

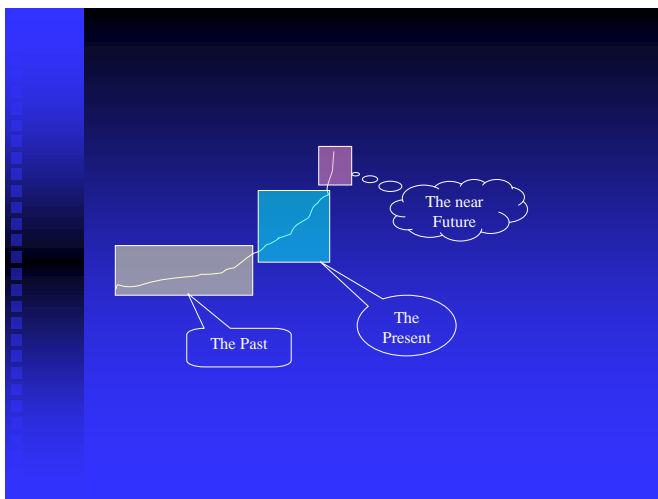
Change – the only constant

An urgent call to teach creative and critical thinking

By Dr Christopher Pepler

I wrote this article in 2004. Now, in 2014 the rate of change is even greater and societies and economies have become increasingly unstable and unpredictable.

In 1972 a futurist by the name of Alvin Toffler wrote a ground-breaking book which he called 'Future Shock'. His main contention was that humanity was suffering trauma because of the premature arrival of the future. That was over three decades ago! If people were in shock then because of the rate of change, what must we all be experiencing today?!



Here is the problem. In our parent's day change occurred at an orderly and manageable rate. It wasn't that hard for them to predict future trends because all they had to do was to extrapolate the past. Marshall McLuhan had it right regarding that generation when he said "We drive into the future using only our rear view mirror." Sounds strange today, but it worked ... then. However, over the last two decades the rate of

change has escalated. No longer can we even attempt to predict the future by projecting past trends. Science fiction writers of twenty years ago observed the technologies and philosophies of their day and then created an imaginative view of the future based on these observations of their present reality. But even that method of getting ahead of the game is now failing because of unprecedented changes that are currently sweeping society. Professor Vernor Vinge of San Diego State University wrote; 'We are on the edge of change comparable to the rise of human life on Earth... we are entering a regime as radically different from our human past as we humans are from the lower animals.' He is not the only one who is thinking like this; the futurist Ray Kurzweil wrote that 'the 21st century will be equivalent to 20,000 years of progress at today's rate of progress'. Think of it! In the year 2004 alone we will experience as much change as occurred in three of our ancestors life-times! How is that for future shock!

At our church camp a month ago I was talking about things like Nanotechnology and how the prediction was that within five years they would have produced a computer hard drive of a thousand gigabytes that would fit on a finger nail. The day before the presentation I was browsing through a computer magazine and came across this advertisement. Only five gigs in capacity at present but just look at how tiny the thing is! Indeed, the premature arrival of the future.



A second dimension to the problem is that the rate of change is not limited to those on the technological cutting edge. Technology cannot be separated from culture and even relatively isolated third-world cultures are experiencing accelerated change because of the tidal wave of change that is sweeping the planet. Jim Pinto, another futurist, wrote; '... there is no segment of modern life that is not currently in crisis. More than ever before, the world seems to be poised for rapid change.'

I have used the word 'problem' twice so far. Why 'problem' instead of 'opportunity'? Because the generation we are currently educating has not been taught to think either creatively or critically. Without the ability to think creatively change of this magnitude becomes numbing and fearful. Without the ability to think critically massive change becomes the grounds for equally massive deception. Fear paralysis and deception are both first order problems and if we are to change these problems into opportunities then we are going to have to teach people to THINK both creatively and critically.

The Lord Jesus foresaw the changes that were to come upon mankind. Luke 21:26 records His words that 'men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world...' In the Matthew 24 passage concerning the signs of the end of the age, Jesus warns of great deception: "Watch out that no one deceives you." (vs. 4) and "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time." (vs. 24,25). Fear and deception, the negative fruit of too much change, too quickly.

Teaching people to think both creatively and critically is number three on the list of the top three things I believe Christian educationalist need to impart in these days. It is such an urgent need that it takes third spot only to the our first priority of encouraging a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus characterised by trust and obedience, and the second priority of encouraging the building of strong friendships with other believers.

Creative thinking is a way of approaching problems and opportunities from radically new perspectives. Instead of making arbitrary either/or decisions, a creative thinker will seek the both/and or the, at first unseen, 'third way'. A creative mind rides the tidal

wave of change while others are closed up in a mental 'ark' just waiting in fear for the wave to swamp them.

Critical thinking is the process of evaluating truth claims against established criteria; of being able to separate intellectual wheat from chaff; of discerning truth from deception. Whilst creative thinking is a predominately right hemisphere brain function, critical thinking is left hemisphere oriented.

The escalating rate of change is going to be a major factor in our lives. If we are to be adequately equipped to meet the future and to effectively serve the Lord Jesus Christ then we need to learn how to think, both creatively and critically.