

Future Narratives Curriculum for Youth Work





FUTURE NARRATIVE CURRICULUM FOR YOUTH WORK

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Future Narratives Curriculum for Youth Work



*“If the future
held
a great secret...,
how would you
discover
it?”*

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FORE

If you want a future for all, it cannot be imagined only by some.

I was born in a small village in the Italian mountains. Nature was my playground and my teacher, a teacher of beauty, silence, sounds, smells, colours, lights, and shadows. The wind, the trees, the scent of pine and rain taught me how to listen.

I discovered the world of words. I loved the magic of poems with their rhythms. I loved stories with their deep meanings. The stories that brought me to other places, to other people, to other ideas. I discovered that stories are bridges: they connect what we know with what we still dare to imagine.

Today, as the world stands at a moment of deep transformation - ecological, social, and technological - imagination has become more than ever a necessity. We live in an age that demands courage: the courage to look honestly at what must end, and the courage to begin anew. I believe that imagination literacy, narrative literacy, and Futures Literacy can form the foundation of these first steps toward renewal.

Imagination literacy teaches us to perceive possibilities where others see limits.

Narrative literacy helps us to read and rewrite the stories shaping our lives.

Futures Literacy empowers us to anticipate change and act with intention.

Together, they are the civic skills of this century. They help us read the world differently, listen to what is emerging, and write new possibilities into being.

The stories we tell about ourselves can either confine or liberate us. Narratives shape the edges of our collective imagination; they define what we think is possible. To imagine together is therefore not an escape from reality - it is a practice of agency, a rehearsal for change.

This conviction led to a question that has guided much of my work: what if we could create spaces where young people, especially those whose voices are too often unheard, could explore their own stories, reclaim agency, and co-design the futures they want to live in? What if imagination itself became a collective act?

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WORD

From that question, Future Narratives was born as a pathway that unites the transformative power of storytelling with the anticipatory insights of Futures Literacy. Its purpose is simple and demanding: to help people reflect on the past with honesty, connect in the present with empathy, and co-create futures that are inclusive, sustainable, and full of possibility.

I first shared the foundational idea for Future Narratives at the World Forum for Women in Science in February 2020. The response revealed both the hunger and the hope for such work. Soon after, the idea grew: what if we could adapt and co-develop this approach with youth workers and young people themselves? That thought took root and blossomed into the project and the publication you now hold in your hands.

At Traces&Dreams, we brought this idea to our partners and started the Erasmus+ Future Narratives project together, an exploration that has since evolved into Future Narratives 2. This journey has been one of continuous discovery, dialogue, and shared creation. Across countries and contexts, through seminars, workshops, and quiet conversations, youth organisations and young people have stepped forward with courage, curiosity, and generosity.

They told stories that mattered. They listened - to themselves, to one another, and to the subtle signs of change that often speak in silence before they take shape. And through that listening, something powerful happened: transformation. Not imposed, but grown, from within individuals, between people, and among communities.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who has taken part in this journey - for your depth, your commitment, your creativity, and your faith in the unseen. For your work, your words, and your dreams. Together, you have shown that imagination is a practice of belonging and a quiet revolution of care.

We are, yes, storytelling animals, but we are also tribal animals. This project reaffirmed the quiet power of a small group that listens deeply, welcomes diverse

FORE

perspectives, and remains open enough to change direction when learning demands it. In those small circles, large transformations begin.

This curriculum is both a methodological guide and an invitation. It invites you to join a growing community of practice, a space for youth workers, educators, and facilitators to exchange experiences, deepen their understanding of imagination, narrative and Futures Literacy, and strengthen one another's practice. It offers practical tools to help young people cultivate awareness, belonging, and the courage to imagine and act.

When storytelling meets Futures Literacy, imagination becomes tangible. It becomes a way to navigate uncertainty, to embrace complexity, to act with purpose and creativity - together.

Our commitment continues. This curriculum marks an important step in expanding Future Narratives to a wider community, and we will continue to foster and facilitate this growing network of practitioners. Traces&Dreams will remain a methodological partner and catalyst for collaboration, helping ideas to move from reflection to practice, from conversation to transformation.

Because the future is not fixed. It is shaped by the stories we tell, and by the communities brave enough to imagine it differently.

And the world now needs imagination-literate, narrative-literate, and futures-literate people, citizens who can hold complexity, act with empathy, and design with hope.

That is the work before us. That is the invitation.

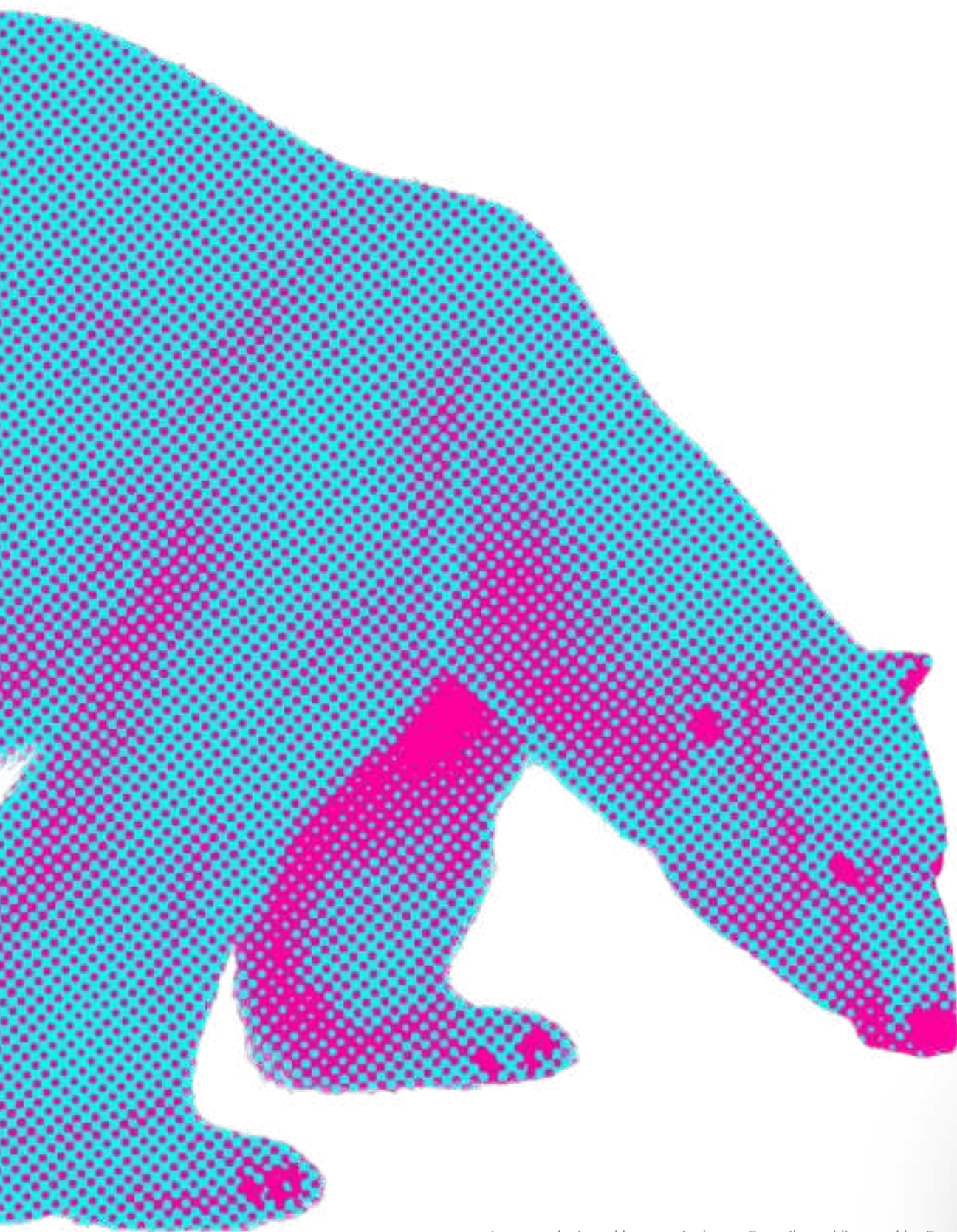
Nerina Finetto
Founder and Director,
Traces&Dreams

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WORD



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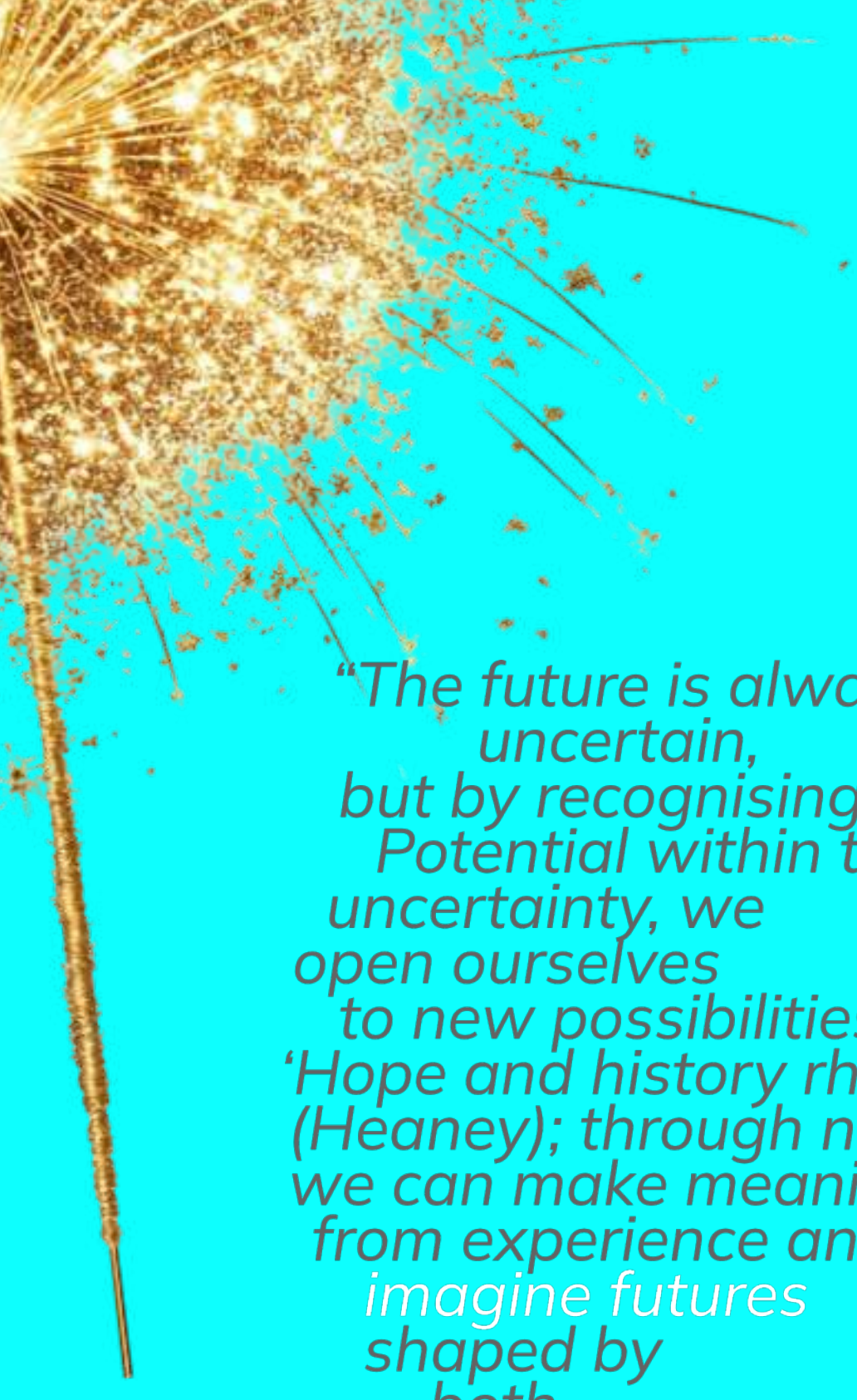
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1 | INTRODUCTION



*“The future is always
uncertain,
but by recognising the
Potential within that
uncertainty, we
open ourselves
to new possibilities.
‘Hope and history rhyme’
(Heaney); through narrative,
we can make meaning
from experience and
imagine futures
shaped by
both
memory and hope.”*

Rhiannon Moss

23 | 1



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Welcome to the Future Narratives Curriculum, a practical guide designed for **youth workers, educators, and practitioners** who support young people in navigating an increasingly complex world. This curriculum brings together storytelling, narrative exploration, and Futures Literacy into a method aiming to empower young people as active agents of change in their own lives, communities, and societies.

This document is part of the **Future Narratives 2 project**, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme. It responds directly to the insights gathered from youth workers, educators, and young people across Germany, Greece, Spain, and Sweden. It aims to provide a **structured, systematic, and transferable** curriculum that can be adapted for diverse contexts and audiences.

The curriculum is built for those who:

- _ Facilitate workshops or training with young adults.
- _ Work in youth organisations, education, or community development.
- _ Are interested in integrating **narrative methods and futures thinking** into their practice.
- _ Want to support young people in imagining, planning, and creating positive futures.

By working through this curriculum, practitioners will:

- _ Understand core concepts of storytelling and Futures Literacy.
- _ Learn practical tools and methods for engaging young people in narrative exploration.
- _ Access detailed activity plans and examples to use directly in their work.
- _ Gain strategies for adapting content to different cultural and social contexts.
- _ Learn how to evaluate and reflect on the impacts of narrative and futures work.

This document is organised into chapters, combining theoretical background with practical exercises, tips, and examples. It can be used as a complete programme or as a toolbox from which practitioners can choose individual activities to integrate into existing work.

With this curriculum, we invite you to **join a growing community of practice** dedicated to helping young people reflect on their past, connect in the present, and imagine futures worth striving for.

1.1 | WHY FUTURE NARRATIVES?

We all live in a world marked by rapid changes, uncertainty, and complex social challenges. The stories we tell about ourselves, our communities, and the world at large play a powerful role in shaping how we see possibilities, make decisions, and engage with the future. These narratives can either open doors to new opportunities or reinforce barriers that limit a sense of agency and hope.

Future Narratives is a methodology designed to support young people in exploring and reimagining the stories that shape our worlds. It combines storytelling, narratives and Futures Literacy, offering a framework through which young people can reflect on their own identities, connect their personal experiences to broader cultural and social narratives, and envision alternative futures beyond the constraints of dominant discourses. By guiding young people through this process, youth workers can help them develop both the confidence and the skills to become active participants in shaping their own lives and the communities around them.

Developed by Nerina Finetto, founder and director of Traces&Dreams and refined through two Erasmus+ projects, Future Narratives emerged from a deep commitment to help youth workers and practitioners to integrate innovative methods into their practice. In our project's first phase, Future Narratives brought together youth workers and young people from Spain, Greece, Germany, and Sweden to experiment with our approach, develop new skills, and create collective stories. Through Future Narratives 2, we have designed and developed this curriculum, intended as an introduction to our methodology for use in diverse contexts across Europe and a first step towards joining our community of practice.

The curriculum provides practical tools for facilitating meaningful dialogue, creative expression, and critical reflection. Through this approach, youth workers are equipped to engage young people in exploring how their past and present influence the possibilities they see for the future. As practitioners, we are also part of a learning journey, as with the participants we are invited to reflect on our own stories, assumptions and practices. Together we can challenge limiting narratives and imagine new, more inclusive paths forward.

At the heart of Future Narratives lies the understanding that stories operate at multiple, interconnected levels. On a **personal level**, young people explore individual stories that help them make sense of who they are and where they come from. On a **community level**, storytelling helps groups to discover shared experiences, values, and aspirations, fostering stronger bonds and mutual understanding. On a **societal level**, narratives shed light on the broader cultural myths, dominant discourses, and systems of power that influence how we all think and act. Finally, at the level of **imagination**, participants are invited to step beyond the limitations of the present and create new stories about what could be, opening space for transformative futures and collective hope.

One of the strengths of the Future Narratives methodology is its flexibility. It is designed to be modular and adaptable, allowing youth workers to integrate its methods into diverse contexts and communities. Whether used as a comprehensive programme or as individual activities incorporated into existing youth work, Future Narratives offers a rich and versatile toolkit for helping young people reflect, connect, and imagine futures worth striving for.

Future Narratives is not only about telling stories. It is about understanding the personal and collective power of re-authoring stories, at a personal and

community level, for the present and for the future. It is a call to help young people recognise the power of their own voices, question the narratives that shape their realities, and discover the agency to participate actively in building a more just, inclusive, and hopeful world.

1.2 | HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT?

The document is intended for professionals who work directly with young people in a variety of settings, such as youth centres, community projects, educational environments, and non-formal education. Whether you are new to narrative methods and futures thinking or already have experience, this curriculum offers tools and ideas to help you integrate these approaches into your work.

The curriculum is structured as a flexible resource that you can navigate in different ways, depending on your goals and context. It contains:

- _Background on storytelling and futures thinking, explaining the concepts behind the Future Narratives approach.**
- _Detailed explanations of methods such as Causal Layered Analysis and Futures Literacy Labs.**
- _A practical pathway that guides young people from personal narratives through to collective visions of the future.**
- _Tips and considerations for working with diverse groups.**

You can choose to use the curriculum as:

- _A complete programme, delivering a series of workshops that gradually build skills and confidence among young people.**
- _A toolbox, selecting individual exercises to integrate into your existing work. For example, you might take one storytelling activity from the curriculum and include it in a broader youth workshop.**
- _An inspiration source for developing your own activities, adapted to the specific interests and needs of your group.**

Each chapter includes:

- _Learning objectives to help you understand what the activities are designed to achieve.**
- _Indicative activities, with guidance on time, group size, and materials.**

We invite you to consider this document alongside the other results of our project:

_Our digital platform **futurenarratives.eu**, which provides an **online course** exploring the key concepts of our approach, **curated resources** to allow you to delve deeper and explore more widely, and **videos and stories** created through our journey.

_Our **European Guidelines for the Innovative Use of Narrative and Storytelling in the Empowerment of Young People**, a result of our first project which presents the theoretical and methodological approaches behind Future Narratives.

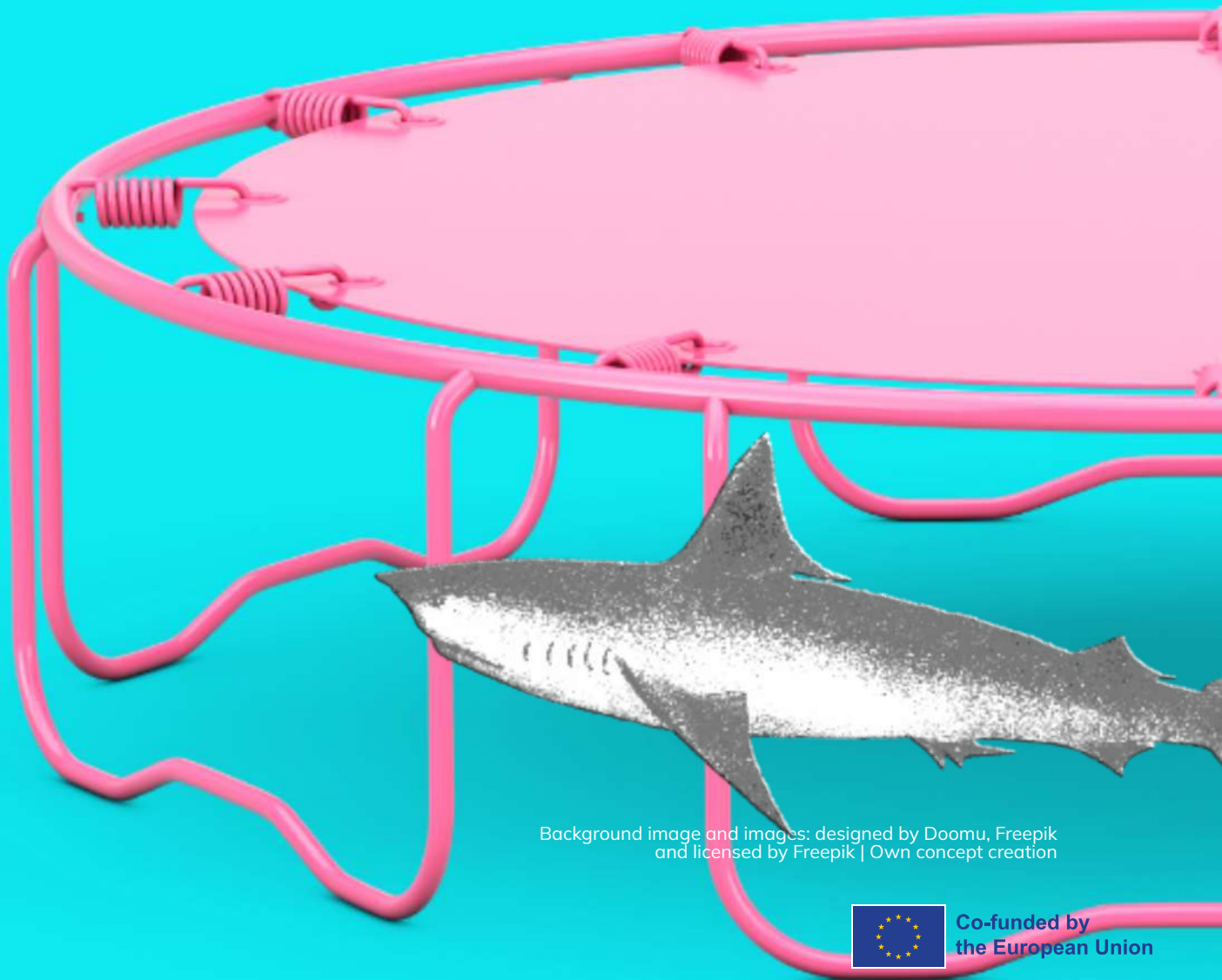
_Our **Future Narratives Informal Innovation Pathways**, which describes the journey of our first project and provides many practical activities which can be used with young people to explore storytelling, narrative and Futures Literacy.

_ **Towards a Future Narratives Curriculum**, annexed to this document, which presents the research and needs analysis underlying the approach taken here.

Both documents can be downloaded at futurenarratives.eu/all-resources/ For additional materials, resources, and updates connected to this curriculum, please visit our digital platform at **futurenarratives.eu**.

Contact us at **info@futurenarratives.eu** to share your experience, discover opportunities for in-person training, and connect with our community.

This curriculum should be seen as a starting point, not a finished product. We invite you to experiment, adapt, and contribute your insights, helping to build a growing community of practitioners dedicated to supporting young people in exploring and shaping positive futures.



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2 | WHAT IS FUTURE NARRATIVES?



2.1 | THE POWER OF STORIES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Define the concept of Future Narratives and its purpose in youth work.
- _Recognise the four levels of narratives (personal, community, societal, future).
- _Understand how storytelling and **futures thinking** are interlinked.
- _Appreciate the value and potential of digital storytelling.

Future Narratives is an approach to youth work that combines the power of storytelling with the tools of futures thinking. It was developed to help young people reflect on who they are, connect with others, and imagine the worlds they want to create. At its heart lies the belief that the stories we tell, about ourselves, our communities, and our future, shape how we understand the world and how we act within it. As Ella Saltmarshe states, "Recognizing the impact of dominant narratives and developing the skills to author new ones can catapult people from a place of acceptance... to a place of action."¹

The Future Narratives approach works by developing competencies and literacies across four interconnected levels:

- _**Personal Storytelling:** helping young people explore their own stories and identities, discovering how past experiences shape their present and future.
- _**Community Narratives:** supporting groups to understand and share the cultural stories that reveal shared values, challenges, and hopes, building stronger bonds and collective purpose.
- _**Societal Narratives and Myths:** examining the wider cultural myths and dominant narratives that influence how society sees the future, and inviting young people to question or reimagine these stories.
- _**Futures Literacy:** encouraging young people to create new narratives about what could be possible, moving beyond the limitations of the present.

Through this multi-level approach, Future Narratives sees stories as:

- _**Meaning makers**, helping young people understand themselves and their world.
- _**Worldbuilders**, shaping the collective realities in which we live.
- _**Drivers of change**, influencing choices, behaviours, and social transformation.

¹ Saltmarshe, E. (2018, February 20). Using story to change systems. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/using_story_to_change_systems

Personal Storytelling: The Stories We Tell Ourselves

Stories are central to the ways we construct and understand both individual identities and collective communities. On a personal level, narratives serve as a framework through which individuals organise their experiences and memories, allowing them to make sense of their lives. These narratives do more than just recount events; they actively shape one's identity by assigning meaning and significance to past experiences. As Lorraine DeKruyf states, “people construct stories as a way of making meaning of their experiences, and... these stories will strongly influence which experiences will be chosen for further expression and performance. In other words, people’s stories allow them to know themselves and guide their behavior.”² This idea of stories as meaning makers highlights how our personal narratives shape both how we interpret the past and how we act in the present and future.

This is the most intimate level of narrative, our inner monologue and the personal history we construct. Alice Morgan describes this as the “thread that weaves events together, forming a story,” emphasising how narrative brings coherence to the flow of our experiences.³ These personal stories are fundamental to our sense of self. As neurologist Oliver Sacks observes, “each of us constructs and lives, a ‘narrative,’ and that this narrative is us, our identities.”⁴ In other words, our identity is inseparable from the stories we tell about ourselves. Yet, we are often unaware of how deeply these stories shape us, and they can sometimes limit our potential or keep us tethered to old patterns.

At this level, our approach helps us to both recognise the stories we live by and understand that we have the capacity to step outside these narratives and re-author them. The stories we tell ourselves are not fixed; they can be examined, questioned, and rewritten. By reflecting on our internal narratives, we begin to see that meaning is not inherent in events themselves, but is created through the interpretations and stories we construct around them. The ability to reflect on and reframe our personal stories is, as Rebecca Solnit suggests, a powerful act of self-empowerment: it is about learning to recognise the stories that “saddle us” and “learning to be free” by becoming our own storytellers.⁵ Through this process, we can move beyond limiting beliefs, open ourselves to new possibilities, and begin to see ourselves and our futures differently. In this way, re-authoring our personal narratives is not just an act of self-understanding, but also an act of self-creation.

Storytelling is not only a creative and reflective process but also a political act that supports young people in building self-esteem, exercising creativity, and developing trust within a collaborative community.⁶ Storytelling practices - particularly those grounded in participatory and critical frameworks - encourage

²DeKruyf, L. (2008). An Introduction To Narrative Therapy. In Faculty Publications - Graduate School of Counseling (Paper 15). George Fox University. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gsc/15>

³Morgan, A. (2000). What Is Narrative Therapy? An Easy-To-Read Introduction. Dulwich Centre Publications

⁴Sacks, O. (1985). The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat And Other Clinical Tales. Summit Books

⁵Solnit, R. (2013). The Faraway Nearby. Viking Books

⁶Alrutz, M. (2013) Sites of possibility: applied theatre and digital storytelling with youth, Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 18:1, 44-57, DOI: 10.1080/13569783.2012.756169

young people to express themselves, reflect on their experiences, and validate their lived realities. Using storytelling in this way is especially powerful for those who are marginalised or discriminated against.⁷ By engaging in personal storytelling, young people can articulate their identities, explore how they have become who they are, and gain confidence and self-awareness.

Participatory narrative inquiry (PNI) further highlights that sharing everyday stories is an ancient and relational practice, fostering deep connection, respect, and authenticity among individuals. When people are invited to share and reflect on their personal stories together, they build relationships, see the world through each other's eyes, and co-create meaning, making storytelling a vital tool for both individual understanding and collective sense-making.⁸

Community Narratives: The Stories We Share

Our personal stories do not exist in isolation; rather, they are woven into the broader fabric of community narratives. At the community level, stories play a vital role in creating and sustaining social cohesion, acting as a glue that binds individuals together. Culture itself can be understood as a series of stories we believe: stories that define who we are, how we see the world, and to what communities we belong. To be part of a culture is, in essence, to participate in a collective storytelling tradition, sharing and inheriting narratives that ground our values, norms, and sense of purpose.

These shared stories, whether cultural myths, family histories, or local traditions, provide a collective understanding of what matters, what is possible, and what is expected. As philosophe Alisdair MacIntyre puts it, "I can only answer the question, 'What am I here to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"⁹ Within a social group, stories are not merely descriptive; they are constitutive, actively shaping and expressing the identities, beliefs, and social norms of the community. They are also normative: stories both reveal and establish the social values of a group, motivating cooperation and solidarity through the communication of shared norms.¹⁰

Through this shared narrative framework, individuals within a community are able to identify their roles and responsibilities, which in turn promotes cooperation and unity. Storytelling at the community level can, as Darla K. Deardorff argues, "create bonds and build relationships across generations, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds," supporting communities in "moving toward collective action on issues of mutual interest or concern."¹¹

⁷ Goessling, K. P. (2018). Increasing the depth of field: Critical race theory and photovoice as counter storytelling praxis. *Urban Review*, 50(2), 262–284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0460-2>

⁸ Kurtz, C. F. (2016, November). Participatory narrative inquiry: People sharing stories for a reason [Presentation]. Mohawk Valley Museum Consortium. https://cfkurtz.com/papers/Kurtz_PNI_ForMuseums_Nov2016.pdf

⁹ MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. University of Notre Dame Press

¹⁰ Dillon, S. (n.d.). The Function Of Stories. Faculty of English, University of Cambridge <https://www.storylistening.ac.uk/uploads/1/2/3/3/123332454/the-function-of-stories-dr-sarah-dillon.pdf>

¹¹ Deardorff, D. K. (2020). *Manual For Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles*. UNESCO; Routledge, pp.16-17 <https://en.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/resources/manual-developing-intercultural-competencies-story-circles>

Structured practices for community storytelling, such as the Story Circles discussed by Deardorff and the approaches included as part of our Future Narratives Pathway (Chapter 5), can bring together people from diverse backgrounds, creating a respectful space in which everyone is regarded as equal and invited to share their personal experiences. Through this process, we can develop new understanding of each other and how we connect, deepening relationships, empathy, and trust within the community. Community-based storytelling enables the co-creation of collective narratives that honour both individual and communal experiences. In their description of community-based storytelling projects that are explicitly collaborative, Iseke and Moore show that community-based storytelling is a process of co-creating collective narratives that respect and integrate both individual stories and the broader communal experience.¹² Such practices preserve cultural knowledge and traditions while building solidarity and belonging, as storytelling creates space for underrepresented voices and challenges social inequities.¹³

Further, stories have the power to connect individuals across differences, fostering empathy and understanding. In diverse and pluralistic societies, where varying perspectives and experiences coexist, the ability to engage with and appreciate different narratives is crucial. Stories enable individuals from different backgrounds to find common ground, discover shared values, and connect on a human level, beyond superficial identities. Clare Patey has observed, “Stories have a transformative power to allow us to see the world in a different way than we do if we just encounter it on our own. Stories are an entry point to understanding a different experience of the world.”¹⁴ Research on the empowerment of young people underscores the value of social empathy, which can enable us to better understand others’ circumstances and viewpoints.¹⁵ By encouraging social empathy, storytelling can help to develop the capacity to engage meaningfully with diverse experiences and backgrounds. In this sense, narrative practices that cultivate empathy are vital for supporting us in navigating complex social realities and becoming more compassionate, engaged members of our communities.

Societal Narratives and Myths: The Stories We Ceate

Societal narratives shape the overarching values, norms, and worldviews that bind - or divide - entire societies. These societal stories are the foundational myths and dominant discourses that influence how people perceive social issues, power structures, and collective visions of the future. Societies are built on shared

¹² Iseke, J., & Moore, S. (2011). Community-based Indigenous digital storytelling with elders and youth. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35(4), 19–38. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9k85t8nd>

¹³ St. John, T. (2021). Taking Youth Voices Seriously: Theatre, Storytelling, and Empowerment with Refugee Youth in Memphis, TN. *Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal*: Vol. 6, Article 2 <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/ptoj/vol6/iss1/2>

¹⁴ Health Foundation. (2016). The power of storytelling. <https://www.health.org.uk/features-and-opinion/features/the-power-of-storytelling>

¹⁵ Wagaman, M. A. (2011). Social Empathy as a Framework for Adolescent Empowerment. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 37(3), 278–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2011.564045>

narratives: cultural myths, imagined orders, and collective worldviews that both organise and constrain our social realities.

At the highest and most encompassing level, these narratives form the “imagined orders” and “fictional stories” that Yuval Noah Harari argues humans have created to enable cooperation on a mass scale.¹⁶ These stories are powerful concepts, such as nations, money, and human rights, that exist only in our collective imagination yet profoundly shape our lives. As Luis Botella argues, these grand narratives constitute “the very fabric of our private lives, our relational networks, our social traditions, and our cultural and historical institutions.”¹⁷

A central insight from Harari, and a key principle in our Future Narratives approach, is the recognition that we collectively imagine these things into being. Everything from money to nations, from legal systems to social movements, is built on stories we agree to believe and enact together. This capacity to imagine and reimagine the stories we live by represents the powerful, as it allows us to collectively reimagine and forge a new future. As Margaret Atwood wrote, “a word after a word after a word is power.”¹⁸ If we are aware that many of the societal constructions we live in are created by us, as humans, we understand that they are not universal or unchanging. We can develop and build new ones, together.

Part of the Future Narratives approach is helping young people, and ourselves as practitioners, to examine and critically reflect on these broader narratives. This involves learning to recognise, deconstruct, and challenge the stories that shape society, especially those that marginalise certain groups or restrict what is seen as possible. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has argued that “the single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” By encouraging young people to identify and challenge these “single stories,” we help them see the complexity and diversity of human experience, rather than accepting narrow or reductive accounts.

Adichie further observes, “Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”¹⁹

Societal narratives thus hold the potential both to perpetuate injustice and to enable transformation. By equipping us to interrogate dominant narratives and to create and share their own, the Future Narratives approach opens up possibilities for social change and justice.

When we learn to question the stories that underpin society, we gain the power to imagine and create a more inclusive and just world. As Adichie reminds us,

¹⁶ Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A Brief History Of Humankind* (J. Purcell & H. Watzman, Trans.). Harper. (Original work published 2011)

¹⁷ Botella, L., Herrero, O., Pacheco, M. & Corbella, Sergi. (2004). Working With Narrative in Psychotherapy: A Relational Constructivist Approach. In Lynne E. Angus & John McLeod (Eds.), *The Handbook of Narrative and Psychotherapy: Practice, Theory, and Research* (pp. 119-136). SAGE

¹⁸ Atwood, M. (1981). Spelling. In *True Stories*. Oxford University Press

¹⁹ Ibid.

regaining “a kind of paradise” means building a world in which many stories are told, valued, and heard; where we, as a collective, can imagine new futures together and bring them into being.²⁰

Stories in Action

In practical youth work, storytelling can be woven into many activities, such as:

- _Asking participants to share a memory linked to a personal object as a way to explore identity and belonging.
- _Creating group stories that reflect shared community challenges and brainstorming solutions.
- _Analysing news articles or social media posts to uncover hidden narratives and discuss how these shape perceptions of the future.
- _Using creative methods like theatre, drawing, or digital media to express alternative visions for society.

By working with stories at all these levels, personal, community, societal, and future, youth workers help young people discover how narratives can both limit and expand their sense of possibility. Through storytelling, they gain tools to **re-author their own narratives, challenge dominant discourses, and imagine new realities for themselves and the world around them.**

Beyond shaping individual identities and community connections, the power of stories reaches into the heart of social change. **Future Narratives can profoundly impact both young people and the youth workers who support them, offering tools to challenge prejudice, bias, and discrimination.** By creating spaces where hidden assumptions and dominant narratives can be examined and reimaged, storytelling becomes a means to question norms that may no longer serve society or that actively exclude certain groups. This process helps to cultivate new understandings and possibilities that are more just, inclusive, and compassionate.

Importantly, Future Narratives recognises that the future of human societies cannot be built solely on technological innovation. While technology offers powerful tools, it is through new meanings and shared narratives that communities find resilience, adaptability, and cohesion. By helping young people, and those who work with them, to construct alternative stories about who they are, what communities can be, and what futures are possible, the Future Narratives approach nurtures a vision of progress rooted in humanity, diversity, and creativity. It invites us all to engage in **meaning-making that is open, transformative, and able to guide societies toward futures where everyone has a place.**

Throughout this curriculum, you will find sample activities designed to help you put the concepts of Future Narratives into practice with young people. These activities are provided as practical tools for you to use and adapt in your own work. Please note that while these exercises offer immediate ways to experiment with the approach, the full methodology and step-by-step guidance on

²⁰ Ibid.

implementing the Future Narratives method are detailed in Chapter 5, 'The Future Narratives Pathway.' We encourage you to engage with these sample activities as you progress through the curriculum, building towards a full understanding of our approach.

Activity | Personal Object Storytelling

Description

Participants bring an object that holds personal meaning and share the story behind it with the group. Through this simple yet powerful storytelling exercise, participants explore aspects of their identity and connect with others in a safe, supportive environment. This activity serves as an accessible introduction to personal narratives and helps build trust within a group. As an optional extension, participants can use digital tools (such as audio recording, photography, or short video clips) to document or share their stories.

Purpose

- _Help participants reflect on identity and self-expression.
- _Develop empathy, trust, and deeper connections among group members.
- _Introduce the concept of personal narratives as a foundation for exploring storytelling in youth work.
- _Create a safe environment for participants to practice storytelling and active listening.
- _Offer an opportunity to experiment with digital storytelling methods, building digital confidence and creativity

Duration 20–30 minutes total

- _Preparation and introduction: 5 minutes
- _Sharing stories: 10–15 minutes
- _Group reflection: 5–10 minutes

Group Size Ideal for groups of 6–10 participants.

- _For larger groups, split into smaller circles or breakout rooms.

Materials Needed

_Personal objects brought by participants

_Optional:

- | Paper and pens for note-taking or drawing
- | Flipchart or whiteboard for recording common themes
- | Mobile phones or tablets for audio/photo/video recording (optional, if using digital storytelling)

Instructions

1 | Preparation (before the session)

- _Ask participants in advance to bring an object that holds personal significance (e.g. a photo, souvenir, piece of jewelry, book, etc.).
- _If using digital storytelling, invite participants to consider capturing a photo of their object or recording their story on their phone (audio or video), either during or after the activity.
- _If a participant forgets or prefers not to share a personal item:
 - | Offer the choice to select an imaginary or fictional object.
 - | Provide a small collection of neutral objects (e.g. a stone, a shell, a toy) for inspiration.

2 | Introduction (3–5 minutes)

- _Explain the purpose: “Objects often carry stories and memories. Sharing these stories helps us learn more about one another and discover the power of personal narratives.”
- _Emphasise that sharing is completely voluntary.
- _Set the tone for respectful and attentive listening.
- _Highlight that participants can choose to share their story verbally, or experiment with

digital methods, such as making a short voice note, photo, or video clip if they feel comfortable.

3 | Sharing Stories (10–15 minutes)

_Invite each participant, one by one, to:

| Show or describe their object.

| Share:

What is the object?

Why is it meaningful?

How does it connect to their personal story, identity, or values?

_If using digital methods, participants can record their story as they share, or create a digital version to share with the group afterwards.

_Facilitate gently:

| Keep the group attentive.

| Avoid interruptions.

| Thank each participant for sharing.

4 | Group Reflection (5–10 minutes)

_Ask the group:

| Were there common themes or feelings in the stories?

| Did any stories surprise or inspire you?

| How did it feel to share and listen?

| How do personal stories shape how we see ourselves and each other?

| For those who used digital storytelling, how did it feel to use a digital tool to share your story? Did it change how you told or experienced your narrative?

_ Optionally:

| Record key words, emotions, or themes on a flipchart (e.g. “family,” “courage,” “change”).

2.2 | FUTURES LITERACY FOR FUTURE NARRATIVES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Understand the concept of Futures Literacy and its relevance in youth work.
- _Recognise the role of questioning assumptions about the future.
- _Identify practical ways Futures Literacy can empower young people as **co-creators of their futures**.
- _Connect Futures Literacy with storytelling as a method of exploring and expressing alternative futures.

To rewrite our own stories, whether as individuals, communities, or societies, we all need inspiration and the ability to reshape the narratives around us. **Futures Literacy**, a key competency developed by UNESCO, nurtures this ability by helping us imagine new possibilities at personal, communal, and societal levels, and take action to create sustainable and inclusive futures. Futures Literacy equips young people and those who work with them to actively participate in creating the futures they want to see.

When looking at the world around us, it's easy to conclude that humanity is facing multiple existential challenges (climate change, war, pandemics, economic crisis, social exclusion, racism etc.). We try, as a society, to prepare and change our daily lives based on the predictions we make based on the facts we know today.

Depression is a consequence because we're lacking a positive narrative which could make us feel secure and confident to invest in tomorrow.

But the future is uncertain, unknown, complex and hardly predictable. Who could have foreseen the Coronavirus epidemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine? We don't know. We cannot know. That makes everything worse. It scares us because we cannot control uncertainty.

Futures Literacy allows us to think in alternative ways and narratives and helps us to better deal with uncertainty and complexity – in the present and the future. We become more balanced between preparation and planning, or emergence and novelty. Uncertainty and complexity can be seen as opportunities and not as adversaries we cannot control. Instead of being afraid, we can explore the different possibilities, have hope while connecting with other people, share

dreams and create new powerful narratives which guide us in the present (**creative collective content generation**).

Futures Literacy isn't something that only practitioners bring to young people. Instead, it's a capacity that young people themselves already engage in when they dream, plan, question, or explore possibilities. This approach invites all of us, youth and youth workers alike, to question and examine the stories we hold about the future. By uncovering the often-hidden assumptions that shape our expectations, we learn to identify and challenge inherited or limiting beliefs about what is possible. This process opens space for imagining a broader spectrum of futures, making it easier to envision more inclusive, diverse, and resilient ways forward, both individually and collectively.

Cultivating Futures Literacy nurtures a strong sense of agency. When young people and youth workers recognise that the future is not set in stone but emerges from the choices and actions of the present, they gain confidence as active participants in shaping their own lives and communities. Futures Literacy gives us practical tools to translate visions into action, helping individuals and groups move from imagination to implementation and to see themselves as authors and co-creators of change.

Importantly, Futures Literacy supports us all in exploring and creating stories at multiple levels:

_Personal: examining how our own experiences, values, and dreams shape the futures we imagine.

_Communal: discovering how shared hopes and concerns bring groups together to co-create narratives of collective possibility.

_Societal: critically exploring the larger cultural myths, dominant discourses, and systems that influence how societies define what is possible or desirable.

Through this expanded perspective, young people and practitioners become better equipped to collaborate with others, building shared narratives that foster mutual understanding, solidarity, and positive transformation. This work highlights that new futures cannot be built solely through technological innovation, they also depend on creating new meanings and shared narratives that help people make sense of the world in ways that are resilient, adaptable, and inclusive.

Futures Literacy empowers young people, and those working alongside them, to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of the 21st century. By bringing Futures Literacy into our approach to narrative, we encourage young people to become more imaginative, adaptive, and proactive in shaping the world they are part of and will continue to help build. This approach reinforces the importance of listening to diverse voices, encouraging critical reflection, and supporting the emergence of new stories that can drive meaningful change.

Futures Literacy invites us to recognise that imagining the future is an act of creativity and transformation. It enables us to 'use the future' as a tool for questioning the present and identifying alternative pathways for action. As UNESCO highlight, Futures Literacy helps individuals and groups shift their

anticipatory assumptions²¹ from an unconscious to a conscious state, extending their imagination, making the unknown more knowable, and creating space for new possibilities.²²

What does it mean to be Futures Literate?

Futures Literacy is based on all three categories of Futures Thinking (Forecast, Foresight, Anticipation), but the main category to focus on is Anticipation. Anticipation is the capacity, found in both natural and human systems, to engage with and act in the present in light of imagined or expected future states. It includes all ways of “using the future,” from unconscious biological responses (like a tree shedding leaves before winter) to conscious human strategies, including the use of predictive models to analyse trends and explore possible futures. These models can be external (like weather forecasts) or internal (based on personal expectations and feelings), and play a crucial role in how individuals, groups, and organizations anticipate and navigate the future.

To become Futures Literate is a question of learning to shift the ability to anticipate from an unconscious to a conscious state. The revelation of the personal and collective anticipatory assumptions suddenly offers new opportunities to think about the future and the present – extending one’s imagination, making the unknown knowable, grasping the unique.

Starting consciously with the unconscious, being outside of pre-existing models of anticipation and then experimenting with sense (invent, discover) and sense-making (explain, tell a story) with new anticipatory assumptions.

This may feel surreal or absurd at first because we are not used to it. But it can lead to alternative narratives about the future, which can be good guides for actions in the present.

A Futures Literate person is someone who:

- _can shift the ability to anticipate from an unconscious to a conscious state,
- _can experiment with new anticipatory assumptions,
- _can imagine different futures,
- _has a diverse “menu” of choices,
- _can derive concrete alternative courses of action for the present from new future narratives,
- _is more comfortable with uncertainty, because uncertainty is seen as a source of power that allows for rethinking and reveals invisible possibilities,

²¹ Riel Miller describes anticipatory assumptions (AA) as “the ontological and epistemological attributes of anticipatory activities [...] [AA] are the most basic component of anticipatory activities: these assumptions are necessary for all ‘uses-of-the-future’ because ‘imagination’ can only be elaborated on the basis of the underlying assumptions.” Miller, R. (2018). Futures Literacy: Transforming the future. Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century. UNESCO; Routledge, 4-12, p.4.<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000264644.locale=en>

²² For more resources on Futures Literacy, see: Larsen, N., Kæseler Mortensen, J., & Miller, R. (2020). What is ‘Futures Literacy’ and Why is it Important? Medium. ; UNESCO. (2025). Futures Literacy & Foresight: About. ; Miller, R. (2015). Learning, the Future, and Complexity: An Essay on the Emergence of Futures Literacy. European Journal of Education, 50 (4), 513-525. ; Miller, R. (Ed.). (2018). Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century. UNESCO; Routledge. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000264644.locale=en>

_is more comfortable with complexity, because they are used to constantly shifting their view of the future and the present,
_and feels optimistic and capable of taking action.

So here is the good news: **novelty is already there**. We just need to learn to see it, imagine it, and believe in it. And everyone is Futures Literate to some degree, because everyone is capable of thinking about the future, even if we do so at different levels or in different ways.

Lacking the ability to read, to be Futures Literate, we are like an illiterate in an illiterate society who is told about the treasures of being able to read, but we cannot even understand the promise.²³

So, how is it possible to get there? The easiest way is to use the future to understand how we use the future. It starts with a simple question: “What do you think the future will be?”

Everybody is engaging with futures. We think about the future on an everyday, personal, social or global level in our individual depth. It is a human competence. It is not possible not to be Futures Literate. According to Stefan Bergheim, it is a matter of degree.²⁴ To understand what is meant by this, he refers to a narrative that the European Union uses in its Digital Competence Framework for Citizens:²⁵

Everybody knows what water is.

You can touch it, put your feet into it,
step in deeper.

At this basic level, some guidance may
be needed if you are very unfamiliar, for
example as a child. Then, if you
like and have the opportunity,
you can learn to swim. Usually with
guidance. First, you swim in an odd-looking
style, but you move forward. As you practice
more, your swimming gets smoother.

Then – advanced level – maybe you want to
guide others as they learn to swim. Or you can
exercise your competence for different ends
such as a rescue swimmer. And
eventually – specialized level – you may create
new uses and contribute to the field in different
ways. Of course, to demonstrate your swimming
competence, you need supportive
external conditions such as a pool
or a lake.²⁶

²³ Miller, R. (2015). Learning, the Future, and Complexity. Op cit.

²⁴ Bergheim, S. (2024, August). On the Competence of Futures Literacy. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383122741_On_the_Competence_of_Futures_Literacy

²⁵ Vuorikari, R., Kluzer, S., & Punie, Y. (2022). DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens – With New Examples of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2760/115376>

²⁶ Bergheim, S. (2024, August). On the Competence of Futures Literacy. op. cit.

According to that, Bergheim defined **four levels of being Futures Literate:**

A | Basic: All human beings regularly imagine different futures.

B | Intermediate: Many humans imagine alternative futures by stretching their imagination and thinking of new ideas and connecting them with others.

C | Advanced: Some people are engaged with the theoretical and practical community of Futures Literacy pioneers. They can derive concrete strategies of action, relevant to the present, from new ideas.

D | Specialised: A few people write and teach about Futures Literacy.

Thinking about the future is a natural human ability. In fact, everyone has some degree of Futures Literacy; it's not a question of whether you have it, but to what extent. Futures Literacy is a skill that can be developed and strengthened. We can start by reflecting on everyday life and gradually build our capacity to think about bigger, more complex futures. The goal is to expand our imagination and become more open to new possibilities.

Futures Literacy in youth work is about engaging in shared exploration and learning. Together, youth workers and young people can question dominant assumptions, envision alternative futures, and co-create stories that shape actions in the present. In practical terms, this might include:

_Exploring young people's expected futures, and then imagining futures they desire.

_Examining media stories to uncover whose voices are heard or excluded and discussing how this shapes perceptions of the future.

_Designing creative outputs such as a **Newspaper from the Future** or digital storytelling projects that express new visions for communities, societies, or the planet.

Bringing Futures Literacy into youth work means inviting young people into a shared journey of curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. It's about listening deeply, learning together, and recognising that young people are not simply preparing for the future, they are already helping to shape it today.

While Futures Literacy equips young people and practitioners with the skills to question assumptions and imagine new possibilities, **storytelling is the method through which those possibilities are expressed, shared, and brought to life.**

Storytelling gives form and meaning to the visions that emerge from futures thinking, transforming abstract ideas into narratives that people can relate to and act upon. It creates a bridge between what individuals imagine and what communities can collectively pursue. Within the Future Narratives approach, storytelling and Futures Literacy are deeply interconnected, working hand in hand to help young people not only envision alternative futures but also communicate those visions, build solidarity, and inspire change. A key methodological tool of Futures Literacy is the Futures Literacy Labs (FLL). Using FLLs as part of the Future Narratives pathway is explained in Chapter 4.5 below. This activity summarises how Futures Literacy can be introduced in a practical, accessible way.

Activity | Expected vs. Desired Futures

Description

Participants reflect on what they expect might happen in the future compared to what they truly desire for themselves, their communities, or the world. Through individual reflection and group discussion, they explore how assumptions and dominant narratives shape their visions of the future.

Purpose

- _Help participants distinguish between expected futures (what seems likely) and desired futures (what they hope for).
- _Surface hidden assumptions shaping how participants think about the future.
- _Encourage critical thinking about narratives that influence expectations.
- _Lay the groundwork for imagining alternative futures and personal agency.

Duration 30–40 minutes total

- _Introduction and explanation: 5 minutes
- _Individual reflection: 5 minutes
- _Group sharing and discussion: 15–20 minutes
- _Group reflection: 5–10 minutes

Group Size Ideal for groups of 6–20 participants.

- _For larger groups, split into smaller circles or breakout rooms.

Materials Needed

- _Flipchart or whiteboard
- _Markers

- _Sticky notes or index cards
- _Optional: images or symbols to stimulate thinking for lower-literacy participants

Instructions

1 | Introduction (5 minutes)

- _Explain the key concept:
 - “Sometimes the future we expect is different from the future we truly want. For example, someone might expect climate change to worsen but desire a world with green energy and healthy ecosystems.”
- _Emphasise:
 - | There are no “wrong” answers.
 - | The goal is to explore different ways of thinking about the future.

2 | Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

- _Hand out sticky notes or index cards.
- _Ask participants to quietly write or draw:
 - | One thing they expect will happen in the future.
 - | One thing they desire for the future.

3 | Group Sharing and Discussion (15–20 minutes)

- _Collect the notes and stick them on the flipchart under two columns:
 - | “Expected Futures”
 - | “Desired Futures”
- _Facilitate discussion:
 - | Why do expected and desired futures sometimes differ?

- | What shapes our expectations?
- | Are there stories or messages we've heard that influence what we think is possible?
- | How can we start moving toward the futures we desire?

4 | Group Reflection (5–10 minutes)

_Invite participants to share:

- | What surprised them during the activity?
- | How did it feel to compare their expected and desired futures?
- | What narratives or assumptions might they want to challenge?

5 | Possible Follow-Up

_Lead into a storytelling activity where participants **create a short narrative** about their desired future.

_Connect the discussion to a critical analysis of **dominant media narratives** about the future.

_Use the insights to brainstorm practical steps toward desired futures in participants' lives or communities.



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3 | FUTURE STUDIES AND THE CONCEPT OF FUTURES





*“Tell fairy tales again, of
enchanted forests,
of infinite universes.
Dream again
to narrate a world full of
magic*

while awake.

*Because, in the face of
prefabricated futures,
magical thinking brings us
options to mind realities.
Because futures, maybe,
are just waiting
to make up our minds.*

*No, I'm not talking
about magic.
Just a little bit.”*

Alicia Ocon Fdez.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Define Future Studies and its purpose in exploring societal change.
- _Distinguish between “the future” (singular) and “futures” (plural).
- _Understand the historical evolution of thinking about the future, from prediction to systematic study.
- _Describe how futures thinking can be applied in youth work to foster imagination, critical thinking, and agency.
- _Identify common archetypes of the future and explain how they shape collective narratives, worldviews, and expectations.

3.1 | STORIES FOR THE FUTURE

In the previous section, we explored how Futures Literacy helps individuals and communities question their assumptions and imagine new possibilities. We also saw how storytelling plays a powerful role in giving shape and meaning to these visions of the future. Together, storytelling and futures thinking provide tools for examining the present, challenging dominant narratives, and opening up alternative pathways forward.

To understand why this combination is so powerful, it helps to look at the broader field known as Future Studies. This field offers the theoretical foundations and practical tools that underpin Futures Literacy and the Future Narratives approach. In this chapter, we will introduce the key ideas of Future Studies and show how young people can use these concepts to become active participants in shaping their own lives and the world around them.

Whether the future is seen as a single path or as a set of many possibilities, it has always inspired curiosity, hope, and sometimes fear. Throughout history, people have tried to anticipate and shape what comes next, through myths, predictions, dreams, and deliberate planning. Yet, the future is never entirely separate from the present; every choice we make and every story we tell helps to shape the world ahead.

For young people, understanding the future is about realising their power to influence what happens next, both individually and collectively. Future Studies provide tools and approaches to help young people critically examine possible

futures, consider the consequences of different choices, and imagine new paths forward.

Future Studies is both an academic discipline and a practical approach focused on exploring how people envision and shape potential futures. Instead of trying to predict exactly what will happen, it encourages us to examine **multiple futures**, different scenarios, possibilities, and pathways that could emerge depending on our choices, values, and actions.

A central idea in Future Studies is the distinction between **“the future” (singular)** and “futures” (plural). When we speak of “the future” as if it’s one predetermined outcome, we risk closing off our imagination and limiting our ability to act. In contrast, thinking in terms of “futures” reminds us that the future is open, uncertain, and shaped by human agency. This perspective invites creativity, adaptability, and resilience.

Future Studies intersects with many fields, including:

- _Social sciences and psychology, to understand human behaviour and social change.
- _Cultural studies and philosophy, to explore values and worldviews.
- _Environmental studies, to consider sustainability and ecological futures.
- _Narrative and storytelling methods, to help people express and share their visions of possible futures.

3.2 | THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Whether the future (and futures) exists (exist) or not, whether it is or they are set in stone or unfolding at the same time in a fourth dimension imperceptible to most (currently) humans, is a mystery. However, the future has been expected, studied, projected, divined, intuited, sensed, and conditioned since and in every nook and cranny of history.

The present, however, has always been “somewhat forgotten”. It is examined through the lens of the past and overshadowed by our hopes, anxieties, and dreams for the future. Yet, every moment we experience is shaped by both our memories and our expectations, and in each present moment, we are already influencing what comes next.

Our experience of time – past, present, and future – is not just a personal journey. We are part of social, cultural, and global networks, where individual choices and collective actions are deeply interconnected. The present may feel personal and immediate, but the future is now a shared, global concern, shaped by diverse forces across societies.

At this intersection, Future Studies take on a social, economic, political, and

strategic dimension. Each person and community has the opportunity - and the responsibility - to decide whether to accept futures shaped by others or to actively participate in imagining and creating their own. This process is complex, and not everyone has equal power or resources, but it is through conscious choice and collaboration that we build the lives and the world we want to inhabit.

3.3 | FROM PREDICTION TO FUTURE STUDIES

Human beings have always been fascinated by the future. Across history and cultures, people have developed countless ways to try to understand, predict, or shape what comes next. Early practices included consulting oracles, interpreting dreams, and reading the stars. Ancient methods, such as astrology in Mesopotamia, or rituals and ceremonies in many cultures, show that the desire to anticipate and influence the future is universal.²⁷

The ways in which people think about time and the future are deeply shaped by culture. Some societies have imagined time as a cycle, repeating endlessly, while others have seen it as a journey with a clear direction toward progress or fulfillment. In some traditions, the “future” was not a separate category but part of an “eternal now”.²⁸ These perspectives have influenced not only how people plan and act, but also how they tell stories, organise communities, and make sense of change.

As human societies developed, so did their approaches to the future. Practical needs such as planting crops, planning migrations, or creating calendars required people to look ahead and make decisions based on expected outcomes. Over time, the study of the future evolved from mystical or divinatory practices to more systematic approaches that use observation, analysis, and imagination.

In the twentieth century, Future Studies emerged as a formal field. Thinkers such as Fred Polak, Bertrand de Jouvenel, and organizations such as the World Future Society and the Club of Rome began to explore ways to study and influence possible futures, using research, creativity, and collective dialogue.²⁹ Today, Future Studies is a global effort, supported by universities, research institutes, and international organizations like UNESCO.³⁰

For young people, this history is important: it shows that curiosity about the future is natural and that many different approaches have been used to address it.

²⁷ Milojević, I. (2002). A Selective History of Futures Thinking. In *Futures of Education: Feminist and Post-Western Critiques and Visions* (PhD thesis, School of Education, The University of Queensland, pp. 29-40). <https://www.metafuture.org/library/A-selective-history-of-futurest-thinking-Milojevic.pdf>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See e.g. Poli, R. (2021). The Challenges of Futures Literacy. *Futures*, 132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2021.102800>
World Futures Studies Federation. <https://wfsf.org/>
World Future Society. <https://www.worldfuture.org/>

³⁰ See e.g. Futures Literacy & Foresight at UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/futures-literacy>

Most importantly, the tools and methods of Future Studies are now available to everyone, not just experts or leaders. Young people can use these approaches to imagine new possibilities, examine the consequences of different choices, and participate in shaping their own lives and communities.

By understanding how humans have studied and shaped the future throughout history, youth workers and young people can better appreciate their own power to question, imagine, and create the futures they wish to see.

3.4 | WHAT IS FUTURE STUDIES FOR?

The introduction of elements of the future in the decision-making process allows people to develop the capacity to see a wider spectrum of possible futures. The problem is whether these visions are meant to colonise the seen futures or will be used for improving people's capacity to aspire to better lives. If the future is going to frame our decision-making processes, the capacity to distinguish between authentic and non-authentic futures becomes relevant.

One of the major tasks of the theory of Futures Studies is to provide guidance in distinguishing genuine from non-genuine futures, open from closed, unadulterated from deceptive, adulterated futures.³¹

Futures Studies is the systematic study of possible, probable and preferable futures including the worldviews and myths that underlie each future. In the last fifty or so years, the study of the future has moved from predicting the future to mapping alternative futures to shaping desired futures, both at external collective levels and inner individual levels.³²

While many embrace Futures Studies so as to reduce risk, to avoid negative futures, particularly the worst case, others actively move to creating desired futures, positive visions of the future.³³ The identification of alternative futures is thus a fluid dance of structure (the weights of history) and agency (the capacity to influence the world and create desired futures).³⁴ The first principle is that there is a constant dilemma in Futures Studies between knowledge, on the one side, and desire and fear, on the other. The second principle, which has been largely accepted by futurists, is that the only space on which humans can have an impact is the future.³⁵ The third generally accepted principle of Futures Studies is that there is not one future, but many possible futures. If we think or act for only one future, we are determining the future itself.

³¹ Poli, R. (2024). Chapter 1: Introduction: The Subtle Interplay Between Futures Studies and Anticipation Theory. In Handbook of Futures Studies. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035301607.00006>

³² Inayatullah, S. (2012). Futures Studies: Theories and Methods. In N. Al-Fodham (Ed.), There's a Future: Visions for a Better World (pp. 37-65). BBVA Group. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281595208_Futures_Studies_Theories_and_Methods

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Masini, E. B. (1993). Why Futures Studies? Grey Seal. <https://archive.org/details/whyfuturesstudie0000masi/mode/2up>

3.5 | FUTURES STUDIES, FORESIGHT AND ANTICIPATION THEORY

Futures Studies, Foresight, and Anticipation Theory explore how we think about and prepare for what comes next. American biologist Robert Rosen defined an “anticipatory system” as any living system (plants, animals, people, ecosystems...) that uses internal models to predict and adapt to future conditions.³⁶ The way we usually think about time - as a series of events happening one after another - doesn't fully apply to living organisms. Instead, organisms use internal models of time that help them anticipate what might happen next and generate new information based on those expectations: “The future still has not yet happened: the organism has a model of the future, but not definitive knowledge of the future itself”.³⁷

“An anticipatory system is a natural system that contains an internal predictive model of itself and of its environment, which allows it to change state at an instant in accord with the model's predictions pertaining to a later instant.”³⁸

This idea - having a model of the future, but never complete knowledge of it - is a key to Future Studies.

Within Future Studies, anticipation means adopting a foresight mindset that leads to concrete actions before events actually happen. Foresight is a structured, participatory approach to exploring the medium- and long-term future, based on the belief that the future cannot be predicted but can be shaped. It brings together diverse perspectives to build collective intelligence, inform present-day decisions, and encourage joint action. For young people, foresight activities can broaden participants' horizons, stimulate learning and engagement, and help develop shared understandings of future challenges and opportunities. Its purpose is not to predict the future, but to generate valuable insights to enable better decision-making in the present.³⁹

Anticipation involves using predictive models to analyse trends (such as megatrends) and explore possible futures. A crucial aspect of this process is whether the models we use are internal or external. For example, checking a weather forecast before leaving home is using an external model, while making decisions based on your own expectations and feelings is using an internal model. Internal models are especially important for understanding how people, groups, and organizations anticipate the future.

³⁶ Louie, A. H. (2010). Robert Rosen's Anticipatory Systems. *Foresight*, 12 (3), 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14636681011049848>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ European Commission, Joint Research Centre. (n.d.). *Foresight: What, Why and How*. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/foresight_briefme.pdf

Roberto Poli raises the important question of where our internal models come from. He also distinguishes between explicit anticipations, which we are consciously aware of, and implicit anticipations, which operate unconsciously or automatically.⁴⁰

Traditionally, science has been based on causality: systems react to changes that have already happened. In contrast, anticipatory systems are feedforward – they change in the present based on predictions of a possible future state. This allows for new possibilities to emerge, shaped by today's anticipatory systems.

However, our models of the future are always incomplete, since the future has not yet happened. These models are shaped by individual and collective anticipation, leading people to act differently even under the same circumstances. As Rosen reflected:

The study of anticipatory systems thus involves in an essential way the subjective notions of good and ill, as they manifest themselves in the models which shape our behavior. For in a profound sense, the study of models is the study of man; and if we can agree about our models, we can agree about everything else.⁴¹

That leads to the question: How can we expose anticipatory systems and make them usable? Futures Literacy, discussed in Chapter 4, is one approach to this question. Yet, even as we become more conscious of how we anticipate and imagine the future, our expectations are often shaped by deeper, shared patterns, archetypes and collective worldviews, that shape our sense of what is possible. Exploring these archetypes of and in the future can help us to better understand the stories, symbols, and assumptions that guide collective realities and influence the ways we act, both individually and as communities.

3.6 |

ARCHETYPES OF AND IN THE FUTURE, COLLECTIVE REALITIES, AND WORLDVIEWS

Archetypes represent, symbolise and recreate models, patterns, ideas, concepts. They have a symbolic, cultural, identity and collective meaning.

They are thought schemes created and sustained collectively, becoming widely accepted and validated within a group or society.

They are represented in images, symbols, concepts, ideas, and in language itself through symbolic narrative (myth is a well-known example).

⁴⁰ Poli, R. (2024). Chapter 1: Introduction: The Subtle Interplay Between Futures Studies and Anticipation Theory. op. cit.

⁴¹ Quoted in Louie, A. H. (2010). Robert Rosen's Anticipatory Systems. op. cit.

Archetypes promote ways of understanding the world, explaining grouped forms of meaning that represent (and feed) social and cultural models.

They are a mirror for collective and individual realities, and a model to identify with, avoid, follow, pursue or reference.

They also represent realities and timelines, scenes and scenarios that can be part of a moment of human experience or the whole of the experience of a reality.

The future and reality as a concept, and futures and realities as possible, parallel or simultaneous time-space lines, are also represented symbolically and are reflected in archetypes.

When the ideas, concepts, emotions and meanings as archetypes are acknowledged in a society, culture or group and they are sustained over time, something that could be called projected images are formed with sufficient autonomy to evolve by themselves.

These symbolic constructions can take on different meanings or implications for each person or group, yet over time they also develop their own independent identity and can strengthen their meaning autonomously. In an imaginary world, archetypes take shape, evolve, influence one another, and sustain themselves.

Think of love. It is not seen, it may not be spoken, but whether there are people who are explicitly in love or not, you know when “love is in the air”, because it has taken on enough strength of reference and influence that invisibly it is seen, and imperceptibly it is recognised.

This non-real and imaginary but existing space is called in different ways, although it is generally known as “[Collective Unconscious](#)”.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist who is credited with the concept of Collective Unconscious and Archetype defines it as follows:

The collective unconscious
is a form of inherited
universal memory,
present in every human being,
that carries knowledge about the significance of certain objects,
patterns and behaviours
in nature.

(...) these objects are named by Carl G. Jung as Archetypes:
“event, figures, symbols of motifs whose meaning is evolutionary inherited,
the presence thereof being consistent in the lives of individuals
across ages and time.

An example of an event archetype is the birth,
an example of a figure archetype is the hero,
and example of a symbol archetype
is the apocalypse.⁴²

⁴² Quoted in Fergnani, Alex & Jackson, Mike. (2019). Extracting scenario archetypes: A quantitative text analysis of documents about the future. FUTURES & FORESIGHT SCIENCE. 1. e00017. 10.1002/ffo2.17

Jung identified twelve archetypes that are widely recognised and embedded in personal, social, and collective narratives, as well as in cinema, literature, advertising, art, and organizational or governmental storytelling. These archetypes serve as models or reference points, appearing as protagonists, antagonists, or symbols, to project ideas, shape identities, and influence the realities and futures we imagine.

- 1 | The creator
- 2 | The Ruler
- 3 | The Caregiver
- 4 | The hero
- 5 | The magician
- 6 | The rebel
- 7 | The jester
- 8 | The lover
- 9 | The everyman
- 10 | The innocent
- 11 | The explorer
- 12 | The sage

There are other archetypal forms that represent models of life, models of people, ways of understanding and interpreting reality: present (presents) and future (futures), changes in reality, ways of projecting or foreseeing reality and also in the way of anticipating reality. They follow the process of symbolic creation of any other archetype but they are processes that can transit lives or can direct them.

Many more archetypes can be identified in this modality. The following are the ones that most represent in Western culture (in recent times, at present in many ways in many future projections) the interpretation of reality, the shaping of lives or the way we “ordinary people” can understand transits and life itself and our personal, and collective expectations.⁴³

These archetypes are also present in common narratives, in “day to day” conversations, in the narratives we elaborate and externalise, and they are also common narratives widely available and within the reach of anyone, sustained in time and anchored in the psyche and in the emotional system through repetition, internally and through numerous external stimuli. They are applied to many subjects and are narrated in many versions.

They are archetypes that make us go through life with our own meaning and decision (or not), but they are also archetypes that make us live lives in a loop with our own and other people's narratives, pursuing goals that may or may not exist, building realities that we may or may not desire, but which we legitimise or justify. They are also represented in formal narrative, in literature, in cinema, in art, in the media, in advertising, everywhere, over and over again....

⁴³ Ocon Fdez., Alicia (January 26, 2023). The magical work of narratives. Future Narratives. <https://futurenarratives.eu/blog/the-magical-work-of-narratives/>

1 | Futuristic Future Archetype |

If when you close your eyes and think about the future the mental image you create is surrounded by robots, unknown technology (you don't know what it's for but it looks very useful and advanced) and strange shaped multilevel cities with flying vehicles, greenhouse plants in domes, synthetic food, movie colored sky over "mars", and androgynous people between mystical and ultramodern the Futuristic Future Archetype has anchored itself in your dominant paradigm of reality.

2 | Uncertainty Future Archetype |

If you think about the future and believe that anything at all can happen, could happen or possibly happening, at any time, in any place, any event, fact, or situation, at personal, local or global, or even could reasonably or foreseeably happen, not only has the Uncertain Future Archetype become part of your belief system, but you have legitimised it.

3 | Safe Road Future Archetype |

If faced with a world (reality/realities) full of uncertainty, built so that uncertainty is part of a "road" a model and a system artificially, if external agents outnumber internal ones by millions, safe space can certainly be created, but there is no safe road in that reality, and the Archetype of a safe road, established or not, is a valium, but above all a fallacy. If one intends to travel that "same road", it could passable, could be achieved in a safer way, but still a fallacy.

4 | Endless Loop Road or Perpetual Goal Future Archetype |

If the anchored reality or the process of creating realities (personal and collective) is framed in a pre-designed pathtime, where satisfaction, success and achievement, well-being, and "best possibilities" is one step away from the next rung, as well as a fallacy the Endless Loop Road or Perpetual Goal Future Archetype will itself be the object never the reality (realities) itself(themselves). This will possibly provide purpose but not real meaning nor authenticity.

5 | Romanticised Future Archetype |

If at the end of the goal-path, at the end of one of the goal-paths or when reaching one of the goal-goals that you consider bring you or would bring you absolute security you believe that finally everything will be perfect as if you could perceive it with the smell of roses, enveloping soundtrack, perfect sunset sky, infinite looks of satisfaction and an eternal sense of "now yes" that is perpetuated only by inertia and by the "mystical" pleasure of the continuous perfect present, the archetype of the romanticised future has convinced your psyche that a retained static image is equivalent to a reality by design dynamic and in permanent transformation, and has convinced you that the "meanwhile" served only to wait.

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6 | Dystopian Futures Archetype |

If you imagine yourself walking down the street and as you turn the corner you encounter a group of zombies and the first emotion you feel is fear and not surprise, the Dystopian Future archetype has become embedded in your mind. If you imagine the future and see a completely annihilated planet earth, with remnants of humanity wearing breathing masks, the Dystopian Future has anchored itself in your dominant paradigm of reality creation, and it has also annihilated your reality(realities)-creating power..

7 | Bonus:

Fake Utopian Futures Archetype (from the unattainable to the parody) |

If when thinking of an ideal world, a perfect reality, a “utopian” future, you visualise people in series, smiling in perfect symmetry and certain traits of psychopathy, with perfect one-color suits, repeating actions and saying good morning, good afternoon, good evening with an fairy voice, the Dystopian Futures Archetype is installed in your psique with with sweet angel face and dressed in white organic cotton in a permanently sunny residential neighborhood, it has usurped not only the identity but also the infinite and magical possibilities of Utopia (and Utopia is not to be trifled with!).

The seven archetypes above always “work in groups, interact and feed back” have a great anchoring power and a great power in the creation of realities (present-s/future/s), but they are like all archetypes are a possibility, an option, a projection that can be real or not only if they are sustained with enough strength and time in the “collective unconscious”, if this does not happen, the archetypes disappear, transit or transform. And they transform us...

While archetypes hold significant power in shaping our collective realities, they represent just one set of possibilities among many. If left unexamined, these symbols can limit our imagination, subtly “colonising” how we see ourselves and the futures we can envision. This is where Futures Literacy becomes essential: by becoming aware of the archetypes and narratives that shape our thinking, we gain the ability to question, expand, or even transform them, opening space for new ideas, greater agency, and more diverse imagined futures.





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4 |
CRITICAL
FUTURES
THINKING AND
CHALLENGING
DOMINANT
NARRATIVES

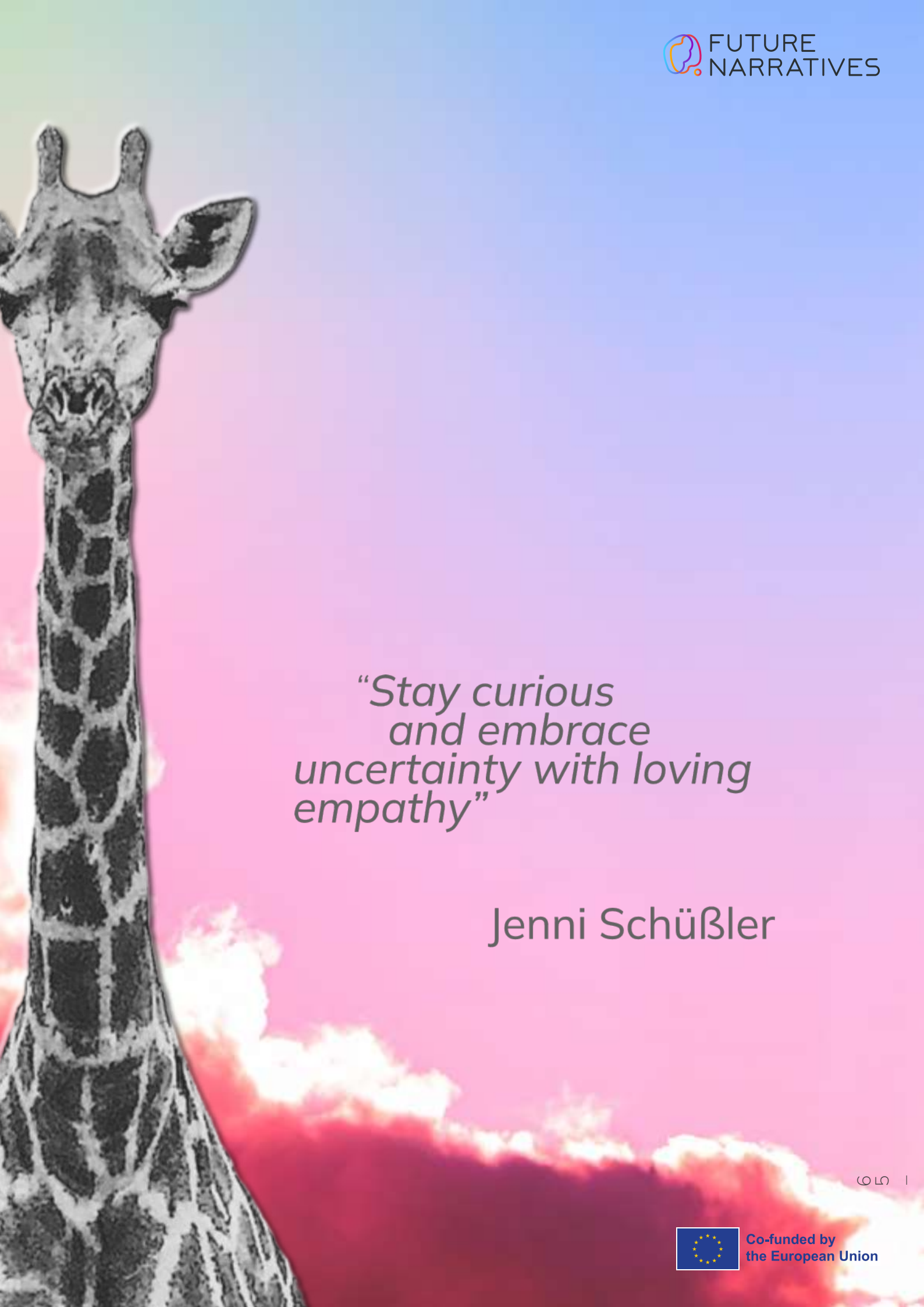




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*“Stay curious
and embrace
uncertainty with loving
empathy”*

Jenni Schüßler

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Understand the concept of Futures Literacy and its relevance in youth work.
- _Recognise the role of questioning assumptions about the future.
- _Identify practical ways Futures Literacy can empower young people as **co-creators of their futures**.
- _Connect Futures Literacy with storytelling as a method of exploring and expressing alternative futures.

4.1 | FROM DECONSTRUCTION TO CREATION

When we think about the future, we often don't realise how much our ideas are shaped by **dominant narratives**, the powerful stories society tells about how the world works, who belongs, and what is possible. These narratives appear in news headlines, political speeches, advertising, films, and everyday conversations. Sometimes they give people hope and a sense of shared purpose. But often, they can be narrow, excluding certain communities or ideas, and reinforcing existing inequalities. This is especially important to recognise when working with young people, whose sense of identity and possibility is still developing.

This is where Critical Futures Thinking becomes essential. It pushes us to look beneath the surface of the stories we hear about the future and ask deeper questions. For example, we can reflect on whose visions of the future are being promoted and whose voices are missing. We might consider which assumptions about society, progress, or human nature are taken for granted, and who benefits from those assumptions staying unchallenged. Critical Futures Thinking invites us to see that the future is not simply waiting to happen, but is constructed through narratives, choices, and power dynamics that can be examined and reshaped.

Consider the popular narrative that technology will inevitably solve all social problems. While technology can indeed be transformative, critical thinking asks us to look closer: Who designs and controls new technologies? Who stands to benefit the most, and who might be left behind? What social or cultural values are embedded in technological solutions, and what might be lost in the rush toward progress? By exploring these questions, we avoid simply accepting a single story about progress and open space for diverse, community-driven visions of the future.

Another common narrative suggests that certain communities will always remain disadvantaged or marginalised. Such stories can be harmful because they limit people's ability to imagine change and reinforce feelings of hopelessness. Critical futures thinking helps us to question these narratives, identify the deeper systems and beliefs that sustain inequality, and create space for new stories that reflect justice, inclusion, and hope.

Scholars like **Sohail Inayatullah, Ziauddin Sardar, and Wendell Bell** have contributed important ideas to this field. They encourage us to look beyond surface-level trends and explore the deeper cultural symbols, myths, and “used futures” that shape our thinking. A “used future” is an idea or model inherited from the past that we keep using without questioning whether it still serves our needs. For example, educational systems designed for industrial societies may not be the best fit for a rapidly changing, creative, and interconnected world. Critical futures thinking helps us identify these outdated models and imagine alternatives better suited for today and tomorrow.

For those working with young people, critical futures thinking is a powerful tool for understanding how social systems, culture, and media influence what they expect or fear about the future. It gives them the skills to identify stories that limit their sense of possibility or self-worth. Equally importantly, it helps them build the confidence to imagine and articulate alternative futures that reflect their values and aspirations.

This doesn't mean only focusing on negative or dystopian futures. Instead, critical futures thinking is about **expanding the range of possibilities** and giving young people tools to examine the present critically, recognise injustice, and craft hopeful stories for change. It teaches that futures work is not only about prediction, it's about choice, imagination, and agency.

As part of the **Future Narratives** approach, critical futures thinking connects directly to storytelling. By rewriting stories, inventing new characters, or imagining new settings, young people can challenge harmful narratives and bring forward experiences and visions that often go unseen. Through storytelling, they can propose futures that are fairer, more inclusive, and more aligned with their communities' needs and dreams. This process is deeply political and transformative, reminding us that the future is something we build together.

Activity | Deconstructing Dominant Narratives

Description

Participants identify dominant narratives that influence how society sees the future, then work in groups to analyse the assumptions and power dynamics behind these narratives. Finally, they create alternative stories that offer more inclusive, just, and hopeful visions. This exercise builds critical thinking and connects directly to narrative work in youth practice.

Purpose

- _Help participants recognise dominant narratives and understand how these shape expectations about the future.
- _Develop skills to critically analyse the assumptions, values, and power dynamics embedded in social stories.
- _Encourage the creation of counter-narratives that reflect diversity, justice, and alternative possibilities.
- _Build confidence in facilitating similar conversations with young people.

Duration 45–60 minutes total

- _Introduction: 5 minutes
- _Identifying dominant narratives: 10 minutes
- _Group analysis: 15–20 minutes
- _Creating alternative narratives: 10–15 minutes
- _Sharing and reflection: 5–10 minutes

Group Size Ideal for groups of 6–15 participants.

- _For larger groups, divide into smaller groups of 4–5.

Materials Needed

- _Flipchart or whiteboard
- _Markers
- _Sticky notes or index cards
- _Printed examples of media headlines, advertisements, social media posts, etc. (optional)

Instructions

1 | Introduction (5 minutes)

- _Introduce the concept:

“Stories in society often tell us who belongs, who has power, and what kind of future is possible. Sometimes these stories inspire hope, but other times they limit our imagination or exclude people. Today we’re going to examine some of these dominant narratives and explore how we can create new stories for more inclusive futures.”

2 | Identifying Dominant Narratives (10 minutes)

- _Ask participants:
 - | What big stories do you hear in society about the future?
 - | Examples might include:
 - “Technology will solve all problems.”
 - “Certain communities will always be left behind.”
 - “Economic growth is the only path to progress.”
- _Write their examples on a flipchart.

3 | Group Analysis (15–20 minutes)

- _Divide participants into small groups.
- _Assign each group one dominant narrative from the flipchart (or let them choose).
- _Ask groups to discuss:
 - | Who is telling this story?
 - | Who benefits from it?
 - | Who might be harmed or left out?
 - | What assumptions or values lie underneath it?
 - | Does this story feel hopeful, fearful, or limiting?

4 | Creating Alternative Narratives (10–15 minutes)

- _Still in groups, invite participants to rewrite the narrative to reflect justice, hope, and inclusivity.
 - | How would they change the story?
 - | Who would be included?
 - | What new possibilities would the alternative narrative open up?
- _Encourage creative formats:
 - | Write a short headline.
 - | Draft a mini news article.
 - | Create a slogan or short story.
 - | Draw a simple poster or symbol.

5 | Sharing and Reflection (5–10 minutes)

- _Each group presents their alternative narrative.
- _Discuss as a full group:
 - | What did you learn by deconstructing these dominant stories?

- | How did it feel to create a different narrative?
- | How might this process be useful when working with young people?

Possible Follow-Up

- _Connect this activity to digital storytelling, inviting participants to record their alternative narratives as podcasts, videos, or visual stories.
- _Use participants' alternative narratives as inspiration for Futures Literacy Labs in later sections.
- _Encourage youth workers to repeat this activity with young people using local examples of dominant narratives.

4.2 | PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR CRITIQUING AND REIMAGINING FUTURES

There are many **practical tools and methods** that youth workers can use to help young people explore and imagine different futures in creative, critical, and hopeful ways. For some readers, this might be your first encounter with futures thinking methods. It's natural to wonder whether these tools are complicated or reserved for specialists. The good news is they are highly adaptable and can be integrated into youth work without needing to be an expert in futures studies. The real power of these tools is in helping young people look at their world with fresh eyes, connect personal experiences to wider social changes, and discover that the future is something they can help shape.

Futures thinking can sometimes feel abstract or theoretical. Practical tools transform it into something tangible and engaging. They give young people a way to:

- _Discuss important topics in safe, creative ways.
- _Explore how social changes affect their lives.
- _Question narratives that limit their sense of possibility.
- _Imagine different futures and consider how to move toward them.

These tools also help youth workers create spaces for reflection and creativity. They make complex issues accessible, even for those who may not be used to talking about futures, power structures, or dominant narratives. The activities you'll find in this curriculum show how futures thinking can be woven into storytelling, art, and everyday conversations.

Trends and signals of change

One of the most accessible ways to begin exploring futures thinking is to look at **trends and signals of change**. These are simply patterns we notice in society or small events that might hint at bigger shifts ahead. For instance, a trend might be the growing use of social media among young people, increasing concern about climate change, or rising discussions around mental health and wellbeing. These are patterns we can observe over several years. On the other hand, a signal of change might be something small and new, like a sudden viral TikTok trend raising awareness about sustainable fashion, or a new piece of technology that makes it easier for communities to organise local projects.

In youth work, discussing trends and signals is an excellent way to connect **personal experiences to larger social changes**. A youth worker might start

by asking questions like, “What changes have you noticed in your community in the past few years?” or “Have you seen anything new happening in social media, music, or fashion that seems different from before?” These questions invite young people to share their own observations, making futures thinking personal and relevant rather than abstract.

Exploring trends also helps young people realise that society is not static. The world is constantly evolving, and they are living through changes that could shape the future in important ways. It’s also a chance to introduce **critical thinking** about who benefits from certain trends and who might be excluded. For example, while digital technology connects many people, it can also leave some groups behind if they lack access to devices or internet service.

By starting with trends and signals, youth workers help young people **notice the present with sharper eyes**. They see that change is happening all around them and that they have the right, and sometimes the responsibility, to think about what those changes might mean for themselves and their communities.

Scenario Thinking

While exploring trends is a great way to start futures thinking, another powerful tool is **scenario thinking**. Scenarios are stories about how the future might unfold in different ways. Instead of predicting exactly what will happen, scenarios help us explore several possibilities. They remind us that there’s no single, inevitable future, but rather many paths that depend on choices, events, and social forces.

In youth work, scenario thinking can be introduced in simple, engaging ways. A youth worker might begin with a question like, “What if all schools were run by students instead of teachers?” or “What if the internet suddenly disappeared?” These “what if” questions invite young people to imagine how life would change, both for themselves and for their communities. The goal is not to decide which scenario is right or wrong but to help young people **think beyond what they take for granted**.

Working through scenarios can help young people develop important skills. They learn to consider consequences, examine assumptions, and imagine alternatives. For example, imagining a future where local communities generate their own renewable energy might raise questions about technology, fairness, and who has the power to make decisions. Exploring a scenario where migration becomes easier worldwide might open discussions about cultural diversity, justice, and belonging.

Scenarios can be expressed through different forms. Young people might write short stories, draw posters, act out scenes in theatre exercises, or create “news articles from the future.” Each format makes futures thinking tangible and engaging, ensuring that everyone can participate regardless of literacy level or comfort with public speaking.

Foresight Activity | Futures Wheel

Description

Futures Wheels are one of the original foresight methods used to explore the potential consequences of a specific event or trend by visualizing its direct and indirect impacts. Participants are exposed to media clips, literature excerpts, or artworks that portray imagined futures (e.g. dystopian cities, utopian societies). In groups, they identify the underlying narrative archetype (e.g. perpetual crisis, technological salvation, ecological harmony). Then, each group rewrites the piece using a contrasting archetype, reshaping the narrative to reflect a different set of values or assumptions. This activity sharpens critical thinking and empowers participants to question and reframe societal myths.

Purpose

Participants reflect on possible future changes and their impacts, identify and make connections between different implications, prioritise effects based on interests and urgency, and inspire possible interventions and solutions

Duration 30–60 minutes

Instructions

- 1 | Divide participants into groups of 4–5.
- 2 | Write a proposed change in the centre of a flipchart paper inside a circle.
- 3 | Brainstorm direct consequences of this change (“first-order” consequences). Write each in its own circle and connect to the centre with arrows.
- 4 | Explore “second-order” consequences: for each first-order consequence, brainstorm further effects and add these in connected circles.
- 5 | Continue with “third-order,” “fourth-order,” and so on, as needed.
Observe the outcomes. If appropriate, move to an extended version of the activity.

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Extended Version

Participants analyse and prioritise the various implications identified. Groups can be divided by thematic interest to discuss possible actions to promote positive outcomes or mitigate negative impacts.

Online Tools

_Online whiteboards (e.g., Google Jamboard, Padlet, Lino) can be used for virtual collaboration.

_This exercise develops foresight while also helping participants see how their assumptions and archetypes might shape their understanding of possible futures.

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

A more in-depth tool for exploring futures is called **Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)**. This method was created by futurist Sohail Inayatullah and is designed to help people dig below the surface of social problems and understand the deeper stories and beliefs that keep those problems in place.⁴⁴

CLA is a key methodology for exploring Future Narratives because it helps us deconstruct the dominant narratives and assumptions that surround us. By unpacking the different layers, from surface-level facts and trends to deeper worldviews and underlying myths, CLA reveals how our thinking about the future is shaped, limited, or expanded by the stories we tell ourselves. This makes it possible to question existing assumptions and envision alternative futures that might otherwise remain hidden.

Unlike traditional forecasting methods that focus on predicting a single future, CLA opens up both the present and the past to create space for multiple, alternative futures. It does this by unpacking system causes, worldviews, myths, and metaphors connected to any given issue. For this reason, CLA is especially useful in the Reveal stage of Futures Literacy Labs, where participants are encouraged to reflect deeply, challenge their assumptions, and begin to see new possibilities for change.

The meanings we attach to data shape our deepest beliefs and, over time, help define both individual and collective identities. By deconstructing these meanings, we can uncover insights we were previously unaware of, discover the unknown, and gain the power to reinterpret or rebuild our understandings in new ways. This process allows us to imagine different futures, and to understand the underlying factors - beneath the data, trends, and events - that drive change itself.

CLA is based on the following elements

_The litany (i.e. the quantitative trends and the conventional research indicators for the future): is there any data that could reveal what is expected to happen in the future? How would a newspaper in the future present the issue? – This is the official reality.

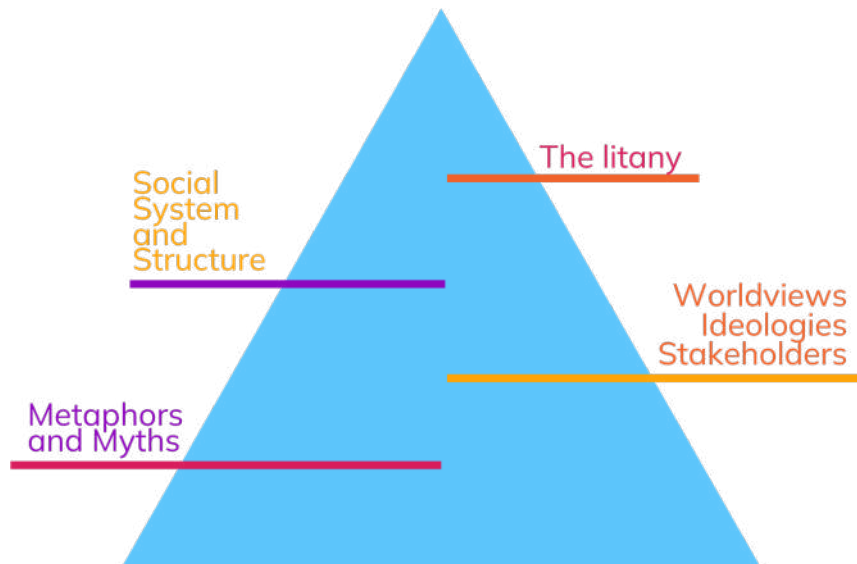
_The social system and structure (including the economic, cultural, political, and historical factors that affect behavior): is there any particular relevance of your scenario to such factors? How could the policy reports describe the issue? – Systemic causes that explain the official reality.

_The worldviews/ideologies/stakeholders (i.e. the discourse that legitimises and supports the structure): you can ask “why” the social system and structure would be as you described in the previous part. Why could this be accepted? Who and why is going to be involved in this future? Use your critical thinking to go

⁴⁴Inayatullah, S. (1998). Causal layered analysis: Poststructuralism as method. *Futures* (30.8).
Inayatullah S. (2019). Causal Layered Analysis A Four-Level Approach to Alternative Futures Relevance And Use In Foresight. *Futuribles* (April). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287\(98\)00086-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(98)00086-X)
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332706079_Causal_Layered_Analysis_A_Four-Level_Approach_to_Alternative_Futures_RELEVANCE_AND_USE_IN_FORESIGHT
Causal Layered Analysis: Sohail Inayatullah at TEDxNoosa (2013). <https://youtu.be/lmWDMFPfifi?si=udwWXSKEOfDIFIsH>

deeper into the analysis. – Deeper ideological assumptions that construct the systemic structures.

_The metaphors and myths: is there a particular narrative behind it? Is there an unconscious dimension that affects this future? – Unconscious, emotional level that can be found in poems, stories, images, humor and idioms.



In everyday life, most people move on the litany level. This is the most visible, the most obvious and you don't need much analytical skill for it. But the data, trends and so on appear discontinuous because they do not appear in any larger context. This can cause various feelings: helplessness (what can I do?); apathy (I can't do anything...) or accusation (why don't they [e.g. the politicians] do anything?).

On the systemic level, data is questioned, further analyses are made. This is the field of researchers and politicians. Solutions are sought, but the search for solutions takes place within the logic of the system and remains within it. For example

- _There is too much traffic in the city (litany)
- _There are not enough roads (systemic)
- _We need to build more roads to lighten up traffic (change)

But this will not solve the problem of traffic in the future. The population is rising and more and more cars are being bought, also per household – this means more traffic. And even more: sometimes we think we have a clear and specific problem

and when we find a solution for it, everything is fine. But surprisingly after solving the problem there is still something wrong, because the problem was only one (of many) real instances on which a deeper problem is negotiated.

Assuming we really want to change something, then we should move to the levels of worldview and myths. We start by a process of **deconstruction** - examining and unpacking the underlying ideological discourses and emotional channels that shape our understanding of problems. If we understand which discourses we use and how they are consolidated emotionally, we can think much bigger and broader than if we only look at the apparent problem. This enables us to develop future scenarios that bring about long-term change. For example: too much traffic in the city (litany) – there are not enough roads (systemic) – owning property and individualism raise social status (discourse) – my house, my car, my wife (myth).

We then proceed to **reconstruction**: if we play this through once, it could look like this: share and repair (change on the myth level) - sharing something and preserving things for as long as possible is more sustainable for everyone and saves raw materials (change on the discourse level) - we need more car sharing offers and good (inexpensive) public transport, making the city unattractive for private transport (change on the system level) - this will lighten up traffic (litany). This solution is much more resilient and long-term than the short-term troubleshooting in the first example.

CLA can be used in different ways in work with young people. For example:

_Analyse future scenarios: break down any future scenario, real or imagined, using the four CLA layers (Litany, System, Worldview, Myth). This helps you and your group see beyond surface details and understand the deeper beliefs and systems shaping that future.

_Investigate current trends or events: choose a trend or news story relevant to young people, such as climate action or social media influence. Explore it layer by layer to reveal underlying causes, societal values, and hidden narratives. This encourages critical thinking and deeper discussion.

_Create alternative futures: encourage young people to imagine different assumptions at each CLA level. Guide them to build new, creative scenarios for the future that challenge the status quo and open up fresh possibilities for their communities and beyond.⁴⁵

Tips for Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

These method-specific tips can help you deepen engagement, maintain clarity, and adapt Causal Layered Analysis to different participant groups and contexts. They serve as an essential bridge between theory and effective practice. Also, they complement the general facilitation tips available in Chapter 6 by addressing the unique requirements and opportunities of Causal Layered Analysis.

⁴⁵Inayatullah, S. (2004). Causal Layered Analysis: Theory, Historical Context, and Case Studies. In S. Inayatullah (Ed.), *The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) Reader: Theory and Case Studies of an Integrative and Transformative Methodology* (pp. 8-49). Tamkang University Press. <https://shorturl.at/FJByG>

- _Introduce the layers with concrete examples: use a relatable topic (e.g. traffic) to demonstrate how issues look at each CLA layer (litany, system, worldview, myth).
- _Break it into stages: don't try to cover all four layers in one go. Introduce one layer at a time and allow discussion before moving to the next.
- _Provide guiding questions: offer prompts tailored to each level. For example: "What headlines do you see on this topic?" (Litany) or "What story does your culture tell about this issue?" (Myth).
- _Use visual aids: a layered iceberg diagram or stairway graphic can help participants grasp the depth of analysis.
- _Encourage critical reflection: ask participants to compare how they normally talk about issues (litany/systemic) versus what emerges at the worldview and myth levels.
- _Build toward reconstruction: use the deconstruction process to inspire alternative future narratives – this is the key strength of CLA in futures work.

Creative Storytelling and Artistic Methods

Finally, futures thinking truly comes alive when paired with [creative storytelling and artistic methods](#), which can make futures thinking accessible, engaging, and meaningful for young people.

Storytelling allows young people to express complex ideas through characters, plots, and emotions rather than abstract concepts. They might invent a character living in a future society, write a personal diary entry dated 2050, or imagine an interview with someone from a completely new world. These stories give shape and colour to abstract ideas, making the future feel real and possible.

Artistic approaches also offer a path for participants who may feel shy about speaking or writing. A group might create murals showing how their neighbourhood could look in twenty years, produce podcasts about new inventions, or use theatre games to act out future challenges and solutions.

These activities help young people process emotions and ideas in ways that are deeply personal and often joyful.

Creative methods also help youth workers reach diverse groups. Participants with lower literacy levels can draw or act instead of writing. Those more comfortable with technology can create videos or digital collages.

Artistic methods are flexible and adaptable to different cultures, languages, and abilities.

Perhaps most importantly, creativity builds emotional connection.

When young people tell stories about the futures they hope for, they become invested in the idea that change is possible. They discover that imagining different futures is about courage, hope, and community.

How to Use these Tools in practice

The tools described in this chapter, exploring trends and signals, scenario thinking, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), and creative storytelling, can be powerful resources in youth work. However, it's important to remember that there's no single "correct" way to use them. Each group of young people is different, with unique interests, experiences, and comfort levels. The tools can be used together in flexible ways: a workshop might begin by exploring trends, move into scenario building, dive deeper using CLA, and finish with a creative storytelling activity. Youth workers can adjust the tools to suit different ages, group sizes, or topics. The key is to create an environment where young people feel safe questioning assumptions, imagining new possibilities, and expressing themselves in ways that feel authentic. As a youth worker, your skill lies in choosing and adapting methods so they feel relevant and safe for the young people you're working with.

For many young people, talking about "the future" might feel abstract, overwhelming, or even frightening. The key is to **start small and keep it personal**. Instead of asking, "What do you think the world will look like in 2050?" you might begin with questions like:

- _What changes have you noticed in your community in the past few years?
- _Is there something you wish could be different in your school, neighbourhood, or country?
- _Have you seen anything new happening on social media, in music, or fashion that seems interesting or surprising?

These everyday observations can be stepping stones into bigger conversations about trends, signals, and possible futures. By starting from young people's own experiences, you help ensure the discussion feels relevant and grounded.

Another helpful approach is to keep futures thinking playful and creative. Futures work doesn't have to be serious all the time. Drawing, storytelling, theatre, music, and digital media are excellent ways for young people to express ideas without feeling pressured to "get it right." Even complex tools like scenario building or CLA can be introduced gently, through games, art projects, or collaborative stories. The goal is to spark curiosity and imagination.

For example:

- _Instead of explaining scenario thinking in technical terms, you might ask, "Let's imagine tomorrow looks completely different, what might your morning routine look like?"
- _Rather than presenting CLA as a complicated framework, you might explore layers of an issue simply by asking:
 - | What do people say about this issue?
 - | What causes it?
 - | What beliefs are behind it?
 - | Are there deep stories that keep this problem going?

As you experiment with these tools, keep sessions flexible. If an exercise feels too difficult or abstract, pause and check in with the group. It's perfectly fine to adjust activities on the spot, simplify questions, or move on to something else.

The most important thing is to keep the atmosphere safe, open, and respectful.

Futures work can sometimes stir strong feelings, especially if young people are dealing with uncertainty or challenges in their lives. It's essential to balance critical thinking with hope. Encourage participants not just to explore possible risks or problems, but also to imagine solutions and new possibilities. Even small, positive changes can help young people see that the future isn't just something to fear, it's also something they can help create.

General tips for using futures tools in youth work include

_Start small and simple. Introduce futures thinking through short discussions or creative exercises before diving into more complex methods.

_Connect to personal experiences. Help young people see how futures thinking relates to their own lives.

_Use creative methods. Drawing, acting, music, and digital tools can help participants feel more comfortable and engaged.

_Check for emotional safety. Some topics may trigger anxiety or bring up difficult feelings. Always offer participants the choice to opt out or talk about hypothetical futures instead of personal ones.

_Adapt to the group's needs. Consider age, language, literacy levels, cultural context, and previous experience when planning sessions.

_Keep it hopeful. Balance honest discussions about challenges with space for imagining positive change.

Above all, remember that futures thinking is not about predicting the future. It's about opening doors to new possibilities and helping young people believe they have the power to shape what comes next. Whether you're running a one-hour activity or planning a series of workshops, these tools can help young people see that the future is not set in stone, and that their stories, ideas, and voices matter.



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5 | THE FUTURES PATHWAY





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004 |



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*“The Future
Narratives - of us and
of the others: we’ve been
working on the concept of
creating our own desired
story for the future for quite
some time now and my main
take up is that future
appears in plural.*

*Countless stories,
countless futures,
for young people,
for youth workers,
for those
who dream
and for those who haven’t
dared dreaming yet.”*

Boyka Boneva

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, youth workers and practitioners will be able to:

- | Understand the Structure and Purpose of the Pathway
 - _Describe the four levels of the Future Narratives Pathway: personal, community, societal, and future thinking.
 - _Explain why following this sequence helps young people move from self-reflection to imagining social change.
- | Facilitate Activities at Each Level
 - _Identify practical methods and exercises suitable for each narrative level.
 - _Adapt storytelling and narrative tools to guide participants through each stage of the Pathway.
- | Connect Narrative Work to Futures Literacy
 - _Recognise how Futures Literacy becomes an integrated outcome of the narrative process.
 - _Explain the role of disruptive thinking and imagination in re-authoring futures.
- | Support Critical Reflection and Social Analysis
 - _Help young people examine dominant societal narratives and create counter-narratives.
 - _Encourage critical thinking about social norms, inclusion, and justice.
- | Plan a Cohesive Workshop Series
 - _Design workshops that connect personal stories to community building, societal critique, and future visioning.
 - _Tailor the Pathway to different groups, ages, and cultural contexts.
- | Evaluate Learning and Impact
 - _Use reflection tools to assess participants' understanding and emotional responses at each stage.
 - _Adjust workshop plans based on participant feedback and observed outcomes.

5.1 |

INTRODUCTION TO THE PATHWAY

In the previous chapters, we explored the foundations of Future Narratives, the power of storytelling, the principles of Futures Literacy, and the role of narrative in shaping how we understand both the present and the future. We examined how young people and practitioners can question dominant narratives, imagine alternative futures, and begin to re-author the stories that influence their lives and communities.

These insights can be used as individual activities adapted to different contexts. However, the Future Narratives methodology is most effective when implemented through a **structured pathway** that guides participants through a meaningful journey, from personal stories, to community connections, to societal reflections, and ultimately to imagining new futures.

This chapter presents the **Future Narratives Pathway**, the core framework that ensures all these narrative tools and methods work together coherently.

The Pathway is significant because it ensures that narrative work is not just a series of disconnected activities. Instead, it creates a logical flow where each level builds on the last, helping participants:

- _Develop self-awareness and personal agency.
- _Recognise shared experiences and build community.
- _Analyse and question dominant societal narratives.
- _Envision new possibilities for themselves and the world around them.

At the heart of this approach is the belief that stories shape our understanding of the present and the possibilities we see for the future. When young people become aware of the stories they tell, and those told about them, they can begin to challenge limiting narratives and imagine alternatives. This is crucial for helping them build resilience, hope, and a sense of agency in uncertain times.

The Future Narratives Pathway consists of five interconnected levels:

- 1 | Personal Narratives:** Exploring individual identity, experiences, and values.
- 2 | Community Narratives:** Discovering the role of culture and shared stories and building connections among groups.
- 3 | Societal Narratives:** Critically examining cultural myths, dominant discourses, and systems of power.
- 4 | Future Narratives:** Using storytelling and Futures Literacy to envision alternative futures and new pathways for action.
- 5 | Sharing Stories:** Platforming perspectives and dreams for the future.

These levels are interconnected layers rather than rigid steps. Depending on time and context, facilitators might move through all five in a single programme or focus deeply on one or two levels. The Pathway is designed to be flexible and adaptable for different groups, cultural contexts, and workshop lengths.

Importantly, the Pathway helps practitioners avoid two common pitfalls:

_Staying too personal: Some storytelling work remains purely focused on individual experiences and misses the chance to connect those stories to larger social change.

_Jumping too quickly to future visions: Imagining futures without first examining personal and social narratives can feel disconnected and superficial.

By following this structured journey, youth workers can help young people connect their personal stories to broader societal contexts, and ultimately to the futures they wish to create. This ensures that **Futures Literacy Labs and other narrative tools are not standalone events, but part of a deeper process of transformation.**

The sections that follow will explore each level of the Pathway in detail, providing:

- _The purpose and significance of each level.
- _Practical activities and methods to facilitate exploration.
- _Tips for working with diverse groups.
- _Ideas for connecting each level to the next.

The Pathway empowers young people to **recognise the power of stories, challenge what limits them, and co-create new narratives** that are more inclusive, resilient, and hopeful.

5.2 |

PERSONAL NARRATIVES _ NARRATIVES FOR CHANGE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Understand what personal narratives are and how they shape identity and future possibilities.
- _Explore how young people can critically reflect on and reauthor their personal narratives.
- _Apply narrative theory in practice to facilitate activities and use frameworks such as the Journey to help young people explore and express their personal stories.
- _Create supportive environments for sharing stories and adapt methods for diverse literacy, cultural backgrounds, and comfort levels.
- _Understand how working with personal narratives supports youth development and lays the foundation for exploring community, societal, and future narratives.

The starting point of any journey into future thinking is understanding the stories we carry about ourselves. Personal narratives are not simply memories or biographical details, they are the way we give meaning to our lives, create our identities, and shape the possibilities we see for our future. As human beings, we live our lives through stories, linking experiences, emotions, and relationships into narratives that help us understand who we are and how we relate to the world.

In the context of youth work, exploring personal narratives is fundamental. Many young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, have had their stories defined or constrained by others. Social systems, stereotypes, and dominant discourses often impose narratives that tell young people who they are and what they can expect from life. These external stories can become internalised, limiting how young people imagine their futures.

The practice of working with personal narratives aims to help young people reclaim ownership of their own stories. This is at the heart of approaches like narrative therapy, developed by Michael White and David Epston,⁴⁶ which propose that people are not the problem, the problem is the problem.⁴⁷ In other words, people's lives are always richer and more complex than any single, problem-focused story might suggest. Through storytelling, individuals can discover hidden strengths, alternative explanations, and possibilities for change.

Encouraging young people to reflect on their personal narratives offers several benefits. First, it builds **self-awareness** by helping them articulate how they have become who they are. Second, it fosters **confidence and voice**, especially for those who have felt silenced or overlooked. Third, it lays the groundwork for connecting personal stories to broader community and societal narratives, helping young people see that their experiences are part of larger social patterns rather than isolated events.

Working with personal narratives often involves looking backward, but is also about looking forward, imagining new ways of living and alternative versions of one's own life story. This is where the concept of "**re-authoring**" becomes powerful. By examining how they have told their stories so far, young people can choose which parts they wish to emphasise, which meanings to challenge, and what new chapters they might write for themselves.

One effective framework for helping young people explore and reimagine their personal narratives is the **Hero's Journey**. Originally identified by Joseph Campbell, this model describes a universal pattern found in myths and stories worldwide: an ordinary person is called into adventure, faces challenges and helpers, undergoes transformation, and returns with new wisdom.⁴⁸ Many youth workers have found this narrative structure helpful because it enables young people to see their lives as a journey, rather than a series of disconnected events. It can be particularly empowering for young people who have faced hardships, as it helps them identify moments of courage, resilience, and growth within their own experiences.

⁴⁶ White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). Narrative means to therapeutic ends. Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre

⁴⁷ See <https://narrativetherapycentre.com/about/> for more information on narrative therapy

⁴⁸ See <https://www.jcf.org/learn/joseph-campbell-heros-journey> for more information on the Hero's Journey. Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) discusses the archetypal hero. <https://www.eriesd.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=35845&dataid=53662&FileName=The%20Hero%20with%20a%20Thousand%20Faces.pdf>

Storytelling at the personal level can take many forms. For some young people, spoken storytelling is most comfortable; for others, writing, drawing, music, or digital media provide safer or more engaging ways to express themselves. Digital storytelling, in particular, has become an increasingly popular method for young people to explore their identities. Combining photographs, video, voice recordings, and music, digital stories allow young people to produce a narrative that is both deeply personal and creatively expressive. This process helps them discover a sense of control over how their stories are told and who gets to hear them. Importantly, it also provides opportunities for sharing their voices in broader social conversations, challenging stereotypes and dominant narratives.

However, working with personal narratives also requires sensitivity and care. Sharing personal stories can evoke strong emotions, both positive and painful. Some young people may carry trauma or difficult memories that surface during storytelling activities. Youth workers need to create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel respected and in control. It is crucial to ensure that sharing is voluntary and that no one feels pressured to reveal more than they wish. Establishing clear agreements about confidentiality and respectful listening is essential.

Equally, it is important to adapt narrative activities to the diverse needs of groups. For some participants, especially those with limited literacy skills or language barriers, storytelling through images, objects, or creative arts can be more accessible than written or verbal narratives. Flexibility in methods allows every young person to find a way to express their story comfortably.

Personal narratives are not an endpoint but a foundation. Exploring individual stories opens pathways toward community narratives, societal analysis, and future visioning. When young people can articulate their own experiences and identities, they are better equipped to connect with others, recognise shared struggles, and begin imagining new futures. Personal narratives help young people see that they are not simply shaped by their circumstances, they can shape the story of who they are becoming and the world they want to build.

As one participant in a previous Future Narratives workshop said:

“Telling my story helped me see that my life isn’t just what happened to me. **It’s what I decide to do next.**”

In the Future Narratives Pathway, personal storytelling is the first step toward transforming both personal lives and collective futures. It reminds us that every young person is more than a single story, and that within each story lies the seed of change.

What Shapes Personal Narratives

Personal narratives are woven from countless threads in our environment and experience. Several forces strongly shape the stories we tell about who we are and what futures are possible for us:

_Family and Upbringing. Early family relationships, cultural traditions, and parental expectations provide the first stories about identity, belonging, and values. A young person growing up in a family that emphasises resilience may develop narratives of strength, while another might carry stories of caution shaped by family hardship.

_Cultural Context.

Culture influences what stories are told, how they are told, and which stories are valued. It shapes beliefs about success, gender roles, community responsibility, and how life events are interpreted.

_Community and Social Environment.

Neighbourhoods, schools, religious communities, and peer groups all influence the stories young people internalise about who they are, what groups they belong to, and how safe or threatened their future feels.

_Media and Pop Culture.

Music, films, social media, influencers, and gaming worlds flood young people with narratives about appearance, success, relationships, and the “right” way to live. These cultural messages can either expand horizons or impose narrow, stereotypical expectations.

_Personal Experiences.

Moments of triumph, trauma, migration, discrimination, love, loss, or achievement become significant events around which narratives are organised.

Recognising these influences is critical in narrative work. It helps ensure that when youth workers invite young people to tell their stories, they do so with respect, curiosity, and openness to diverse perspectives. It also helps avoid unintentionally imposing assumptions or dominant cultural narratives onto participants’ experiences.

Activity | Life Chapters Telling My Story in Book Form

Description

This activity invites participants to imagine their lives as a book, with different chapters representing significant times, experiences, or feelings. By choosing chapter titles and optionally illustrating them, young people gain insight into the narrative arc of their lives so far and begin thinking about what they want future chapters to include. It allows storytelling without requiring detailed personal disclosures, making it accessible and safe for a wide range of participants.

Purpose

To help young people reflect on their life journey as a story composed of different chapters. This builds self-awareness and a sense of agency over how future chapters might unfold, offering a gentle and creative way to explore personal identity.

Duration 60–75 minutes

Materials

- _Sheets of paper (A4 or larger)
- _Coloured markers, pens, or pencils
- _Optional: Large flipchart paper or wall space for a collective “Library of Life Chapters”
- _Optional: Sticky notes for participants who wish to share anonymously

Instructions

1 | Introduce the concept

- _Explain that our lives can be seen as books, filled with chapters that tell different parts of our story.

_Highlight that some chapters might be joyful, others challenging, some exciting, or full of change.

2 | Quiet reflection

_Ask participants to think silently:

- | “If your life were a book, what would some of your chapter titles be?”
- | “Which events, feelings, or experiences would those chapters describe?”
- | “What chapter are you in right now?”
- | “What might the next chapter be called?”

_Creative time:

- | Provide paper and markers.
- | Invite participants to write chapter titles and optionally draw simple images or symbols for each chapter.

_Optional sharing:

_In pairs or small groups, invite participants to share some of their chapters if they feel comfortable.

_Encourage listeners to ask gentle, curious questions like:

- | “What did you learn during that chapter?”
- | “How did that chapter shape who you are today?”
- | “What do you hope your next chapter will be like?”

_Collective “Library” (optional):

| Participants may anonymously write chapter titles on sticky notes and post them on a wall.

- | This creates a visual collection of diverse life experiences and shared themes.

_Group reflection:

| Conclude with a discussion:

“What was it like to think about your life as chapters in a book?”

“Did anything surprise you?”

“How does thinking about your next chapter change how you feel about the future?”

Tips for Inclusion and Diversity:

_Emphasise that sharing is always voluntary.

_Allow artistic alternatives for participants who prefer drawing, symbols, or images instead of writing.

_Be mindful of language and examples to ensure cultural relevance and sensitivity.

_Recognise that some participants may find reflecting on past chapters emotional; create space for opting out or for private reflection instead of sharing publicly.

_Consider adapting the metaphor if books or storytelling structures are culturally unfamiliar or sensitive.

Case Study 1 | My Monster Story and Biographical Impulses (Germany)

Overview

As part of the Future Narratives Training programme in Germany, participants explored personal storytelling using a range of biographical prompts. A standout activity was “My Monster Story”, where each participant created a fictional monster that symbolized a fear or inner obstacle. Other prompts included “My childhood hero” and “Three short life stories – one of them true”. The goal was to encourage reflection, creative expression, and emotional literacy.

How it went

The monster metaphor proved especially effective. Participants described rich, multi-sensory characters, giving voice to complex emotions like anxiety, shame, or pressure. Sharing stories (voluntarily) in small groups fostered a sense of connection and vulnerability. Participants were surprised by how deeply they resonated with others' monsters, finding common ground in very different life experiences.

Tips for implementation

- _Use playful formats (e.g., storytelling prompts, genre mash-ups) to lower the barrier to self-expression.
- _Ensure that sharing is optional and that the group environment feels safe and non-judgmental.
- _Offer revision time to deepen stories after feedback, this helps shift from catharsis to insight.

Case Study 2 | Three-Part Personal Stories and Story Mining (Greece)

Overview

In the early stage of the Future Narratives training, participants engaged with two storytelling tools:

_Three-Part Stories: A structured narrative exercise helping participants connect past experiences, present situations, and future aspirations through prompts into a meaningful personal story.

_Story Mining: A storytelling activity to reflect on a past experience of discrimination and use it as a lens to explore personal strengths, growth, and learning.

How it went

The Three-Part Stories activity helped participants surface formative memories and imagine future selves by weaving them into a structured personal narrative, though some noted that emotional depth was high for a first-day activity. Story Mining, inspired by narrative therapy, encouraged nuanced reflection but proved emotionally demanding. Participants recommended adapting both activities with lighter prompts when working with youth, and introducing more guidance and emotional safety for vulnerable groups.

Tips for implementation

_Use Three-Part Stories with prompts that feel playful before asking for emotional depth.

_For Story Mining, consider using visual metaphors or storytelling cards to simplify the experience for youth.

_Reframe challenging themes (e.g., from “discrimination” to “resilience” or “empowerment”) depending on your group.

Case Study 3 | Narrative Archetypes and “Letter to the Future” (Spain)

Overview

Participants worked with personal storytelling tools such as “Letter to the Future” along with the analysis of narrative archetypes based on “Future Archetypes”: Futuristic Future Archetype; Uncertainty Future Archetype; Safe Road Future Archetype; Endless Loop Road or Perpetual Goal Future Archetype; Romanticized Future Archetype; Dystopian Futures Archetype; Fake Utopian Futures Archetype (see Chapter 4) These activities helped participants reflect on their current life story, identify core beliefs, and to analyse how the future has been constructed as an archetype in itself (instead of a process of conscious self-construction), considering it as an external magical being that helps or punishes us. This activity is focused on analysing and externalising the expectations, emotions, claims, acknowledgments, and attitudes participants have with the present-future time and how the “future of life” has been outsourced to a worldview magic entity sustained by the collective imaginary.

How it went

The letter-writing was described as highly reflective and empowering. Connecting present realities with a symbolic future persona helped participants see themselves as protagonists of change. Participants especially resonated with creative reflection-action involving imagination, symbolism, and personal transformation. At the same time, it was a very emotional activity for them.

Tips for implementation

- _Use future dates and past-present life scenarios to spark a deep analysis and emotional connection.
- _Adapt archetypes visually (e.g., via cards or mood boards) to support participants who think non-linearly.
- _Follow with group sharing or journaling or a common panel to integrate insights.

Case Study 4 | Shared Timelines and Turning Points (Sweden)

Overview

In the initial workshop, participants co-created a collective timeline using large post-it notes. They added personal memories, family milestones, and global events using color codes. This exercise transitioned into the “My Story Matters” discussion, where individuals shared a turning point in their life, focusing on how the past shapes one’s sense of agency and belonging.

How it went

Many participants were hesitant at first, unsure if their stories were “worthy” or afraid of vulnerability. Facilitators used active listening and gentle prompts to build trust. By the end, participants had shared deeply personal narratives. Seeing their stories mapped together visibly fostered group cohesion and emotional openness.

Tips for implementation

- _Use simple color-coded prompts (e.g. yellow = family, pink = school, blue = world events) to ease participants into storytelling.
- _Model storytelling with facilitator examples to create safety.
- _This activity pairs well with audio clips or journaling for quieter participants.

5.3 | COMMUNITY NARRATIVES _ TELLING STORIES TOGETHER

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _ Understand how culture shapes the way we see the world, and how our families, histories, languages, religions and traditions determine how we live.
- _ Understand what community narratives are and how they shape identity, belonging, and collective memory.
- _ Recognise how community narratives can be both empowering and limiting for different individuals.
- _ Facilitate activities that help young people explore, share, and reflect on community narratives.
- _ Create safe and inclusive spaces for discussing potentially sensitive community experiences.
- _ Connect community narratives to broader discussions about societal narratives and future visioning.

After exploring personal narratives, the next step in the Future Narratives Pathway guides young people outward, into the stories shared by the groups and communities they belong to. **Community narratives** are the threads that bind individuals into a collective identity. They form the cultures that surround and shape individual identities. They are the stories that answer questions like, “Who are we?” and “What do we believe in?” and “How do we live together?”

For many young people, community narratives are a source of belonging, pride, and resilience. They might be carried through family traditions, local customs, shared language, or the history of a neighbourhood or cultural group. These stories can be a powerful force for solidarity and mutual support, reminding young people that they are part of something larger than themselves.

Yet community narratives can also carry challenges. Not every story included in a community narrative is positive or inclusive. Sometimes communities hold beliefs, expectations, or unwritten rules that exclude certain members, reinforce stereotypes, or suppress change. A young person who feels different from dominant community norms, because of gender, sexuality, beliefs, migration background, or other reasons, may experience these narratives as limiting or painful.

Community narratives are also not static, they are shaped, sustained, and sometimes disrupted by the forces and events that touch people's lives. These collective stories are kept alive through family traditions, communal rituals, local histories, and everyday conversations. Schools, places of worship, neighbourhood spaces, and local media all play roles in reinforcing the sense of "who we are" as a community. These narratives often persist across generations, providing a sense of continuity and belonging.

Yet moments of crisis, upheaval, or disaster can profoundly shake these narratives. During social unrest, political upheaval, or natural disasters, the stories that once provided certainty and identity may fracture under the weight of new realities. Communities may find that the narratives they've relied on no longer fit their experiences or fail to explain sudden changes in their circumstances. For young people, this disruption can create confusion, anxiety, or a sense of loss. At the same time, crises can become moments of transformation, giving rise to new narratives of solidarity, resilience, or resistance. People may tell stories of coming together in mutual aid, redefining what community means in times of hardship.

Community narratives also shift when people join new communities, whether by choice or through forced migration, displacement, or other circumstances beyond their control. Individuals arriving in a new environment carry narratives from their past that may or may not align with the dominant stories in their new setting. This can produce a powerful dissonance. A young person might feel caught between maintaining loyalty to familiar narratives from their culture of origin and navigating new expectations and values in the community they now inhabit. This tension can affect identity, belonging, and mental well-being, leaving individuals unsure where they fit or whether their own story has a place in the collective narrative.

Sometimes, personal narratives and community narratives come into direct contradiction. A young person's story of self-discovery, identity, or beliefs might clash with community expectations or values. For example, someone coming to terms with their sexual orientation or political views may find their personal truth unwelcome in their community's dominant narrative. This contradiction can lead to feelings of isolation, secrecy, or conflict. Yet it can also spark change. Individuals who speak their truths can become catalysts for expanding or transforming community narratives, helping to create spaces where more diverse stories belong.

Working with community narratives in youth work helps young people explore both sides of this reality. It allows them to celebrate the stories that give their communities strength while also identifying narratives that might be harmful, outdated, or in need of transformation. This process encourages critical thinking and opens the door to imagining how communities can evolve.

Community narratives are shaped by many influences. Family networks often carry stories of migration, survival, or cultural continuity. Schools, religious institutions, youth organisations, and neighbourhood spaces contribute their own narratives about identity, belonging, and social expectations. Popular culture, too,

influences community stories, through music, sports, social media, and the representation of communities in news and entertainment. For young people today, even online communities may feel as real and significant as physical ones, creating new spaces for shared narratives.

For youth workers, engaging with community narratives means helping young people to:

- _Recognise the collective dimensions of their identity.
- _Discover common ground with others who may seem different at first.
- _Reflect critically on community beliefs and practices.
- _Feel empowered to contribute to reshaping narratives where needed.

One of the most effective ways to explore community narratives is through story circles. [Story circles](#) draw on the universal human tradition of sharing experiences in groups. Sitting in a circle, each participant takes a turn telling a story related to a common theme, for example, “A time I felt proud of my community,” or “A time I felt excluded.” The stories shared are often short and informal but carry deep emotional and cultural weight. Listening without interruption fosters respect, empathy, and connection. Many youth workers find that story circles quickly reveal both the joys and the tensions within community life.

Creative activities are another way to surface community narratives. Groups might create a map of their neighbourhood, placing drawings, words, or photos on locations that hold meaning. They might write collective poems about community identity, perform short theatre scenes about local life, or produce digital collages of images and music representing their shared experiences. These activities help young people express community stories visually and emotionally, making abstract concepts tangible.

It’s crucial, however, for youth workers to approach community narrative work with sensitivity. Talking about community can bring up memories of conflict, discrimination, or exclusion. Youth workers should ensure that participation is always voluntary and that young people have the option to share less personal stories if they wish. Creating ground rules for respectful listening and confidentiality is essential.

Exploring community narratives often leaves young people with a sense of connection and shared purpose. As one participant in a previous project shared:

“I thought I was the only one who felt like an outsider.
But hearing everyone’s stories, I realise so many
of us share the same feelings.
Now it feels like
[we’re not alone.](#)”

In the Future Narratives Pathway, working with community narratives builds the bridge from personal reflection to societal awareness. It reminds young people that they are members of interconnected communities with the power to question, sustain, and transform the stories that shape their collective future.

Activity | Crossing Stories, Old and New Communities

Description

This activity invites participants to reflect on times when they or someone they know entered a new community, either by choice or due to circumstances like migration, displacement, or crisis. Through drawing and storytelling, participants explore what narratives they brought with them, what new narratives they encountered, and how these stories sometimes align, or clash. The goal is to help young people understand the dynamics of narrative change and the feelings that come with navigating between communities.

Purpose

To help young people explore how community narratives can change during times of crisis, migration, or life transitions, and to reflect on how personal narratives may align with or contradict community stories. The activity encourages empathy, critical thinking, and recognition of diverse experiences.

Duration 60–75 minutes total

Materials Needed

- _Paper and pens
- _Coloured markers
- _Optional: large sheets of flipchart paper for group work

Instructions

1 | Introduction

- _Explain that communities have shared stories about “who we are” and “how we live.”

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These stories can change during crises or when people join new communities.

_Emphasise that this can be a sensitive topic and that participants should only share what feels safe for them.

2 | Individual Reflection

_Ask participants to think about a time when they or someone they know:

| Moved to a new community (e.g. new school, new country, new neighbourhood).

| Experienced a crisis that changed how their community functioned or felt.

_Encourage them to reflect:

| “What stories did you carry with you?”

| “What new stories did you encounter?”

| “Did any of your personal beliefs or experiences feel different from the new community’s stories?”

| “How did that feel?”

3 | Drawing Exercise

_Invite participants to draw two overlapping circles (like a Venn diagram).

| One circle represents “My Old Community’s Stories.”

| The other represents “My New Community’s Stories.”

_In the overlap, write or draw stories or values that felt similar.

_In the non-overlapping parts, note stories or values that felt different or in conflict.

4 | Sharing (Optional)

_In pairs or small groups, participants can share:

| How it felt to belong to different communities.

| Any challenges or positive surprises they experienced.

| Whether they feel they have blended old and new stories.

5 | Group Reflection

_Facilitate a group discussion:

- | “How do community stories help us feel we belong?”
- | “What happens when our personal stories don’t match the community’s stories?”
- | “Can new communities change our personal narratives for better or worse?”
- | “What can communities do to help people feel included?”

Tips for Inclusion and Diversity

- _Acknowledge that discussions about crisis, migration, or exclusion can be emotional or painful; make clear that sharing is always voluntary.
- _Provide alternatives like drawing symbols or writing single words for those who prefer not to share detailed stories.
- _Avoid assumptions that all participants have migration experiences; allow room for other types of community transitions (e.g. changing schools, joining a new group).
- _Be mindful of language; terms like “community,” “migration,” or “crisis” can mean very different things to different participants.
- _Offer extra support for participants who become emotional; let them step out or speak privately if needed.

Case Study 5 | Re-Authoring Collective Narratives (Germany)

Overview

Facilitators led an exploration of dominant societal narratives, phrases like “Früher war alles besser” (“Everything was better in the past”) or “Ohne Schulabschluss bist du nichts” (“You’re nothing without a degree”). Participants critically examined these messages in group discussion, then engaged in a “re-authoring” exercise: collaboratively crafting alternative narratives that were more empowering, inclusive, and hopeful.

How it went

The process helped participants recognize how deeply they had internalized limiting messages. Through dialogue, they unpacked shared frustrations and reframed them. For instance, “Without a diploma you’re nothing” became “Learning looks different for everyone, knowledge isn’t only academic.” This exercise built empathy and solidarity, especially among participants from different backgrounds.

Tips for implementation

- _Start with real-life examples or media references to ground abstract narratives.
- _Use a facilitated structure to prevent dominant voices from steering the group.
- _Consider documenting the re-authored narratives (e.g. posters, zines, videos) to give them visibility and power.

Case Study 6 | Shared Visions through Collective Narratives (Greece)

Overview

Participants explored how personal stories interweave into community narratives. After individual storytelling, they moved into collective reflection, comparing personal timelines and mapping shared obstacles and sources of support. Through a flipchart-based group process, they visualised their “collective power”, identifying social structures, allies, and constraints in their communities.

How it went

The process illuminated overlapping challenges, particularly around housing, precarity, and identity, and emphasized community as a source of support and change. While participants appreciated this collective turn, they stressed the importance of adapting the language and structure for younger audiences, possibly with gamified or artistic elements.

Tips for implementation

- _Use drawing, mapping, or collage instead of abstract discussion to visualize collective experiences.
- _Facilitate a debrief to reflect on shared values, not just shared struggles.
- _Document the process: community narratives are powerful when made visible.

Case Study 7 | “Basic Circle of Connection” Narrative Construction Session (Spain)

Overview

This session explored how narratives and future narratives impact, nourish, and transform us on a conscious and unconscious level and can significantly influence our own communications, narratives, and perceptions of the present and the future.

This session analysed the power of words, but especially the power of the real and symbolic meaning of words and narratives, and how they shape our perception of the world through their impact on our emotional system. Based on the tool ‘Basic Circle of Connection: words, narratives, impact & realities’ included in the publication ‘European guidelines for the innovative use of narrative and storytelling in the empowerment of young people’ (of the first iteration of Future Narratives), news items, narratives, communications and future narratives were analysed and discussed, focusing on the personal and collective impact that the messages and their implicit intentions had on the group and how the information contained therein fed and transformed the minds of participants with and without self-control.

Additional information was included on communication patterns, with a special focus on Joseph Campbell's ‘Hero's Journey’ myth and how this narrative structure is present in most formal and informal narratives, including fiction. The analysis of this type of communication and narrative pattern and of the archetypes that can be deduced from it is particularly important for raising awareness, especially of social beliefs and expectations in the face of desired or unforeseen situations, challenges, and events, and therefore of their future projection. The widely used and prevalent narrative based on the ‘Hero's Journey’ can be a real path of discovery or an unreal and artificial loop that can be difficult to escape and that reduces the paradigms for creating new presents and better futures.

How it went

The analysis of different narratives and future narratives from different

perspectives, approaches, and using the game of impacts included in “Basic Circle of Connection: words, narratives, impact & realities” tool is particularly enriching for groups and generates very deep and reflective debates. To this end, including different, even antagonistic, narratives of analysis on different topics (including the most current ones) is one of the keys.

Tips for implementation

- _Use storytelling structures like the Hero's Journey to make community challenges feel transformational.
- _Encourage symbolic or metaphorical storytelling, especially with youth not used to public speaking.
- _Map stories spatially (e.g. paths, bridges, crossroads) to support embodied understanding.

Case Study 8 | Group Mapping and Youth Voice Collage (Sweden)

Overview

Youth groups explored community-level concerns through mind-mapping sessions. Each group chose a topic (e.g., “work & economy”, “social media & mental health”, “technology & AI”) and mapped how future trends could reshape youth life. These maps became the base for group “mini-scenarios” and collaged storytelling posters, imagining how their communities might evolve by 2050.

How it went

Participants enjoyed the creative freedom. The mind-map structure helped make complex issues feel manageable, and drawing connections between present struggles and future outcomes encouraged systemic thinking. Creating posters with narrative fragments helped anchor their ideas visually and emotionally.

Tips for implementation

- _Begin with playful prompts (e.g. “A Monday in 2050”) to open creative thinking.
- _Use visual materials (collage, colored paper, symbols) to include participants who prefer non-verbal expression.
- _Encourage documentation: many groups took photos and audio clips as part of their stories

5.4 |

SOCIETAL NARRATIVES AND MYTHS _ THE POWER OF WORDS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _ Understand what societal narratives are and how they shape individuals and communities.
- _ Recognise the role of societal narratives in maintaining or challenging social inequalities.
- _ Facilitate activities that help young people critically examine dominant cultural, media, and political narratives.
- _ Support young people in creating counter-narratives and imagining alternative social realities.
- _ Create safe spaces for discussions about potentially sensitive societal issues, enabling an environment where new realities can be co-created through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

As young people explore their personal stories and the narratives of their communities, the next step in the Future Narratives Pathway invites them to look outward even further, to the powerful, often invisible stories told by society at large. **Societal narratives** are the broad cultural, historical, and ideological stories that shape how entire populations understand the world, define what is “normal,” and determine who belongs or who is left out.

These narratives are embedded in laws, media, education systems, religious teachings, political speeches, economic structures, and cultural traditions. They tell people what our collective values are, what success looks like, who deserves respect, what kinds of families are acceptable, who is seen as dangerous, and which futures are considered possible or impossible.

Societal narratives are constantly shaped and reshaped by powerful forces, many of which operate on global and local scales. **Technology** is one of the most significant drivers of change in societal narratives today. The rise of social media, artificial intelligence, and digital communication has transformed how stories are shared and whose voices are amplified. Technology can create new spaces for marginalized voices to be heard, allowing young people to challenge dominant narratives and build movements across borders. Yet it can also reinforce harmful stereotypes, spread misinformation, and create echo chambers that deepen divisions.

Youth workers find themselves navigating this complex landscape, supporting young people to critically assess digital narratives and manage the emotional impact of constant online engagement.

Political systems and ideologies also shape societal narratives profoundly. Laws, policies, and political discourse define who belongs, who is excluded, and what values society prioritizes. Narratives about social welfare, immigration, public safety, and freedom are often tools used by those in power to maintain control or pursue specific agendas. For young people, these narratives influence their sense of possibility and belonging. A political climate that promotes fear and division can leave young people feeling alienated or targeted, while more inclusive political narratives can empower youth to participate in civic life. Youth workers play a crucial role in helping young people process political messages, encouraging critical thinking and supporting participation in democratic processes.

The **environment and natural resources** have always been foundational in shaping societal narratives, but climate change and environmental crises have brought this force into sharper focus. Narratives about progress and economic growth are now increasingly challenged by stories of ecological limits and the urgent need for sustainability. Environmental disasters or changing weather patterns can swiftly reshape a society's narrative about security, resilience, and responsibility. Young people today are acutely aware of these narratives, often experiencing eco-anxiety or a sense of urgency to act. Youth workers must help balance this deep concern with hope and agency, supporting young people to find their place in movements for environmental justice and sustainable futures.

Conflict and war dramatically reshape societal narratives, sometimes overnight. They redefine who is considered friend or enemy, who deserves protection, and whose suffering is visible or invisible. In times of war, narratives of nationalism, survival, and sacrifice become dominant, while other stories may be silenced. For young people who have experienced conflict directly or indirectly, these narratives profoundly influence identity, trust, and visions of the future. For youth workers, engaging with young people affected by war or displacement requires immense sensitivity, trauma-informed approaches, and awareness of how deeply these societal narratives can wound or empower.

Scarcity or abundance of resources, such as food, water, housing, or economic opportunities, also creates powerful societal narratives. When resources are scarce, narratives of competition, fear, or exclusion often take hold, influencing attitudes toward migration, welfare, and who is perceived as deserving of help. Conversely, in times or places of relative abundance, narratives may focus more on inclusion, diversity, and collective well-being. These narratives directly shape policy responses to issues like poverty, education, health, and social welfare. For young people, resource-driven narratives affect access to opportunities and feelings of fairness and hope. Youth workers often find themselves helping young people navigate systems that can either support or constrain their dreams, advocating for more equitable narratives and policies.

Broad social debates enter the intimate worlds of young people's lives. Societal narratives influence how young people see themselves, how others see them,

and what futures they believe are possible. For youth workers, understanding how these forces intersect is essential. It enables them to help young people critically question dominant stories, build resilience in the face of harmful narratives, and participate in creating new narratives that reflect justice, diversity, and hope.

For young people, societal narratives can often feel like an invisible force pressing upon them. They may grow up absorbing dominant messages about gender roles, body image, wealth, race, migration, or who is “worthy” of being heard. These stories can provide a sense of stability and shared meaning, but they can also limit imagination and reinforce inequalities.

Importantly, societal narratives are not merely abstract concepts. They become deeply personal when they clash with an individual’s or a community’s lived reality. A young person might believe they can succeed in any field, only to encounter narratives in the media suggesting people like them don’t belong there. Or they might grow up hearing societal stories that define their identity as “wrong” or “less valuable.” Such experiences can lead to confusion, shame, anger, or even silence.

Yet societal narratives can also be challenged and changed. Throughout history, social movements have emerged precisely because people refused to accept the stories being told about who they are or what their future should be. Activists, artists, writers, and everyday people have created counter-narratives, alternative stories that resist dominant discourses and offer new visions of justice, belonging, and possibility. From civil rights campaigns to climate justice movements, counter-narratives have been critical tools for transforming societies.

In youth work, exploring societal narratives helps young people:

- _Become aware of the “big stories” shaping their lives, often without their conscious awareness.
- _Critically question which stories serve justice and inclusion, and which perpetuate harm or exclusion.
- _Recognise their own power to contribute to counter-narratives and new societal visions.
- _Connect personal experiences to broader social and political contexts.

Techniques for working with societal narratives can include analysing media articles, discussing popular films or music, exploring news stories, and examining public policies. It can also involve creative processes like writing alternative news headlines, making protest art, or devising theatre scenes that expose contradictions in dominant narratives.

As always, this work requires sensitivity. Discussions about societal narratives can quickly touch on deeply held beliefs, political views, or painful experiences of discrimination and injustice. Youth workers must create spaces where multiple perspectives can be heard without shaming or silencing anyone. It’s essential to approach these conversations with curiosity, respect, and a commitment to listening.

Societal narratives can be both oppressive and liberating. Helping young people examine these forces gives them the tools to see how the world operates,

and to imagine how it could be different. As one participant in a Future Narratives workshop expressed:

“Before, I thought the world was just
the way it is.
Now I realise people made these rules and stories,
and we can change them.”

In the Future Narratives Pathway, working with societal narratives is crucial for building bridges between personal reflection, community belonging, and collective futures. It equips young people to become potential authors of new social realities.

Activity | Mapping Forces and Stories

Description

Participants work in groups to create a visual map connecting major societal forces to specific narratives and their impacts on individuals and communities.

They explore how technology, politics, environmental issues, war, and resource scarcity shape the stories societies tell and how these narratives influence everyday life, identities, and perceptions of the future. This helps young people see that societal narratives are not fixed but are created and can be challenged.

Purpose

To help young people identify and analyse the large forces that shape societal narratives (e.g. technology, politics, environment, war, resources) and to explore how these forces influence stories about identity, community, and future possibilities.

This activity encourages critical thinking, empathy, and connection between personal experiences and broader social dynamics.

Duration 60–75 minutes total

Materials Needed

_Large sheets of flipchart paper or whiteboard.

_Coloured markers and pens.

_Sticky notes.

_Optional:

printed images or magazine cut-outs representing different societal forces (e.g. politicians, climate imagery, news headlines).

Instructions

1 | Introduction

- _Explain that societies are influenced by powerful forces, like technology, politics, the environment, conflicts, and resources, that shape the stories people tell and believe.
- _Emphasise that understanding these forces helps us question whose stories are told, whose are silenced, and what futures are imagined.

2 | Brainstorming Forces:

- _On a large sheet, write the following headings around the page:
 - | Technology
 - | Politics
 - | Environment
 - | War/Conflict
 - | Resources (e.g. money, food, housing)
- | Briefly discuss what each force means and give examples relevant to the group's context.

3 | Connecting Forces to Narratives:

- _Divide participants into small groups.
- _Ask each group to choose one force and discuss:
 - | What stories does society tell about this topic? (e.g. "Technology will solve all problems," or "There's not enough for everyone.")
 - | How do these stories affect people's identities, communities, or opportunities?
 - | How do these stories influence how we think about the future?

4 | Creating the Map:

- _Groups write key words, phrases, or draw images on sticky notes and place them around their chosen force on the large sheet.
- _Optional: Add magazine cut-outs or images to visualise ideas.

5 | Sharing and Discussion:

- _Groups present their sections of the map to the whole group.
- _Facilitate discussion:
 - | Did any patterns emerge across different forces?
 - | Are there stories that feel harmful or unfair?
 - | Can we imagine alternative stories that would be more just or hopeful?
 - | How might young people help change these narratives?

6 | Closing Reflection:

- _Invite participants to share one insight or new idea they are taking away from the activity.

Tips for Inclusion and Diversity

- _Acknowledge that topics like war, politics, and scarcity can be sensitive; remind participants that they can choose how much they wish to share.
- _Encourage participants to draw or use symbols if writing or speaking feels challenging.
- _Be mindful of cultural and political contexts; avoid assuming all participants share the same views or experiences.
- _Allow space for emotional reactions, especially if discussing personal experiences related to conflict, migration, or discrimination.
- _Highlight that societal narratives are diverse and that there is no single “correct” perspective.

Case Study 9 | Causal Layered Analysis and Narrative Myths Workshop (Germany)

Overview

Participants engaged in Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) to examine societal myths shaping collective futures. Using examples from TV, politics, and everyday beliefs, the group identified metaphors and deep cultural assumptions (e.g., “The world is falling apart” or “Progress means growth”). They then practiced “narrative reframing”, retelling societal myths in ways that open space for different futures.

How it went

The CLA framework helped participants think in layers: beyond symptoms and policies toward deeper belief systems. One group reimagined the narrative “Technology will save us” into “Community resilience builds real safety”. The approach was especially effective with participants interested in activism or education.

Tips for implementation

- _Keep the CLA framework accessible by using visual templates and metaphors.
- _Encourage artistic responses (e.g. drawing, performance) to express deeper cultural layers.
- _Allow time for emotional processing, some myths may feel personal or triggering.

Case Study 10 | Exploring Urban Myths with Causal Layered Analysis (Greece)

Overview

The group applied Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) to challenge deep-rooted narratives around housing and public space. They explored myths like “home equals ownership”, “public space is unsafe”, and “Airbnb is good for touristic development and the local economy”, and worked through the four layers of the CLA: Litany, Social Causes, Worldview, and Myth/Metaphor.

How it went

Participants found the method eye-opening. They traced surface challenges to deeper assumptions about individualism, capitalism, and ownership. However, many noted that CLA is cognitively demanding and needs simplified formats for youth. Suggestions included visual icebergs, or case-study videos.

Tips for implementation

- _Break down CLA into four separate sessions or support the approach visually.
- _Use media, advertisements, or neighborhood photos as “narrative prompts”.
- _Invite artistic or metaphorical expressions of worldviews and myths.

Case Study 11 | The Bucket List Futures Session (Spain)

Overview

During the session, each participant was asked to create 'A Narrative of her/his bucket list Futures.'

They were presented with two options:

_One option was to describe their best desired future, with the initial instruction that in their projection, visualisation, and narration, their chosen reality was 'everything they desired, wanted, or chose because all these desires already were really and totally possible. And a second guideline: choose and narrate what they would really like to experience and what you would like more people to experience without any doubt.

_A second option where they would create a 'story-like' narrative in which "archetypal" characters representing the 'past,' 'present,' and 'future' would interact, giving each character a personality. This option could be a creative, reflective narrative, written in a humorous or even scathing tone.

To facilitate narrative creation, they were offered some examples from Chapter 6: 'The Bucket List Futures' and from the bonus chapter 'Tale: Past, Present and Future at the living room' from the publication "European guidelines for the innovative use of narrative and storytelling in the empowerment of young people" (from the first iteration of Future Narratives).

How it went

This is a reflective, introspective, and powerful process of analysis. The act of putting down on paper a story that reflects facts, contexts, details, ways of life, relationships, communications, and assuming as a commitment that this would be a reality that they undoubtedly wanted to live right now, makes them consciously and unconsciously create realities with almost no restrictions, because the game of applying fantastic or fictional narrative frees the mind and the emotional system and is one of the most liberating forms of projection.

As for creating stories by developing archetypes or characters imagined or assigned to 'Present,' 'Past,' and 'Future,' this is also an absolutely liberating and symbolic exercise, as it reflects the vision, projection, and relationship we have with ourselves or how much we have projected onto 'a magical entity,' our destiny. In addition, the stories that come out are usually very entertaining and enjoyable to read.

Tips for implementation

_Offer this session to the group of participants when they already have basic knowledge of the topic and when you believe they are ready to explore, with minimal restrictions, the projection of futures 'where they really want to live.'

_There is one basic rule: stories and tales are only shared if each participant wants to, although a reflective and participatory group discussion can be held.

_The stories or tales must be created by the participants themselves, either handwritten (recommended) or typed on a device, but under no circumstances may they be created from external digital generative resources, as this exercise would not serve as a process of analysis or cognitive or emotional reflection.

Case Study 12 | Debating Futures with Embodied Scenarios (Sweden)

Overview

In this workshop, participants used embodied storytelling techniques (e.g. freeze-frames, forum theatre) to perform scenarios about the future. One group staged a debate on AI laws and freedom, while another explored youth mental health in hyper-digital societies. They used emotion and body language to express societal tensions and hidden myths, like “tech will solve everything” or “success means always being productive.”

How it went

The drama format was highly engaging. It surfaced emotional layers often left out of discussions and allowed participants to explore discomfort and contradiction safely. Several said they “felt the future in their bones”, not just in theory.

Tips fro implementation

- _Use short warm-ups (mirroring games, tableaux) before deeper scenarios.
- _Debrief every scene to unpack emotional and symbolic content.
- _Avoid overly abstract themes, start with relatable experiences (school, family, work) and scale up.

5.5 | CO-CREATING FUTURE WORLDS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Understand the concept and purpose of Futures Literacy Labs (FLLs), their relevance in youth work, and how they build on narrative exploration.
- _Recognise how Future Narratives integrates storytelling and futures thinking, using FLLs to help participants to reveal, disrupt, and reimagine stories of the future.
- _Guide participants through each stage of an FLL, supporting the transition from narrative reflection to futures exploration.
- _Modify FLL activities to suit different age groups, cultures, and group needs, addressing any emotional or practical challenges.
- _Use reflection and assessment tools to process experiences and measure the impact of narrative-based FLLs on participants' thinking, emotions, and agency.

The stages of the Future Narratives Pathway have explored the power of stories in shaping how young people understand themselves, connect with their communities, question societal norms, and imagine the future. We have examined how **personal narratives** help individuals find meaning and identity, how **community narratives** foster belonging and solidarity, and how **societal narratives** influence perceptions of justice, progress, and possibility. Together, these narratives form the fabric through which young people make sense of the world and their place within it.

Futures Literacy has emerged as a central concept throughout this pathway, offering tools to critically examine the stories we hold about what is possible and to imagine alternative futures beyond the limits of current assumptions. It is both a mindset and a set of practical techniques that empower young people and those who work with them to become more conscious of how they use the future to interpret the present and to act with greater agency.

Futures Literacy Labs (FLLs) represent one of the primary practical applications

of all the content shared in this curriculum. Within Future Narratives, they bring together storytelling, creativity, and futures thinking into a structured, participatory process. FLLs are designed to help individuals and groups surface hidden assumptions about the future, disrupt habitual ways of thinking, and co-create new narratives that open space for transformation. They provide a space where young people can connect personal experiences to wider social and cultural contexts, and where they can imagine futures that reflect justice, inclusion, and hope.

FLLs are not the only way to bring together narratives and futures thinking. During our work with young people, a variety of creative approaches have been inspired by Futures Literacy principles and tools. These include using foresight methods such as futures wheels, scenario-building, and backcasting maps alongside storytelling formats like personal manifestos, collaborative story creation, and speculative roleplay. Some activities blend imaginative exercises with practical action planning, supporting young people to link their visions of the future to concrete steps in the present. Others encourage participants to express future scenarios through writing, performance, digital media, or visual arts, often culminating in public sharing or group reflection.

This diversity of methods demonstrates that Futures Literacy can be adapted to suit different contexts and groups, enriching the process of **co-creating future worlds**. Whether through structured labs or other narrative-based activities, the aim remains the same: to empower young people to explore, challenge, and reimagine the stories that shape their futures, and to turn their insights into meaningful action.

In this stage, we will explore what Futures Literacy Labs are, how they work, and how they can be integrated into youth work as a powerful method for engaging young people in shaping their own futures. Case studies from our project then present the diversity of ways in which the FLL model can be adapted and reimaged. This stage serves as a bridge between the conceptual foundations laid in earlier sections and the hands-on tools youth workers can use to create meaningful change.

Futures Literacy Labs

Futures Literacy Labs (FLL) invite a group of people to think about the future. They bring together anticipatory assumptions on different perspectives of futures with Collective Intelligence Knowledge Creation. FLLs are a key tool in helping participants understand their anticipatory assumptions- the underlying beliefs and expectations that shape how individuals and communities imagine and interact with the future- opening up new possibilities for their ideas about what the future could be.

Within the Future Narratives approach, the structure of Futures Literacy Labs is especially valuable. What distinguishes our method is that we base each lab on the narrative work already done with participants. By first exploring personal, community, and societal stories, we help participants gain a deep understanding

of the narratives that influence their worldview. The lab then builds on this foundation, using storytelling as a springboard for futures thinking. This sequence ensures that futures exploration is rooted in lived experience and reflective practice, making the process more relevant, inclusive, and transformative for young people.

Choosing a Topic for Your Futures Literacy Lab

A successful Futures Literacy Lab begins with **selecting a topic** that resonates with the group. This can happen in **two ways**:

_Bottom-up: The group members themselves decide on a topic that is meaningful and important to them. This approach supports ownership and engagement.

_Top-down: The facilitator or organization defines a topic in advance. This can be useful if time is limited or if the lab needs to address a specific issue.

Topics relevant to young adults may include:

_Identity and community: Exploring questions like “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?”

_Balancing family and society: Navigating the expectations of family, culture, tradition, and religion while seeking personal independence.

_Beliefs and media: Considering “What do I believe?” – including questions about religion, social media, technology, and trust in information (e.g., AI and deep fakes).

_Participation, economic security, and social justice: Discussing how to achieve financial stability, fairness, and opportunities for all.

_Respect: Addressing the need to be seen, heard, and valued for one’s abilities, needs, and concerns.

_Physical and mental health: Strategies and choices for staying healthy in body and mind.

_Megatrends: Understanding large-scale social, economic, or technological trends and their impact on personal lives.

| Note: For some groups, especially those facing social or economic disadvantages, this topic may feel less immediately relevant.

Encourage participants to select a topic that matters to them, as this will foster deeper engagement and more meaningful exploration throughout the Futures Literacy Lab.

The Phases of a Futures Literacy Lab

FLLs proceed through four phases:⁴⁹

FLL Phase 1 - Reveal

This is the first phase of the Futures Literacy Lab, focusing on two key steps: imagining the expected future and the desirable future. The goal is to reveal how

⁴⁹ For additional guidance on designing and running a Futures Literacy Lab, see: UNESCO, & Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University. (2023). Futures Literacy Laboratory Playbook: An Essentials Guide for Co-Designing a Lab to Explore How and Why We Anticipate. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000385485>

participants think about change, and to surface the stories and assumptions that shape these views. Causal Layered Analysis (explored in Chapter 5.3) can usefully be incorporated into this stage.

Step 1_Expected Future 20XX

_Individual reflection: Each participant considers the chosen topic (for example, “the future of education”) and imagines what they realistically expect it to look like in a specific year (e.g., 2035).

_Group discussion: Participants share their expectations in small groups or as a whole group, depending on the size of the group. Together, they look for the commonalities and differences between their ideas of the future, and any blind spots, i.e. things that might have been missed.

_Method: Writing down ideas, then discussing them as a group.

Step 2: Desirable Future 20XX

_Dream journey: The facilitator guides participants through a short visualisation or “dream journey”, inviting them to imagine their ideal version of the future for the chosen topic (for example, “What would you like the future of education to look like in 20XX?”).

_Pair walk and discussion: Participants pair up and take a short walk together, sharing and discussing their visions for a desirable future.

_Collective drawing: Returning to the group, participants work together to create a collective visual representation of their desirable future. This can be done on a large sheet of paper or a wall, using drawing or collage.

_Group reflection: The group reviews the collective drawing and discusses common ideas and themes, differences in visions, and any blind spots or aspects that may have been overlooked.

_Methods: Guided visualisation (“dream journey”), individual reflection and writing, pair “walk and talk”, group drawing/painting.

Step 3_Reveal anticipatory assumptions based on Steps 1 & 2

In this step, the facilitator guides participants to reflect on the differences between their expected and desirable futures. Through group discussion and targeted questions, participants explore the beliefs, values, and stories that shape their assumptions about what the future will be like. This process helps everyone to recognise how personal experiences, cultural narratives, and current realities influence their views of the future, highlighting the assumptions that may limit or expand their sense of what is possible.

Indicative questions

_What facts do you have for this future forecast? A fact is clear and verifiable (e.g. quantitative trends, data).

_What narratives and values does my culture convey so that I come to these assumptions (books, films, politics)?

_What sayings and mottos are there in your family or culture? Could they have influenced your assumptions?

_What personal stories might have affected you?

FLL Phase 2 – Reframe

In this phase, participants create their own visions of the future, which helps them clarify their goals, find hope and motivation to address challenging issues, and become more creative. This process also encourages participants to discuss and share different perspectives, hopes and fears, allowing them to identify both shared ideas and differences within the group.

The key to this phase is the introduction by the facilitator of an unexpected or provocative story about the future related to the chosen theme. This story should be prepared in advance and can be presented in various formats (spoken, written, or visual).

Participants will listen to, read, or watch this unusual future scenario. Afterwards, they will explore and analyse this future in greater depth by following three steps. This phase is designed to help participants challenge their assumptions, consider new possibilities, and expand their understanding of what the future could be.

The Futures Wheel activity (presented in Chapter 4.2) is a very useful tool for this stage of the Lab, which can be held through three steps:

_Step 1: Participants use the Future Wheel exercise to analyse the possible outcomes of an unexpected development in the future.

_Step 2: Participants are asked to create a chain of stories by imagining a day they live in such a future. The first person to speak describes the first thing they would do in the future. Afterwards, one by one, each participant continues with the rest of the daily activities they would do in the future, until the last participant closes the story by bringing the protagonist to bed. Each person should try to incorporate in their story elements that present the different future realities compared with the present.

_Step 3: For the last step, participants could creatively express their daily lives in the unexpected future. They could use theatre techniques, visual art, film-making, or storytelling, as suits the needs and resources of the group.

FLL Phase 3 - Rethink

In this third phase of the Futures Lab, participants focus on defining the key questions that are essential for creating new and preferred futures. This stage encourages participants to become more specific and targeted in their thinking, helping them concentrate on particular topics that matter most for influencing the future.

During the Rethink phase, participants, supported by the facilitator, review and compare the insights and outcomes from the previous phases of the lab. By reflecting on both the expected and desirable futures and the reframed perspectives, they are guided to identify important questions that must be addressed to move closer to their preferred futures. This process involves

considering which topics and issues repeatedly arise, as well as recognising any new challenges or areas of uncertainty that have surfaced.

Participants are encouraged to think deeply about strategies for moving forward, drawing on their reflections about the present. They consider what questions they need to ask themselves today to better understand the current situation, and reflect on what feels unclear, troublesome, or possibly overlooked. The essential task in this phase is to shift from simply identifying “what” is happening to exploring “how” change can occur. It can also be valuable to investigate the motives and actors connected to these topics, asking “why” these issues matter and “who” is involved.

_Step 1: Participants review and compare the topics and issues that emerged in the earlier phases of the Futures Lab. They discuss which concerns or themes stood out for them personally and as a group, identifying areas of overlap as well as unique perspectives. This collective comparison helps clarify which topics are most relevant and meaningful for the group to explore further.

_Step 2: Participants are encouraged to formulate research questions related to these topics. They consider what they need to understand or investigate in order to make progress toward their preferred futures. These questions might address uncertainties, challenges, or opportunities for change. The aim is to move from general ideas to specific, actionable questions.

_Step 3: Once everyone has drafted their questions, participants share them with the group. Through discussion, they look for connections and similarities between questions, working together to merge overlapping ideas or rephrase questions for greater clarity. This collaborative process may also spark new questions or reveal deeper layers of inquiry that had not yet been considered.

_Step 4: The group works together to agree on three to four main questions that will guide their further exploration and action. Reaching consensus on these key questions helps focus the group’s efforts and ensures that everyone is invested in the topics selected.

If time allows, participants can deepen their inquiry by examining the historical trends, regulations, or cultural influences that shape their chosen issues. Exploring how the past continues to impact the present can offer valuable insights and help uncover root causes or hidden dynamics. This additional step requires more time but can significantly enrich the understanding and relevance of the research questions developed in this phase.

FLL Phase 4 - Act

In this final phase of the Futures Literacy Lab, participants are encouraged to put their insights and ideas into action. This stage helps them become more open-minded and willing to experiment with new and alternative possibilities for the future. Through creative activities and discussions, participants experience collective ways of thinking, challenge their own assumptions, and become more confident in expressing and exchanging their views, beliefs, and values.

During the Act phase, participants use everything they have learned so far to take practical steps toward the futures they have imagined together. This may involve designing and testing new ideas, developing action plans, or collaborating on small experiments or projects. The facilitator supports the group in exploring different approaches, encouraging creativity, and fostering an atmosphere where everyone feels empowered to contribute and try out new solutions. As participants share and discuss their actions, they are challenged to think in new ways, learn from each other, and continuously adapt their strategies. This phase is about turning reflection and vision into meaningful and creative action, helping participants see themselves as active agents in shaping the future.

_Step 1: Participants work on the following questions:

- | What responses to these questions can we already give today?
- | How can we change our narratives?
- | What actions or projects can we make to support this change?

They need to answer these questions bearing in mind three different levels: the individual, the community, and wider society.

- a | They take some time to work on their ideas and thoughts individually.
- b | They come together and share their discoveries and thoughts, make comparisons and choose 2-3 ideas that stand out the most and respond to the needs as a group.
- c | Test how these ideas, new narratives or realities may look on a community level. It might be useful to think about the effects more as a system being influenced by and having influence on more than one aspect at the same time.
- d | Create new myths for these narratives (see Causal Layered Analysis).

_Step 2: Participants should have time to visualise and express the new narratives and ideas in creative ways such as painting, filmmaking, theatre, song writing, using verbal, visual or written forms, anything!

_Step 3: The groups present the outcomes of their work together to each other.

_Debriefing and reflection

- | How was it?
- | Do you see how changes today affect the future tomorrow?
- | Have you thought about these possibilities before participating in the Futures Literacy lab?
- | What did you learn from this that you could use in your life?

Futures Literacy Labs provide a structured yet creative space for participants to explore, question, and shape their understanding of possible futures. By moving through each phase, from revealing and reframing assumptions to rethinking and acting, participants develop essential skills for imagining and influencing change. Through this process, they become more open-minded, empowered, and capable of working collaboratively to create better futures for themselves and their communities. They become more capable of 'using the future'.

Emotional Impact of Disruption in Futures Literacy Labs

Futures Literacy Labs are powerful because they disrupt how people normally think about what lies ahead. They challenge participants to step outside their habitual expectations and imagine futures that might feel unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or radically different from the present. This disruption is intentional, it's a way of making hidden assumptions visible so that new possibilities can be explored. However, it's important to recognise that **disruption does not only happen intellectually; it also happens emotionally.**

For many young people, being asked to imagine a world entirely different from their own can provoke strong and complex emotions. Some participants may feel excitement, curiosity, and hope as they glimpse new possibilities they had never considered. For others, it can stir anxiety, sadness, or fear, particularly if the futures being explored involve crisis, loss, or rapid change. Imagining the collapse of systems, environmental disasters, or technological changes that threaten familiar ways of life can feel overwhelming or even frightening. These emotions can sometimes surface unexpectedly, even if the scenarios were intended as creative exercises rather than predictions.

Reactions to disruptive futures are also shaped by **each participant's personal history and current circumstances.** Young people who have experienced instability, trauma, or marginalisation may be more sensitive to discussions about uncertainty or risk. For someone living with economic insecurity, a scenario about resource scarcity may feel uncomfortably close to reality rather than a distant hypothetical. Similarly, a participant who has experienced migration or displacement may find discussions of societal upheaval triggering or distressing.

For youth workers facilitating Futures Literacy Labs, **anticipating and managing these emotional responses is crucial.** Creating a safe and supportive environment means:

- _Clearly explaining the purpose of the Lab and reassuring participants that exploring futures is not about predicting disaster but about expanding imagination and agency.
- _Reminding participants that they have the right to step back, pass on a question, or choose not to participate in a particular activity without judgment.
- _Checking in regularly with participants, both during group discussions and in private conversations if someone appears uncomfortable.
- _Building in moments of grounding and reflection, so participants can process strong feelings and reconnect with the present.
- _Encouraging the group to balance exploring challenges with envisioning hopeful, positive futures, so sessions do not become emotionally overwhelming.
- _Ensuring participants leave the session feeling stable and supported, not anxious or distressed.

Above all, youth workers should remember that the goal of a Futures Literacy Lab is empowerment, not fear. While disruption can be uncomfortable, it can also

unlock creativity, resilience, and new visions for personal and collective change. Handling the emotional dimensions with care ensures that young people emerge from the Lab with a greater sense of possibility and confidence in their ability to shape the future.

Tips for Future Literacy Labs (FLL)

These method-specific tips can help you deepen engagement, maintain clarity, and adapt Future Literacy Labs to different participant groups and contexts. They serve as an essential bridge between theory and effective practice. Also, they complement the general facilitation tips available in Chapter 6 by addressing the unique requirements and opportunities of Future Literacy Labs.

_Prepare participants for abstract thinking: FLLs often involve unfamiliar ways of imagining the future. Ease participants into it through warm-up exercises, such as imagination prompts or creative drawing.

_Use clear phase transitions: Mark each phase (Reveal, Reframe, Rethink, Act) with a change in tone, setting, or activity. This helps participants mentally shift between different cognitive modes.

_Combine individual and group work: Balance personal reflection with collaborative creation to engage diverse learning styles and comfort levels.

_Use diverse media: Encourage drawing, collage, storytelling, physical movement, or digital tools to help participants express their visions in ways that feel natural and inspiring.

_Be flexible and adaptive: Let the group shape the pace. Some phases may need more time, while others might resolve quickly depending on energy and engagement.

_Anchor abstract futures in personal meaning: Link imagined futures to present-day values, experiences, or desires so that the outcomes feel relevant and motivating.

Case Study 13 – Praxisprojekttag: Youth Future Lab (Germany).

Case Study 13 | Praxisprojekttag: Youth Future Lab (Germany)

Overview

Each trainee in the German Future Narratives program facilitated a full-day workshop with youth (ages 13-21) with the aim to co-create alternative futures using Futures Literacy tools and storytelling. Activities included trend spotting, imaginative scenario creation, and speculative storytelling formats like “A day in 2040”. Youth designed “future personas” and invented speculative artifacts (e.g. future backpacks, passports, apps).

How it went

The workshops were energising and playful. Young people responded positively to the open-ended format and the invitation to be creators rather than just problem-solvers. Some imagined dystopias, while others designed utopias grounded in values like justice, sustainability, and care. The sessions often ended with collective sharing through performances, posters, or role-plays.

Tips for implementation

- _Combine speculative thinking with creative expression (drawing, theater, roleplay).
- _Keep instructions flexible: allow groups to define their own future themes.
- _Reflect on how different imagined futures reflect real hopes, fears, and lived experiences.

Case Study 14 | Housing in 2040: Future Scenario and Collective Policy-Making (Greece)

Overview

Participants used Foresight tools (like the Futures Wheel) to imagine speculative futures for housing in 2040. They explored a scenario where people live in dynamic, mobile smart homes integrated in shared urban networks. Participants created daily-life stories from this world, and drafted new policies for inclusive, collective housing as an ideal alternative to the presented scenario.

How it went

The imaginative leap was energizing. Participants imagined future scenarios guided by their values and sense of civic responsibility. The session culminated in working collaboratively on ideal futures, and crafting collective visions and policy proposals for change.

Tips for implementation

- _Use future prompts grounded in everyday life (e.g., “Where do you live in 2040?”)
- _Pair foresight tools (like the Futures Wheel) with creative formats (like improv or roleplay).
- _End with storytelling actions (e.g., performances, policy drafts, zines) to ground the work.

Case Study 15 | Desired Futures and Anchoring Action Plan (Spain)

Overview

Participants used Foresight tools (e.g., Futures Wheel) to imagine bold preferred futures, then developed an action plan to begin living that future in the present. This included journaling, personal habit shifts, community projects, and proposals for public storytelling. Participants created a narrative that linked their imagined world to current steps, blending symbolic and practical thinking.

How it went

The mix of dreamwork and real-world planning resonated with diverse youth. Some created personal manifestos, others mapped potential allies or micro-rituals to embody future values. A few turned their plans into workshop proposals or digital zines for peer engagement.

Tips for implementation

- _Use visual templates like the Futures Wheel or “Backcasting Maps” to scaffold the planning process.
- _Ask participants to give their plan a title or motto to make it more memorable.
- _Celebrate outputs in a group sharing circle or exhibition to reinforce commitment.

Case Study 16 | “A Monday in 2050” Scenario Lab (Sweden)

Overview

In a guided scenario-building exercise, each participant wrote a short story titled “A Monday in 2050.” They imagined their future selves and described everything from how they commute to how decisions are made at work. Prompts encouraged sensory and emotional detail, for example: “What does your outfit feel like?” or “How do you start your day?”

After sharing their stories, the group discussed and compared them. The contrasts were striking, from AI-managed routines to cooperative eco-communities, and sparked conversations about different values and lifestyles. Participants began to question why things are done a certain way today, and whether there might be alternative ways of living.

To make this process easier, we first stepped back and explored what our current routines, daily habits, and everyday lives looked like. This led to a lot of laughter as we realized how different our days actually are from one another.

This playful reflection on the present helped make it easier to imagine future routines and sparked ideas about how life could look different in 2050, with new ways of living, working, and connecting.

How it went

At first, participants found it challenging to imagine life 50 years into the future. The concept felt abstract and overwhelming. However, once they were guided by specific prompts and began sharing ideas with peers, their creativity quickly opened up.

The use of vivid, detailed storytelling, featuring elements like drone transport pods, smart clothing, and AI-powered pet companions, made the future feel more tangible. These details helped participants question present-day assumptions and experiment with alternative futures.

Stories were brought to life through read-aloud sessions, short skits, and visual posters, creating a lively and engaging atmosphere that encouraged deeper discussion and reflection.

Tips for implementation

Participants used Foresight tools (e.g., Futures Wheel) to imagine bold preferred futures, then developed an action plan to begin living that future in the present. This included journaling, personal habit shifts, community projects, and proposals for public storytelling. Participants created a narrative that linked their imagined world to current steps, blending symbolic and practical thinking.

How it went

The mix of dreamwork and real-world planning resonated with diverse youth. Some created personal manifestos, others mapped potential allies or micro-rituals to embody future values. A few turned their plans into workshop proposals or digital zines for peer engagement.

Tips for implementation

- _Prompt with accessible, everyday scenes rather than abstract futures.
- _Encourage emotional tone and texture, not just tech or policy ideas.
- _Consider sharing stories in a public exhibit or digital zine to celebrate the work.

5.6 |

SHARING STORIES _ YOUR FUTURE, OUR FUTURE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Recognise and analyse effective methods for communicating young people's hopes, dreams, and future narratives to wider audiences.
- _Understand and apply diverse approaches to curating, showcasing, and presenting youth-led storytelling projects using various media (e.g., writing, theatre, visual arts, video, podcasts, installations).
- _Develop strategies to support young people in authoring or re-authoring their own narratives, and in sharing these stories to inspire action and change in their communities.
- _Design and implement activities or events that enable young people to present their stories to the public, fostering dialogue, empathy, and understanding between youth and broader society.
- _Empower young people to use storytelling as a tool for advocacy and activism, encouraging them to take ongoing action and continue shaping narratives that promote justice, inclusion, and hope.

The Future Narratives approach has the power to generate positive change that extends beyond the individual. When young people explore and share their visions for the future, they develop their own personal growth, and can help to shape their communities and influence broader society. The approach recognises and strengthens the connection between personal development and collective transformation.

The Future Narratives approach has the power to generate positive change that extends beyond the individual. When young people explore and share their visions for the future, they develop their own personal growth and help to shape their communities and influence broader society. Central to this approach is the belief that the co-creation of stories is foundational to meaningful transformation. It is through the collaborative process of building,

sharing, and listening to each other's narratives that participants experience being truly seen and heard. Collective storytelling cultivates empathy, mutual understanding, and a sense of belonging. By making space for multiple voices and perspectives, the Future Narratives approach recognises and strengthens the connection between personal development and collective transformation. In this way, the act of co-creating and sharing stories becomes both a tool for individual empowerment and a catalyst for community and societal change.

By engaging with Future Narratives, young people are empowered to recognise their agency and understand the significance of their contributions. Through storytelling, creative expression, and collaborative projects, they move from imagining new possibilities for themselves to actively participating in the creation of a better future for everyone around them.

From Creation to Communication

Future Narratives can be used in many different ways – as a programme for young people, or as a modular toolbox incorporated into many contexts of youth work or activism. Whatever the approach, young people often want to move from exploring narratives and imagination to sharing the stories and visions they have created. When young people author and present new stories about themselves and their communities, they claim agency and shape collective understanding of what is possible.

Trainers can facilitate and evaluate creative pathways for this activation. Storytelling can take many forms: writing, theatre, design, photography, video, installations, podcasts, or a combination of media. The facilitators' role is to guide young people in choosing the formats that best express their ideas, and to support them in refining their messages for maximum impact.

Storytelling projects can become the foundation for public engagement. Curating and presenting these stories is both an act of celebration and an opportunity for advocacy. Presentations can take many shapes:

_Exhibitions: Displaying artworks, photographs, or design pieces in community spaces, galleries, or online.

_Performances: Showcasing plays, readings, or dance, either live or as recorded events.

_Digital media: Releasing podcasts, short films, or social media campaigns to reach wider audiences.

_Installations: Creating interactive spaces or pop-up events where the public can engage directly with youth visions for the future.

_Public presentations: Organising community forums, youth summits, or school assemblies where young people share their stories directly.

When planning these activities, consider accessibility, inclusivity, and the diversity of your group. Encourage processes that allow every participant to contribute, whether through individual works or collaborative projects.

Amplifying Young Voices

When supporting activism and engagement, the goal is to ensure that young people's stories are truly heard and valued. This means thinking strategically about:

_Audiences: Who do you want to reach? Community members, policymakers, peers, or the broader public?

_Media: Which formats will best carry the intended message, and which platforms will reach your desired audiences?

_Support: What resources or partnerships can help amplify the impact: local media, cultural institutions, or youth organisations?

_Feedback: How will you gather and use responses from audiences to further support young people's growth and confidence?

Best practices to consider include:

_Celebrate diversity: Encourage a variety of storytelling methods and perspectives.

_Support ownership: Let young people lead in deciding how their stories are told and presented.

_Create safe spaces: Ensure presentation environments are supportive, inclusive, and respectful.

_Connect to action: Link storytelling to opportunities for real-world impact, such as community projects, advocacy campaigns, or dialogues with decision-makers.

_Reflect and adapt: After each event, reflect with participants on what worked, what was challenging, and how to improve next time.

Activation and wider impact are about turning imagination into action, and stories into social change. By supporting young people to author and share their visions, trainers empower a new generation to shape the future - together, and out loud.

Digital StoryTelling

Digital storytelling offers many ways to create and share the stories of young people. It can take many different forms, such as voice recordings, short films, music, digital photos, or creative multimedia projects. What matters most, as Alrutz points out, is the process itself: digital tools let youth save, update, and reshape their stories over time.⁵⁰ For many, creating digital stories can be a powerful way to share their culture and experiences, and can even be a political act that challenges stereotypes and expresses identity.

Digital storytelling is especially helpful for those who might feel uncomfortable performing in front of others or who don't have time for live presentations. While there can be barriers to participating, like access to technology or support, digital storytelling still offers a valuable way for individuals and groups to find their voice

⁵⁰ Alrutz, M. (2013). Sites of possibility: Applied theatre and digital storytelling with youth. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 18(1), 44-57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2012.756169>

and create change. Digital storytelling provides a flexible and creative platform where people can share their stories in ways that suit their comfort level and schedules. This approach allows participants to build confidence, develop communication skills, and reach wider audiences, even if they face challenges with traditional, in-person forms of storytelling. By using digital tools, more people have the opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives, build communities, and work towards social transformation.⁵¹

There are now more possibilities than ever for young people to express themselves digitally, thanks to the growing availability of free and easy-to-use tools. For example, visual stories can be created using tools like Canva or Photopea for image editing and design, or DaVinci Resolve for video editing, all available for free. For those who prefer audio storytelling, Audacity is a free tool that allows users to record and edit podcasts or personal stories, making it possible to share one's voice without needing to appear on camera.

Digital storytelling can also take interactive forms: platforms like Twine let anyone create “choose your own adventure” stories, where listeners or readers can make choices and shape the narrative path. Even more advanced formats, such as 3D storytelling, are now possible using tools like RealityScan or Kiri Engine to create digital twins of real-world objects, or Unreal Engine and Blender to build immersive 3D worlds and games. These options make it possible to document personal histories, tell stories of the future, or simply experiment with creative forms of expression.

With the rise of generative AI tools, and the ability to easily post and share content online, digital storytelling becomes highly accessible and shareable, helping stories reach a global audience. Whether through short-form videos, podcasts, interactive stories, or digital art, digital storytelling opens up new ways for people to participate, connect, and inspire positive change.

Digital storytelling also helps participants develop a range of practical and creative abilities. Hands-on experiences with different types of media and technology help to support digital literacy as well as creative thinking, problem-solving and project management skills. As participants plan, script, and produce their stories, they practice organising information, collaborating with others, and navigating digital environments, all skills that are increasingly essential in today's world. Through this process, digital storytelling becomes a powerful tool for holistic development, supporting both personal expression and the acquisition of valuable, future-oriented competencies.

Narratives as Activism

Narrative as activism is the intentional use of storytelling to challenge injustice, redefine identities, and inspire collective action. At its core, narrative activism recognises that dominant societal stories often uphold power structures, marginalise certain voices, and dictate who is visible and valued. By creating and

⁵¹ Many tools and guides for digital storytelling are available here: Bouchrika, I. (2025). Digital Storytelling: Benefits, Examples, Tools & Tips for 2025. <https://research.com/education/digital-storytelling>

sharing **counter-narratives** people can resist these dominant scripts, making space for new possibilities and social transformation.

For young people, narrative activism is both deeply personal and powerfully communal. It allows them to speak truths that might otherwise remain hidden and to challenge stereotypes that misrepresent who they are. It's an act of claiming space, visibility, and dignity. In contexts of social inequality, racism, gender discrimination, migration, or economic injustice, young people's stories often push back against harmful narratives, offering **new visions of what is possible**. Through narrative activism, young people can become **authors of social change**.

Narrative activism can take many forms. It may appear in spoken word poetry that disrupts stereotypes about race or gender. It might emerge through digital storytelling projects that share lived experiences of migrants, refugees, or LGBTQ+ youth. It can be expressed in theatre performances highlighting systemic injustices, or in visual arts and protest art that reclaim public space for marginalised voices. Even social media posts and viral hashtags have become tools for narrative activism, spreading counter-narratives rapidly across communities and borders.

For youth workers, supporting narrative activism involves creating spaces where young people feel safe to tell their stories and where their words are taken seriously. It means helping young people:

- _Reflect critically on the dominant narratives that shape their lives.
- _Recognise the power of their own voices to influence others.
- _Develop skills in storytelling, public speaking, art, or digital media.
- _Understand the ethical responsibilities of sharing personal and community stories publicly.
- _Connect personal experiences to wider social and political contexts.

It's also essential for youth workers to help young people navigate the **risks of narrative activism**. Speaking out can make individuals vulnerable to criticism, misunderstanding, or backlash. Young activists may feel emotionally drained or isolated when confronting deeply entrenched systems of injustice. Youth workers can support them by:

- _Ensuring informed consent when stories are shared publicly.
- _Discussing potential risks and preparing strategies for self-care.
- _Celebrating successes and moments of impact, no matter how small.
- _Connecting young people to supportive networks and allies.

At its best, narrative activism **reimagines the world**. It can transform how communities understand issues like poverty, migration, gender equality, racial justice, climate action, and human rights. It offers hope and a sense of agency, showing that storytelling can be a collective tool for justice, dignity, and lasting social change.

Case Study 17 | Ceramic Futures _ Shaping the Future with Clay

Overview

The Ceramic Futures workshop took place in Greece as part of the Future Narratives curriculum, exploring how tactile art-making can serve as a medium for storytelling and Futures Literacy. Through a sequence of seven structured exercises, participants (mainly young spatial thinkers and creatives aged 18-30) embarked on a journey from individual visioning to collaborative foresight, culminating in the construction of a collective imaginary of distant spatial futures. Using clay as the primary material, the workshop bridged ancient ceramic traditions with speculative world-building.

This workshop also marked the first opportunity to test methods from Ceramic Futures, the homonymous hands-on research project by Giorgos Xanthopoulos and Georgia Xypolia. Currently in development, the project investigates clay as a critical tool for spatial visioning and collaborative future-making.

The workshop aimed at:

_engaging participants in envisioning possible and preferable futures through tactile and symbolic expression;

_practicing Futures Literacy tools such as scenario building, transition-thinking, and backcasting;

_promoting interdisciplinary dialogue between art, design, and foresight practices;

_exploring the use of collective narrative-making as a driver for systems transformation; and

_generating tangible artistic artifacts representing imagined futures.

Methodology

The workshop combined intuitive art-making with structured foresight methods. Participants began by sculpting personal “future idols” from clay – each containing a hidden message or symbol about their individual futures. Building on this, they collaborated in small groups to imagine different aspects of a distant society (e.g., governance, water, food, or leisure), translating their ideas into sketches and texts.

A mid-workshop activity invited participants to “ostracize” elements of the present by inscribing words or symbols on ceramic shards, drawing inspiration from ancient democratic practices. These inscriptions formed a collective artifact symbolizing shared values and critiques. In the final collective phase, participants co-created 4 large speculative ceramic vessels, each one representing distinct time periods (present, 2080, 2125, and 2500). They painted, carved, and adorned the vessels with symbols and words and phrases derived from previous exercises, reflecting on transitions and the role of cultural memory in shaping futures.

How it went

Participants reported a strong sense of engagement and empowerment through the use of tactile media. The integration of storytelling and materiality fostered deeper emotional connections to future thinking. The collaborative exercises promoted active listening and interdisciplinary dialogue. Some noted that the process of “ostracizing” unwanted present conditions was cathartic and helped frame systemic change. The layering of Futures Literacy methods with accessible artistic processes proved highly effective in mixed-experience groups. The integration of historical references (e.g., ancient Greek ostraka) anchored the speculative work in cultural continuity and provided meaningful symbolic depth. Some groups wished for more time on reflection and group discussion; time allocation between exercises needs to remain flexible.

Tips for implementation

This workshop model is adaptable for use in schools, community centers, and policy labs. Its tactile and symbolic approach allows for futures thinking beyond verbal or written formats and can be especially effective in intergenerational or cross-cultural settings.

Case Study 18 | Future Narratives Festival

Overview

The first Future Narratives Festival took place in Ferrara, Italy, in May 2025. Designed as a living laboratory for public engagement with future thinking, it was held in the historic core area of the city center, transforming public space into a space for engagement in storytelling, reflection, and co-creation around possible futures.

Structured as an open and inclusive event, the festival brought young people, local artists, foresight professionals, and members of the general public together in an active sharing of ideas and experiences. The activities motivated passers-by and registered participants to interact with main Futures Literacy tools in informal but influential ways.

The Festival was intended to:

- _Bring Futures Literacy into public space to enable democratic access to thinking about the future;
- _Offer a participatory and experiential entry point to future tales;
- _Share the creative output of the Future Narratives course throughout Europe;
- _Create a common reflection space for imagining different futures for Ferrara and beyond;
- _Enable intergenerational discussion on values, hopes and fears for the future.

Methodology

The Festival was designed as an open-format event that combined artistic expression, reflective practice, and futures thinking. The central point of the Festival was a series of participatory workshops exploring issues such as artificial intelligence, self-discovery, and seeing oneself from different angles – encouraging participants to look at their identities, imagine alternative futures, and engage with challenging questions about society and transformation.

For the final event of the Festival, participants co-created performances based on their experiences through the workshops. These varied from short films and stage scenes, visual storytelling sequences, to an original

interactive game. The variety of outputs testified to the multidisciplinary character of the methodology and the focus on personal and collaborative expression. Participants could choose the format that best responded to their ideas, and thus express themselves personally and imaginatively about future stories.

One of the workshops, focused on envisioning the world in 2050, inspired participants to collaboratively create a performance imagining a future president addressing the city's residents. Through this fictional public address and voices from different community members, the piece explored the social and emotional impacts of AI on daily life, decision-making, and human connection. This performance sparked both humour and critical reflection, showing how storytelling can animate abstract futures.

The Festival design was intentionally open and flexible to allow people to participate in ways that were inclusive of their interests, abilities, and modes of expression. The open design provided room for a diverse array of voices and experiences to be heard and appreciated to enrich the collective outcomes.

By linking foresight methodology with collaborative creation, the Future Narratives Festival was true to the core of our methodology – bringing forward thinking and turning it into experiential, concrete outcomes that could be shared with a wider audience.

Tips for implementation

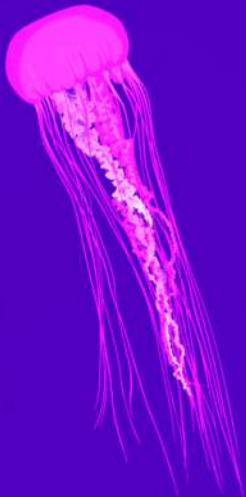
The Ferrara Festival strategy can be successfully transferred to schools, youth clubs, cultural festivals, and community festivals. Its strength lies in combining creativity with Futures Literacy in an open, inclusive format. This model offers a great means of democratizing foresight and facilitating cross-generational, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary dialogue.

The success of the Future Narratives Festival showed how that multimedia storytelling platforms are powerful tools for enabling young people to share their unique perspectives, hopes, and visions for the future. To adapt and scale this strategy in your own context, whether in schools, youth clubs,

cultural or community festivals, consider the following recommendations:

- _Design open and flexible formats where young people can contribute in ways that reflect their interests, abilities, and preferred forms of expression (video, audio, writing, visual art, performance, games). See Chapter 5 for tips on inclusive facilitation.
- _Offer a range of accessible multimedia tools (smartphones, tablets, cameras, editing software, art supplies) so young people can shape and share their narratives in diverse ways. Encourage experimentation with formats: short films, podcasts, digital comics, photo essays, interactive games, or live performances.
- _Sustain the platform beyond a single event. Create online archives or social media channels to share and preserve stories, allowing ongoing discovery and inspiration (stories from the Future Narratives Festival are shared at futurenarratives.eu). Young people can be supported as peer facilitators and digital curators, and partnership with local organisations, such as schools, libraries, and cultural centres, to share promote impact and engagement.
- _Adapt and remix these steps to suit the needs, resources, and context of your group. The core principle is simple: giving young people the tools, trust, and stage to tell their future stories, and listening deeply to what they share.





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6 | INCLUSIVE FACILITATION



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*“The
Future Narratives
project showed me that
when young people
challenge mainstream
perceptions
of the future and
imagine new ones,
they are engaging in a
deeply political
and transformative act.
They reclaim power from
those who have long
shaped their imaginaries,
question what is
considered
‘normal,’
and begin to take
action toward
different futures.”*

Amerissa Giannouli

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- _Understand how culture shapes the way we see the
 - _Describe the principles of inclusive facilitation and explain why they are essential for engaging diverse groups in narrative and futures work.
 - _Apply practical strategies to create safe, welcoming, and participatory environments that support young people from a variety of backgrounds, abilities, and identities.
 - _Adapt narrative activities and communication methods to accommodate differences in language, literacy, neurodiversity, sensory needs, and other individual factors.
- _Recognise the impact of trauma on young people's participation and storytelling, and implement trauma-informed approaches to support psychological safety.
- _Reflect on their own facilitation practices and demonstrate increased confidence and competence in fostering inclusion, belonging, and agency among all participants.

Facilitating narrative and futures work with young people demands a thoughtful, inclusive, and trauma-aware approach that recognises the diverse realities and starting points of every participant. True inclusion means not only adapting to individual needs, but also critically engaging with the broader power structures, privileges, and social injustices that shape young people's experiences and opportunities. This chapter aims to support youth workers in creating environments where all voices can be heard and valued, while remaining mindful of the ways that systemic barriers, marginalisation, and privilege affect participation and storytelling. By combining strong facilitation skills, inclusive practices, trauma-informed awareness, and a commitment to social justice, youth workers can help ensure that future narratives are co-created by and for everyone, while being conscious of the deeper contexts in which these stories unfold.

6.1 | General Tips for Facilitation

Effective facilitation is at the heart of making Future Narratives meaningful for young people. As a facilitator, your role is to create an environment where everyone feels safe, valued, and encouraged to share and imagine freely. This involves modelling openness, empathy, and respect. The following general tips are designed to help you foster inclusion, inspire agency, and support participants as they reflect, connect, and co-create stories of the future together.

1 | Create a Safe and Welcoming Space

_Why It Matters: A safe environment allows young people to share stories and explore futures without fear of judgment, aligning with the curriculum's emphasis on empowerment and agency.

_How to Do It: Start sessions with clear ground rules, co-created with participants, emphasizing respect, confidentiality, and the right to pass on sharing. Arrange seating in a circle or open layout to foster connection and visibility. Minimize distractions (e.g., noise, clutter) and ensure physical accessibility (e.g., clear pathways). For virtual sessions, use welcoming visuals and check audio/video clarity.

_Example: Begin with a simple icebreaker, like sharing a favorite object or word, to build trust before diving into deeper storytelling activities.

_Tip: Check in privately with participants who seem hesitant, offering reassurance that their comfort is the priority.

2 | Encourage Creative Expression

_Why It Matters: Creativity helps young people express complex ideas and emotions, especially when words feel limiting, supporting the curriculum's focus on diverse storytelling formats.

_How to Do It: Offer multiple ways to participate—writing, drawing, speaking, or role-playing—so participants can choose what feels natural. Provide materials like markers, paper, or digital tools to spark imagination. Frame activities as invitations to explore, not perform, to reduce pressure.

_Example: If a participant struggles to articulate a future vision verbally, suggest they draw a symbol or create a short skit to share their idea.

_Tip: Celebrate all forms of expression, from a single word to a detailed story, to reinforce that every contribution matters.

3 | Celebrate Diversity and Perspectives

_Why It Matters: Honoring diverse backgrounds and viewpoints strengthens group connection and challenges limiting narratives, a core goal of the curriculum.

_How to Do It: Acknowledge the unique experiences participants bring, encouraging them to share stories rooted in their cultures, identities, or communities.

Use prompts that invite multiple perspectives (e.g., “How might someone else see this future?”). Be mindful of power dynamics, ensuring no single voice dominates.

_Example: When discussing future scenarios, ask participants to consider how different communities might experience the same future, fostering empathy and broader thinking.

_Tip: Use translation support or visual aids for multilingual groups to ensure everyone can contribute fully.

4 | Promote Critical Thinking

_Why It Matters: Questioning assumptions and societal narratives, as emphasized in the curriculum, empowers young people to reimagine possibilities and take agency over their futures.

_How to Do It: Pose open-ended questions that challenge dominant ideas (e.g., “Who benefits from this story about the future?”). Encourage participants to explore contradictions or gaps in narratives they encounter. Use tools like group discussions or reflective writing to deepen analysis.

_Example: After a storytelling activity, ask, “What assumptions about the future did this story reveal, and how might we imagine it differently?”

_Tip: Model curiosity by sharing your own reflections or questions, showing it’s okay to explore without having all the answers.

5 | Foster Reflection and Learning

_Why It Matters: Reflection helps participants process their experiences and recognize their growth, aligning with the feedback tools in Chapter 7.3.

_How to Do It: Build in time for reflection at the end of activities, using tools like the Story Reflection Circle or Future Vision Cards (Chapter 7.3). Ask questions that connect personal stories to broader themes (e.g., “How does your story connect to your community’s future?”). Encourage both individual and group reflection to capture diverse insights.

_Example: After an activity imagining a future community, invite participants to write or share one lesson they’re taking away.

_Tip: Use the Emoji Feedback Board (Chapter 7.3) for quick, visual reflections, especially for younger or less verbal participants.

6 | Model Vulnerability and Courage

_Why It Matters: Showing openness builds trust and encourages participants to take risks in sharing their stories, supporting the curriculum’s goal of empowerment.

_How to Do It: Share a brief, relevant story or reflection of your own to set a tone of authenticity (e.g., a moment when you questioned a future assumption). Be honest about uncertainties while modeling confidence in exploring them. Acknowledge participants’ courage when they share.

_Example: Start a session by sharing a simple story about a time you imagined a different future, inviting participants to do the same.

_Tip: Keep your sharing concise and relevant, ensuring the focus remains on participants’ stories.

7 | Support Collective Action

_Why It Matters: The curriculum envisions storytelling as a catalyst for community change, connecting individual narratives to collective futures.

_How to Do It: Design activities that encourage group collaboration, like co-creating a story or vision for the future. Use feedback tools like the Narrative Impact Survey (Chapter 7.3) to identify shared goals. Connect participants to opportunities for action, such as public storytelling events or community projects.

_Example: After a group activity, facilitate a discussion on how participants' visions could inspire a small community initiative, like a mural or podcast.

_Tip: Highlight small, achievable actions to build momentum, reinforcing participants' sense of agency.

8 | Use Trauma-Informed Practices

_Why It Matters: Many young people may carry experiences of trauma, and a safe space, as outlined in Chapter 7.2, ensures storytelling is healing, not harmful.

_How to Do It: Offer choice in how participants engage (e.g., drawing instead of speaking). Avoid prompts that may trigger distress unless trust is established. Watch for signs of discomfort (e.g., withdrawal) and respond with care, offering breaks or private check-ins. End sessions with hopeful, grounding activities, as in the Trauma-Informed Considerations Checklist (Chapter 7.4).

_Example: If a participant seems upset during a storytelling activity, gently offer them the option to step out or express through a non-verbal format.

_Tip: Keep resources (e.g., counseling contacts) handy and share discreetly if needed, ensuring participants feel supported.

9 | Adapt to Group Needs

_Why It Matters: Every group is unique, and flexibility ensures inclusivity, aligning with Chapter 6.1's emphasis on welcoming all voices.

_How to Do It: Assess group dynamics early (e.g., through a quick icebreaker) to gauge energy, language needs, or comfort levels. Adjust pacing, prompts, or formats based on observations, using tools like observational notes (Chapter 7.2). Offer multiple ways to participate, such as verbal, written, or visual responses.

_Example: If a group includes non-native speakers, simplify prompts and provide visual aids to support understanding.

_Tip: Use the Pre-Session Checklist (Chapter 7.4) to anticipate needs and have backup options ready, like extra time or alternative activities.

10 | Build a Supportive Community

_Why It Matters: The curriculum's vision of a practitioner community starts with fostering connection within each group.

_How to Do It: Use group activities, like co-creating a shared story, to build trust and collaboration. Encourage participants to listen actively and celebrate each other's contributions. Connect your work to the broader Future Narratives community by sharing insights on platforms like future narratives.eu.

_Example: End a session with a group ritual, like sharing one word that captures the day's experience, to reinforce a sense of togetherness.

_Tip: Reflect on group dynamics using the During-Session Checklist (Chapter 7.4) to strengthen community bonds in future sessions.

6.2 | Inclusion and Diversity

Creating a genuinely inclusive space for narrative and futures thinking requires intentional planning and flexible facilitation. Young people bring a wide range of lived experiences, communication styles, abilities, and comfort levels to storytelling activities. By anticipating and accommodating diverse needs, whether related to literacy, language, neurodiversity, sensory access, or personal history, we can increase participation and ensure that everyone feels valued.

The following tips offer practical ways to adapt your approach, foster a sense of belonging, and support all participants in sharing their stories in ways that are meaningful to them.

_Offer multiple formats for sharing stories, such as drawing, speaking, writing, roleplay, or using symbols/images. Encourage participants to choose formats that suit their preferences and abilities.

_Provide clear, step-by-step instructions both verbally and in writing. Use visuals, gestures, and demonstrations to support understanding, especially for those with low literacy, neurodiversity, or language differences.

_For inclusion encourage storytelling in participants' preferred languages. Provide translation support or use visual aids to bridge language gaps in multilingual groups.

_Verbally describe visual materials for visually impaired participants. Offer written instructions and arrange seating for clear visibility for hearing-impaired participants; provide sign language interpretation if possible.

_Avoid potentially triggering topics (such as violence or discrimination) unless trust and comfort have been established. Allow the use of fictional or abstract narratives as an alternative to personal stories. A deeper discussion of trauma informed narrative work is below.

_Keep session structures clear and predictable, especially for neurodiverse participants. Assign co-facilitators for large groups to ensure everyone is supported and heard.

_Limit group sharing time as needed to give everyone space, and allow alternative ways of participating (such as creating zines, posters, or audio recordings).

By thoughtfully adapting your approach, you can create a space where all young people feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their stories.

6.3 | Trauma Informed Narrative Work

Trauma-informed practice begins with understanding what trauma is and how it affects those who experience it. **Trauma can be defined as an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening, and that has lasting adverse effects on the person's functioning and well-being.** Yet trauma is not just about the event itself, it's also about how each person experiences, interprets, and stores that event in memory and emotion. What is traumatic for one person may not be for another. In this way, trauma is **unique to each individual, as distinctive as a fingerprint.**

Trauma often shapes personal and community narratives in profound ways. It can leave young people with stories of fear, helplessness, or shame, and can sometimes silence their voices altogether. The effects of trauma may show up in many forms, such as withdrawal or silence, irritability, hyper-vigilance, physical symptoms like headaches or stomach pain, difficulties concentrating, or sudden emotional reactions that may seem disconnected from the immediate situation. In narrative work, these reactions might surface during storytelling exercises, even if the content of the story seems unrelated to the traumatic event.

In youth work, **being trauma-informed means recognising that trauma may be present even if it is not visible or disclosed.** It means approaching every young person with empathy, curiosity, and respect, rather than assumptions or judgment. Youth workers should be prepared to notice signs of distress and to respond with sensitivity. Some practical tools for anticipating, managing, and preventing re-traumatisation in narrative work include:

_Establishing clear ground rules for respect, confidentiality, and the right to pass on any activity or question without explanation.

_Offering choice and control, ensuring participants know they can stop participating at any point.

_Using less direct methods, like drawing, music, or metaphors, for storytelling, so young people can express experiences indirectly if direct language feels too vulnerable.

_Building safety into the physical space by arranging seating comfortably, reducing external interruptions, and keeping the environment predictable.

_Checking in individually, especially if a young person seems distressed or quiet, without putting them on the spot publicly.

_Having supportive resources available, such as contacts for counselling, crisis services, or trusted adults who can offer follow-up support.

_Monitoring your own responses, as a youth worker, so that you remain calm, grounded, and present even when hearing difficult stories.

Planning how to close sessions gently, bringing the group back to the present, and ending on a hopeful or stabilising note.

Above all, trauma-informed narrative work is about empowering young people to reclaim authorship over their own stories while keeping their psychological safety as the top priority. It recognises that storytelling can be deeply healing, but only when it is done on the individual's terms, without pressure to disclose or perform. A trauma-informed lens helps ensure that narrative work does not become another source of harm, but instead offers a path toward meaning, connection, and hope.



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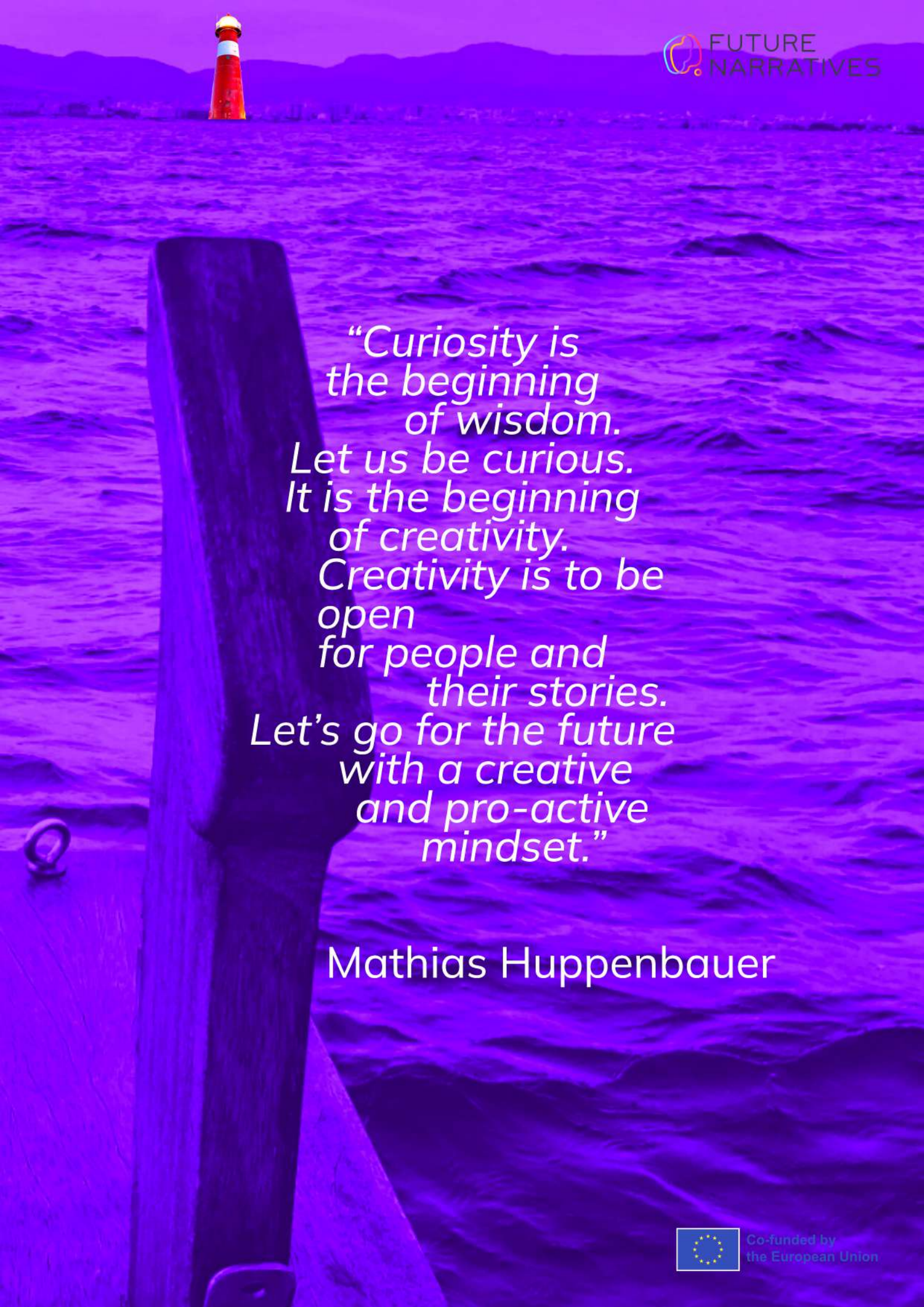
7 | SESSION ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK TOOLS



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*“Curiosity is
the beginning
of wisdom.
Let us be curious.
It is the beginning
of creativity.
Creativity is to be
open
for people and
their stories.
Let’s go for the future
with a creative
and pro-active
mindset.”*

Mathias Huppenbauer

7.1 | Principles, scope and goal of assessment

When we talk about assessment in the Future Narratives curriculum, we're not chasing grades or ticking boxes. It's about pausing to listen, really listen, to the stories young people are weaving, the futures they're imagining, and the connections they're building with each other.

Assessment here is a shared journey, much like the storytelling itself, where youth workers and young people reflect together on what's unfolding in their hearts and minds. It's about noticing the spark in someone's eyes when they share a vision of a future they hadn't dared to dream before, or the quiet strength in a group that finds common ground through their stories.

This chapter lays out the why and how of assessment, rooted in the same empathy, curiosity, and hope that drive the Future Narratives approach.

Principles of Assessment

At its core, assessment in Future Narratives is about **honouring voices**, those of young people, youth workers, and the communities they're part of. It's guided by the same values that run through the curriculum: inclusion, empowerment, and transformation. We assess to understand how storytelling and Futures Literacy are helping young people see themselves as authors of their own lives and co-creators of their communities' futures. This isn't a top-down process; it's collaborative, inviting participants to reflect on their experiences and share what feels meaningful to them. We approach assessment with:

- _Empathy:** Creating space for young people to express what they feel, think, and imagine without judgment, recognizing that every story carries personal weight.
- _Inclusivity:** Ensuring everyone, regardless of background, ability, or comfort level, can contribute to the assessment in a way that feels safe and authentic.
- _Reflection:** Encouraging both individual and collective reflection to deepen understanding of how stories shape identities and futures.
- _Agency:** Framing assessment as a tool for young people to recognize their own growth and power to shape what comes next.

Think of assessment as a conversation, like the ones sparked in the **Personal Object Storytelling activity** (Chapter 2.2), where sharing a small object opens up big insights. It's about capturing those moments of transformation, when a shy participant speaks up for the first time or when a group realizes their shared story challenges a societal myth.

Scope

Assessment in Future Narratives looks at four interconnected layers, much like the levels of storytelling described in Chapter 2 (personal, community, societal, future):

_Individual Growth: How are young people growing in confidence, self-awareness, and their ability to imagine alternative futures? For example, after an activity like Expected vs. Desired Futures (Chapter 2.2), are they more comfortable questioning their assumptions or expressing their hopes?

_Group Dynamics: How do storytelling and Futures Literacy activities, like those in Futures Literacy Labs, build trust, empathy, and collaboration within a group? Are participants listening more deeply to each other's stories?

_Facilitator Impact: How effectively are youth workers creating safe, inclusive spaces for narrative work, as outlined in Chapter 6? Are they adapting activities to meet diverse needs, like offering drawing instead of writing for neurodiverse participants?

_Community Transformation: How do the stories and futures imagined in sessions ripple out to influence communities, as seen in activities like the **Future Narratives Festival** (Case Study 14, Chapter 5.6)? Are young people feeling empowered to share their visions publicly?

This scope mirrors the curriculum's multi-level approach, ensuring assessment captures the personal breakthroughs, collective connections, and broader social impact of Future Narratives.

Goal

The goal of assessment is to create a living feedback loop that strengthens the Future Narratives journey for everyone involved. It's about helping young people see the power of their own stories, just as Nerina Finetto describes in the Foreword: "When young people are given the tools to reflect, share, and dream together, they begin to recognize their potential and their power." Assessment helps us understand how these tools are working, are they helping a young person feel seen? Are they sparking new connections in a group? Are they inspiring youth workers to rethink their facilitation?

By gathering these insights, we can refine our approach, making sure activities resonate with the unique experiences of each group, whether they're in a youth center in Greece or a community space in Sweden. Assessment also empowers young people to take ownership of their learning, much like the **Ceramic Futures workshop** (Case Study 13, Chapter 5.6), where participants shaped clay and futures together, reflecting on their own visions. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure Future Narratives remains a catalyst for hope, agency, and transformation, helping young people not just imagine futures but feel ready to build them.

7.2 | Assessment Methodology

Assessment in Future Narratives is like gathering around a campfire to share stories. It's a moment to pause, listen, and weave together the threads of what young people are feeling, thinking, and imagining. Just as we guide participants to explore their personal narratives in activities like Personal Object Storytelling (Chapter 2.2) or challenge societal myths through Causal Layered Analysis (Chapter 4), assessment is about capturing the sparks of growth, connection, and hope that emerge during these moments. This methodology is flexible, participatory, and deeply rooted in the curriculum's commitment to empowering young people as co-creators of their futures. It blends qualitative and quantitative approaches to honor the emotional, creative, and intellectual dimensions of narrative and futures work, ensuring every voice is valued.

Core Approaches

The assessment methodology mirrors the multi-level storytelling framework (personal, community, societal, future) outlined in Chapter 2, capturing both individual transformations and collective impact. It's designed to adapt to diverse groups, whether in a lively urban youth center or a quiet rural community space. The following approaches are crafted to reflect the curriculum's focus on storytelling and Futures Literacy:

1 | Reflective Discussions

_What It Is: Group conversations, inspired by activities like Personal Object Storytelling (Chapter 2.2), where participants share their experiences, emotions, and insights after a session. These discussions echo the collaborative spirit of Futures Literacy Labs (Chapter 4.5), where participants reveal and reframe their anticipatory assumptions together.

_How It Works: At the end of an activity like Expected vs. Desired Futures (Chapter 2.2), the facilitator poses open-ended questions: "What moment in today's activity felt most meaningful to you?" or "How did someone else's story shift the way you see your future?" These prompts invite participants to reflect on their emotions and discoveries, fostering a sense of shared understanding.

_Why It Matters: Reflective discussions build on the curriculum's emphasis on community narratives (Chapter 2.1), helping young people feel heard and connected. They allow facilitators to notice shifts in group dynamics, such as the trust built when participants share personal stories or co-create visions of the future. For example, a group discussion after a storytelling activity might reveal how participants began questioning a dominant narrative, like the idea that technology alone solves problems, sparking deeper connections.

_Example: In one workshop, participants reflected on a performance activity where they imagined a future community leader addressing shared challenges. The discussion brought out laughter and critical insights, showing how storytelling made abstract futures feel tangible and actionable.

2 | Individual Reflections

_What It Is: A space for young people to express their personal growth through writing, drawing, or speaking, similar to activities where participants craft narratives of their desired futures (Chapter 5.5).

_How It Works: After an activity like Deconstructing Dominant Narratives (Chapter 4), participants might journal about a moment that resonated, draw a symbol of their imagined future, or record a short voice note. For instance, a participant might write, “I realized I want a future where we solve problems together, not just rely on machines,” reflecting a shift in perspective.

_Why It Matters: This approach aligns with the curriculum’s focus on personal narratives (Chapter 2.1), helping young people articulate their evolving sense of identity and agency. It’s particularly valuable for quieter participants or those who find group sharing challenging, offering a safe way to process their experiences, as seen in workshops where tactile activities like sculpting allowed for introspective expression.

_Example: In a session focused on imagining daily routines in the future, participants wrote short stories about their lives decades ahead. These reflections revealed how envisioning new routines helped them question present-day assumptions and feel more confident in their ability to shape what’s next.

3 | Surveys and Questionnaires

_What It Is: Short, structured forms that capture specific feedback on learning outcomes, confidence, and group connection, designed to be accessible like the visual prompts in Exploring Multiple Futures (Chapter 3).

_How It Works: After a futures-focused activity, participants might rate statements like “I feel more confident sharing my ideas about the future” on a 1-5 scale or answer open-ended questions like “What story from today will you carry forward?” Surveys can be paper-based, digital, or verbal to accommodate diverse needs.

_Why It Matters: Surveys provide a clear picture of how activities are resonating, helping facilitators measure growth in Futures Literacy or storytelling skills, as emphasized in Chapter 2.2. They also ensure inclusivity (Chapter 6.2) by offering a private way for less vocal participants to share feedback, ensuring all voices are captured.

_Example: In a workshop exploring future communities, a quick survey showed that most participants felt more hopeful about their role in shaping their surroundings after creating imaginative scenarios, providing data to guide future session planning.

4 | Creative Output Analysis

_What It Is: A qualitative review of participants’ stories, drawings, performances, or artifacts, like those created in activities involving speculative storytelling

or artistic expression (Chapter 5.6), to assess engagement, narrative depth, and futures thinking.

_How It Works: Facilitators collect outputs (with permission) from activities like imagining a future day and analyze them for themes, emotions, and evidence of agency. For example, a participant's drawing of a future community might show a shift from isolation to collaboration, reflecting the curriculum's goal of fostering connection (Chapter 2.1).

_Why It Matters: This method celebrates the creative expression at the heart of Future Narratives, capturing how participants translate their visions into tangible forms, as seen in workshops where performances or art became a lens for understanding hopes and fears. It also honors diverse communication styles, aligning with the inclusive facilitation tips in Chapter 6.2.

_Example: In a session where participants reframed societal narratives, their collective artwork revealed a move away from individualistic solutions toward shared responsibility, highlighting the impact of questioning dominant assumptions.

5 | Observational Notes

_What It Is: Facilitators' real-time observations of group dynamics, participation, and emotional responses during activities, like those involving embodied storytelling or scenario-building (Chapter 5.5).

_How It Works: During a session, facilitators note moments of engagement (e.g., a participant sharing a story for the first time), hesitation, or emotional shifts, as well as group interactions like laughter or debate. These notes are reviewed post-session to identify what worked and what needs adjustment.

_Why It Matters: This approach captures subtle transformations that might not surface in surveys or discussions, such as the joy of a group finding common ground through shared stories. It also supports trauma-informed facilitation (Chapter 6.3) by helping facilitators notice signs of distress or disengagement, ensuring a safe space.

_Example: In a workshop with role-playing activities, a facilitator observed a quiet participant become animated while creating a future vision, signaling a boost in confidence that informed how the facilitator tailored subsequent activities.

Steps for Implementation

To integrate these approaches into your Future Narratives sessions, follow these steps, inspired by the practical guidance for running Futures Literacy Labs (Chapter 5.5):

1 | Set Clear Intentions: Before a session, decide what you're assessing, e.g., how well a storytelling activity builds trust or how a futures-focused exercise sparks imagination. Link these to the learning objectives in Chapters 2 and 3.

2 | Choose Context-Appropriate Methods: Select approaches that suit your group's needs. For younger or less verbal participants, use creative outputs or observational notes, like those from tactile storytelling activities. For older groups, combine surveys with reflective discussions to capture deeper insights.

3 | Ensure Inclusivity: Adapt methods for diverse needs, as outlined in Chapter 6.2. Offer drawing or verbal options for reflections, provide translation support for

multilingual groups, and use trauma-informed practices (Chapter 6.3) to create a safe, welcoming environment.

4 | Analyze Collectively: Review feedback with co-facilitators or, when appropriate, with participants, mirroring the collaborative reflection in group storytelling activities. Look for patterns, like increased confidence or new connections, that show the curriculum's impact.

5 | Act on Insights: Use findings to refine future sessions. For example, if surveys indicate participants want more creative expression, incorporate activities like speculative storytelling. If observational notes suggest discomfort with certain topics, adjust prompts to be less triggering, as advised in Chapter 6.3.

A Human Touch

Assessment isn't just about collecting feedback, it's about hearing the stories behind the responses. When a young person shares a vision of a future where their community thrives it's a sign they're beginning to see themselves as a change-maker, as Nerina Finetto envisioned in the Foreword. When a facilitator notices a group erupt in laughter while sharing future scenarios, it's a moment of connection that echoes the curriculum's goal of building community through stories. These approaches are designed to capture those moments, ensuring we honor the courage it takes to share a story and the hope it ignites to dream of new futures.

7.3 | Principles, scope and goal of assessment

Feedback tools in Future Narratives are like the quiet moments after a story is shared, where everyone pauses to take in what was said and felt. They're designed to capture the sparks of connection, courage, and imagination that young people bring to their narratives and visions of the future, much like gathering around a table to share what a story meant to each listener. Building on the empathetic and inclusive principles from Chapter 6.1 and the participatory approaches in Chapter 6.2, these tools feel natural and inviting, encouraging young people to reflect in ways that honor their unique voices. They're crafted to work with the curriculum's storytelling and futures-focused activities, ensuring feedback is a continuation of the creative, transformative process.

Below is a detailed list of five feedback tools, each tailored to capture different facets of participants' experiences, personal growth, group bonds, or creative expression, with sample formats and tips to make them accessible and meaningful.

Feedback tool 1 | Story Reflection Circle

Description

This tool brings participants together in a group discussion to share what they felt, learned, or imagined during a storytelling or futures-focused activity. It fosters a sense of community, encouraging empathy and active listening as participants reflect on their own and others' stories, much like the collaborative spirit of group narrative exercises. It's ideal for noticing emotional shifts and group connections, helping facilitators see how sharing stories builds trust or sparks new ideas.

When to use

At the end of a session or after a key activity, such as one where participants share personal stories or imagine future scenarios, when the group is ready to reflect together.

Sample Format:

| Prompt Questions:

- 1 | What story or moment from today stayed with you, and why did it feel important?
- 2 | How did hearing someone else's narrative make you think differently about your own future?
- 3 | What emotions, excitement, curiosity, or maybe uncertainty, came up for you today?
- 4 | If we were to do another session, what would help you dive even deeper into your story or vision?

| Process:

Gather participants in a circle, in-person or virtually. Use a "talking object" (like a small stone or a digital timer) to give each person 1-2 minutes to share. The facilitator takes brief notes on recurring themes, emotions, or insights, such as a sense of hope or new connections, for later reflection.

Tips for Implementation

Emphasize that sharing is voluntary, allowing participants to pass if they're not ready. To ensure inclusivity, offer alternatives like drawing a symbol or writing a brief note for those less comfortable speaking. If emotions run high, check in privately with participants and use grounding prompts (e.g., "What's one hopeful idea you're taking away?") to maintain a safe, supportive space, aligning with trauma-informed practices from Chapter 6.2.

Feedback tool 2 | Future Vision Cards

Description

Participants use small index cards to jot down quick reflections through words, drawings, or symbols, capturing their thoughts and feelings about the future after an activity. This tool, similar to the individual reflections in Chapter 5.2, is low-pressure and can be anonymous, making it accessible for quieter participants or those exploring personal visions of the future. It helps track growth in confidence and imagination, showing how participants are beginning to see themselves as agents of change.

When to use

Mid-session for a quick check-in or at the end of an activity where participants have imagined future possibilities or shared personal stories, to capture immediate insights.

Sample Format:

| Card Prompts (one per card or side):

- 1 | Draw or write one word or symbol that captures how you feel about the future after today.
- 2 | What new story or idea about yourself or your community did you discover?
- 3 | What question about the future are you carrying with you now?

| Process:

Distribute index cards and markers, giving participants 3-5 minutes to respond. Collect cards anonymously, or invite voluntary sharing in pairs or small groups. The facilitator reviews responses for patterns, such as increased hope or curiosity, to inform future sessions.

Tips for Implementation

Provide stickers or images for participants with low literacy or those who prefer visual expression, ensuring accessibility for diverse needs.

For virtual sessions, use digital tools like shared slides or apps. Group cards thematically (e.g., hope, connection) to guide session planning. Offer extra time or support for those who need it, keeping the process flexible and inclusive.

Feedback tool 3 | Emoji Feedback Board

Description

A visual, interactive tool where participants use emoji stickers or drawings on a board to express their emotions and insights, building on the observational approach. It's quick, engaging, and especially effective for younger or less verbal participants, capturing how activities like storytelling or scenario-building resonate emotionally. This tool helps facilitators gauge group dynamics and emotional responses in a fun, inclusive way.

When to use

At the end of a session, especially after creative or emotionally intense activities like group storytelling or imagining future worlds, to quickly capture feelings and reactions.

Sample Format:

| Board Setup (flipchart or digital board with columns):

Column 1 | "How I Felt Today" (e.g., 😊 for inspired, 😐 for neutral, 😞 for challenged)

Column 2 | "What I Learned" (e.g., 💡 for a new idea, ❓ for a question sparked, 🌟 for a hopeful vision)

Column 3 | "What I Want More Of" (e.g., 🗣️ for discussions, 🎨 for creative activities, 🤝 for group collaboration)

| Process:

Provide emoji stickers or markers for drawing. Participants add to the board in 2-3 minutes. Optionally, discuss patterns as a group (e.g., many 😊 emojis signaling engagement). The facilitator notes or photographs results for later reflection.

Tips for Implementation

Offer a wide range of emojis to capture nuanced emotions, and use tactile stickers for participants with sensory needs. For virtual settings, use platforms like Miro or Jamboard. If strong emotions emerge, follow with a brief group grounding activity (e.g., sharing one positive takeaway) to ensure emotional safety, aligning with trauma-informed principles from Chapter 6.2.

Feedback tool 4 | Narrative Impact Survey

Description

A short questionnaire with rating scales and open-ended questions to measure shifts in confidence, connection, and futures thinking, similar to the surveys described in Chapter 7.2. It provides structured feedback while leaving room for personal stories, making it ideal for assessing how storytelling or futures activities impact participants' sense of agency and belonging.

When to use

After a series of sessions or a particularly impactful activity, such as one where participants challenge societal narratives or envision collective futures, to track progress toward empowerment and transformation.

Sample Format:

| Questions (mix of scales and open-ended):

1 | On a scale of 1-5 (1=not at all, 5=very much), how confident do you feel sharing your stories after this session?

2 | On a scale of 1-5, how connected do you feel to others in the group?

3 | On a scale of 1-5, how much do you feel you can imagine new futures for yourself or your community?

4 | Open-ended: What was the most meaningful story or moment from today, and why did it matter to you?

Open-ended: How might today's session change the way you think about or act toward your future?

| Process:

Distribute surveys (paper, digital, or verbal) and allow 5-10 minutes for completion. Ensure anonymity to encourage honesty. Analyze ratings for trends (e.g., average confidence scores) and review open-ended responses for narrative insights.

Tips for Implementation

Use simple language or visual scales (e.g., smiley faces) for younger or low-literacy participants. Offer verbal surveys for accessibility, ensuring inclusivity as emphasized in Chapter 6.1. Share anonymized results with the group to foster transparency and collective reflection, reinforcing participants' sense of agency.

Feedback tool 5 | Creative Output Reflection

Description

Participants and facilitators review creative outputs, like drawings, stories, or performances, created during the session, building on the creative output analysis in Chapter 7.2. This tool invites participants to reflect on their creations, deepening their understanding of their own narratives and futures, and helps facilitators assess engagement and imagination.

When to use

After activities involving art, storytelling, or performance, such as crafting a story about a future day or creating a visual representation of a desired future, to explore how outputs reflect personal or collective growth.

Sample Format:

| Reflection Prompts (for participants to discuss or write about their outputs):

- 1 | What does your drawing, story, or performance say about the future you imagine?
- 2 | How does this creation connect to a personal or community story you shared today?
- 3 | What surprised you about what you made, or how did it feel to create it?
- 4 | How might this output inspire a small step or action in your life?

| Process:

Encourage diverse formats (e.g., verbal reflections for non-writers) to ensure inclusivity. If outputs touch sensitive topics, frame reflections positively (e.g., focus on strengths) to align with trauma-informed practices from Chapter 7.3. Celebrate outputs by displaying them (with consent) to reinforce participants' sense of ownership.

These feedback tools are like a palette of colors, each offering a different way to capture the vibrancy of young people's stories and visions. They're flexible enough to adapt to any group, from a lively bunch of teens to a quieter mix of young adults, ensuring every voice is heard in a way that feels authentic. By using these tools, facilitators can not only gather insights but also mirror the curriculum's heart, helping young people see the power in their stories and the futures they dare to imagine.

7.4 | Checklists for Facilitators

These feedback tools are like a palette of colors, each offering a different way to capture the vibrancy of young people's stories and visions. They're flexible enough to adapt to any group, from a lively bunch of teens to a quieter mix of young adults, ensuring every voice is heard in a way that feels authentic.

By using these tools, facilitators can not only gather insights but also mirror the curriculum's heart, helping young people see the power in their stories and the futures they dare to imagine.

Facilitating Future Narratives is like holding space for a story to unfold. Each session is a chance to help young people weave their experiences, dreams, and visions into something transformative.

The checklists below are practical tools to guide facilitators through this process, ensuring every session is a safe, inclusive, and empowering experience. Building on the empathetic principles of Chapter 6.1, the participatory methodology of Chapter 6.2, and the feedback tools in Chapter 6.3, these checklists help you prepare, engage, and reflect with intention. They're designed to support the curriculum's heart: creating spaces where young people feel seen, heard, and capable of shaping their futures.

The four checklists, Pre-Session, During-Session, Post-Session, and Trauma-Informed Considerations, are formatted for printing, with clear layouts and checkboxes to make them easy to use in any workshop setting, whether you're guiding a storytelling circle or a futures-focused activity.

Pre_Session | Checklist for Facilitators

Preparation is the foundation of a safe and meaningful session. Use this checklist to ensure you're ready to create a welcoming space for storytelling and futures thinking.

Date:

Session Topic_Activity:

Facilitator Name:

Group Size_Age:

_Define Assessment Goals: Clarify what you're assessing (e.g., confidence in storytelling, group connection, or futures imagination) to align with feedback tools like the Narrative Impact Survey or Story Reflection Circle (Chapter 7.3).

_Select Feedback Tools: Choose tools from Chapter 7.3 that suit the group's needs (e.g., Emoji Feedback Board for younger participants, Future Vision Cards for quieter groups). Ensure tools are accessible for diverse abilities.

_Prepare Materials: Gather supplies for activities and feedback (e.g., index cards, markers, emoji stickers, flipcharts, digital tools for virtual sessions). Check for extras to accommodate spontaneous needs.

_Plan for Inclusivity: Review group diversity (language, literacy, neurodiversity) and adapt activities (e.g., offer verbal or visual options, translation support) to ensure everyone can participate.

_Incorporate Trauma-Informed Practices: Plan grounding activities (e.g., a brief breathing exercise) and ensure prompts avoid sensitive topics unless trust is established. Have resources (e.g., counseling contacts) ready.

_Set Up Space: Arrange seating for comfort and visibility (e.g., circle for discussions). Minimize distractions and ensure accessibility (e.g., clear paths for mobility needs).

_Review Session Flow: Plan time for activities, feedback, and reflection (e.g., 5-10 minutes for Story Reflection Circle). Build in flexibility for emotional or group dynamics.

_Collaborate with Co-Facilitators: Brief any co-facilitators on roles, feedback collection, and inclusivity strategies to ensure consistent support.

Notes:

During_Session | Checklist for Facilitators

Stay present and responsive during the session to foster a supportive environment. This checklist helps you monitor engagement and adapt to participants' needs.

Date:

Session Topic_Activity:

Facilitator Name:

Group Size_Age:

_Introduce Feedback Purpose: Clearly explain why feedback matters (e.g., "Your reflections help us make future sessions even better") and how tools like Future Vision Cards will be used, ensuring transparency (Chapter 6.1).

_Monitor Group Dynamics: Observe participation levels, noting who's engaged or hesitant. Look for signs of connection (e.g., laughter, active listening) or disengagement to adjust pacing or activities.

_Adapt for Inclusivity: Offer alternative participation methods (e.g., drawing instead of speaking for Story Reflection Circle) for diverse needs. Check in with quieter participants privately to ensure they feel included.

_Encourage Active Listening: Model and reinforce respectful listening during discussions, using techniques like passing a talking object to give everyone a chance to share, as in Chapter 6.3.

_Watch for Emotional Cues: Notice signs of distress (e.g., withdrawal, sudden silence) and respond with care, offering breaks or grounding prompts (e.g., "Let's share one hopeful idea"). Align with trauma-informed practices from Chapter 6.3.

_Facilitate Feedback Activities: Guide feedback tools (e.g., Emoji Feedback Board) clearly, giving enough time (e.g., 3-5 minutes for cards, 10 minutes for discussions). Ensure instructions are simple and accessible.

_Take Observational Notes: Jot down key moments (e.g., a participant's breakthrough in sharing, group laughter) for post-session reflection, as outlined in Chapter 7.2's observational approach.

_Balance Time: Keep activities on track while allowing flexibility for deeper discussions or emotional processing, ensuring no one feels rushed.

Notes:

Post_Session | Checklist for Facilitators

Reflection after a session helps you understand impact and plan improvements. Use this checklist to process feedback and refine your approach.

Date:

Session Topic_Activity:

Facilitator Name:

Group Size_Age:

_Collect Feedback: Gather outputs from tools like Future Vision Cards or Narrative Impact Surveys (Chapter 7.3). Ensure all responses are collected respectfully, respecting anonymity preferences.

_Organize Data: Sort feedback (e.g., group cards by themes, tally survey scores) to identify patterns, such as increased confidence or recurring emotions, as per Chapter 7.2's analysis step.

_Reflect with Co-Facilitators: Discuss observations and feedback with team members. Note successes (e.g., strong group connection) and challenges (e.g., some participants disengaged) to plan adjustments.

_Document Insights: Record key findings (e.g., "Participants felt hopeful after imagining futures") in a session log to track progress and inform future workshops. Include emotional and narrative themes.

_Share with Participants: If appropriate, share anonymized feedback (e.g., "Many of you felt inspired by today's stories") to build transparency and reinforce agency.

_Plan Adaptations: Use insights to tweak future sessions (e.g., add more creative activities if Emoji Feedback Board shows demand). Address any inclusivity gaps, like offering more visual prompts.

_Check Emotional Impact: Reflect on whether the session left participants hopeful or stable. If emotional challenges arose, plan follow-up support (e.g., check-ins, resource sharing).

_Celebrate Successes: Acknowledge positive moments (e.g., a shy participant sharing a story) to maintain motivation and reinforce the curriculum's goal of empowerment.

Notes:

Trauma-Informed | Consideration Checklist

Creating a safe space is critical for storytelling and futures work. This checklist ensures facilitators prioritize psychological safety and empowerment.

Date:

Session Topic_Activity:

Facilitator Name:

Group Size_Age:

_Set Ground Rules: Establish clear guidelines for respect, confidentiality, and the right to pass on any activity or question, communicated at the start of the session.

_Offer Choice and Control: Ensure participants know they can opt out of sharing or choose alternative formats (e.g., drawing instead of speaking) for feedback tools like Creative Output Reflection (Chapter 7.3).

_Use Indirect Methods: Incorporate less direct storytelling methods (e.g., metaphors, fictional narratives) for sensitive topics, allowing participants to express without vulnerability.

_Monitor Emotional Responses: Watch for signs of distress (e.g., withdrawal, irritability) during activities or feedback, responding with care (e.g., offering a break, checking in privately).

_Create a Safe Physical Space: Arrange seating comfortably, reduce noise or interruptions, and ensure accessibility (e.g., clear paths for mobility needs) to support emotional stability.

_End on a Hopeful Note: Close feedback activities (e.g., Story Reflection Circle) with positive prompts (e.g., "What's one idea you're excited to carry forward?") to leave participants empowered, not anxious.

_Provide Support Resources: Have contacts for counseling or crisis services available, sharing discreetly if needed. Ensure participants know where to find help post-session.

_Reflect on Your Responses: Stay calm and present when hearing difficult stories, modeling grounding behavior to maintain a safe environment, as emphasized in Chapter 7.2.

Notes:

These checklists are like a trusted notebook for facilitators, helping you stay grounded while guiding young people through their stories and futures. They're designed to be printed and carried into any workshop, offering a clear, practical way to ensure sessions are inclusive, reflective, and transformative. By using them, you'll create spaces where every participant feels valued and empowered to imagine what's possible, just as the curriculum envisions.



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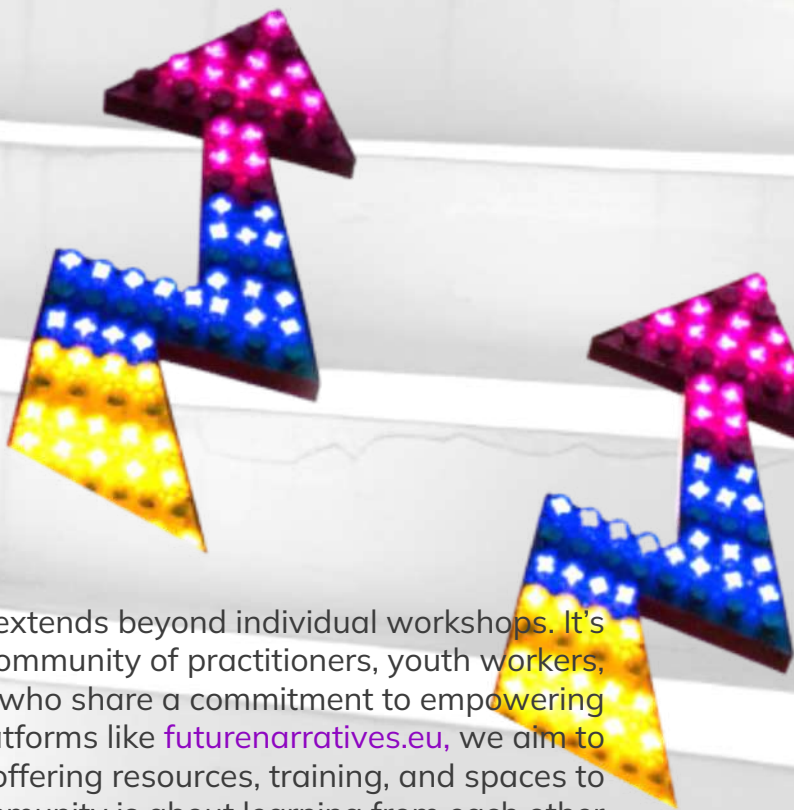
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**FINAL WORDS
& WIDER
IMPACT**

The Future Narratives curriculum is a journey of stories, stories that young people tell about themselves, their communities, and the futures they want to build. It's about creating spaces where voices often unheard find strength, where imagination becomes a tool for change, and where youth workers and young people together shape possibilities that are inclusive and hopeful. As we close this curriculum, we reflect on its core idea: that stories are not just reflections of who we are but powerful acts of creation, capable of redefining what's possible.

This curriculum, developed through collaboration across diverse contexts across Europe, offers a structured yet flexible framework for youth workers. It starts with foundational concepts in storytelling and Futures Literacy, explaining how narratives operate at multiple levels: personal, where individuals explore their identities and experiences; community, where shared stories build bonds and understanding; societal, where broader myths and discourses are questioned; and future, where new visions emerge. Practical activities, such as sharing personal objects to uncover individual stories or using Causal Layered Analysis to dissect societal narratives, provide hands-on ways to engage young people in this process.

Central to the curriculum is the integration of storytelling with Futures Literacy, equipping participants with tools to navigate uncertainty and imagine alternatives. Methods like Futures Literacy Labs guide groups through revealing assumptions, reframing perspectives, rethinking questions, and acting on insights, turning abstract ideas into actionable steps. These elements are supported by inclusive facilitation strategies that address diversity, from adapting activities for different abilities to incorporating trauma-informed practices that prioritise safety and choice. Assessment and feedback tools, including reflection circles and surveys, ensure the process remains reflective, allowing facilitators to measure growth in confidence, connection, and agency while adapting to each group's needs.

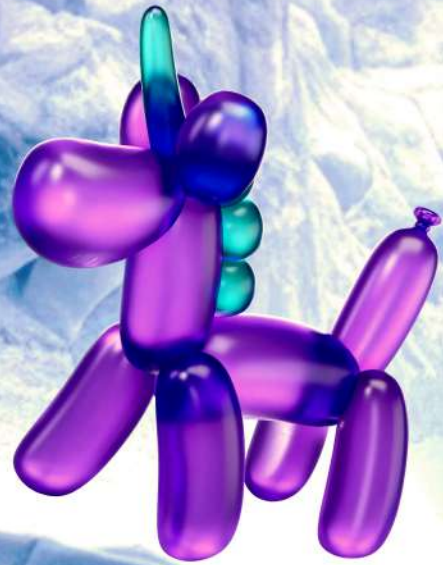
At its heart, Future Narratives is about agency. It invites young people to see themselves not as passive recipients of a predetermined future but as active authors of what comes next. By combining storytelling with Futures Literacy, the curriculum equips participants with the skills to question assumptions, imagine alternatives, and take small, meaningful steps toward change. It's a process that starts with individuals, perhaps a young person discovering their voice through a story they've never shared before, and ripples outward to communities, where shared narratives foster connection and collective action.



The vision for Future Narratives extends beyond individual workshops. It's about building a growing community of practitioners, youth workers, educators, and facilitators, who share a commitment to empowering young people. Through platforms like futurenarratives.eu, we aim to connect these practitioners, offering resources, training, and spaces to exchange experiences. This community is about learning from each other to refine and expand how we help young people shape their worlds. Traces&Dreams, as project coordinator, is dedicated to supporting this network, fostering collaboration, and encouraging innovation in youth work.

The wider impact of Future Narratives lies in its potential to shift how we think about the future. By giving young people tools to tell their stories and imagine possibilities, we're not just preparing them for what's ahead, we're inviting them to define it. This work can influence communities, challenging dominant narratives that limit opportunity and amplifying voices that are too often overlooked. It can spark conversations that lead to action, whether through public storytelling events, creative projects, or advocacy rooted in youth-led visions. The curriculum's flexibility means it can take root in diverse settings, schools, youth centers, or community spaces, adapting to local needs while staying true to its core: that the future is not fixed, but shaped by the stories we tell and the courage we bring to telling them.

As you move forward with Future Narratives, we invite you to see this curriculum as a starting point. Experiment with its tools, adapt them to your context, and share what you learn. Every story shared, every future imagined, is a step toward a world where young people are not just dreamers but builders of what's possible. Together, we can create spaces where their voices shape not only their own futures but the futures of their communities and beyond.



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APPENDIX _ GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Anticipation

A theory and practice exploring how systems (especially living systems) anticipate and adapt based on internal models of the future. Unlike reactive systems, anticipatory systems act in the present based on expectations of future conditions.

Anticipatory Present Moment (APM)

A concept proposing that time is multidimensional, combining succession, potential, and ability to act. It describes how individuals use mental time travel to access different kinds of futures and make choices in the present.

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

A method developed by Sohail Inayatullah to explore four layers of understanding: (1) Litany (surface-level facts and issues), (2) Systemic causes, (3) Worldviews/discourses, and (4) Metaphors/myths. It allows for deep analysis and alternative future scenario development.

Drivers of Change

Forces (social, technological, political, ecological, economic) that amplify and influence trends. They are often interconnected and dynamic, shaping how change spreads.

Forecast

A probabilistic statement about the future based on existing data and trends. Common in economics and science, forecasts suggest what is likely to happen under current trajectories.

Foresight

A structured, participatory process of exploring multiple possible futures to inform present-day decision-making. It is not predictive but rather exploratory and strategic.

Futures Literacy

The capacity to understand and use the future to guide action in the present. It involves revealing and reframing anticipatory assumptions, and embracing uncertainty and complexity.

Futures Literacy Lab (FLL)

A learning-by-doing method for exploring, challenging, and reshaping anticipatory assumptions about the future through collaborative, creative processes.

Futures Studies

Also known as futurology or foresight, it is the study of possible, probable, and preferable futures. It includes analysis of trends, alternative scenarios, and underlying worldviews.

Futuribles

A term indicating a range of possible and probable alternative futures. Commonly used in Europe, it underscores the plurality of future outcomes.

Futurist

A person trained or practiced in exploring future possibilities, trends, and strategies. Futurists help individuals and organisations navigate uncertainty and make informed decisions.

Futures Thinking

A discipline involving the systematic exploration of potential futures through methods like scenario planning, foresight, and visioning. It fosters creativity, preparedness, and agency.

Litany (CLA layer)

The most visible and superficial level of an issue, typically including media headlines, statistics, and everyday complaints. Often disconnected from deeper analysis.

Megatrend

A long-term, large-scale shift impacting multiple areas of society, such as climate change, digitalisation, or demographic ageing. Often composed of multiple converging trends.

Metaphor/Myth (CLA layer)

The deepest layer in CLA, referring to symbolic or emotional narratives that shape collective understanding (e.g., "man conquers nature"). Often unconscious but powerful.

Prediction

An absolute, non-probabilistic statement about the future. Unlike forecasts, predictions imply full certainty, which is rarely achievable in complex systems.

Prevision

A rarely used term related to foreseeing the future. Distinct from forecast and prediction, but lacking widespread application or consensus.

Projection

A linear extension of past and present trends into the future. Common in demographic and economic modelling, it assumes continuity.

Prospective

A concept rooted in French tradition, referring to a way of engaging with the future that combines deterministic constraints (from the past/present) and willed choices (toward change).

Storytelling

The practice of conveying experiences, values, and knowledge through narrative. Used as a tool for identity-building, community cohesion, knowledge transfer, and imagining futures.

Strategic Foresight

A subset of foresight focused on informing decision-making and strategy development, often within organisations or governments.

Systemic Causes (CLA layer)

The underlying structures, economic, social, cultural, institutional, that generate and sustain surface-level issues. Explored in the second layer of CLA.

Trend

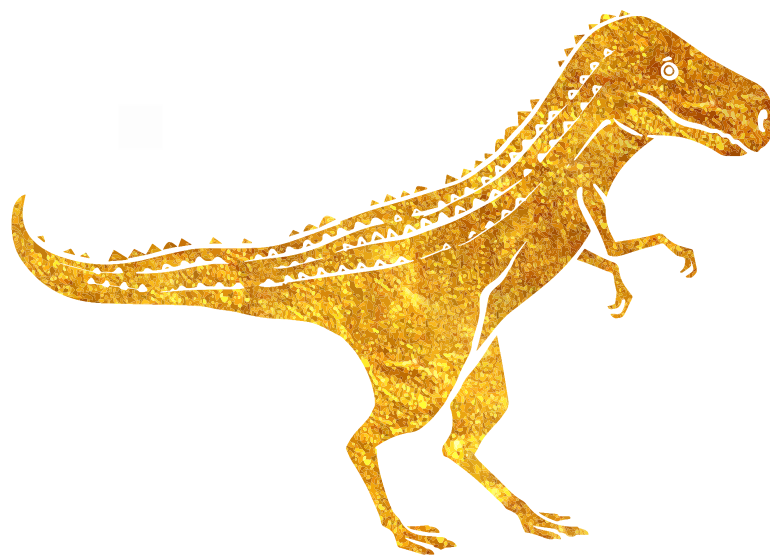
A measurable change or pattern over time, often indicating emerging directions in behaviour, society, technology, or the environment.

Worldview/Discourse (CLA layer)

The third CLA layer encompassing the ideologies, belief systems, and stakeholders that frame how issues are perceived and legitimised.



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*“...What if instead
of
a secret,
it were just
a matter of c*

