



THE TRANSFORMING EARLY LEARNING FUTURE VISIONING INITIATIVE

Purpose: The future of the early years system is on the national agenda. The overarching goal of this process is to ensure that children, families and communities across Australia are contributing to the dialogue on visions for the future of the early learning system. System stakeholders are also being engaged to ensure that diverse perspectives from across a range of agendas and sectors are being woven into ongoing visioning, dialogue and strategic considerations.

About the Apiary Fellowship: The Front Project, with The Apiary Fellowship, is bringing the voices of children and families to the centre of conversations about the future. The Apiary Fellowship is for leaders committed to creating thriving futures for children in Australia. It builds collaborative leadership and the capability to bring about change at a systems level. Apiary Fellows continuously collaborate and learn to identify what can be done to improve the lives of children today and in generations to come.

The ‘transformative futures’ conversation series: From October 2022 for several months, Apiary Fellows will be hosting a series of visioning conversations with children, families and communities from across Australia. These conversations will be focused on visioning for the future of the early learning system and will include perspectives from children as young as 4 years old as well as parents, carers and families.

October Summit: To launch these conversations and to enable a wider contribution from system stakeholders, a one-day Summit was held in Canberra on **28 October 2022**. [Read the interim report.](#)

- Futuring is about exploring diverse perspectives.
- Practitioners, leaders, and decision makers are being invited to attend. Participants will include those working with or for children in ECEC settings, playgroups, early learning initiatives and campaigns, First Nations and cultural settings, health, mental health, disability, early intervention, community, arts and play.
- The Summit will be unlike other conversations being held. It will provide a unique forum for thinking differently with others in order to re-imagine a new era for children.

Outcomes for the early years: In addition to the benefits of participation in the Summit and subsequent conversations, this process of collective visioning will also generate a rich bank of insights about desired futures for the early learning system. These outputs from the conversation series will be curated and shared. Insights generated will provide critical information that can inform strategy development across a diverse range of early years issues.

A subsequent series of 'sensemaking' activities is being planned for March-April 2023. These activities will be tailored to address specific needs and themes emerging from the visioning conversations. Each will consider the strategic implications of the visioning process and explore how to navigate from the current to desired future states.

ABOUT COLLECTIVE VISIONING

What is futures thinking?

Collective visions emerge over time from the exploration of a wide range of desired and plausible futures. This exploration is facilitated by futures thinking.

Futures thinking does not attempt to predict the future. Rather, it is a creative and exploratory process that uses divergent thinking, seeking many possible answers and acknowledging uncertainty. It's a different mind-set to analytical thinking which uses convergent thinking to seek the right answer and reduce uncertainty.

There are many possible futures. Judgment of what is possible, plausible, probable, or even preferable, will differ between people and over time. This is what makes inclusive and collective discussions about the future so engaging and important. It is these discussions which can generate rich insights into the future, and inform decisions in the present.

Futures thinking has a range of innovative and interactive methods to help people uncover unique insights for the longer-term. The intention of each method is to help participants to move beyond the default frames of likely-unlikely or desirable-undesirable futures, to question assumptions and to explore a wider lens of possibilities.

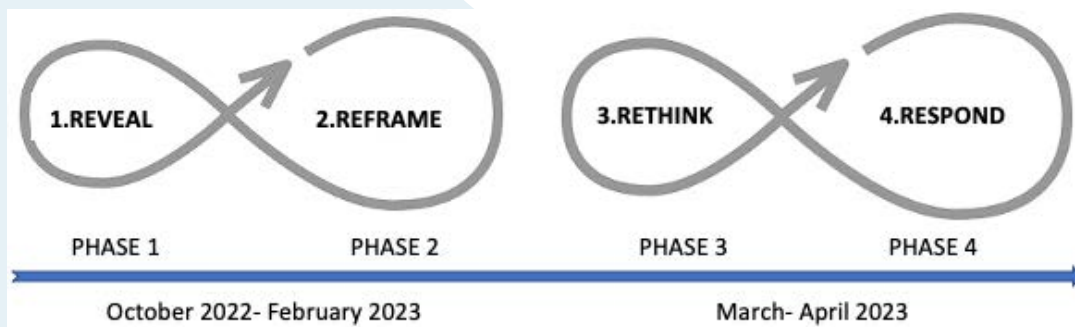
How is it done?

To put it simply, futuring has four phases that build on each other:

- **Phase 1 – reveal:** a chance for participants to share their individual expectations and images for a desirable future and to explicitly discuss their assumptions about the topic
- **Phase 2 – reframe:** a collaborative opportunity to imagine the future through a frame that is distinct from the ones revealed in phase 1. We achieve this by experimenting with different sets of key drivers and assumptions to stretch the imagination and craft an alternative future scenario.
- **Phase 3 – rethink:** when participants come back to the present and look at the futures they explored, search for new issues that have emerged and ask powerful new questions
- **Phase 4 – respond:** driven by the questions raised in phase 3, this phase is about ideas for learning and gaining new knowledge. It can include projects, prototypes, and action learning plans.

What will we be doing?

Our goal is to help participants move through phases 1 and 2 (reveal and reframe) during the Summit and the wider visioning process across Australia from November 2022 to February 2023.



Phases 3 and 4 (rethink and respond) will be part of the sense making process in 2023, when collective visions gathered from across Australia will be explored.

As mentioned above, creativity is a key technique for futuring. It helps to enable a focus on complexity, novelty, and openness.

During the Summit, three distinct methods were utilised to help prompt collective imagining. These methods have been designed with inputs from leading futurists. They included: postcards to the future (photo elicitation); landscapes of the future (3d system modelling) and transformative futures (narrative scenario development).

These methods will be repeated across the 'transformative futures' conversation activities with children, families, early learning professionals, child development specialists, policymakers and advocates. Results will be pooled and themed to generate collective visions of the future of early learning in Australia.

Authored by Dr Fiona McKenzie for the Front Project, October 2022

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