

Seeing is believing:

The Future School is here

VALERIE HANNON

all.

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AUSTRALIAN LEARNING LECTURE

The Australian Learning Lecture is a ten-year initiative by the Koshland Education Innovation designed to bring big ideas and new approaches in education to national attention. ALL acts as a hub and a catalyst, working with the world's leading knowledge shapers to drive impact in key areas of need for change. It draws on the input of multiple voices and stakeholders to strengthen the importance of learning for all Australians. ALL is not politically or commercially aligned.

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Since 2015, the Australian Learning Lecture has delivered two biennial lectures presented by two global thought leaders — Sir Michael Barber (*Joy and Data, 2015*) and Charles Fadel (*The New Success 2017*).

THE THIRD LECTURE

The third lecture *Seeing is Believing: The Future School is Here, 2020* is delivered by Valerie Hannon.

The 2020 ALL lecture is based on a global scan of schools commissioned by ALL and conducted by Valerie Hannon. The scan focused on schools that are designed to meet the future needs of students and our world. It revealed that radically transformed schools are already here – all around the world. Although these future-focussed schools are widely divergent in their settings and purposes, a core set of design principles was common to them all. ALL believes that these principles can provide useful guidance to designing future-fit schools across Australia.

VALERIE HANNON

Valerie Hannon is a global thought leader, inspiring education systems to re-think what 'success' will mean in the C 21st, and the implications for education. She is co-founder of the UK-based Innovation Unit and has worked on education change in the UK, Europe, USA, Australia and Africa. Valerie is a founding member and Co-Chair of the Global Education Leaders Partnership; expert adviser on education to the OECD and a frequent contributor to the World Summit on Innovation in Education (WISE). Currently, she is Senior Adviser to the OECD in its *Education 2030* project.

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The Australian Learning Lecture is proudly supported by the Koshland Innovation Extension Fund, a sub fund of Australian Communities Foundation.

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ISBN - 978-0-6450239-0-9

FOREWORD

It is a great pleasure to present the transcript of Valerie Hannon's ALL Lecture *Seeing is Believing: The Future School is Here*.

Before COVID struck the world, in March 2020 Valerie Hannon was poised to deliver the third ALL (Australian Learning Lecture) on The Future School in both Melbourne and Sydney.

The Future School was ALL's chosen topic because people around us were asking what would significant change in schooling look like to meet the needs of the future? Many people had understood the new skill set and capabilities students would need – but how exactly would that translate into new models of schools.

We were thrilled that Valerie Hannon accepted our invitation to conduct a global scan and analysis of the nature of the future school. Valerie is an outstanding thought leader who has worked with many countries around the world in their efforts to transform schooling.

The deep thinking that Valerie undertook over the year before COVID has stood a major test of time; her case holds just as strongly after the pandemic's disruption as before. Valerie presents a cohesive view of a way forward for education. She identified more than 50 future schools already operating – and there could have been many more. While different circumstances in schools all around the world are celebrated, ALL's research identified a core set of principles that guides them all.

I believe we owe it to our young people today to prepare and enable every one of them for the future ahead. They deserve to look forward with confidence and with positive strong foundations.

Schools are core to the well-being of society. There is a greater imperative than ever to make them centres of exciting, purposeful learning.

We look forward to your thoughts and responses. ALL exists to bring big ideas to shared discussion and to consider how they become effective practice.



Ellen Koshland

Founder, Australian Learning Lecture

SEEING IS BELIEVING: THE FUTURE SCHOOL IS HERE

DELIVERED BY VALERIE HANNON

Back in 2019 BC (Before Covid) I was invited by the Australian Learning Lecture to consider the nature of the Future School. In doing this work, I found remarkable schools around the world well advanced in the work of creating institutions fit for the future.

COVID interrupted that work (and the work of every human on earth) and the impact of COVID on schools will remain ambiguous for some time. Some people are understandably desperate to get their old lives back, to snap back to things as they were. Others see this as an extraordinary opportunity to step back, and to ask ourselves some long-overdue fundamental questions. I believe that it is *vital* that we seize this opportunity; that we don't just wait to slide back into old patterns, habits and structures. Rather, we should be thinking about the longer term plans we can lay now to transform our schooling systems to be future-fit.

And the good news? We now have an immense number of examples to help us; a kind of global prototyping lab from which to learn.

Seeing is believing.

If you were asked to pick out which schools should provide our guides, how would you go about it?

My thinking process went like this:

There are evolving new models of schools around the world but suggesting which provide models for the future can't just be a matter of personal opinion.

A good way in is to look first at the organisations that focus on the *future itself*: how is it shaping up, and what does this mean for schools?

My research showed that you can distil out of the work of such organisations sets of *design principles* for creating schools fit for the future. The second step was identifying those principles.

I then looked at schools across the world that were using these principles in their work – with some remarkably encouraging outcomes. We looked at future-focused schools in diverse settings – from California to Delhi, from New Zealand to Spain. There's a database of around 50 schools – there could have been many more.

We explored the thinking that has led to their establishment, the practical new models that have resulted. We then considered what they might have to teach us about what a new 'normal' might look like – one that is focused on creating the future the next generation needs.

Out of this, some interesting other patterns emerged.

In this lecture, I am going to share these research findings with you; and then make some suggestions about how to go forward. Before getting stuck in, let me say though, that one of the outcomes of the COVID catastrophe has been a resurgence of the view that 'the school' as an institution has had its day – that the long-delayed promise of Edtech is about to be fulfilled. Soon we won't need schools anymore and Edtech will do to the institution of school what Amazon has done to shopping. Maybe the growth of 'pandemic pods' will fuel this idea.

I passionately reject this suggestion – whilst I recognise that it IS a possibility. As I will argue, the social institution of school is a vital component in thriving communities; and in fostering the well-being of young people – *if the institution is redesigned*. That redesign is even more imperative if we want our institutions to drive towards equity, as opposed to entrenching existing inequalities.

The beginning of my research journey was to review the global organisations that intentionally employ forms of futures thinking as tools to support policy.

In case you believe that 'futures thinking' is an irrelevant, academic activity, let's get clear: *the future just kicked the door down*.

We can't assume steady-state continuity with the past. There are discernible trends and disruptions that profoundly impact the nature of life on earth. And schools need to shape up to that reality.

SCHOOLS SHAPING UP TO REALITY

Here is the set of 23 organisations we looked at who *intentionally* factor in thinking about the nature of the future into their work on learning. No doubt there are more out there.

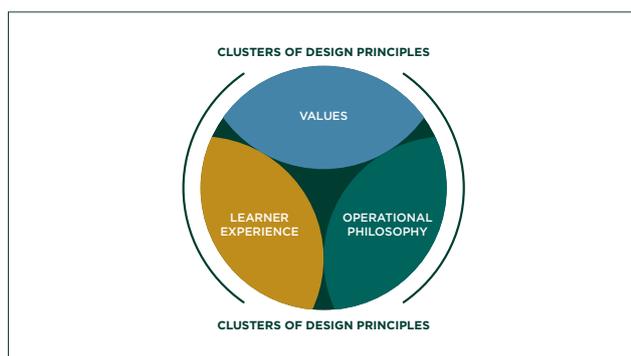
The research scan looked at 23 future-focused organisations...

- The Coalition of Essential School
- Big Picture Learning
- Expeditionary Learning
- Education Re-Imagined
- Learning Frontiers
- OECD Innovative Learning Environments 7 Principles
- OECD Education 2030 Learning Framework
- Yidan Prize
- Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative
- XQ Institute
- Next Gen Learning
- The High Tec High Group
- Deep Learning
- Re-school Colorado
- LEAP Innovations
- Remake Learning
- Transcend Education
- First Peoples Principles of Learning (Canada)
- Deans for Impact
- Institute of Applied Neuroscience
- Lego Foundation
- Carnegie Mellon Eberly Centre
- Knowledge Works

You can see they are diverse, ranging from intergovernmental research agencies, to challenge-prize sponsors, to think-tanks.

Out of this review, it was possible to distil sets of *design principles* of future-focused schools that were held in common, though they were sometimes expressed in different language. These design principles form the heart of my findings and are the key practical takeaway for educators and leaders.

They fall into three clusters.



These three design principles focused on:

Values that future schools should manifest;

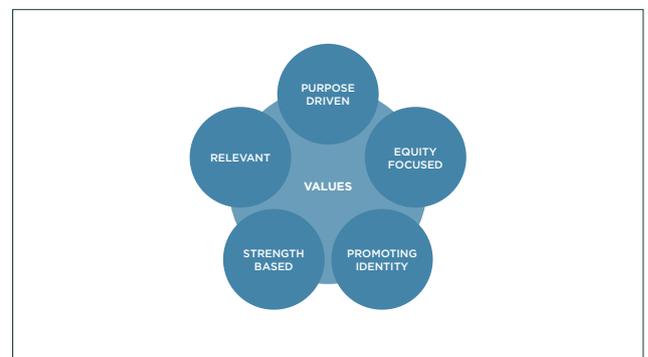
The **operational philosophy** that demonstrate those values in practice; and

The **learners' experience** of all that.

VALUES

Our surveyed organisations all privileged some key values for future schools in their work. Perhaps this reflects the fact that something important has been lost — a north star. This is not to deny that many school leaders do already try to focus on this issue — in some contexts, finding it very difficult to do so in their prevailing accountability regimes.

In looking at the initiatives in our dataset we found the following design principles relating to the concept of values.



Purpose driven: Future Schools are themselves focused on the purpose of both individual and collective thriving, and on helping their learners to acquire personal purpose: building their ‘why?’

Equity-focused: such schools should work to address inequities and social justice and help young people to do so.

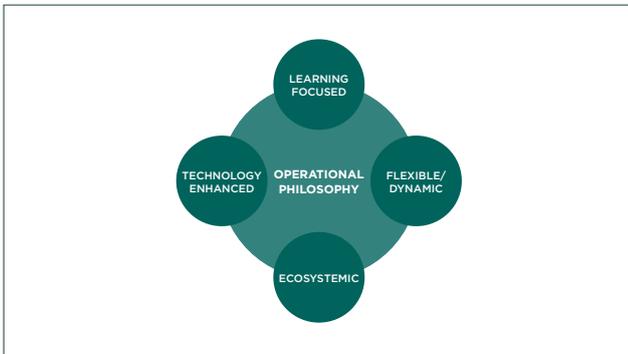
Promoting identity: this principle suggests that each learner’s social and cultural identity must be nurtured, cultivating a sense of belonging and value.

Strength-based: this principle asserts that the school recognizes, celebrates and builds from each (and every) individual’s existing assets.

Relevant: this proposes that learning be relevant to the local and global community. ‘Work that matters’ should be an important feature.

OPERATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The second set of principles focuses on operational philosophy. Values mean nothing if their force is not felt in translation to practice. The organisations we looked at had assembled clear principles in this domain.



Learning focused: learning is at the heart.

Understanding how learning happens, the very best in research on learning sciences, underpin developments. This applies to the adult learning (of all staff) too. This is a critically important principle — and it is not axiomatic by any means in all schools.

Flexible/dynamic: the school should flexibly iterate different modes of teaching and learning to meet the evolving needs of learners and the wider world. In an age of disruption this is an imperative — as schools found out in 2020.

Technology enhanced: Future Schools use technology extensively and responsibly to liberate learning, amplify effective and diverse modalities, and to enable both personalization and collaboration.

Ecosystemic: this principle asserts the school should be seriously porous with many active partners in organizing learning. It will be deeply connected to its local community, and to the global community through technology, to provide richer learning experiences and diverse pathways for learners.

LEARNER EXPERIENCE

The third cluster of design principles focuses on how learners' experience all the previous principles, for that is crucial. What is it like to be on the receiving end? We found a strong awareness of this issue in many of the organisations we surveyed, and it is reflected in the following principles:



Personalised: the learner's experience relates to her personal needs, passions, and development. These are at the centre: not the institution, the teacher, or external bodies of knowledge.

Integrated: the learner experiences meaning through learning that transcends siloes, building relevant connections both within and between disciplines.

Inclusive: the culture is experienced as respectful and welcoming.

Relational: individuals are known, good relationships are the basis for deep learning. Collaboration is the norm.

Empowering: Future Schools build and leverage learner agency, providing opportunities for learners to take increasing responsibility and ownership over their learning.

EMERGING PATTERNS

I would be surprised if any of these principles were completely unfamiliar to you. But ask yourself how often you see them fully realised, and combined. Taken together they give the co-ordinates of the new model. They aren't a recipe: they are the ingredients. It is inspiring to see how schools across the world are combining and emphasising them differently.

When we compiled a database of schools that were utilising these principles, we also noticed another pattern emerging.

Many of the schools utilising these principles were also addressing some of the key challenges and opportunities of our time.

The mission of course was for the benefit of their own young people: but they also had big global issues in mind.



We found six areas where schools had explicitly and intentionally determined to make a difference to the future — and were employing the design principles to help them do it.

The first is that of schools aiming to **grow ethical leadership**. The Liger Leadership Academy is archetypal of schools giving primacy to the notion *that the future demands new kinds of leadership: ethical, democratized*.

Jeff Holte runs the Liger Leadership Academy in Phnom Penh, a school shaped to create the leaders of the future. This is in a country ravaged by a traumatic past. In this inspiring [video](#) Jeff describes the school's approach to ethical leadership.

"We take very seriously our goals. We call them leadership competencies and it is things like vision and influence about networking, about problem solving, about communication and collaboration, and dot connecting — being able to connect dots and solve problems; being able to understand how one thing impacts another thing.

And that is really the basis for our whole curriculum. It is not just an add-on as many people talk about. But those kinds of competencies, these leadership competencies, are skills that will bring them into the future. And for our students in Cambodia, we believe these literally are the skills that they need to create a better economy and a better country.

But in addition to that we also think about their future skills, not only of just competencies like being able to network, being able to communicate effectively and so on, but also who people are. The ethics and the values that people hold are very important to us and it's very important in Cambodia to rebuild people who are leaders with strong value systems, and that really understand — that are globally minded, understand the world and care about other people.

We do real world projects. We have a group of students that are working on marine biology in the coast off Cambodia. They have become the first certified scuba divers in the country, and they are working with people, with researchers from all over the world to try to save the habitat off the coast. This is a three-year project so it's very authentic and very real, and it really makes a huge impact. They've presented at international conferences.

For the first time in my career I've seen students completely engaged in their learning. Every day they want to make a difference, they want to work on these larger initiatives that can create change.

I guess the second part of our approach is the idea of the world as a classroom. There are seven billion people in the world, more than seven billion people. We think at Liger that pretty much everyone works together with our students at Liger to learn and work on projects together. Every single day our students are working with people from all over the world, working with mentors to work on projects. We have a critical staff that works with them, but often we don't really know anything about the project. For example, I'm working on this satellite project with students. I don't know anything about satellites, but I know a lot more now and our students are literally satellite experts, because the whole world has opened. We really question the idea of the teacher at school. We question the whole notion of who's working with students and who's helping them learn. The real answer that we've been working on for years, is that it is — everyone."

For Jeff, design principles of 'purpose', 'ecosystemic', and 'empowering' are especially important. This is a fast expanding field, for example the United World Colleges, Future Nation Schools Africa, Mary L Booker Leadership Academy, Nova Pioneer Schools. There seems to be a felt need to address the leadership deficit in this world of ours. Leadership based not on class or wealth or entitlement but by competence and values.

The second archetype is of schools **building our technological future**. In the Kosen Schools in Japan, for example, and schools such as Chung Nam Samsung Academy, South Korea, or Wooranna Park in Australia, we found schools that take as a guiding mission the idea that we need to create young people who are not just consumers, victims or objects of technology; but rather combine technological confidence and competence with a value frame that serves humanity.

The evolution of this type of school may be a fundamental part of our overall quest to thrive. Naturally, design principles of ‘technology enhanced’ and ‘learning focused’, amongst others, are pre-eminent.

Third, we see schools devoted to our **environmental thriving**.



The Green School in Indonesia, and now New Zealand, Mexico and South Africa is representative of schools giving primacy to the idea *that we have no future unless every child becomes environmentally literate, passionate and active*.

At the Green School, the curriculum design is derived from its key principles of relevance, purpose, relational, and of course ecosystemic. This is a fast expanding category: worldwide examples include the Academy for Global Citizenship in the US, Spark Lynedoch, South Africa, The Muse School, California; Forest Schools; and many others.

Fourth we see schools committed to enabling their learners to navigate the fast-changing **world of work and employment**.



This archetype comprises schools that are particularly focused on the idea that the future labour market will be disrupted, and volatile; and *that to ensure their future prosperity, learners need to become career navigators*. There are numerous examples. Schools in the pioneering Big Picture family across the world, and here in Australia, make internships a central part of their offer to introduce their learners to multiple models of a working life.

Fifth, we are seeing schools that **grow entrepreneurs and change makers**.



LearnLife, Barcelona is representative of the numerous schools now addressing the challenge of growing the world’s capacity to create and manage change and innovation. This rapidly growing field is becoming increasingly studied. It includes schools like The Riverside School in Gujarat, India and the NuVu Studio in the US.

These schools are drawing upon design principles for learning that develop the entrepreneurial competencies — and the value frame that drives motivation to make change for the common good. The practical impact of those design principles is directly felt – in the case of LearnLife for example — a different way of using time, of structuring the week.

Finally, the schools that give emphasis to nurturing a **sense of identity** in their learners: Nga Tapuwae, in Auckland New Zealand is archetypal of schools whose foremost mission is to help young people develop and discover their human identity. An all-through school educating from kindergarten to y13, the school's ethos is that students need a strong and embedded understanding of themselves as Maori, as "a proud and productive people pre- and post-colonisation".

Arihia Stirling, the much-honoured principal of the school, talks [here](#) about the school's belief that to create successful futures, young people need to discover who they are, together with a sense of belonging.

"We really need to ensure that our children come from a space where they feel safe about their self-identity, which will improve their self-efficacy because they understand who they are, why they are, where they've come from. That's totally different to just teaching a person something.

In terms of us as Maori, we come from quite a broken space. And our children need to understand that you don't need to remain feeling deprived from being Maori, you can still be Maori and a much better world that recognise their Maori-ness. When our students know how important their Maori-ness is, then everything's important. When they know how important their language is, then everything's important.

I believe that the future for our students in terms of their identity is far more important, because the world's asking for a different type of human being now. The world is asking for someone that knows how to connect, truly connect — with an energy that another person requires you to connect to.

And that's what we require in our culture; that you're truly present, that what you're saying is honest, that what you are saying is dignified and it doesn't belittle people, that you check yourself, and you be the best part of yourself, because that's what you expect you to be as a Maori person.

When you look at the world and the way in which we need to engage now, it's about relationships. Entrepreneurialism means that the more that you can make someone understand your space, and understand that you would be safe in their space, and vice versa, is a much more important commodity than handing over a piece of paper with a whole lot of things on it saying that you can be that person.

And the new dimensions of education systems are identity and how valuable it is that every child in the world has one. And how do we capture that to enrich their learning experience and return joy to them."

NO SCHOOL IS ABOUT ONE THING

Let me say clearly: no school is about just one thing.

In this research, I found that first, there are usable, clear design principles available for the Future Schools, and they are being modelled across the world for educators to explore and adopt or adapt.

And second: there is emerging a movement in which schools are engaging themselves deeply in the biggest challenges of our time. They are addressing them head on. They believe schools should no longer exist in a separate bubble.

And then there is the issue of leadership.

Many – though by no means all – of the examples of schools we have found that are intentionally working to be future-fit are operating outside of the publicly-funded systems.

Across the world, numerous start-ups are appearing. A few are state-sponsored such as in Beijing and Qatar. School chains, utilizing configurations of the design principles described earlier are multiplying: from the United World Colleges, micro-schools such as Agile Learning Centres, Quantum Camp, Acton Academy; Round Square; Whittle Schools and Studios, and many more.

Too few such schools are available to the disadvantaged, so many are fee paying or independent.

A serious concern is that the advantaged will access future-facing schools whilst many schools in the public sector remain constrained by the old paradigm. This is partly because the *public will* has not yet been built to effect a shift; and partly because teachers are not trusted sufficiently to reorient in these directions.

Too many schools are stuck in the slow lane.

WHAT CAN LEADERS DO TO BRING THEIR SYSTEMS UP TO SPEED?

This isn't just a question for leaders: there is a need for learners and parents to get proactive too.

In addressing this professional audience, I offer three ideas, which I see as a priority.



First: **Build the public will for change**

A major blockage to change is politicians' assumptions about what the public wants or will tolerate. But they have a role in *creating* a different culture of expectation — and the pandemic may help in that, since so much is being re-evaluated.

We need new narratives of what education is for, and what it can be. The diverse experiences of parents, educators and young people of the disruption of learning during the pandemic can be a springboard for the development of such narratives.

Second: **Encourage a different professional debate**

How might we encourage informed, systematic debate about the school design principles: what they mean; what they are based on, where is the research on how they are best implemented, and what are the practical implications?

The set of principles laid out here have been synthesised from the work of some of the key future-focused organisations, in an iterative process with innovative practitioners. That does not make them comprehensive: no doubt others might arise.

Whether as a leader of a system, or as a leader within a school, creating learning communities committed to exploring future-focused design could become a priority. And then creating the conditions where the selected principles can be systematically enacted in practice *authentically*.

This is what creates the school fit for the future.

What's important is to show *how* this is a doable — and with powerful effect.

Third: **Become leaders who really lead**

System leaders — the public servants sometimes pejoratively termed 'bureaucrats' — have a particularly crucial role in offering real leadership. They need to enrich the ideas pool and evidence upon which politicians can rely. And they need an un-bureaucratic mind-set: more outward looking, curious, and open to new developments. Informed by design principles, they need to be more willing to consider different uses of time, space, people and technology.

CONCLUSION

In closing, let me say this: a school of the future should not be imagined as, on the one hand, adjuncts of the powerful new technologies; nor even as new community centres. I believe we need to see them as a *fundamental element* in the range of new solutions humankind must evolve, if we are to overcome and transcend the existential challenges that confront us. Schools have by no means outlived their usefulness: on the contrary. They are vital institutions — but only if they are redesigned.

An environmental revolution that saves our habitat and our existence upon it; a transformed approach to other species; genuinely democratic equitable societies; personal well-being — none of this is achievable unless we develop institutions that are explicitly aimed at bigger objectives than heretofore. It is about the development of new humans.

In short, it is about how we are to thrive. I believe that transformed schools are key to achieving this vision for our futures, and I know now there are schools who are intent on doing it.

With the right leadership, it can become every school's journey.

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