

The Curriculum Creators – Part 3

In a June 1998 article entitled *The New Transatlantic Agenda*, Dr. D. L. Cuddy wrote the article below about who or what is controlling the United States education system.

Cuddy was a political risk analyst for an international consulting firm and has authored and/or edited four books on American foreign relations and immigration. He has also served as a senior associate with the U. S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C.

In the U.S. Congress, Rep. Henry Hyde has been warning people about school-to-work (STW) education initiatives, and Senator John Ashcroft has amended the Workforce Investment Partnership Act now being discussed to prohibit its funding of STW.

At the state level, N.C. Rep. Don Davis is chairing a House Select Committee for Federal Education Grants, which has been investigating STW grants among others, and invited Richmond Times-Dispatch op-ed editor Robert Holland to address the Select Committee on this subject.

While the implications of STW at the state and national levels have been widely debated, not much has been written about the international connections. On May 18, the White House released a statement at the conclusion of the U.S.-European Summit in London, indicating that 'through the New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA), created in 1995, the United States and the European Union have focused on addressing the challenges and opportunities of global integration.'

One part of this 'global integration' in 1995 was the agreement between the U.S. and the European Community establishing a cooperation program in higher education and vocational education and training.

The agreement, signed December 21 of that year, called for 'improving the quality of human resource development . . . Transatlantic student mobility . . . and thus portability of academic credits.'

In this regard, a Joint Committee would reach decisions by consensus. As part of the NTA, the U.S. and European Union then convened a major conference, 'Bridging the Atlantic: People-to-People Links,' on May 5-6, 1997 calling for 'thematic networks for curriculum development,' and further stating that in an information-based global economy, 'governments too are obliged to adapt their economic, training and social welfare programs.'

The conference final report noted that in the U.S., ACHIEVE has been one of the organizations at the forefront of defining key issues in this regard and developing strategies to address them.

ACHIEVE has been measuring and reporting each state's annual progress in establishing Internationally competitive standards, and business leaders involved have indicated their commitment to consider the quality of each state's standards when making business location or expansion decisions.

The 'Partners in a Global Economy Working Group' of the conference discussed 'what redesigning of curricula is required . . . (i.e. what career skills are needed) . . . portability of skill certificates . . . and institutionalizing cross-national learning/training activities.'

Most people debating STW in the U.S. are familiar with the role of Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy. He's also on the National Skill Standards Board (NSSB), and on its website under international links, one finds 'Smartcards Project Forum,' under which one reads: 'The Tavistock Institute and the European Commission are working on a feasibility study to research the affect of using Smart Cards in competence accreditation. The study will be carried out in the USA and parts of Europe.' The project involves assessing and validating students' skills, with information placed on personal skills Smartcards, which 'become real passports to employment.'

If without a passport one cannot enter a country, does this mean that without a skills passport one may not be able to get a job in the future?

In October 1997, the Tavistock Institute (and Manchester University) completed the final report for the European Commission, and described in a report summary were the relevancy of Goals 2000, SCANS (U.S. Department of Labor 'Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills') typology with its 'profound implications for the curriculum and training changes that this will require,' valid skills standards and portable credentials 'benchmarked to international standards such as those promulgated by the International Standards Organization (ISO).'

The report summary went on to say that 'there is increasing attention being focused on developing global skill standards and accreditation agreements,' and there will be 'partnerships between government, industry, and representatives of worker organizations . . . (and) a high degree of integration . . . embedding skills within the broader context of economic and social activity, and specifically within the areas of secondary education, work-based learning and local and regional economic development. . . . The NSSB, Goals 2000, STW Program are all combining to act as a catalyst to promote the formation of partnerships to develop skills standards.

*In this regard, a system like O*Net can be seen as the 'glue' that holds everything together.'*

*O*Net is a new occupational database system sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, and is being piloted in Texas, South Carolina, California, New York and Minnesota. It includes information such as 'Worker Characteristics' (abilities, interests and work styles) and 'Worker Requirements' (e.g., basic skills, knowledge and education).*