

Our futures

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have little.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

THEMES



CHILDREN



ENVIRONMENT



GEN. HUMAN RIGHTS

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 2

GROUP SIZE



15-20

TIME



60 MINUTES

- Themes** Children, Environment, General human rights
- Complexity** Level 2
- Group size** 15 - 20
- Time** 60 minutes
- Overview** In this activity participants draw, contemplate and discuss their hopes and concerns for the future of their generation. Among the issues addressed are:
- Environmental issues affecting future generations
 - Young people and the family
 - Community life
- Related rights**
- The right to an opinion and access to information
 - The right to be heard on all matters concerning the best interests of the child
 - The right to a decent standard of living
- Objectives**
- To develop knowledge about community life, rights and responsibilities
 - To promote skills to discuss openly, to work in a team and to have vision
 - To see the world as a developing and open-ended opportunity to which every young person can make a positive or negative contribution
- Materials**
- Paper for drafts
 - Large sheets of paper for the final design
 - Paints, pens and markers
 - Materials for a collage, coloured paper, magazines, twigs, rice, beans, dead leaves, shells, etc
 - Glue
 - Pictures or photographs of how the neighbourhood/town looked ten or twenty years ago (optional)

Instructions

1. Introduce the concept of change over time. Ask participants to think back to when they were younger and what their homes and the local streets looked like, and how they have changed. Have any of the rooms in the training centre been redecorated, or do they have any new furniture? Are there any new buildings in the neighbourhood? Ask people to think about why these things have changed and who made the decisions about what should be renewed and how it should be done.

2. Ask people to brainstorm the changes they would have made if they had been consulted.
3. Now make the links with making decisions that affect other people and human rights. Do people think that human rights make a useful framework for decision making? Will human rights be more or less important for decision-makers in the future? Why?
4. Tell the group that the opportunity is now! This is the moment for them to take the chance to start thinking about - and influencing - the futures they may inhabit.
5. Ask people to get into groups of three to four.
6. Hand out the paper and pens and ask them to draft or sketch ideas for their ideal neighbourhood/town of the future. They have a free hand. The limits are their own imaginations.
7. When each group has agreed a draft plan, they should transfer it onto a large sheet of paper and complete it with paint and collage materials.
8. When the work is done, ask each group in turn to present their plan and to say where they got their ideas and how they developed them. Allow time for short questions and answers after each presentation, but leave general discussion for the debriefing.

Debriefing and evaluation

Start with a review of how people worked together in their groups and how they made their decisions and carried out the work.

- Did everyone feel able to participate and to contribute to the work? How did the different small groups make the best use of the individual talents of their members?
- How did it feel to receive feedback about their plans?
- How did it feel to give feedback about their plans?
- Would they be prepared to compromise some of their ideals if they now had to design a single class or group plan that met the needs and aspirations of everyone in the class or group?
- Did people enjoy the feeling of being “architects of their futures”?
- Do they believe their ideals could ever come true? Why? Why not?
- Do they believe adults would be ready to discuss their plans? Why? Why not?
- What was the biggest surprise in any of the plans?
- What would be their rights as citizens in the future?
- What would be their duties as citizens in the future?
- What steps can young people take now to have influence in the democratic processes which shape their lives and their futures?

Tips for facilitators

The title of this activity is “Our futures”. The intention of using the plural is to emphasise that the future is not pre-determined but, rather, that it is what we make it. Therefore, there are many possible futures and the challenge for young people is to build a future which reflects their ideals and aspirations.

To reinforce the concept of change, you may like to show old pictures of how the local area looked ten or twenty years ago. You can also ask them to think of global changes. For instance, they should think about the fact that thirty years ago the Internet was the stuff of science fiction, but that in a few years time there will be connections to the web in every school and library in the world.

Key date

12 August
International Youth Day

If the participants are not sure about what the future town may be like you could prompt them by asking:

- Who will live here? People born here, or newcomers? What ages will they be? Will they live in families?
- What will their daily lives be like? Where will they shop for food? How will they travel around?
- What sort of welfare services, such as hospitals, dentists, etc. will they need?
- What will their schools be like?
- What will their social lives be like? What will they do for leisure activities?
- Will they have pets?
- What work will people do?
- What new technological developments might there be?
- What about the environment? The natural surroundings?

Variations

An alternative method could be to use the idea of “futures wheels”. Get people to work in small groups. Each group takes one issue, (for instance, education, the family, the community, employment or health) and draws the futures wheel for that topic. For example, an environment wheel would have a hub of the most important things and then other concentric circles around it. “Spokes” divide the wheel up into sections, in which people can write points such as: no smoke, electromobiles, lots of trees, clean rivers and humane farming.

Suggestions for follow-up

Find out more about the planning processes for local development and how to influence them. Get involved with decision-making in the school, club or association by attending council meetings, or even standing for election. There are other activities that can be useful to explore futures options. For instance “Path to Equality-land” looks at how to achieve gender equality, and “The impact of the Internet” looks at future scenarios for new technologies.

While we dream about our futures, we can make a start at building a more just society. If the group would like to look at the issue of bullying and explore ways to develop empathy and respect for everyone, then they could do the activity “Do we have alternatives?”, on page 111.

Ideas for action

Take the plan to the local council and see if you can involve them. Your plan could be used in the town/village plan.