediscovery of childhood)

- ❑ Children are humans, not humans in the making.
 - There is incredible potential already in the newly born – and thus, by implication, also in the not yet born (e.g. Gopnik, A., Meltzoff, A. N. & Kuhl, P. K. (1999). *The scientist in the crib: Minds, brains, and how children learn*. New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc).
 - There lives a child in every adult.
 - Humans (children and adults) grow by exposure to and reflection on an ever increasing body of experience.
 - Nurturing our innate and evolving potential is a lifelong collective and individual challenge.
- ❑ Focus on existence in context (plurality of culture; history and evolution; physical, biological and social context)
 - Learning *between* us rather than *in* us (identity; community; appreciation of otherness; communication; affectivity).
 - Critical awareness within linguistically and culturally pluralistic world.
 - Mind over competency.
 - Awareness of one's belonging to a larger whole, i.e. one's home in the universe, place in evolution, spiritual connections.
 - Stories – including such stories as science provides – as supreme expression of wisdom.

3) Points of attention

- ❑ Look at totality of learning landscape. Different spaces of learning (family, school, media, etc.) are ecologically interrelated.
- ❑ Explore interstices (the spaces in between) in the learning ecology as well as indirect routes to solving some of the problems, e.g. improving school based learning may well depend on creating an educated family environment, which may in turn depend on how the media and the family interact with each other.
- ❑ Seek natural opportunities to integrate technology.
- ❑ Focus on ability to interact with knowledge rather than on 'having it.'
- ❑ Rethink curriculum from perspectives that overcome compartmentalization of knowledge.
- ❑ Ethics and esthetics are neither marginal nor an afterthought to what we should focus on in the development of humanity.
- ❑ Rethink learning.