



## Transforming the Future Anticipation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

As we enter the 2020s decade in a world that appears chaotic and unpredictable, apprehension about the future grows, exacerbated by the widespread conviction that change is accelerating. All of these perceptions, and the associated feelings and actions, are powerfully influenced by the futures we imagine. It is images of the future that orient our attention, set up the scales and rates of change that induce anxiety, and fill us with hope and ambition or dread and despair. Yet, despite the power of both the human imagination and the images of the future it conjures, we know very little about why and how we imagine the future.



Thursday 20 February  
2020

1 – 2 pm

Room IX

**Futures Literacy** refers to the capacity to determine why and how we imagine the future. Like any competency, mastery requires an understanding of both the theory and practice. Since 2012 UNESCO has been pioneering an action-learning/action-research approach to: a) discovering the diversity of anticipatory systems and processes that shape why and how people ‘use-the-future’; b) co-creating local Futures Literacy capabilities; c) expanding perceptions of the present and sparking new questions of direct relevance to local actors; and d) improved the tools for diffusing and researching Futures Literacy. The Routledge/UNESCO publication, [Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century](#), presents key findings from this work and points to the critical role Futures Literacy could play in addressing the challenges of the 21st Century.

In 2012 **Riel Miller** was appointed Head of Foresight at UNESCO and he is currently Head of Futures Literacy. Since his arrival at UNESCO a series of projects, leveraging UNESCO’s pivotal role as a global laboratory-of-ideas, have enabled major advances in the development of the theory and practice of Futures Literacy. Over sixty-five Futures Literacy Laboratories have been co-designed with local partners in over twenty-five countries. A significant UNESCO Chairs initiative has created eleven new post holders, dedicated to advancing research, learning and community engagement in Futures Studies/Futures Literacy. There are some five to eight more Chairs in the pipeline for 2020. Recently UNESCO’s leadership role in the field has been recognized by the UN High Level Committee on Programmes with a request to champion a UN wide community of practice. Last December UNESCO organized the first Global Futures Literacy Design Forum here in Paris and a follow-up Futures Literacy Summit is planned for September.



To mark its 75th anniversary in 2020, the United Nations has launched the biggest-ever global conversation on the role of global cooperation in building the future we want. The Memory & Future Club invites its members and friends to join this conversation in a spontaneous and improvised anticipation exercise with Riel Miller to imagine possible futures.



**Dr Riel Miller** joined UNESCO in 2012 and is currently Head of Futures Literacy in the Social and Human Sciences Sector. He has previously worked as a senior manager in the Ontario public service (Ministries of Finance, of Universities and of Industry) and at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris (Economics, Science & Technology, Education, Territorial Development, Development Centre, International Futures Programme). In 2005 he founded a consultancy – xperidox to advise on how to use the future more effectively. He is widely published in academic journals and other media on a range of topics, from the future of the Internet to transforming strategic processes. His new book, a major academic work entitled *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century*, was co-published in 2018 by UNESCO and Routledge.

The Memory & Future Club of the Association of Former UNESCO staff strives to collect and transmit testimonies of former officials and confront them with current issues in international cooperation. Building on their shared memory, members of this group meet informally with colleagues in charge to exchange freely and find through past experience a better path for the future.