

PISGA Be'er Sheva Future Center-an Engine for Educating city

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1. Abstract

One of the pillars of the "educating city" is the formal education system. And the good teacher – who continuously explores, learns, creates, initiates, educates and implements – is one of its most important agents. The PISGA Beer Sheva City Center is responsible for the professional development of the teachers.

- ❖ What if the center will reinvent itself, and provide future-oriented development of the city teaching staff of today and tomorrow, so they will fit the needs of the urban education environment - also in 5, 10 and 20 years from now?
- ❖ What if all city stakeholders – the teachers themselves, the city council people, the children, the business community, the senior citizens the artists – will be involved in this future-oriented teachers development? Thus, the teacher's development will co-evolve as a collective creation of the conversing community.
- ❖ And therefore, what if the traditional development center will be TRANSFORMED into an Educational future center?

The team of the Beer Sheva PISGA center, augmented by many other city players, is working on turning the above vision into reality and making it happen.

We developed a unique concept with five building blocks:

At the heart of it, there is the "COMMUNITY CONVERSATION" which discuss the future needs, challenges, trends and opportunities of Education in general and teachers development in particular; The community conversations generate "FUTURE IMAGES" which identify and illustrate possible development directions of the local and global society, economy, and technology and their implication to education. these images trigger invention and exploration of new (or upgraded) educating concepts, methods and tools which are developed and experimented in the "INNOVATION LAB". And finally, the "CENTER for FUTURE SKILLS" provide the teachers and other stakeholders with the new set of skills that they will need in order to remain a main influencing player in the future educating city.

The model of the PISGA future center is based on the model of "Urban Future Center". Our work was inspired by ideas from the democratic education movement as well as by pioneering attempts in the business world to establish future centers.

2. HISTORY

When the center was established some 30 years ago, it was called “The Center for Pedagogical Resources”. In the recent years, a process of self renewal was initiated. In 1999 the center moved to its new purpose building contributed by the Jewish community of Montréal city. In 2000 it initiated the Café’ periodical gathering series; in 2001 it redefined its goal, and Knowledge Management became a core objective. In 2002 It was transformed into a “PISGA-center for professional development of teaching staff”. Throughout this period, the team was continuously pioneering new ways of teaching, and the place became a role model for similar institutions and also created significant network of collaborations with external players such as universities.

And...in parallel to its dedication to the on-going work and tasks, the team was in a continuous search after the next challenges and unexplored territories. Thus, when we were exposed to the idea of Future Center, it was only natural for us to decide – we are going to be the first Future Center in the country, and possibly one of the firsts in the world, in the domain of education. Nothing less. However, the team never saw this move as an end for itself. Rather, it fit perfectly not only to the team’s adventurous spirit but also to the center’s basic beliefs, core principles and the way we perceived the fundamental goals of the center. The objectives of the transformation into a future center are highlighted in the following section.

3. THE OBJECTIVES

The future center has several interlinked objectives:

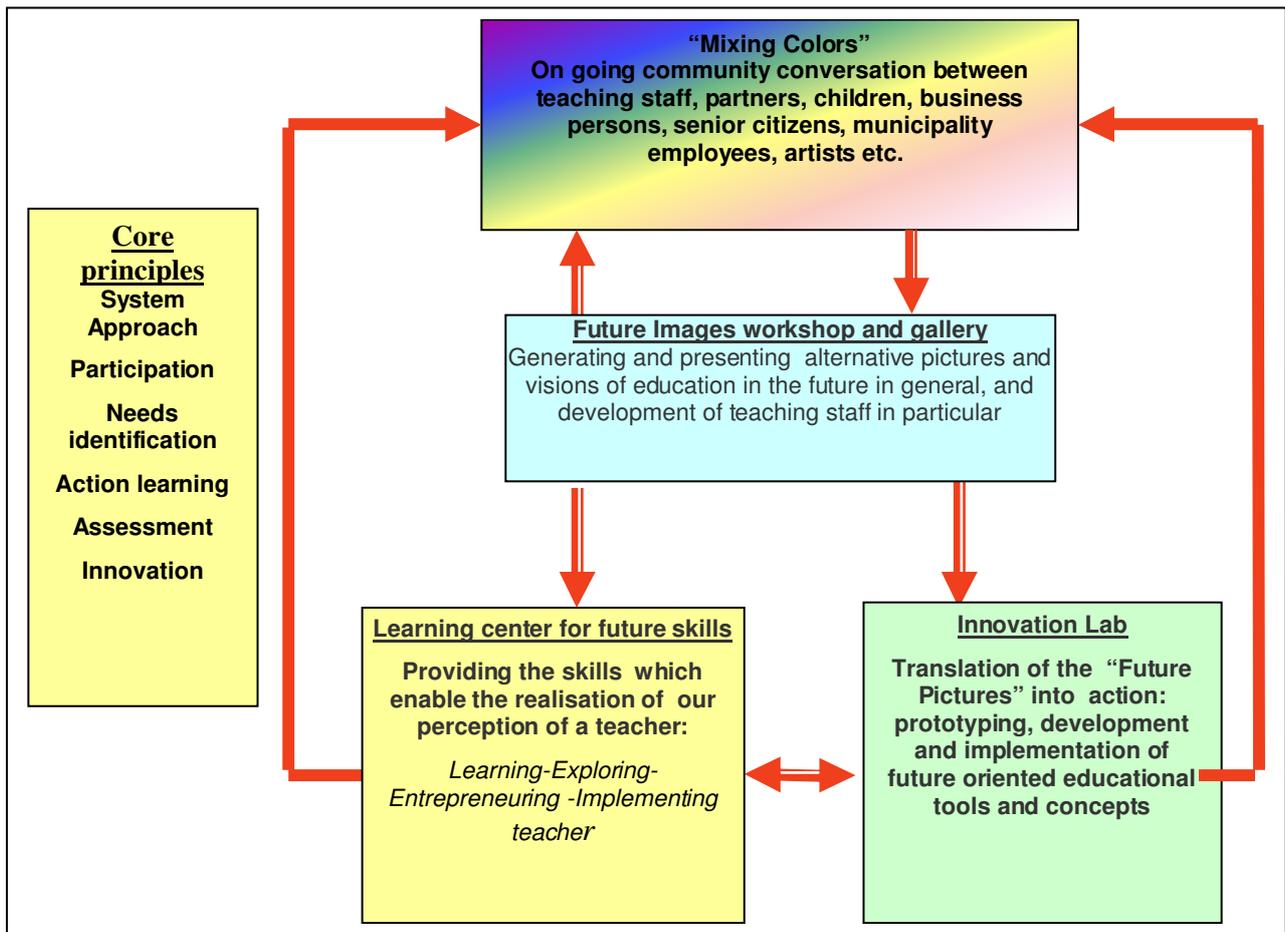
- ❖ Helping the professional development system of Beer Sheva city teaching staff to **prepare to the future** in a systematic way.
- ❖ **Future-oriented development** of the city teaching staff of today and tomorrow, so they will fit the needs of the urban education environment - also in 5, 10 and 20 years from now.
- ❖ Transforming the teaching development center into a **proactive** innovation-based organisation.
- ❖ Enabling **unconventional thinking** which leads to educational breakthroughs.
- ❖ Development, **prototyping** and implementation of new teaching paradigms, method and tools.
- ❖ Creation of a lively, warm and **stimulating professional home** for the city’s teaching staff.
- ❖ Providing the space, process, context and stimulus for **an ongoing participatory wide community conversation** about education in general, and development of teaching staff in particular. Invites wide involvement of relevant stakeholders (including teachers, parents, business people, senior citizens, artists, municipality officials, and of course children) in creating a better education system.

5. MODEL and BUILDING BLOCKS

The architecture of the future center is based on the concept of "Regional and Urban Future Centers", We were inspired by ideas from parallel worlds: both the democratic education movement and the business world (future centers of organizations like Skandia, Sydkraft and Ericsson – more details in the following section).

The PISGA future center is composed of four building blocks, which interplay with each other: Community Conversation, Future Images, Innovation Laboratory, Future Skills Learning center.

The following figure represents the model:



COMMUNITY CONVESATIONS are the heart of future center. Stakeholders of the Be'er Sheva education system are involved – teachers, headmasters, parents, teaching students, artists, academics, municipality officials, members of the local business community, retired teachers etc. The multiple conversations address the challenges, needs and future directions of education in general, and teaching staff development in particular. The idea of **“Mixing Colors”** is guiding this element –the mixing of



different disciplines, ages, backgrounds and even interests will yield in the best solutions which are always complex and multi color.

FUTURE IMAGES are created in the community conversations. The center is used as both a workshop arena to create the Future Images, and a Galley to present the images to the public. Various participatory techniques, such as “knowledge Cafes” and “Open Space Events” are used. While the starting point of many future images (or Future Pictures, as we sometimes call them) might be a wide brainstorming session, some pictures will receive a more in-depth treatment afterwards, for example in the form of a 3 month educational research into the possibilities offered by a particularly attractive image. We believe that the continuous traveling between future images and present challenges provides interesting insights and ideas.

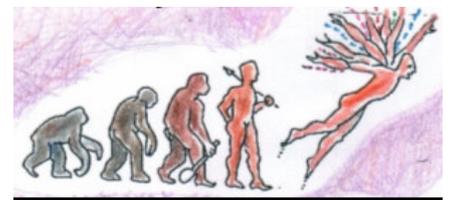


THE INNOVATION LABORATORY is where Future Images are translated into actual doing. This is where existing tools for teaching staff development are upgraded, new future-oriented courses are developed and innovative methods are prototyped. While some of the work in the lab will be done by the Future Center staff, other initiatives will be led by teachers and other stakeholders who would come to the lab for possibly 2 full weeks, or maybe one afternoon every Monday, to pursue their ideas. In such cases the Future Center team members will act as facilitators supporting the development process.



LEARNING CENTER for FUTURE SKILLS provide Be'er Sheva teaching staff with the skills needed to applying our vision of a

Learning-Exploring- Entrepreneuring -Implementing teacher.



There is a fifth element which supports the four core building blocks:

EDUCATION INTELLIGENCE CENTER provides all users if the future center with access to the most updated relevant information in the specific field – trends, predications, state-of-the-art development around the world, emerging methods and tools. This information will be used to create better informed future pictures, to develop future oriented methods without re-inventing the wheel and even to stimulate the community conversations.



CORE PRINCIPLES

During 2003, the center leading team went through a comprehensive process to define a set of six core principles/values which will serve as the compass for all its activities. These are:

- ✓ **Participatory approach** of all relevant stakeholders.

- ✓ **Systematic approach** to any subject which is dealt with at the center, be it the way to better teach History, or the strategy and workplan of the Center itself.
- ✓ **Needs identification** in order to address issues which really matters. This ensures that the Future Center will not become an Ivory Tower detached from real needs of its intended “customers”.
- ✓ **Learning by Action**, which implies a clear bias to do, to action research (as opposed to theoretical investigations, and rapid prototyping.
- ✓ **Assessment** which accompanies the embarked upon.
- ✓ **Innovation** as basis for renewal was the last principle to be added to the list, once the idea of the Future Center was agreed.

One of the first pilots of the PISGA Future Center is focused on the way that these principles are – and could – be implemented in the work of professional leaders of several learning areas (e.g. mathematics and geography). The principles are used not only to enable structured analysis of what these professionals are doing today, but to help them reflect on how they might improve what they do in the future.

6. PLANNING & DESIGN PROCESS



The process of planning the Future Center took more than a year. There was a “core planning team”, as well as many other participants which contributed their ideas and diverse perspectives in different stages. We had monthly planning meetings – some were

one or two full day workshops, while others required only three or four hours.

The intensive planning process was required due to the complexity of the challenge – to transform an ordinary teacher development center into a future center – and ensure its sustainability and relevancy to the real needs of Beer Sheva city. However, we used this long process as an opportunity to achieve three objectives:

- ❖ To involve many stakeholders so that their voices will not only be heard but also will impact the vision as well as the detailed particularities of the center.
- ❖ To experiment and prototype some of the methods that will be used in the different functions of the future center, once established. We called it “modeling”.
- ❖ To learn-through-planning and discover together the different aspects of the future center.



Therefore, no planning meeting was a standard discussion. In each, we tried one of the envisioned methods and tools. For example:

In one meeting we created “future pictures” of the future center; each group created and visualized a different vision.

In another meeting we developed scenarios of how the place will operate, by creating a weekly workplan for a typical week in the summer of 2007.

In another meeting we went together to a remote Alpaca Ranch in the desert – to talk with the rancher and learn from him what true entrepreneurship means.



That journey was also an opportunity to experiment with outdoor training techniques.



Another meeting was devoted to address the visions of the different stakeholders – what do they think about the future of education in the city.



Among other techniques, we used interviews – each team member went to interview a child, or a retired teacher, or a hi-tech person, or a philosopher.

And another meeting was a virtual visit to several future centers in Scandinavia.

7. RESOURCES and INFRASTRUCTURES

So far there was no need to recruit new staff – it is the existing staff that leads the transformed future center. The team is composed of 5 full timers and augmented by many part time professionals.

In addition, many the activities will be conducted by external experts, most of them from the local community. This refers to subject experts in the many areas related to education, as well as process experts and professional facilitators which are instrumental for the participatory processes.

The building itself is considered as an important element of the "ecology for innovation" which we are trying to create. Fortunately, the PISGA center building provides an ideal setting for inspiring participatory work, and very little resources are required for some marginal modifications. How can we design the desired “creative space” which supports “out-of-box” thinking and a sense of community and feeling-at-home for all visitors? We plan to involve a theatre stage designer to help with this

challenge – aren't stage designers expert in creating environments which impact emotions?



Another important aspect is the technological infrastructure. A “virtual future center” will allow some of the action to take place in the virtual space, namely the internet. The intention is to expand participation in the center activities by all stakeholders.

Beyond the benefit of public recognition and inclusion in an advanced experimental framework, there will be also a financial benefit. The work of PISGA Future Center is currently based on the ordinary operational budget which is provided by the ministry of education to all teaching staff development centers. It will be entitled for a special budget once recognized as an official experiment of the Ministry of Education Experiments directorate. Such budget would enable intensifying the special operations of the center.

8. PARTNERS

The experiment is based on joint dreams, visions and efforts of people coming from:

- ❖ The PISGA center: the full time members of the staff as well as part timers.
- ❖ The ministry of education (the directorate for professional development, the experiments directorate and other units). We have close collaboration with the Be'er Shave local arm of the ministry as well as people at the headquarter.
- ❖ Be'er Sheva city municipality- the education department.
- ❖ Academic institutions in Beer Sheva city, including the Bek college and Ben Gurion University. They are providing us with the academic and scientific rigor which is required for well grounded future visioning.
- ❖ The contribution and support of the Jewish community of Montréal enabled the construction of the center's building – a core element in the Innovation Ecology we are trying to establish.
- ❖ As demonstrated earlier in this paper, we are learning from other future centers, which operates in different domains and not necessarily only in the education field.
- ❖ The planners of the center, Ron Dvir from Innovation Ecology and Yael Shwartzberg from the Institute for Democratic Education.
- ❖ And...we envision a much wider and more diverse group of partners. For example, we are trying to recruit partners from the business community. Such partnership will serve as a bridge between the education and business worlds.

9. DILEMMAS

The realisation of the objectives set for the PISGA future center in not a trivial task. The center's team and steering committee faces many questions and

dilemmas. Most can not be solved through an analytical discussion. Rather, answers will co-evolve through the extensive community conversation and on-going experimentation with new ideas and approaches. As already mentioned in the “core Principles” section, we believe in action learning. Here are some of the questions which we already facing:

- ❖ How to balance the need to develop teachers for tomorrows tasks with the need to prepare them to the day-after-tomorrow challenges and world (time horizon of 10-20 years)?
- ❖ Where should the center focus mostly its attention? Which “customers” is should primarily address in order to make the greatest difference in the educating city – the teachers? The headmasters? The teacher’s teachers? The education ministry supervisors? All of the above?
- ❖ Preparation for the future – is it about best fitting into the future environment, or maybe also about revolting against it, at times?
- ❖ The future center is about renewal of the educating city in general, and teaching staff in particular. But, how can we ensure that the future itself will renew itself continuously?
- ❖ How can we create a truly participatory process and spirit, in which the wide public is involved in the future center work (including children, teachers, partners, business people. artists etc. etc.)?
- ❖ And the complementary question – how to avoid the future center from becoming an Ivory Tower – which looks to the far horizons, but forget the real needs of the real people of the city?