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## INTRODUCTION

Education, by its very nature, is future oriented and should be presented in such a fashion. The student should learn information and skills which will be of value in the future. The child learns so the adult will know.

All too frequently, schools and curricula are a time machine in reverse. One may sense this situation by simply walking down the halls, pausing momentarily and glancing in each classroom, sometimes only to see signs of outdated efforts at teaching outdated information. Granted, educators are doing the best they can, given fiscal problems and inherent organizational difficulties. However, the realities of our world and the spectrum of possible future situations are by and large ignored in favor of curricula which focus on today and the past. The long-range perspective which allows a student to investigate his personal and our collective future is conspicuous only by its absence.

Today's students will spend most of their lives in the twenty-first century. Accelerating knowledge and technology are altering today's information into tomorrow's misinformation. This phenomenon calls for a type of learning experience which keeps one from drowning in the sea of information and is instead oriented toward acquiring skills for the near and distant future.

It is naive to believe that any curriculum will serve all purposes for all people. However, the fact that there is presently no other institution that can take the place of education requires us to advance curricular approaches that more closely reflect today's world and tomorrow's possibilities. This constant revision is critical for the well-being of all students, but especially important for any student who holds the potential to shape tomorrow's world.

The study of alternative futures is an area of which all students should be aware, but it is essential for the gifted student. This often undereducated population contains many of tomorrow's decision makers. Giftedness, like any other volatile attribute, is more of a promise than a fact. It needs to be developed and refined rather than merely accepted. Some individuals still feel that the gifted, talented, and creative student population will "make it anyway," regardless of the type of programming with which they are provided. This attitude reduces educational opportunities, and it indicates a short-sighted approach to our future needs.

One characteristic of gifted students is their ability to see situations and patterns in a different perspective (a much needed skill). "They sense the significance of problems and solve problems of which others may not be aware" (Martinson, 1974). Where there are young minds with a great deal of promise, we must respond with adequate and appropriate educational experiences which will develop their ability to deal with our problems of tomorrow. If we allow these leaders of tomorrow to slip into mediocrity, from where will our guidance come?

The combination of gifted education and global futures is not to be interpreted as implying that global futures is an area of study only for the gifted and talented student. To the contrary, it is becoming increasingly important for all students to become familiar with the complex interdependence of economic, political, and cultural global systems. However, *as an individual's ability increases, there is a commensurate increase of that individual's responsibility to contribute to the betterment of society.* This is especially applicable to that element in our student spectrum known as gifted and/or talented students. These individuals do have a propensity to influence future policy as decision makers. It would seem critical for these students to be exposed to the research tools and be afforded the opportunity to explore and investigate future options from a global perspective.

## SECTION I:

### *Thoughts on Future Curricular Needs*

A number of papers have recently been published by various government agencies, private foundations, and individuals, all of which are concerned with the future from a global perspective. They vary in their forecasts and outlooks, but there is one clear message sent to the reader: If we are to shape the future rather than allow the future to shape us, we must learn certain skills and abilities. These skills and abilities will allow an individual to conceptualize more clearly and cope with a future which will be demanding, exhilarating, and changing.

One publication intended to draw our attention to possible future prospects for humankind is *The Global 2000 Report to the President* (July, 1980). In this report some rather foreboding conclusions are presented: "If present trends continue, the world in 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable ecologically, more vulnerable to disruption than the world in which we now live. Serious stresses involving population, resources, and environment are clearly visible ahead."

This report was a joint effort of the State Department and the Council on Environmental Quality. They were assisted by departments and agencies such as the Departments of Energy, Interior, and Agriculture, the CIA, NASA, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It is a report formulated by some of our government's most credible individuals and agencies. *Global 2000* is not the last word in forecasting our global future. It is a warning. Our charge as individuals must be to insure that *Global 2000* remains only a warning and does not succeed as a forecast.

There are any number of alternative futures available to us on a personal as well as a global level. The lack of understanding of future prospects is our worst enemy. Lack of understanding causes inaction which ultimately narrows our alternatives. Because of past inaction during various "warning situations," options were lost. Just as issues are by default allowed to grow into problems, problems are compounded by further inaction until they grow into crises. The longer we wait to solve any situation, the greater the risks and the fewer the choices. Options diminish as we forego action. Today's choices delineate our future.