

## ACADEMIC/TECHNICAL CURRICULUM and CRISS

“Integration.” “School-to Work.” “Transition.” “Authentic Assessment.” “Tech-Prep.” Are these “buzz” words in your school district as you are looking to the future? Actually, if you haven’t heard these ideas for change you should be concerned. This spring [1997] I attended an International Conference on Academic/Vocational Curriculum Integration in New Orleans, and I would like to share information from two of the keynote speakers.

Dr. Willard R. Daggett (International Center for Leadership in Education, Schenectady, New York) spoke about preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He noted that our children are living in a society that is radically different from the past years and change is even more apparent in the workplace. These radical changes reflect America’s move from an industrial society to a technical, informational-based society. The world has grown much smaller, which challenges American businesses to be competitive in the global marketplace. Most schools maintain the assembly line structure with bells to note the beginning and end of classes that are mutually exclusive and independent of each other. This structure makes for an inefficient system that bears little resemblance to the world in which we live. In the next 5 years, 70-80% of all new hires in the job market are going to be working in businesses with fewer than 50 employees. Forty-five to fifty percent of these small businesses will have less than ten employees. Small businesses require workers to do many different tasks. They will work longer than the average work day and week just as people did back on the farm. When a problem arises, the workers must solve it themselves, often without procedures to follow or managers to assist them. Assembly line jobs have moved into international competition where salaries are low.

Daggett points out our curriculum is too narrow. Reading is important in almost all jobs, but do schools teach students to read technical manuals, safety codes, and tax forms along with novels and poetry? Math and science have equally narrow curricula. Workers on high-tech production lines—the ones with statistical, numerical controls and instrumentation—use statistics, logic, probability, and measurement systems. Many other countries require minimum competency in these areas to graduate from high school. American schools have responded by requiring additional algebra classes, but the workplace demands more.

A suggestion by Daggett is that America needs to make a critical decision about what it means to be educated. Are we concerned simply with students moving up on Bloom’s Levels of Taxonomy? Or should we also be concerned with their ability to APPLY what they learn? Daggett feels America’s education is the primary cause for many students being ill-prepared for the work place. The International Center contends that data proves beyond a doubt that America must move its curriculum beyond preparing students simply for more school and start preparing them for life as well. That’s what European and Asian nations are doing. Daggett was critical of many college courses that only “reteach” what students were taught in high school and often don’t prepare students with skills for the workplace. To back up this statement, he asked how many in the audience of 1500 knew college graduates without satisfactory jobs or with no job at all. Two thirds of the participants raised their

hands. College training, he said, did not give these graduates the skills and knowledge for success.

Alan November, (Planners, Wellesley, Massachusetts) another keynote speaker, suggested that most district technology plans are often not education plans at all, but shopping lists of “techno-stuff.” He states the focus should be on how to improve student learning rather than buying the latest technology. Networked information systems need to be in the classroom where instruction and learning take place.

November suggests getting rid of all those “T” (technology) words and focusing on information and communication. He advocates moving away from the isolating industrial modes of teaching “this is my classroom and these are my students” to one where the entire faculty is networked and available 24 hours a day to the entire learning community. He encouraged educators to develop teamwork and coalition building within their schools and with the local and global communities and to seek ways of collaborating together to help children become independent, critical managers of their own work with the ability to communicate and work cooperatively with others.

Where does CRISS fit in? CRISS strategies teach students to take control of their learning process and become independent learners. Many of the strategies (*Pattern Puzzles*, *Graphic Organizers*, *Sentence Expansion*) help students grapple with content presented through technical writing. With teacher modeling and a common language, students develop strategies for understanding, sharing, evaluating, and assimilating curriculum information. Everyone participates in activities, everyone is involved, and students are active learners. They learn to communicate with each other (*Think-Pair-Share*, *Seed Discussions*) and put their ideas on paper (*Mapping*, *Power Notes*), come up with questions (*QARs*, *Authentic Questions*), new ideas (*Sticky Notes*), and proceed into problem solving (*Problem-Solution guides*), forming opinions (*Conclusion-Support guides*), and hypotheses. CRISS strategies lead to products and portfolios which show application and which become good tools for assessment. CRISS can help teachers prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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