

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A short while ago an article in the ST. PAUL SUNDAY PIONEER PRESS stated flatly, "schools are living museums." I don't believe it! Having had the distinct advantage of being active in the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English the past four years, I am well aware of the wealth of programs available to many students. However, financial cutbacks trigger curriculum change, and, unfortunately, we seem to be headed for a kind of change in the 1980's. Insufficient funds, together with eliminated programs, poor policies, lack of materials and inadequate inservice training are giving rise to a dilemma.

On October, 1982, a conference sponsored by the JOURNAL OF CURRICULUM THEORIZING features topics such as "The Confluent Curriculum," "Teacher Personality Variables in Curriculum," "Principal/Teacher Expectations in Curriculum," and "The Curriculum Carousel." Although I don't plan to address any of those topics, an inspection of current curriculum can offer some insights into this dilemma.

It was Ray Bradbury who said that writers of science fiction entertain, but also predict and warn. If this is true, and I believe it is, educators in the closing years of the 20th century, coincidentally the threshold of the 21st century, have a job to do.

The term accountability has taken on new meaning for teachers. Certainly we are accountable in the daily tasks of our professions such as course objectives, lesson preparation and grades. But we now find ourselves accountable for the failures and rejects of our "assembly-line" system, in which uniformity, not quality, seems to be the rule. However unintentional our failures might be, they still occur, and the public demands someone be responsible, for they see accountability in the narrow terms of

measurable behaviors, test results and competencies. The burden rests with the already exasperated teacher. It should not! Student achievement must be seen as the mutual responsibility of a team: student, parent, teacher and administrator. Student achievement, teacher attitudes and an environment that fosters learning are influenced by the quality of administrative leadership.

Dealing with the diversity that characterizes the regular classroom becomes a complicated business, yet the key to successful instruction where everyone benefits. The typical student becomes a myth as teachers must adapt their curriculum to meet the needs of many without slighting any. Attitudinally and pedagogically the teacher is unprepared.

What am I teaching? Why am I teaching it? What is the best approach for learning this material? What are my expectations of my students? What should I add, eliminate or keep? Am I only teaching subject content? These questions need to be asked periodically to adapt curriculum to changing interest, motivation, ability and child development. Direction in what is being taught, specific method, and reference for assessment become integral parts of the curriculum process. We understand the learner's abilities, provide direction and guidance, and enhance skills through pupil activity. We revise our expectations. Being too hasty and short-cutting the planning stages to meet deadlines is not as beneficial as good, solid planning, albeit a little late.

Pat Choate, senior policy analyst for TWR, writes in the August, 1982, issue of READING TODAY:

The problem is that adults today do not have the literacy skills to function and think in this, what I call the techno era. Seventy-five percent of

the work force now will be the work force of the 21st century. They need more basic training in thinking skills - the basics are not the basics anymore - to function in our increasingly demanding society. Millions of Americans are in need of functional education skills at a time when our society is expanding its demand for workers who can think critically. The pressure is for the education community to adapt itself to serve the needs of those adults who have not learned the basics and who are also in need of advanced skills. Also, the community must change its focus from merely the basics to the wider scope of thinking skills in its working with-out elementary and secondary schools. . The education community must work to re-tool the American worker. Most Americans' skills will be obsolete . . . What will be required is for each education community to work with local businesses to boost their workers' skills. The new Youth Training Act's Private Industry Councils will bring together business, education, labor, and community-based organizations to set and implement goals. The money is heavily directed toward remedial education . . . It is very exciting . . . we are literally

rebuilding America over the next ten years, and educators have a major role to play.

Being a member of MCTE can help a teacher face the challenge and change of the 1980's MCTE publications and conferences enable members to stay informed and make possible a sharing of new developments in curriculum. Teachers work together to develop strategies to best meet the needs of all students. MCTE committees permit participation in areas of special interest such as censorship, legislation and media. Active membership in MCTE is effective inservice training.

Jim Olson

Acting President and
Immediate Past President