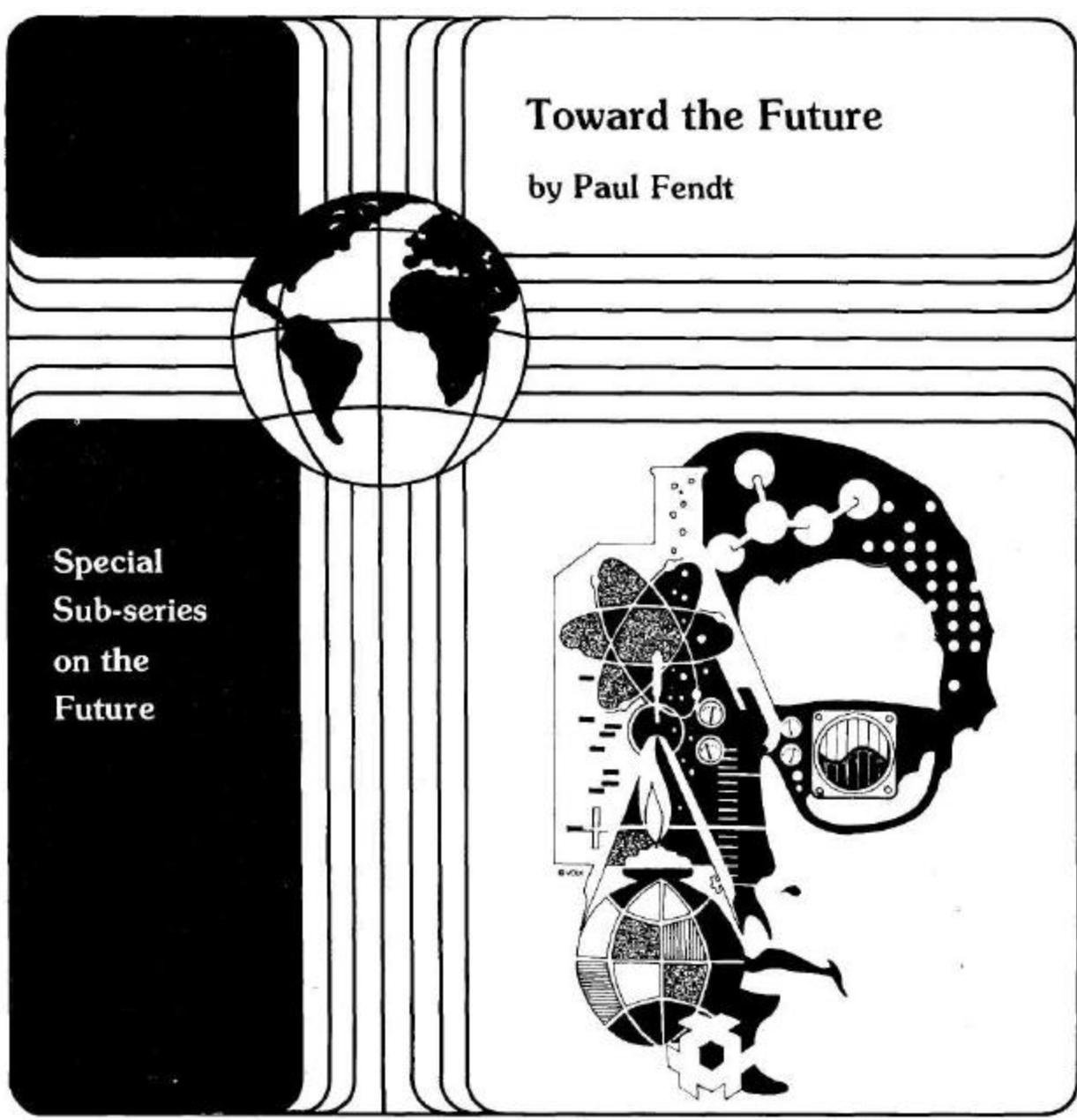


# DD

# themes & issues

A Series of Topical Papers on Developmental Disabilities



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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*DD Themes and Issues* is a series of topical papers for this nation's Developmental Disabilities Planning Councils. Each participating state, territorial, and District of Columbia Council develops and implements a comprehensive State Plan for the coordination of comprehensive services for citizens who are developmentally disabled.

This paper is part of a special sub-series on the future and is intended to broaden the vision of the DD Community about the issues and problems which everyone must face in the remainder of the twentieth century.

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# Toward the Future

by Paul Fendt

The term *foresight* is gaining circulation among the United States Congress as an expression of concern for the impact of legislation upon our country's future. One dictionary definition of foresight includes the notion of "thoughtful regard or provision for the future; prudent forethought."

As early as the beginning of the 1970's the principle of foresight was included in the formation of the Congressional Research Service in the Library of Congress. The first full impact forecast (foresight) to become national legislation is that contained in a bill introduced by Senator Gary Hart of Colorado (Senate Bill 1363) which deals with the expansion of electrical production through cogeneration, the multiple use of energy used in industrial production.

We have begun to recognize that as our society and the societies of the developed countries of the world have grown in nature and complexity, the urgent need for foresight also grows. As an example, consider voice communication. Since 1876, the date of the invention of the telephone, we have progressed to a communication capability that permits us to view on our television screens an event taking place anywhere in the world simultaneously with its happening. Today the consequence of world events impacts immediately on all persons in the world community.

Another example of the need for foresight relates to the impact of decisions on *public opinion*. The impact on public opinion of the decision to build the first flying machine at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in 1903, was of little consequence in contrast to the impact on public opinion of the landing of supersonic transport aircraft at our nations' airports in the mid 1970's. The Wright Brothers had to consider few, if any, governmental regulations in their decision. Today, major airlines have to consider voluminous governmental regulations in order to change passenger service schedules or to increase the number of passengers carried per aircraft. To take another perspective on Kitty Hawk, the impact on the United States transportation industry of the decision to make a flying machine was unknown in 1903. It was not believed necessary, and certainly not required by law, to write a comprehensive foresight statement concerning the probable alterations in motor car production, modifications in ship building, or even changes in bus schedules because our transportation industry then was only in its infancy.

Even though foresight and impact statements were virtually unheard of in 1900, such statements are now vital tools in the daily decision-making processes of our governments

(federal, state, and local), of our industries, and are vital to the decision-making activities of a great many other social institutions in the 1970's. And the need for such statements is likely to continue and even become increasingly more important during the 1980's and 1990's. Reasons for this expanding need are many, but among them are continued population growth; the evolution of technology which has brought about business automation, increased production capacity and continuing industrial growth and; importantly, the exponential growth in the quantity of information available to our society. Our societal successes, although seemingly limitless, have created complex new needs not foreseen in earlier stages of human progress. The very complexity of our society, our races, religions, interest groups, life styles, along with our wish to continue to function as a democratic society, leads us to a present state of complexity and perplexity concerning decision-making processes.

### *Expectations of the Future*

As we move into the twenty-first century, and beyond, a series of more challenging decisions will face us. Some futurists, such as Robert Theobald, have sounded an alarmist note (cf. "Entering the Eighties: A Time for Despair") only to follow with guidelines that provide reassurance (cf. "Thinking Along New Lines"). Among the futurists extrapolating current trends, there are both positive thinkers such as Herman Kahn, and the despairing, such as the Club of Rome. Both, however, agree that existing structure and existing patterns of decision-making will adapt to our existing social and governmental institutions, given time enough.

As we move into the future, new decision-making strategies are certain to evolve. During the evolutionary process, we are wisely cautioned to take measures to preserve those qualities of our civilization that are generally considered our best. The right of all interest groups to have a voice in future decision-making is one feature of our democracy that it is imperative to preserve, and it is further imperative that most interest groups do participate in the decision-making processes in the twenty-first century.

Change is occurring at an accelerated pace that has not yet realized maximum velocity. The challenge is to combine our technological growth and the knowledge explosion in ways that preserve those qualities of life that we have come to cherish. A few sects and cults in our society have elected deliberately to retain their "old ways." In opting not to adopt what might be termed a contemporary lifestyle, they hope to preserve the values that have provided, for them, human fulfillment. But, most of us will accept and adapt to change as part of the contemporary living process, but how will we enjoy the benefits of change without sacrificing historically valued qualities? We are challenged to enjoy modern technology with no sacrifice in happiness and security.

### *Where to Begin in the Study of the Future?*

Studying the future is not necessarily a new idea. As early as 3500 B.C., the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* revealed belief about the destiny of the human being throughout eternity.

Human beings seem to have an innate desire to improve their lives. The *Tablets from Nippur* (2200 B.C.) tell how people attempted to gain desirable futures by conjuring to the gods, and by the granting of immortality to a hero.

The future is an irresistibly tempting subject for speculation. The recent growth of the World Future Society from 17,587 members in 1976 to 24,698 members in 1977 is only one of many examples of the growing interest and movement in futures studies. Most of us need to be working *for* something. Futures studies require that we become very clear about our longer range goals and objectives, those we set for ourselves or for our group or our profession. Our efforts must be organized systematically if we hope to achieve carefully developed long-range goals. Finally, futures studies emphasize efficient effort. These requirements, *goal setting, organization and efficiency*, are principles most of us already agree are valuable. Futures studies refer to them as basic requirements. With these notions in mind, we can begin the process of deciding what our future will be, and, at the same time, we can decide what the future will *not* be. We no longer have to accept future events as inevitable. We do, however, have to decide what future or futures we want, what processes we will use to bring them into being as well as the future agendas that we will discard for the sake of efficiency.

The same principles of futures studies apply whether we are looking at the problem of electrical power generation or human services for persons with disabilities. In order to develop future-oriented goals in the delivery of human services, we must be knowledgeable about (1) what our client's needs are and (2) what our support system is that will deliver the benefits described in future-oriented goals. Then we can apply the methodologies of futures studies.

### *Crisis Avoidance*

Futurists cite examples of crises that might have been avoided had foresight been applied in time. The facts surrounding the oil crisis and recent price escalations and the resulting changes in the world economy, were all adequately *available* to us years ago. What we as a society lacked was the ability to focus on these "pieces of knowledge" about an impending energy crisis. We failed to educate ourselves to alternative consequences, and we failed to design an effective action plan to avoid the worst alternative nor did we spend the effort necessary to achieve the best of the possible alternative consequences.

The methodologies identified with futures studies attempt to fill the forecasting voids in education, planning strategies, and alternative consequences. Most futures studies have evolved around the need to solve problems that require long-range solutions, and call for complex planning and greater lead time for anticipation of consequences than was previously deemed necessary.

In addition to the heuristic quality of futures studies, there are other personal reasons for studying the future. It is exciting to create a future "history" or scenario for events which have not yet occurred. There is growing awareness that, unless we develop future "histories," we may face a future filled with crises, most of which might be avoidable.

Indeed we often limit ourselves because we put present parameters around our knowing the future. That futurists believe we have more control over our destiny than we often realize, as individuals and as a society, is a basic premise of futuristics. As we develop systems to create *more desirable* futures, our society will not accept that development to be the responsibility of an "elite" few, rather we will heed the futurists' call for participation in the most democratic sense.

### *Defining the Terms of Futures Studies*

For all of us to participate in studying and shaping our futures, we must have some common set of terms.

*Futuristics* or *Future Studies* is defined by D. L. Kauffman, Jr. as, "Education about the future and about methods for studying the future."<sup>10</sup> Another definition includes "the systematic study, by ....rational or empirical means, of the possible alternative futures of human societies and the special problems and opportunities relating to those futures." Other terms seen in the futures literature include: futurology, futurism, futurbiles, prognostics, long range social forecasting, and the like.

A *futurist* is one who practices futuristics or futures studies. Kauffman speaks of *The Future* as a "zone of potentiality" and *A Future* as a possible course of events.

Futures studies is not the same as, nor should it be confused with, *prediction*. There are many mathematical, machine (computer), and other scientifically based models for prediction and/or trend extrapolation which are very useful. These exploratory models were developed because of a need for certainty in predicting the future. No known model has yet been adequate to correctly and accurately *predict* the future. Futures studies is *not* prophecy. Prophecy often involves some quasi-scientific base from which an attempt is made to state a future with a degree of certainty which is highly subject to error and which has little chance of being factual except for the same chance as has a coin toss, that is 50-50.

Forecasting is the process of making conditional statements about a future possibility. The major categories are *exploratory* (trend extrapolation mentioned above) and *normative* forecasting. Normative forecasting implies an understanding (through educational or other means) of causes, goals; knowledge of the elements which encourage or impede progress toward a certain future. It is the process often referred to as "inventing the future."

According to Kauffman, good forecasts have several characteristics': (1) They can stand on their own. This means, (a) good forecasts have a solid intellectual framework, and (b) assertions about the future have a firm factual base. (2) Good forecasts are plausible. (3) Good forecasts are *clear* and *unambiguous*. (4) They look from new directions and contain strong elements of imagination. (5) Finally, good forecasts clearly reveal their justification and the bases from which they emerge.

## *Classifications of Futurists*

Robert Theobald, a well-known futurist, has made some attempt to classify futurists. There are the *trend extrapolists* who are subdivided into positive trend extrapolists and negative trend extrapolists. Herman Kahn is the optimist/futurist, (cf. "A World Turning Point — And a Better Prospect for the Future")

These persons might be characterized by the statement that, "it is possible to provide everyone on earth with a good standard of living within a century." There are also negative extrapolists, the pessimist/futurists. These persons cannot and do not imagine any fundamental change in the way society operates. Change, they believe, must occur from the top-down. Theobald characterizes these futurists with a quotation from Arthur Koestler's, *The Call Girls*: "We are a horrible race, living in horrible times. Perhaps we should have the courage to think of horrible remedies." Those technocrats who feel that the only way to "straighten things out" is to re-design society bureaucratically and put people in the boxes into which they fit, whether they like it or not, are in this category. The alternatives, so the technocrats believe, are complete disaster. Both the positive and the negative trend extrapolists believe that the traditional institutional structures which have brought us to our present point of crisis can still serve to pull us out. Their style is: if it doesn't fit — push.

Another class of futurists are the *romanticists* typified by Charles Reich, author of *The Greening of America*. The romanticists can be best thought of as reflecting the ideals of the communes of the 1960's. The philosophy of the romanticists might be, "the world will work most successfully if man is left fully free to define his own role. . ."

Finally, there is Theobald's own view: *systems thinkers*. Systems thinkers hold the belief that societies can and must be changed. The change must be toward a more human and humane society, one that values the best qualities of humankind. In order to accomplish this, we must take the time to discover the "real" forces that are operating now and influencing human history. We must imagine creatively what future it is we want, and we must create the necessary methods which will move us from the present future (the future that will happen without our intervention) into a future we choose (design).

## *Our Own Views of the Future*

Our own views of the future generally are shaped by the kinds of decisions we make in the present. The young person who is uncertain about his/her future may not do well in high school or college. Then a sudden interest develops in a particular job and the prospects for a fulfilling career become evident. The young person returns to graduate school, designs an academic program, receives excellent grades and is seen as an emerging leader in his/her profession. The future is what we *expect* (believe likely to happen), what we *fear* (that our future might hold), and what we *desire* (that our future might become). To know that the future is realistically under our control helps us deal with our fears and anxieties. Each of us needs the vision, the goal or objective, and a set of desired alternatives as focal points for action — this

helps keep us going. Warren Ziegler, former Co-director of the Educational Policy Research Center at Syracuse University, and a well-known futurist, calls *reflection* the most important form of action. In ordinary language, it's "getting our head together about where we are going to be in thirty years." Ziegler, and others as well, involve groups of persons in the writing of *future histories* as a way to describe in detail what that desired future is and how we may arrive there realistically at the appointed time in the *future*. We must apply these techniques, not only to our individual futures, but to the future of our society, as well.

### *Assumptions for Futures Planning*

Dr. Gerald C. Hanberry, former director of the Adult Education Think Tank Project, lists some assumptions about futures planning we may find useful. (1) We can invent the future; (2) Our images of the future influence our actions in the present; (3) It is not enough to know or to think about the future; we must participate in its development; (4) The more alternatives we have for the future, the greater the opportunity to invent the desired future; (5) Slogan-systems (cliches) rather than plausible theoretical systems, have been the foundation for planning; (7) A planned future has known events that one wants to occur with known ways of making the event occur; and (8) The more we are able to "leap" into the future and "experience" some moment in future time, the greater the chance of making the future come out the way we intend.

With the proper methods, and with the incentive born in anticipation of a desired future, we can *invent* our desired future. We must work as a team; it cannot be accomplished individually. Listening to each other as we invent our future brings us into the "Communications Era" (or Post-Industrial Era) which futurists describe as the next age or era of the social evolution of our civilization. We cannot and must not accept less than the best for ourselves and for our clients.

Margaret Mead, in her book, *Culture and Commitment*, gives a broad cultural paradigm from her perspective as an anthropologist. Dr. Mead describes the early years of social development in the United States with the term "*Pre-Figurative Culture*." This is the period when grandparents, parents, and children lived together as a family unit and transmitted the culture from the top-down. The next period, the one in which we are still engaged, is termed "*Co-Figurative Culture*." Co-Figurative Culture is top-down, but also the cultural messages are moving laterally: grandparent to grandparent, parent to parent, and child to child. Dr. Mead suggests we are to move into a culture termed "*Post-Figurative*," when culture will move top-down, laterally, and from the bottom-up: child to parent, and parent to grandparent.

A final frame of reference for our planning process is again supplied by Robert Theobald in his book *Beyond Despair*. Theobald and others order the development of civilization in America from the agricultural era of independent families; then the industrial era of organization by machine; finally, our present era of communications in which social organization is achieved through reason and thought. We are moving into a social era of great diversity and pluralism in which we must move from the win-lose and we-they antagonistic construct into a

win-win and we-we pattern of relationships.

#### Footnotes

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<sup>4</sup>/*ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>/*ibid*

<sup>6</sup>/*ibid.*

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