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ABSTRACT

U.S. economic and national security are linked to the quality of teaching and learning within the educational system. There is a need to improve the nation's ability to develop students who possess the capacities for responsible citizenship, vocational competence, and intellectual and social growth in a diverse and complex world. U.S. citizens should be internationally competent, literate, and aware of other cultures, societies, and political systems. Competence levels must increase in foreign languages, history, geography, civics, literature, science, reading, and writing. Cross-national studies indicate U.S. students lag behind students from other countries in competency levels in these subjects. Global education is necessary and should focus on fundamental differences among societies and governments and should highlight values, beliefs, and principles that underlie those differences. International education should also enhance and strengthen students' commitments to the United States and its values and principles.
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MAPPING THE COMMON GROUND

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Remarks before the
American Forum on Education and International Competence

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St. Louis, Missouri
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20208



I thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the manifest need for improving the international competence of our children and our society. I welcome this chance to discuss how to go about actually making that improvement. We at the Department of Education share much common ground with you concerning what is important for our schools to teach. I hope we can also find agreement on what our schools should not teach.

The phrase "international education" and competence can mean many things. It can be code language for something that is not related to the proper purpose of education which is, of course, the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. But it can also resonate positively when it refers to the knowledge of languages, history, geography, cultures, and civilizations that should be a part of the intellectual grounding of every truly educated person, of every young American.

Five years ago, the landmark report A Nation at Risk put forward the plain truth: that "knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce." Americans have long recognized that the economic well being and even the national security of the United States are inextricably linked to the quality of teaching and learning in our education system.

President Reagan, Secretary Bennett and I agree with you about the necessity of international competence. Individuals should be internationally competent -- knowledgeable, informed, and aware of the cultures other people inherit, the societies in which they dwell, the political systems under which they live. Our citizens should be able to navigate successfully through a world full of international, multinational and transnational events and relationships. The society ought to be internationally competent, too, not least so that this nation's prosperity and well-being may continue into the twenty-first century.

In short, competence and literacy in international affairs and issues are critically important today and will likely become even more so in the years ahead. But between now and then, between where we are today and where we hope to be tomorrow, discipline and determination will be needed.

If we are to strengthen our children's knowledge about the world and about our place in it, we have plenty of work to do. There has been an extraordinary increase in the impact of international factors on every aspect of our lives. As educators, we want to improve our ability to develop students who possess the capacities for responsible citizenship, vocational competence, and intellectual and social growth in a world that -- as the cliché goes -- is diverse, complex, and increasingly active across national borders.

We can be cautiously hopeful about recent efforts to teach such subjects as history, languages and geography more

adequately. But we should not shrink from the gravity of our present curricular failures or the urgency with which we need still to strengthen these fundamentals.

In the realm of foreign language study, we occupy much common ground with you. Secretary Bennett's model high school curriculum proposes that all students should study a foreign language for at least two years. I recommend even more than two years and I join the Secretary in suggesting that this study ought to begin in the lower grades, before high school.

The good news is that enrollment in foreign language classes is up. Almost one third (30.9%) of our public high school students are now enrolled in foreign language courses, the largest proportion in 70 years. Sixty four percent of the high school graduates of 1987 had taken at least one foreign language course, up from 49 percent in the class of 1982. But these encouraging facts have an obvious downside: they mean that a third of our children graduate without taking even a single high school course in a foreign language.

One year of study is not nearly adequate if we're talking about competence in international education. What then of those students who study foreign languages for three years or more? Eleven percent of graduates in the class of 1987 were in that group, nearly double the 1982 percentage. That's progress. But it still means that nine students out of ten do not study a foreign language for three years.

Other countries far outstrip us in this regard. In France, high school students must take two foreign languages

-- six years of one, four years of another. In Sweden, all students take English beginning in third grade. About 60 percent also study either German or French from age 13. In Japan, English is a de facto requirement in grades 10 through 12 for virtually all students, most of whom have actually studied it since 7th grade.

It's time to reduce this discrepancy -- we are one of the few countries in which students do not routinely graduate from high school with competence in a second language.

As for the rest of the curriculum, including but not limited to those portions commonly termed social studies, I believe we occupy a good deal of common ground here as well. I take it as given that we all want all our children to graduate from high school knowledgeable in the history, geography and literature of our country and other countries. This common ground will enlarge so long as we can avoid viewing the curriculum as a zero sum game, as long as it does not become a battleground between those who want students to know lots more about American and Western history and those who want students to know lots more about other parts of the world. Students need to know lots more about both.

We need to enlarge substantially the total amount that youngsters are taught and learn in these crucial subject areas. California, as California is prone to, is in the vanguard here. Its state board of education has radically redefined "social studies" as not just a couple of courses during high school but as a thirteen year continuum, beginning

in kindergarten and extending through the twelfth grade. And note how much non-Western history and culture California fits into the framework: "the sixth grade curriculum introduces students to those people and events that ushered in the dawn of major Western and non-Western civilizations."

The study of world history and geography continues in seventh grade with an examination of the fall of Rome, the rise of Islam; and the Mayan, Incan, and Aztec civilizations; the civilizations of China and Japan during the Middle Ages and of Europe through the Renaissance, Reformation, and scientific revolution.

Electives in grade nine include comparative world religions, and studies of world cultures. In tenth grade, the course in "world history and geography" focuses on "the expansion of the West and the growing interdependence of people and cultures throughout the world" (including current issues such as famine in Africa, national debt in Latin America, and so on). In addition, during the 13 year span of the California social studies curriculum, students study American history in grades 5, 8 and 11. They also take a course in the philosophical principles of American democracy in the 12th grade.

Now, if Californians can agree on social studies, anyone can. But this framework is brand new in California, and today it is very much of an exception. Across the nation, not nearly enough history, geography or civics is being studied. Not enough history of the U.S., of the West, and not enough of

other societies either. Look how few history courses our students take:

-- only 43% of the class of 1987 had taken a year of world history while in high school.

-- just 39% completed both a world history course and a U.S. history survey course.

-- just 29 % completed a year of world history, a year of U.S. history, and a half year of civics.

-- 22 % take a year or less of any kind of history.

-- only 21 percent take more than two years of history.

In France, by contrast, all students follow a carefully sequenced program of history, civics, and geography in every year from 7th grade through 12th grade.

We in the Education Department believe that all American youngsters should study a lot more history than most of them do today; I think you believe the same. But the common ground between us shrinks if we are asked to sacrifice or reduce the attention given to U.S. and Western history, geography, and literature. Students do not know nearly enough about their own past, let alone the past of other nations and civilizations.

One out of three high juniors does not know when or why the Declaration of Independence was written; who Aesop, Atlas, or Cain and Abel are; or what the phrase "checks and balances" means.

Half are unaware of the aim of the Monroe Doctrine, the meaning of "laissez-faire" or the significance of Senator

Joseph McCarthy.

Barely a third know about Jim Crow laws, when Abraham Lincoln was president, or in which half century the Civil War was fought.

They don't know much geography either. One out of three 11th graders could not find France on an unlabeled map of Europe (66%); only half could identify the Louisiana Purchase .

Half the students taking an introductory geography course at the University of Tennessee in 1984 couldn't locate Japan or the Middle East. 30% couldn't find Europe! Maybe it's not surprising that some do not even know where in the world they live. A quarter of the high school students in Washington D.C., given a blank map, couldn't identify the U.S. Nearly half the high school students tested in Baltimore couldn't do so, either.

This is intolerable. Students need a firm grounding in American and Western history and geography in order to function as competent members of our society and in order to have the foundation for making informed comparisons and judgments about other places.

The process of acquiring competence in global education requires as a crucial initial step the construction of a solid foundation of knowledge of American and European history, geography and literature. This is necessary first because it gives students the crucial background and perspective from which to make comparisons, and secondly because so much of the history of the world is the history of the West and its impact

on the rest of the globe. As the distinguished historian William McNeil writes: "The key to world history from 1500 is the growing political dominance first of Western Europe, then of an enlarged European-type society astride the north Atlantic and extending eastward into Siberia....From the perspective of the mid-twentieth century, the career of Western civilization since 1500 appears as a vast explosion, far greater than any comparable phenomenon of the past both in geographic range and in social depth."

Now history, geography and literature are vital but they do not comprise a full curriculum; students need math, science, reading and writing skills as well. Without them there is no way we will be competent.

Cross-national studies show that in most subjects and skills U.S. students lag way behind students from other countries. Our youngsters consistently come in near the bottom. A brand new I.E.A. study of achievement in science, for example, put U.S. high school seniors 11th out of 13 nations in chemistry, 9th in physics, and last in biology. A 1982 study of mathematics achievement ranked U.S. students 13th among 17 nations.

We learn a good deal about our education system's performance from international comparisons of this sort, and we're making efforts to step up such cross-national studies. The Department supported a 2 year examination of Japan's education system, the results of which were released last year. We have recently established a new mechanism to

regularize U.S. participation in the work of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. We are also embarked on a parallel effort to encourage the OECD to do a far more systematic and comprehensive job of gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information about education outcomes and results.

International comparative data do not always please us, but if we are to be serious about global competence I believe we need to regularly examine the record and see how we stack up vis-a-vis the rest of the globe. And if our children are to be competent internationally, today's weak performance in skills and knowledge must be dramatically altered.

Let us for the moment assume that we are able to achieve that alteration, that we can repair our education system so that all our students in fact acquire the requisite skills to be internationally competent and the understanding of their own history and culture that is needed for perspective on the rest of the world.

Then it is time to focus on the knowledge they will need about the rest of the world. This is no small task, either, for the amount we'd like them to know is very considerable. There are many other nations, many other cultures, each with its own history. There is much to learn.

Let us be clear, though, that knowing more about other countries will not always bring comfort and contentment. What we learn may alarm us. It may anger or worry us. We are apt to learn things that we wish were not so. We are apt to find

other countries conducting themselves according to principles and pursuing goals that we find not just different from ours but positively repugnant.

These are not judgments to be avoided, if they are honestly rendered on the basis of accurate information. By way of example, just how much do we -- American educators -- actually know about Soviet education or about the Soviet approach to global education?

Sure, we welcome the international exchange arrangements and mutual understandings of recent years, the improved prospects for arms control and the current warming of relationships. But do we know -- do we let ourselves know-- that in the Soviet Union today, as yesterday, the school system is the centerpiece of a nationwide effort to prepare youngsters for both civil defense and military conflict? In Soviet high schools there is compulsory military training for all boys. Even though forty percent of Soviet schools lack indoor plumbing, forty to sixty percent of them have their own firing ranges or shooting facilities and the number is growing fast. War games are held every summer. Students are taught how to use machine guns, mine detectors, missiles, drive tanks, wear gas masks.

Let me quote from Hedrick Smith, former Moscow bureau chief for The New York Times and author of The Russians (as well as the new Washington bestseller The Power Game): "Our first experience of this network of paramilitary activities in civilian life came when our 11 year old daughter, Laurie, went

off to play zarnitsa (lightning), a war game, on Lenin Hills, organized for the sixth and seventh grades by a military instructor at her Russian school. It would all have seemed very much like a summer camp game of capture the flag except for the deadly earnestness with which it was done." Smith said "with the drilling and all, the expedition (zarnitsa) ran about four hours after school. It was a practice carried out in all schools."

Professor Adam Ulam, the distinguished director of Harvard University's Russian Research Center, reports that "one of the principal goals of military patriotic education is to counteract any pacifist tendencies, to teach all Soviet citizens, from the youngest children to pensioners, that they must be prepared at any moment to fight for socialism....Students are taught -- even in courses that ostensibly have nothing to do with politics -- about the inherent need of imperialist states to strive for foreign conquest....The determination to instill explicitly military values in the schools comes through with equally striking clarity in textbooks and manuals used by teachers."

Soviet Colonel General Popkov wrote in August 1986 in a regional military paper Sovetskiy Voin that "the schools are taking on ever increasing importance in military and patriotic indoctrination. Party documents on school reform define an extensive, scientifically based program for this work."

American educators are unaccustomed to viewing schools as agencies of military training and political indoctrination.

We are disinclined to believe that other countries look at education that way. We do not want to think it. Therefore we are not apt to teach it to our students when they are learning about those other countries.

But what do Soviet youngsters learn about the United States? Here are the conclusions of Indiana University dean Howard Mehlinger, based on his recent examination of Soviet textbooks: "The need to make history and geography fit a pre-ordained, analytical framework guides the choice of topic, the selection of evidence, and the decision about how events are to be interpreted....Attention is focused on the least attractive aspects of American life....Despite the material wealth enjoyed by many Americans, life in the United States is characterized by decadence, alienation, poverty and misery. The United States is a militarily powerful and aggressive nation; it is also a spiritually weak one. At least this is what Soviet youth are likely to believe if they rely solely upon their textbooks....The Soviet textbooks stress that despite American attempts to intimidate the USSR, World War II marked a turning point in history, as it marked a major triumph for the socialist forces. Since that time, the 'imperialists,' led mainly by the United States, have struggled to extend their domination over large portions of the world; the socialists, led by the USSR, have resisted these efforts while seeking to maintain peace."

That is the nature of education in the Soviet Union today, and the current reforms show few signs of altering it,

though they may well result in better vocational education, science education and computer mastery. There is no prospect whatsoever that education will cease to be part of the mechanism by which the state indoctrinates and controls the population.

Our youngsters should know this. Our educators should ponder its implications. That is part of a true international education. Students need to have information and they need to be able reflect cogently on that data.

For instance, a good reflective lesson in global education might be based on this week's headlines. I refer to the workers' strikes in Gdansk, Poland. How do students and educators understand the significance of these events? Do they possess the necessary knowledge base by which to see them in context? Does a student in an American classroom perceive the strike in Gdansk as a standard-issue labor dispute -- something similar to the long teachers' strike in Chicago last fall? Or do they have the global education of an Abe Rosenthal, the former New York Times editor, who wrote in his column last Monday that the Gdansk incident was not an account of a labor strike at all but rather the saga of an imprisoned nation. He has the background to know. He was the Times bureau chief in Poland and he won a Pulitzer prize for his work there.

Listen to what Rosenthal wrote: "The essence of what is going on in Poland, the root reality, is plain to see and known to every Pole....Poland is a captive nation....That is

the root, and from it grow almost all of Poland's economic troubles and political unease, today as in the past four decade....Now it is unfashionable for journalistic and diplomatic specialists to mention it. And it seems an embarrassment for the United States to talk about it. But neither fashion nor embarrassment can change historic reality and its consequence."

American global educators need that perspective, too. Students and teachers alike ought to see the world plainly, accurately, and wisely. They need the facts and the background knowledge. They need to know lots about other countries, and they need to have ways of thinking clearly and analytically about what they know.

Global education is valuable if it meets those needs. Included, here, of course, is proper attention to fundamental differences among types of societies and governments and to the values, beliefs, and principles that underlie those differences.

Our students should be encouraged to apply to what they have learned of other countries what Secretary Bennett calls the "gates test."

This test is profoundly simple. When a nation or country opens its gates, which way do people go? Do they leave or do they seek to enter? More than any theoretical suppositions about economic, cultural or political differences, the answer to that simple question explains a great deal. When the gates are open, do the people exit and where do they try to go?

Somewhere today there may be a young American who would prefer to live in Gdansk. Assuredly he has the freedom to leave Boston, Albuquerque or Seattle in order to go live there. Perhaps there is also a young Pole residing in Gdansk who would favor life in Omaha, Baltimore, or Tuscon. There is a pretty good chance we would take him in. But has he the opportunity to leave his current domicile in search of a better life? Don't count on it.

Such matters need to be part of global education. Our students need to know not just the language people speak in Poland, the crops they grow, the religions they observe (if they're lucky), the festivals they celebrate and the products they manufacture. Our children also need to know that their counterparts in countries such as Poland do not have the freedoms we take for granted. The freedom to emigrate. The freedom to join a trade union. The freedom to elect the nation's leaders. The freedom to write and say what's on their minds. Without such knowledge, our children cannot possibly understand what is going on elsewhere on the planet. Lacking an international education of depth and sophistication, they will suppose -- as no doubt do many adult Americans -- that what happened in Gdansk these past few months was a labor dispute. Those with a sound international education know that it was fundamentally a liberty dispute.

As the Ad Hoc Committee on Global Education stated in its report last year, one purpose of international education is to "evaluate the values of other countries and cultures without

assuming that all values have equal merit." Of course, our youngsters need to learn about other countries and cultures. But international studies ought also serve to enhance and strengthen their commitment to this country and its convictions and principles.

Global education can not be allowed explicitly to undermine or subtly to degrade the civic education of our children. If global education becomes an attack, even a covert attack, on the central principles of this republic, then it has to be resisted. If global education envisions a world in which the only enemies are ethnocentrism, patriotism and nationalism, then global education is not something the American people much want or will long tolerate.

But this need not be the case. What we traditionally call civics education and global education are not mutually exclusive. There are healthy signs: a fledgling effort to provide an ongoing forum for discussion and debate within the profession now exists. The Alliance for Education in Global and International Studies has goals and values which include expanding the capacities for effective citizenship, passing to youngsters an understanding of those traditions and values of our heritage which are the structural supports of our democracy, and the principles and commitments which sustain it, a commitment to our democratic system, improving citizens' abilities to interact with other cultures and societies. All worthy goals.

I believe a consensus among diverse people can be reached with regard to such matters. The AEGIS goals statement is one such example. Here is another: last spring 150 Americans from across the political spectrum signed a manifesto known as "Education for Democracy." It was organized by the American Federation of Teachers. This document begins with the premise that the survival of democracy "depends on our transmitting to each new generation the political vision of liberty and equality that unites us as Americans -- and a deep loyalty to the political institutions our founders put together to fulfill that vision." It calls for schools to become far more purposeful in imparting to all youngsters both the knowledge and the attitudes needed for an "informed, reasoned allegiance to the ideals of a free society." This clear, pointed statement of principles was endorsed by Walter Mondale and Gerald Ford, Anthony Podesta and Jeane Kirkpatrick, Orrin Hatch and Al Shanker, Ann Landers and George Will, even Mary Futrell and Bill Bennett.

I trust we agree on one fundamental: that our youngsters -- all of them -- need by the time they finish high school not only to understand but also to affirm the premises of our republic: that all men and women are created equal, that freedom is their birthright, and that such a fundamental right was won at great cost and must be maintained even at great cost. Any true global education obliges us to note that freedom and equality are not recognized as birthrights in every system of government, or in all past or present

civilizations. Of course, these values are universally sought -- whether in the shipyards of Gdansk or the farms of the Great Plains. They are global values in that they are human values -- the aspirations of men and women everywhere. But they are neither honored nor practiced in most of the planet we inhabit. That distinction -- that pre-eminent distinction -- is what a sound global education equips people to make.