

# The Seamless Web: *Minnesota's New Education System*

## 3 Performance Packages

The Profile of Learning consists of the requirement that K-12 students complete 78 content standards by means of doing performance packages. In order to be eligible to graduate, students must complete 24 high school level content standards by means of performance packages. To understand the Profile, we must understand the performance packages.

At the same time, however, we must recognize that the fundamental content of the performance packages is also forced upon our schools in a variety of other ways. The rules which mandate the Profile of Learning, for example, require the same content that is outlined in the packages. Similarly, the new teacher-certification rules contain the same agenda that is apparent in the packages. The new rules for “inclusive education” require much of the same content.

For these reasons, if Minnesota were to make the performance packages optional, as was recommended by the task force created to fine-tune the Profile, and not fundamentally change the entire radical system of which they are part, then little will have changed.

Each performance package must be scored on a 1 to 4 system, 1 being the lowest score and 4 being the highest. Numerous teachers have reported that CFL wants them to give no more than 5 percent of the packages an overall score of “4.” CFL emphasizes that the rubrics are not the same as letter grades. Letter grades are not allowed in the Profile of Learning. This scoring system, referred to as “rubrics,” is not unique to the Profile. It is contained in the federal government’s SCANS report which is also incorporated into Minnesota’s new system of education.<sup>42</sup>

When we evaluate the performance packages themselves, we will see that they rely heavily on group projects. The experience of the two high school seniors described in the introduction of this manual is typical of the methodology of the packages. The performance packages require both content (curriculum) and procedures (teaching methods).

Why do the packages rely on group projects? First, let us recognize what the reason is not. It is not because group projects are an efficient way to teach academic knowledge. That is why higher education has always relied more heavily on lecture, personal study and independent research rather than group projects.

In the performance packages, however, we find that the methodological priorities are reversed. Why is that? There are two reasons: The first is that big business, we are told, wants employees who work well in groups. The revolution in education depends on having big business buy into the program. For that reason, the system must give big business something which it says it wants in order to get its support. Whether the revolution in education will actually produce better workers, however, is another matter. The second reason is that the education revolutionaries do not want our children to see themselves as separate and independent. They want group identities, not individual identities. (See chapter 16.)

It should be noted that the state-written performance packages that will be evaluated in the coming chapters are described by CFL as being “only examples.” Local schools suppo-

sedly can write their own packages if they don't like the state packages. The reality of the new system, however, is that most schools will use mostly state-written packages. Composing these packages is time-consuming and expensive. Locally written packages must: (a) have a difficulty level equal to or exceeding the state packages, (b) have essentially the same content as the state packages, (c) use the performance package methodology, and (d) be submitted to state officials for audit and review. In addition, the state determines how the packages must be scored, what records must be kept, where those records go and who has access to them. State officials control the entire system.<sup>43</sup>

It should also be noted that Minnesota's Department of Children, Families and Learning (CFL) now generally avoids using the terms "Profile of Learning" and "performance packages." The Department prefers to use the labels "high standards" and "assessments." As people have come to understand what the former words mean, the department has changed its terminology in order to become a moving target. The same process occurred several years ago when the education reformers stopped using the words "Outcome-Based Education" (OBE) and replaced it with the terms "results-oriented" and "performance-based" "graduation standards." The language changed, but the program did not.

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<sup>42</sup> *SCANS Report*, p. 65

<sup>43</sup> Minnesota State Board of Education Rules, 3501.0300 to 3501.0450