

I am the Future's Child"

By Hedley Beare

My name is Angelica. I am 5 years old. I really don't have much of a past. In fact, I am the future.

You need to understand what I am learning to believe, how I think about my future, what my world-view is. You and I want me to be a success in the world in which I will enter as an adult and which I will be responsible for. In future days I will admire you for being able to look forward with me and to help me define what I need to learn.

My world is already very different from the one you have grown up in.

Using current life expectancy figures, I will live until I am over 80. So I will be living and well in the 2070's, and my children will live to see the twenty-second century. Can you even imagine what the world will be like for them?

One out of every hundred babies born this year live in developed countries. So wherever I live or work, I will certainly be mixing in a multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-faith setting, and white people could be the ethnic minorities. I will have to think about that when I prepare for a job.

During my lifetime, a planet-wide economic system will operate, controlled not so much by big nations as by big business networks and by regional centres in places like Singapore, Bangkok, Mexico City, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Buenos Aires and Sydney. By the time I am 30, there will be more people living in Shanghai than there are in the whole of the South Pacific including Australia.

The Asia/Pacific area will be a strong focus of my world. China already has a population ten times that of Japan, and nearly half a billion Chinese are under the age of 25. The Asian continent

(from India to Japan) already accounts for half the world's population. A Hong Kong bank advertises now: 'there are three billion people in Asia. Half of them are under 25. Consider it a growing market'. Those under-25s are my contemporaries. They will be very aggressive in a number of ways, good and bad, over the next few decades.

It will not matter what nationality I have, because my world is smaller, people move about, and most workplaces will be internationalised. My world is likely to be borderless. I will have access to the world economy through credit cards and trans-national banks, and it will be easy to travel overseas. I will spend holidays in China, visit South America often, and I will work for periods in Africa. I will probably be employed in an internationally owned firm, and it is likely that in my home we will speak Japanese, Korean, Spanish, English or Chinese as a second language.

In my secondary school courses, we will study the effect on the world's environment of human activity like transport – trucks, aeroplanes, ships, but especially family cars. Every newly developed country wants its own car industry, and every middle-class family wants to own at least one vehicle. Yet car emissions are changing the climate patterns around the world: our cars are changing other people's weather.

Half a billion people in Asian countries are middle class like me, and they have the same consumer patterns and the same attitudes as the middle class everywhere else in the world.

By the time I am in my twenties, world oil production will decline because the known stocks of fossil fuel are being exhausted. Power stations as you know them will not last for much longer. After next decade, world demand for petrol will be going up while the production of oil is going down. Where does that leave me?

There will be urgent international action in my lifetime to limit the size of the world's population. When we entered the twenty-first century, there were 6 billion people alive in the world. A hundred years earlier, at the start of the twentieth century, there were just 1.6 billion people on the planet. Almost exactly that number of the present population live in absolute poverty; and only one billion of the world's people can be confident of having three meals a day.

By the time I am 30 years old, world grain production will have become a problem. China alone will need to import around 370 million tonnes of grain annually, yet in 1995 the entire world exports of grain amounted to around 200 million tonnes.

In my lifetime, the world's super-cities could become almost unliveable, the home of only the chronically poor who do not have the personal resources to move out of them. In the 1950's, when my grandmother was born, only two cities in the world, London and New York, had more than 8 million inhabitants, and each was called a megalopolis. In 2015, there will be about 34 such cities, half of them in Asia.

Big cities may be dangerous places, too, for they are producing dysfunctional societies. They are an inefficient and unequal drain on resources, and they cause some of the world's worst cases of pollution. My generation will have to do something about all of that. If we don't, by about 2020 approximately 90 per cent of the world's population will live in big cities.

When I get to secondary school, the old confrontation between capitalism and Marxism will be largely over, as well as the so-called industrial economy which produced it. The re-aligning of politics and parties is resulting in new political processes and coalitions across the world. Politics, parliaments and governments will look different from what they do now.

This year there are in the world 190 million malnourished children under the age of 5; half of them live in South Asia. By the time I

am an adult there will be at least the beginnings of a world-wide social welfare scheme, to which my country will be required to make contributions in money, personnel and facilities.

The 'basic human needs' to be the target for everyone in the world include: access to at least primary schooling, access to health care, clean drinking water, satisfactory sanitation, immunization of all children, access to family planning services, universal adult literacy, elimination of severe malnutrition, and radically reducing maternal mortality (death in child-birth).

South America and Southern Africa will soon provide several 'new lions' of world trade. On the other hand, because of soil degradation and desertification produced by human activity, Sub-Saharan Africa will be subject to ethnic wars and struggles for survival, and therefore a world trouble-spot, especially politically as other countries become involved.

Two billion people in my world do not have access to electricity. 65 per cent have no guaranteed supply of clean water, and around 40 per cent struggle to meet any kind of water needs. The developed countries have only a fifth of the world's population, but they consume about three-quarters of the world's energy, three-quarter's of the world's metal production, and 85 per cent of the world's wood. While they spend about 15 per cent of their budgets on social security at home, they spend only about 0.3 per cent of their GDP on overseas aid. It just can't go on like this. What will happen if all the world demands what my family takes for granted as its right?

When I was born, global military spending was around one trillion US dollars per annum. That is unacceptable. By the time I leave school, legitimate military and policing activities for the world community will have been taken over by agencies of international cooperation, and peace-keeping forces will be commonplace.

There will also be strong international courts of justice to enforce globally agreed laws.

Environmentally what happens within the borders of one country is no longer solely that country's business. By the time I start work, environmental responsibilities will be enforced internationally. By the time I am 40, the world could be threatened by 'green wars' unless my generation does something to balance up the unequal access to clean water, to good topsoil, to electric power and to food distribution outlets.

While I am in school, and as the result of scientific cooperation like the international genome project, genetic engineering and nanotechnology will eradicate many physical disabilities from the world's population, and will lead to new approaches to food production. Both will be important industries.

Self-programming and artificially intelligent computers will shoulder many of the tasks which are now being done by human beings. I will live in a 'smart home' wired to carry out tasks like electronic shopping, preparation and delivery of meals, washing and cleaning and other household chores.

Human beings are starting to build living platforms in orbit around the earth and will create colonies in space, the developments engineered by means of international cooperation and global consortia.

The sea will concern my generation. More than half the world's population now lives less than a hundred miles from a sea coast. We can't continue to allow sewage, acid sediment, chemicals, fertilizers and toxic spills to pollute the oceans and to poison the sea's creatures. My son will consider becoming a farmer of the sea, because there are now moves to privatise parts of the sea in the same way as people in the past have 'bought' land.

The effects of global warming are already evident. People living in low-lying areas – on some Pacific islands, on large river deltas which are subject to flooding, and on some sea coasts – will try to migrate, often illegally and often in large numbers, to already occupied country above sea level.

Rural industry has already changed. Forty years ago, for example, Australian farmers produced 25 per cent of their country's Gross National Product (GNP) and 95 per cent of its exports. Now it's down to 4 per cent of the GDP, and only 30 per cent of its exports. It employs only 5 per cent of the workforce. The same pattern is evident in other countries.

No wonder there is unemployment around the world, and particularly in developed countries. The jobs are not located where they used to be. So where will they be? The patterns of the industrial economy will have disappeared by the time I start working. In particular, the 9-5 working day, the five day working week, salaried employment based upon hours spent at the workplace, and the regular holidays based upon the seasons (a left-over from the old agrarian economy) will have gone. My work and employment will be based largely upon contracted labour and fixed-term projects for which I will be paid an agreed fee.

The really prosperous nations in my world have small populations and few physical resources. The 'commodities' they trade are non-material, like technical skills, brain-power and know-how. Singapore is a good example. My richest friends will work with problem-solving skills, problem-identifying skills and in strategic brokerage. They will talk about 'creating value through people'. They will often refer to themselves as knowledge-workers. That's the kind of job I want to have.

Because muscular strength is no longer an important factor in employment, there are machines to lift and move things – women will occupy a large number of the new occupations and senior

positions in the world economy. There is already evidence that they can out-perform men in these new roles.

When I complete my twelve years of schooling, every one of my classmates will be expected to undertake some form of post-school training, training for a job, training on the job, a vocational qualification of some kind, or a university degree. In-service training, retraining for a different occupation, professional development and continuous study or learning will be facts of life for all my generation throughout all our lives.

Some jobs may be rationed by allowing a person to work at them for only three days a week. Service industries will abound. We will want people to drive and maintain our cars, to manage our homes, to file our income tax returns, and to look after our assets. Tourism and travel collectively are becoming the world's largest industry and globally will employ the largest number of people.

I do not expect to spend all my life in the employment of one company. No company is likely to remain unchanged for that long anyway. For me, 'work' will ebb and flow, and will often be done intensively, in large chunks in a short period of time. I will manage my own career, and I will not leave it to a company or an organisation to do it for me. I may change jobs or relocate seventeen or so times during my working life, and at least three of those changes will be major ones. My husband and I will have to juggle jobs and careers, perhaps in different locations.

My generation is not keen to have many babies either. In developed countries, only three women in every five between the ages of 25 and 35 have dependent children; ten years ago about three quarters of that group were mothers. And it is mainly the rich who do not want children. The homes with high incomes average less than one child per household; low-income households have nearly three times as many children as the rich do. My generation will have to be concerned about the effect that has on the nature of the community.

Although we will have rediscovered the spiritual and the transcendental, and the world will be 're-enchanted', we will be wary of those people who take fixed and exclusive positions. Fundamentalists of any persuasion (political and religious) will be treated as threats to our society.

Because of all this, it is important for me to know what I stand for. I will expect my school to help me form my values and decide on my system of beliefs. I have to be careful about what I believe and what I take for granted without thinking. I am not sure where my mother and father picked up their beliefs and attitudes. Our family doesn't go to church, tabernacle or temple any more. There is not much religion in my home. I'll have to be more systematic and deliberate about it because of the complex world I will function in.

There will be changes in families, and I am told there is a 40 per cent chance that Mum and Dad will divorce and remarry while I am still at school. I may not grow up with my natural brother or with both my natural parents. I will not know my grandparents very well because our family will move home so often. Many children of my age are growing up in one-parent families.

I already learn as much from television as I do from school. I spend more time with TV than I do with my teachers. I watch each year about 1400 hours of TV and see 22,000 commercials which tell me what I should value, what I should eat and what sort of behaviour is acceptable. During my time as a student, then, attempts will be made to reconcile TV viewing and education, even to blur the boundaries between them.

Some of my classmates have already spent more time in child care (12,500 hours) than they will spend in twelve years of schooling. More than half of our mothers work full-time. The rate has doubled over the past ten years.

Because about 85 per cent of the world's output of videos, films, CDs and TV programmes come from the United States, my classmates and I are unobtrusively absorbing American culture and values. I know that much of it is driven by commercialism and is often not very ennobling. It is not surprising that there is resistance from Asian countries about American and European frames of reference.

By the time I am in my twenties, Chinese and Indians will make up more than half of the population of the world. The 'overseas Chinese' and the 'overseas Indians' will strongly influence and may even control the world's networking webs.

By far the world's largest Muslim country is Indonesia, with a population of over 220 million – larger than that of Japan and Russia but still less than India's. I will have to learn about Islam at school. And because the 'tigers of Asia' are largely Confucian economies, I will be taught in primary school about those characteristics of Confucian societies which produce economic success and community cohesion. A lot of the older textbooks used around the world were Eurocentric in their thinking and are out of date. My schooling must teach me about living comfortably in a multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-faith world.

The way we use computers is gently refashioning what my generation thinks about knowledge – what it is, how it is accessed, how knowledge is produced, who owns it. 'Finding out about things' is taking on new meanings and methods for us. I will do a lot of my learning in non-school locations with my laptop computer. I am connected to the Internet. I have my own email address and some of my teachers will be located overseas. At school, we communicate every week with schoolchildren in other countries.

Computers are changing the way my schooling is arranged. We have access to an enormous amount of information, and we can consult almost any library and government department in the

world. We can find out things through the computer that even our teachers know little about. So we have a different view about knowledge and studying.

The old ways of learning by steps and stages, by the sequencing of learning into the best path, by the traditional, scientific approaches, by having the curriculum divided neatly into subjects – is already passing. Knowledge for me is a web of interconnections where I access interesting information from many angles. Words like ‘subjects’, ‘classes’, ‘grades’ and ‘promotion’ do not make much sense to me. Schools will not be organised that way by the time I leave primary education.

I will study Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Milton, some Buddhist texts from India, the Greek tragedies, some of the novels from South Korea, the history of China, and the politics of South America. Do you know what an international curriculum looks like, and how it can be taught?

Most of the stories I know about have come from films or television or videos. I do not read a lot of storybooks. I am discouraged in many incidental ways from spending time with books. I do not write nearly as much as my mother and father do.

I will not sit for ‘final examinations’ at the end of my last year at school. That seems a rather silly notion to me. My performance as a student will be routinely checked against national and international benchmarks throughout my schooling. I can choose my assessments and which certificates I present for. The really good universities in the world are all international, and are not restricted by the country they happen to be located within. I want to study in a college or university like that.

There will be a users-pay approach to a lot of education. My mother and father will have to consider what kind of education they are willing to buy for me. There is already world trade in good educational practices.

My school will have comparatively fewer teachers than yours had, but they will be better paid and more highly qualified. My school will hire more adults (technical, computing, tutoring, evaluating) to supplement our school work, and some of my teaching will be done by sophisticated technological devices.

In this day and age I need to be a global citizen. I know what that means, I hope you do.

My views about the planet and the universe are probably different from yours. To me the planet is not a machine. It is alive. It is a single, complex, living organism, and I have to nurture its health and growth. That fact has changed the way my family and I live, it influences local and world politics, it is changing my system of beliefs and my values, it influences what I buy, sell and eat, and it is a strong factor in my choice of occupation and where we choose to live.

All these things I have talked about are the raw materials I use to weave my life together. It helps to be hopeful and happy and comfortable about my future. It does not help me if adults keep telling me gloomy things about the future. Education is all about hope, isn't it? Your schooling was.

Most of all, I want to be wise over what to believe about me and my world. I want to know what the wisest people on earth believe, I want to know how to be a success with my life. I want the world to be a beautiful place for my grandchildren. My school teachers are very important to me because they tell me how to deal with the future – the long, long future.

So do you know what to teach me? Do you know what I need to learn? And do you know how to teach me? Are you confident that you can design a curriculum which will equip me to live in my world?

My name is Angelica. I am 5 years old. And I am sitting in one of your classrooms today.