

The following speech was delivered at the Asia Education Foundation National Forum dinner by Sophie Palavestra, a year 12 student at Narrabundah College in Canberra. The text was adapted with kind permission from its author, Headley Beare, and was taken from the second chapter of his book *Creating a Future School*, published by Routledge, in 2000.

Hello I am Sophie Palavestra. I am 18 years old and I am a student. You are my teachers.

I want you to understand what I am learning to believe, how I think about my future and what my world-view is. You and I both want me to be a success in the world which I will enter as an adult and which I will be responsible for. In future days I will admire you for being able to look forward with me and to help me define what I need to learn.

My world is already very different from the one you have grown up in. On present life expectancy figures, I will live until I am well over 80. So I will be alive and well in the 2050's, and my children will live to see the twenty-second century. Can you even imagine what the world will be like for them?

Wherever I live and work, I will certainly be mixing in a multi national, multi faith, multicultural setting. I will need to think about that when I prepare for a job.

During my lifetime, a planet-wide economic system will operate, controlled not so much by big nations as by big business networks and regional centres of trade like Singapore, Los Angeles, Tokyo, and .. Sydney. By the time I am 35, more people will live in Shanghai than in the whole of the south Pacific – including Australia and New Zealand.

The really prosperous countries will trade in technical skills, problem solving skills and in strategic brokerage. These workers will be the knowledge workers –working across national borders- working interculturally- speaking more than one language- probably including an Asian language. That's the kind of job I want. That's one reason I am learning Japanese.

The Asia/Pacific area will be a strong focus of my world. China already has a population ten times that of Japan. The Asian continent (from India to Japan) already accounts for half the world's population. A Hong Kong bank advertises now, 'There are three billion people in Asia. Half of them are under 25. They are my contemporaries. They will be my partners-my competitors.

It will not matter what nationality I have, because my world is smaller, people move about, and most workplaces will be internationalised. My world is likely to be borderless. I will probably be employed in an internationally owned firm, and it is likely that in my home we will speak Japanese, Korean, Spanish, or Chinese as a second language.

Our environment will be changed. In the 1950s, when my parents were born, only two cities in the world, London and New York, had more than 8 million inhabitants, and each was called a megalopolis. In 2015, there will be about thirty-four such cities, half of them in Asia.

Environmentally what happens within the border of one country is no longer solely that country's business. Environmental responsibilities will be enforced internationally. By the time I am 50, the world could be threatened by 'green wars' unless my generation does something to balance up the unequal access to clean water, to good topsoil, to electric power and to food distribution outlets.

Tourism and travel collectively are becoming the world's biggest industry and globally will employ the largest number of people. Do you know it has been predicted that in 25-30 years there will be 5- 10 million Chinese tourists, alone, visiting Australia each year? What skills and understandings will Australians working in the tourism and travel industry need?

I already learn as much from television as I do from school. I spend more time with TV than I do with my teachers. Each year I watch about 22,000 commercials which tell me what I should value, what I should eat and what sort of behaviour is acceptable. Because about 85 percent of the world's output of videos, films, CDs and TV programmes comes from the United States, my classmates and I are absorbing American culture and values.

By far the world's largest Muslim country is Indonesia, with a population of over 220 million – larger than that of Japan and Russia—we will have to learn about Islam at school. And because the 'tigers of Asia' are largely Confucian economies, primary schools will need to teach about those characteristics of Confucian societies which produce economic success and community cohesion. A lot of the older textbooks used around the world were Eurocentric in their thinking and are out-of-date. My schooling must teach me about living comfortably in a multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-faith world.

I will study Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Tim Winton, some Buddhist texts from India, the Greek tragedies, some of the novels from South Korea, the history of China and the politics of South America. Do you know what an international curriculum looks like, and how it can be taught?

My school says I need to be a global citizen. I know what that means. I hope you do.

My views about the planet and the universe are probably very different from yours. To me the planet is not a machine. It is alive. It is a single, complex, living organism, and I have to nurture its health and growth. That fact has changed the way my family and I live, it influences local and world politics, it is changing my system of beliefs and my values, it influences what I buy, sell, and eat, and it is a strong factor in my choice of occupation and where we choose to live.

All these things I have talked about are the raw materials I use to weave my life together. I want to be hopeful and happy and comfortable about my future.

Most of all, I want to be wise over what to believe about me and my world. I want to know what the wisest people on earth believe. I want to know how to be a success with my life. I want the world to be a beautiful place for *my* grandchildren. My school-teachers are very important to me because they tell me how to deal with the future – the long, long future.

So do you know what to teach me? Do you know what I need to learn? And do you know *how* to teach me? Are you confident that you can design a curriculum which will equip me to live in my world?

My name is Sophie. And I am sitting in one of your classrooms today.