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FUTURE STUDIES



Introduction

Futures studies is learning about the alternatives of tomorrow. The philosophy of Futures Studies is that we have possibilities from which to choose our future, and the decisions that we make today will impact the kinds of choices available. Futures Studies educate students to be active participants in their own future. The plural *futures* will be used in this book to emphasize that we are not locked into one future, but have alternative futures based on the decisions that we make today.

"It is no longer sufficient for Johnny to understand the past. It is not even enough for him to understand the present, for the here-and-now environment will soon vanish. Johnny must learn to anticipate the directions and rate of change. He must, to put it technically, learn to make repeated, probabilistic, increasingly long-range assumptions about the future. And so must Johnny's teachers."
(Toffler, 1970, p. 403)

The following book is based on the Autonomous Learner Model for the Gifted and Talented by George Betts and Jolene Knapp-Kercher. The Autonomous Learner Model focuses on the development of concepts, skills, and attitudes necessary to become Autonomous Learners. The futures component of the Autonomous Learner Model helps students develop the concepts, skills, and attitudes specifically needed to study futures.

The Futures component begins in the Orientation Dimension where students are introduced to Futures Studies and begin to learn about themselves as participants in the Autonomous Learner Model. In the Individual Development Dimension students will learn the concepts, skills, and attitudes that will form the basis for further study about Futures. Once students have demonstrated competency in Individual Development, they will learn about different futures issues in the Enrichment Dimension. After the exploration and investigation of futures issues, the students present what they have learned in the Seminar Dimension. In the Seminar Dimension, emphasis is placed on the production of ideas; and it is during this dimension that students begin to be viewed as learners. In the In-Depth Study Dimension, the learners demonstrate a more sophisticated level of research and study, based on their own interests in the futures field.

"If anything is important, it is the future. The past is gone, and the present exists only as a fleeting moment. Everything that we think and do from this moment on can affect only the future. And it is in the future that we shall spend the rest of our lives....."

The study of the future may well be the most exciting intellectual enterprise of today. But it is more than an exciting adventure; it is an awesome responsibility. Though our future is darkened by the possibility of thermonuclear war, environmental destruction, and the potential collapse of the economic and social systems that sustain us, it is also brightened by the knowledge that we have it within our power to create a civilization incomparably superior to any in human history."
(Comish, 1977, p. vii, viii)



Area: Understanding Giftedness

Objectives:

1. The students will be familiar with the characteristics of some futurists from the past. (Activities 1 - 4)
2. The students will relate the concept of "giftedness" to various futurists. (Activities 1 - 4)

Activities:

1. Historical Futurists of the Past

Have students select one of the Historical Futurists (see pages 7-9) and research predictions they made in their era. Then compare them to present-day predictions. The following questions can be used to guide their reading:

- What are the characteristics that make this futurist "ahead of his/her time"?
- How might this futurist think if he/she were alive today?
- Was/is this futurist gifted? Why, or why not?
- What were the most significant contributions by this futurist in thinking about tomorrow?
- What characteristics would a futurist of today need to analyze and predict the future of our present society?

2. Sci-Fi Search

Ask students to read a novel by one of the science fiction writers listed below. As they read the novel, direct them to focus on the specific scientific and technological advances on which the story is based. Conduct weekly classroom discussions to give students an opportunity to present the futuristic views of their science fiction writer.

H. G. Wells

George Orwell

Arthur C. Clarke

Aldous Huxley

Isaac Asimov

Ray Bradbury

3. Time Line

Ask the students to complete a time line of futurists from the past. Include the historical, scientific, and science fiction futurists listed on pages 7-9. Include at least five other futurists from the past that are not listed.