

Resources for Gifted Students Studying the Future

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Many parents and teachers would agree that they want children to be prepared to live in the future. However, Roeper (1988) believes that children are not being taught the futures skills they will require. Education should enlarge, enrich, and help us gain more accurate images of the future (Toffler, 1974), so that the children of today can make a more constructive difference in the future (Frasier, Lee, & Winstead, 1997). The Gifted Program Standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (1998) also support this effort. This article will therefore focus on the rationale for studying futures education and resources and methods to support these studies.

Reasons for Studying the Future

There are several reasons to study futures education. Coupled with the need to be prepared for the future is the fact that gifted learners have said they love to think about the future, and this love increases as they become older (Torrance, 1978). They are more interested in global issues than other students and sometimes feel helpless to do anything about these issues (Galbraith, 1985; Tallent-Runnels & Mullen, 2004; Tallent-Runnels & Yarbrough, 1992). With their acute sense of justice contributing to this interest (Roeper, 1988), they have the potential for intense social, moral, and ethical concerns (Passow, 1988).

Another reason for studying the future is that gifted learners worry about the future, because they are sensitive to world problems (Passow, 1988). Their cognitive complexity can create personality traits that creates an awareness that separates them from others. They also can be more morally sensitive than others—a trait that is essential to

the welfare of our society (Silverman, 1994). When supported and guided in positive directions, these qualities can empower them to successfully manage change (Carroll, 1991) and to cope with problems in general and change the future (Torrance, 1974).

Finally, many believe that gifted youth will become our world leaders and ultimately solve our global problems. Therefore, we must help them develop their leadership abilities and learn to think ahead to the world they will lead (Passow, 1988; Roeper, 1988; Volk, in press). Teaching them to think appropriately about the future can accomplish this important task (Hibel, 1991). They can become change agents and set realistic goals as they lead others (Carroll, 1991).

All of these reasons point to the importance of gifted students studying the future and learning about global issues of interest to them. They need to develop a sense of responsibility for the world they will inherit (Volk, in press) and the need to study the future as seriously as the past. This type of study is the only way to help gifted students stay even with the explosion of knowledge and changing conditions in the world (Torrance, 1974). In futures education students are taught to think about and how to think about the future. They consider “possible, probably, and preferable futures” (Passow, 1988, p. 14). Young learners can also gain the tools they need to make an impact on their own destiny (Roeper, 1988). This futures education can even be folded into the curricula in areas such as social studies (Passow; Roeper).

When students study about the future, they can learn how to deal realistically with the future, anticipate future problems, and develop strategies for studying the future. They will be like other futures professionals who use strategies to keep them from being taken too much by surprise about the

future and show that choices made today influence the future (Torrance, 1974), what Toffler (1970) labeled *future shock*. This article will help teachers in this endeavor by listing different strategies, sources of information, and activities for studying the future. Each activity will be described, as will all the resources. A sample lesson plan will be offered, and tips for studying the future will be shared.

Resources for Studying the Future

Web Sites

There are some good Web sites that teachers and students can use to study the future. All of these sites have many links to other related sites. Teachers might screen some of these to determine which would be the most appropriate for particular age levels and areas of interest.

1. *World Future Society* (<http://www.wfs.org>). This Web site is the home of several publications about studying the future. One of these is the *Futurist*. This is a bimonthly magazine that has been published since 1967. Among the many influential futurists who have contributed are Gene Roddenberry, Alvin and Heidi Toffler, Buckminster Fuller, Isaac Asimov, Margaret Mead, B. F. Skinner, and Arthur C. Clarke. On the Web site, you can see the most current issue of the magazine, as well as past issues. The editor also lists the top 10 forecasts for the future. Other publications that are mentioned are *Futurist Update* (a newsletter), *Future Survey*, and the *Futures Research Quarterly*.

2. *Future Problem Solving Program* (<http://www.fpsp.org>). This international nonprofit organization helps students learn general problem solving

skills through competitive and non-competitive programs (Tallent-Runnels & Candler-Lotven, 1996). Students learn a six-step problem solving model and also learn how to view and study the future. Founded by Paul Torrance, this program has been serving students since 1974. Their goals are cited on the Web site and are as follows:

- increase creative thinking abilities;
- improve analytical thinking skills;
- stimulate an interactive interest in the future;
- extend perceptions of the real world;
- explore complex societal issues;
- refine communication skills—written, oral, and technical;
- promote research;
- integrate problem solving into the curriculum;
- encourage cooperative, responsible group membership; and
- offer authentic assessment.

3. *Methods for studying the future* (<http://www.Crab.rutgers.edu/~goertzel/futuristmethods.htm>). Descriptions of methods for studying the future are listed here as adapted from the World Future Society. These are trend analysis, cyclical pattern analysis, environmental scanning, scenarios,

backcasting, visioning, technological forecasting, and futures research.

4. *Courses on studying the future* (http://www.csudh.edu/global_options/introFS.html#intro/overviewFS). This site takes the reader to information about courses on studying the future, as well as an overview of studying the future, types of futurists, what futurists study, the methods they use to study the future, characteristics of a futurist perspective, and key organizations involved in the study of the future and of change.

5. *Trends for studying international futures* (<http://www.internationalrelations.com/pp/ProspectsI-II.htm>). Rosita Dellios, an associate professor at Bond University in Queensland, Australia, has described trends for international futures. She lists information about futures studies, the history of futurism, descriptions of think tanks that study the future, methods of studying the future, reasons for studying the future, and other links to Web sites about studying the future.

Books

Below are a few books about the future accompanied by brief descrip-

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tions. Some of the books listed here are older books that are considered classics in the field of forecasting the future. Gifted students in grades 4 and up should be able to understand most of the information in these books. Teachers might choose certain chapters to share with them, along with some provocative questions. For example, a teacher might ask students to read the chapter in *Megatrends* on institutional help moving to self-help. Then the teacher might ask questions such as:

- “How did Naisbitt know to predict this trend and others?”
- “How might this trend affect the role of the institutions if people learn to help themselves?”
- “How does this relate to the movement now for more homeschooling?”
- “What other new structures have arisen or will arise from this trend to more self help?”

1. Naisbitt, J. (1982). *Megatrends: Ten new directions transforming our lives*. New York: Warner Books.

John Naisbitt analyzes what America was in the time of this book and uses this analysis to predict the future. He offers 10 major trends for the future that he calls *megatrends*.

2. Naisbitt, J., & Aburdene, P. (1991). *Megatrends 2000: New directions for tomorrow*. New York: William Morrow.

This book is a follow-up to Naisbitt's book *Megatrends* published 9 years earlier. Here he describes 10 new megatrends that will affect the world's future. Naisbitt and his coauthor also show how some of the megatrends from his first book have proven to be true. Along with the previous book, this book is a good tool for students to use in looking at the future.

3. Toffler, A. (1974). *Learning for tomorrow: The role of the future in education*. New York: Vintage Books.

In this book, Toffler suggests we look at *why* we educate and not just how or where. His central thesis is that all education springs from images of the future, and that all education creates images of the future. He contends in this book that educators must understand the future for which they are preparing children. He and others offer many ways to provide futures education.

4. Toffler, A. (1981). *The third wave*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

The third wave follows the agricultural revolution (first wave) and the industrial revolution (second wave). Toffler gives advice on how people can move to a saner, more democratic society. He discusses topics such as the personality of the future, the postnuclear family, the economy, and what he calls our *blip* culture, a culture where individuals are dealing with images of many kinds, a culture that sounds like ours 25 years after this book was written.

5. Toffler, A. (1970). *Future shock*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

This book was reissued in hard cover in 2000. Toffler predicts many events of the future, many which have occurred since he published this book. Toffler talks about the difficulty people have adjusting to change that is as rapid as it is now. *Future shock* is what Toffler coined to describe what happens when people cannot cope with this change.

6. Popcorn, F., & Hanft, A. (2001). *Dictionary of the future*. New York: Hyperion.

Entries in this dictionary of what the authors consider terms of the future

are listed in alphabetical order by categories. Some of the categories are aging, biology and biotechnical jobs, and fear and frustration. Two examples of the authors' coined words are *bankaurants* (chic restaurants that inhabit bank lobbies in the evening hours) and *inkists* (those who insist on signing documents with pens when an e-signature would suffice).

7. Sterling, B. (2003). *Tomorrow now: Envisioning the next fifty years*. New York: Random House.

Sterling offers ideas about how to deal with the future and predicts oddities that might become commonplace in our society. He addresses the future by borrowing from the seven stages of man in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Some issues he discusses are genetics, reproduction, information networks, media, politics, and mortality.

8. Whaley, C. E. (1984). *Futures studies: Personal and global possibilities*. New York: Trillium Press.

The first in this series of books by Whaley, this book includes activities for viewing the future such as extrapolation, analogies, futures wheel, trend analysis, trend exploration, and cross impact analysis. Although this book is somewhat dated (e.g., information about the Future Problem Solving Program), it is still a good resource, particularly for middle school and high school students.

9. Whaley, C. E. (1991). *Enhancing thinking and creativity with future studies*. New York: Trillium Press.

This book includes what Whaley calls the Interactive Futures Model for instruction about the future and lists goals and objectives of futures studies. An activity called the *interdisciplinary wheel* emphasizes and facilitates

work across domains. At the end of the book is a list of 30 futures activities. This book is for use with upper elementary through high school.

10. Whaley, C. E., & Sisk, D. A. (1987). *The futures primer for classroom teachers*. New York: Trillium Press.

Whaley and Sisk offer classroom activities and teaching strategies for gifted children to help them learn about the future. This book is suitable for middle school through high school students with some activities for upper elementary students.

Activities for Teaching the Future

1. A good activity to begin learning how to think about the future is having students interview someone born before 1954, and ask the person about what he or she thought the future would be like when they were the age of the student. Students can compare how accurate the predictions were. Students can also interview someone born between 1970 and 1980 and ask them what they think the future will be like. After interview both people, students can compare the responses from older interviewees and these younger interviewees.

2. Students can conduct research on a future problem and try to come up with a solution or a way to prevent the problem. They can find out what is happening now and what the future problem might present. For example, if the future problem is about how to take care of the growing elderly population, students can find out what is happening for senior citizens now and what professionals are planning. Students can then decide what they think might be missing from these plans and come up with solutions.

3. Students can make a timeline to study the past and document major changes over time. For example, in

the area of flight, they might create a timeline of what they have learned, project the future of flight, and defend their choices.

4. When students are studying the future, it is a good idea for them to contact experts in the field they are studying. For example, if they wonder about the future of news reporting, they might e-mail Bill Moyers. Students can also e-mail experts in any field and ask these experts to predict one future problem. For example, students could e-mail Donald Trump about real estate or Bill Gates about technology. There are some excellent books that can help students find famous people and experts in many fields. Teachers should try to purchase two or three of these to keep in the classroom as resources.

- ✦ Ellis, L. A. (2002). *The celebrity address directory and autographed collector's guide* (2nd ed.). River Falls, WI: Americana Group Publishers.

This is a combination celebrity address directory, celebrity almanac, and autograph collector guide. The directory lists several thousand celebrity names with addresses. A unique feature of this directory is that it groups the celebrity by career. The careers include entertainers, sports personalities, business leaders, and politicians. In addition, you are provided with more than names and addresses. This book provides information on celebrity birthdays, sports Hall of Fame members, *People* magazine's Most Beautiful People, *Fortune* magazine's Most Powerful Celebrities, and celebrity charities.

- ✦ Gottlieb, A. (2001). *Alan Gottlieb's celebrity address book* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Merrill Press.

The book has musicians, political figures, sports personalities, and more. It is broken down alphabetically, and although it appears to be complete,

you may want to verify the address before sending the letter, especially because it has been a few years since it was published.

- ✦ Levine, M. (2001). *The address book: How to reach anyone who is anyone* (10th ed.). New York: Berkley Publishing Group.

This is a helpful book for anyone who wants to write celebrities, politicians, businessmen, and other notable personalities. Each contact is alphabetized by last name, and contains the address, person's occupation, and in some cases, birthdays (for celebrities only) and Web sites (for companies).

- ✦ Mattison, C. (2002). *Addresses of the rich and famous: How to reach the world's movers and shakers*. Gonic, NH: Odyssey Press.

This book is a how-to guide for corresponding with TV and movie stars, politicians, business executives, and many others. It is recommended not only for fans and researchers but also for teachers or anyone else who would like to reach these celebrities.

- ✦ McAuley, J. (1997). *Contact any celebrity*. Santa Monica, CA: Mega Niche Media.

This book contains more than 13,000 contact addresses for movie, television, music, and sports stars, as well as almost every other public figure imaginable. It is suitable for fans, business, or charitable organizations. You can contact celebrities for autographs, photos, memorabilia, and interviews.

- ✦ McAuley, J. (2005). *The celebrity black book*. Santa Monica, CA: Mega Niche Media.

This book has an exhaustive list of essential celebrity contact information with more than 40,000 celebrity addresses. They include movie, television, music,

and sports stars, as well as politicians, authors, models, directors, world leaders, religious figures, and more.

- Moore, D. R. (1999). *The address directory of celebrities in entertainment, sports, business & politics* (2nd ed.). River Falls, WI: Americana Group Publishers.

This directory of celebrities in entertainment, sports, business, and politics is categorized by the celebrity's career. Included in the book are the awards or achievements of the celebrity. This book is useful for persons wishing to contact a celebrity for autographs, charity and fund raising events, school writing projects, real estate leads, or general research.

5. Finally, you might want to adapt parts of the Ecological, Futures, and Global (EFG) Curriculum. The futures component involves a variety of domains and projects about the past, present, and future. They are interdisciplinary and focus on a theme. For example, one theme focuses on the local water supply, certainly a timely topic for now and the future.

Sample Lesson

This lesson focuses on predicting what housing will be like in 2050, both single-family and multiple family housing. First, students decide what areas they will research. For example, one group might conduct research on the Internet and look for futuristic housing. Another group might decide to contact national experts in real estate to see what they think about future housing. The books by Levine, Mattison, and Moore are the best ones for this lesson. Another group of students might explore books and magazines on housing. This third group might make a timeline of major

developments in housing from 1800 to the present. The fourth group might conduct interviews with local experts on real estate and housing. It will need to construct the interview with sample questions and use role-play with the teacher's help to prepare for the interviews. Finally, each group will report to the other three and have displays of its results. Following their reporting, the teacher can lead a general discussion of trends that emerged in the research. Students can then agree on a final report of their work, with each group contributing its information.

Concluding Tips for Teachers

When teachers set up a futures activity, the scenario needs to be set far enough into the future so that it is difficult to predict the outcome (Hibel, 1991). Another tip is to begin with simple ideas and progress to more future-oriented teaching processes.

If students are in the primary grades (K–3), teachers can use familiar situations. These might be personal futures such as the next Christmas vacation or the next summer, or they might be about the future of their own school.

Because studying about the future can help all of us prepare for change, this list of ideas and resources can prove to be very helpful, not only for teaching students, but also for preparing teachers who want their students to study about the future. **GCT**

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