Shakin' the classroom
Spreading alternative knowledge sharing methods

Please briefly explain the knowledge sharing method/approach/tool
What are the main processes? What are the expected outcomes? In what ways does that method bring change or represent an alternative to existing or dominant knowledge sharing settings and methods?

The "Postcard from the future" method is a quick and intuitive tool to get an insight into the beliefs, expectations and future visions of participants, as well as to start and steer discussion on sensitive topics and future scenarios. Each participant creates a postcard – drawing or making collage on one side and writing a message on the other. The postcard should be coming from the future – 10, 20, 100 years time. In practice, this means that participants can either create a postcard to themselves coming from an imagined relative or more-than-human person from a future generation. For shorter time spans, participants can also create a postcard from older self to the current self.

In some of its versions, as the one suggested by RE:Imaginary, participants are asked to imagine positive changes that have taken place in part due to their efforts, and that the future person wants to thank them. The postcard describes the way things are in the future, actions that were taken to get there, and extends gratitude to the people from the past for their efforts and caring. This version stimulates concrete positive visions of the future (which have been shown to help catalyze action), suggests concrete pathways and actions to get there, and incorporates the future generations into one's current identity (essentially expanding the sense of self through time). Because the exercise is relatively broad and open ended, it often provokes unexpected, spontaneous ideas.

In other versions, as the one done by Mas Arte Mas Accion in Choco in Colombia, postcards from the future served as a method to steer public discussion and public imaginary about desireable and undesireable paths of development, specially in the light of the possible construction of a big port in a small fisherman town Nuqui. Based on these postcards further discussions and collection of movies was produced, and served as a way to advocate for desireable changes and against the port.

In a project done within the London city museums, Postcards from the Future method was used by artists to create images of familiar and famous sites within London and other cities, but altered due to the impact of climate change. In this case they postcards were showing negative outcomes in a sort of apocaliptic manner, that were aimed at steering further discussion on climate change.

Steps (as advised by RE:Imagery):
1. Start by explaining the activity and the thinking behind it. Each person should be equipped with large index cards or full size A4 cardstock and drawing materials.
2. The facilitator can start with a statement asking the participants to imagine the future. For example, "place yourself 100 years into the future and imagine that some of the work that you are doing has created a positive change for your great-grandchildren or the great-grandchildren of your close friends and family." Ask them to imagine where their relation lives, how old they are, and what they are doing when they decide to write the postcard. Think about the smells, sights, sounds of the time.

3. Next ask everyone to decorate the front of their card. If you are using collage, make sure to have those materials organized and available. This could take between 5 and 15 minutes.
4. After everyone is finished, people can share in pairs about what inspired the front of the card. Where is the post card from and what do the images represent?
5. Then, ask participants to write the text of the postcard in the voice of the future relation, covering specific questions/prompts as mentioned above in the description, as well as some words about why the post card was "chosen" or made. This should take another 5-10 minutes.
6. Finally invite everyone to share their post cards in small groups and reflect on the process and what stood out. What were the similarities and differences between their visions and pathways? Could these visions coexist? What was meaningful for them, what was surprising, what might have been challenging? These reflections can be captured collectively and reported back in the plenary.

In which way is this method alternative?

How does it try to bring change or represent an alternative to existing or dominant knowledge sharing settings and methods?

This method supports participants in imagining the future and future generations in a way that is tangible and personal, rather than abstract and theoretical. In some versions it engages with real and burning dillemas and problems of present day and tries to introduce unespected perspectives by exceeding the time span of imagination into the future. It is imaginative, engaging and able to reveal hidden assumptions, fears and desires of participants.

What are your experiences with the method?

In case you have created, tested or experienced the method, what are your experiences? How have you applied the method? Would you change anything or suggest further development?

I have not tested the method myself, but I witnessed how the method was used by Mas Arte Mas Accion in Choco in Colombia, as a way to connect Buenaventura as a big port coastal city with a small fisherman town of Nuqui, which faced possibility of building a big port. The method was sucessful in steering public discussion and public imaginary about desireable and undesireable paths of development, and connect experiences and solidarities from one place to another. As I explained, there are numerous variations and addaptation to this method, as it offers an engaging framework for a wide array of issues and topics.

In your opinion, for what kind of pedagogical contexts, settings, participants and/or objectives is this method best suited for?

E.g. age, educational level, cultural and professional background, etc. Did it prove useful or successful in particular contexts and for particular objectives?

The method can be implemented as an ice breaker at the beginning of a whole workshop or even course on specific topic, to get participants engaged in the topic and bring forward ideas, concerns and issues. It can also be a central activity of a workshop specially in the case there is a joint concern and issue about the future or present which is to be addressed by the method, after which a discussion and reflection can take place. The method can be suited for

participants with different backgrounds, including children, as well as a mixed group of participants.

What are the requirements for applying this method?

Are there any requirements or limits in terms of location, number or profile of participants, tools and devices, time constraints and other? Are there certain skills, sensitivities or relations that need to be developed or assumed for the method to be successfully applied? What are the crucial points to pay attention to when implementing the method in different contexts? Are there any contexts for which this method is not best suited?

Depending on how it is used, it can last for 15minutes or even whole day. What is needed are postcard-sized thick paper, pens and color pencils, or collage materials in the case a collage will be made. If there is a particular case or place under discussion, the method is best to be applied in situ, but otherwise can be applied in different settigs, including online.

If possible, please briefly explain the context in which the method/tool/approach has been developed.

Who were the main actors? What were the main reasons/motivations/inspirations behind the creation? Which previous developments have influenced it? If relevant, in what ways did the method/tool develop or change over time or in different locations/contexts?

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Could you provide any relevant testimonies?

If possible, please provide testimonies, reflections, evaluations and statements about the method, by yourself or method's author(s) or other users.

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Additional references and links

If possible, please provide additional links, literature, instructions and/or other relevant content. These can be links, texts and similar. In case you want to share pictures, videos, reports or other materials, please send them to s.nikitin@univ-lyon2.fr.

Hershfield, H. E. (2011). Future self-continuity: How conceptions of the future self transform intertemporal choice.
Hara, K., Yoshioka, R., Kuroda, M., Kurimoto, S., & Saijo, T. (2019). Reconciling intergenerational conflicts with imaginary future generations: evidence from a participatory deliberation practice in a municipality in Japan.