

Three-Minute Philosophers Offer Perspectives on the MVITEC Vision and Mission Statements

John C. Dugger

Over the past 10 years the changing role of the Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference has been a topic of many formal presentations and informal conversations during conference meetings. The past three years have produced the most dramatic proposals for change and yielded evidence of significant movement towards a new direction. Metaphorically speaking, the conference has been like an umbrella being moved around by one small group of people with encouragement by some onlookers and to the clear discomfort of others. The umbrella is moved to locations that serve to protect from the sun, rain, and other potentially threatening forces the current program interests of the group with hands on the umbrella handle. The position of the umbrella determines what is nurtured and what is developed by the conference.

The visioning process utilized during the 1995 conference has the potential to place more hands on the umbrella, resulting in a larger group with ownership and a greater potential impact of the conference. More hands also will mean a more stable vision and mission. This stability of vision and mission is essential while the strategies and processes used in accomplishing the mission must change rapidly to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

The size and location of the umbrella is determined by the *vision* and the location of the umbrella is determined by the *mission* in the statements produced during the 82nd conference. "The premier leadership forum for technology teachers" establishes the size of the umbrella. The "leadership forum" seems appropriate; however, the "technology teachers" component appears to encompass many areas and may carry different meanings to members of the conference and little meaning to anyone outside the disciplines represented by the conference. After acknowledging the positive potential impacts of the visioning process, thoughtful individuals must be concerned with the size of the umbrella. Nurturing a large and oddly shaped area with a large and oddly shaped umbrella may produce solutions, but it will likely produce other unintended problems.

The size of the umbrella can be reduced by focusing on the things that are done at the college or university level and not at the state department, community college, or high school level. Bachelor, master, and doctoral degree programs are concerned with developing aca-

ademic disciplines through discovery of new knowledge and the identification of best practices. By providing a forum for leaders in colleges and universities that addresses the missions of these institutions, the size of the umbrella is reduced and the shape is more uniform. This view is based on a perspective of the nature of academic disciplines.

Academic disciplines have existed since ancient Greek times. Over 6,000 years ago, human beings were already using specialized knowledge in agriculture, shipbuilding, canal and bridge building, and other branches of industry (Szabadvary, 1966). Astronomy and geometry have been known since the Egyptian and Hellenistic times. Since those early years, human knowledge has grown at exponential rates and many academic disciplines have been born.

During the years of Greek influence, the Greeks believed in free discussion of their knowledge and opinions. The influence of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their followers on the development of knowledge is well known. This openness and atmosphere of free thinking resulted in the dissemination of Greek science and the growth of knowledge. It was during the reign of Greek culture that Archimedes (287-212 BC) and Heron (2nd century BC) founded mechanics, Euclid founded geometry, and Hipparchus and Eratosthenes made important discoveries in astronomy. Chemistry also emerged as an area of study toward the end of the period of Greek influence. Thus, the sheer liberalization of the learning environment led to the development of knowledge and the birth of academic disciplines.

From the earliest recorded history, the growth of industry has, in itself, promoted the growth of scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge has been used to set up industrial processes, and the industries have, in turn, spurred the development of new scientific knowledge through the need for improved industrial processes and materials. For example, chemistry and, later, analytical chemistry owe their origin to early searches for methods of making gold (Szabadvary, 1966).

To this day, the growth of science and technology continues to feed on and, at the same time, fuel the development of scientific knowledge. Examples of academic disciplines that have come about largely due to the advances in science and technology are biochemistry, entomology, genetic engineering,

parasitology, and nuclear physics. Further examples of fast-growing disciplines that were born out of the rapid developments in science and technology are computer science and management information systems.

Universities have also played and continue to play a crucial role in the development of disciplines. The concentration of research resources in universities—human, financial, and material—makes universities the crucibles of knowledge. Many disciplines owe their exist-

ence to the work of universities.

The vision of the conference should address the role of the universities in developing the technology-related disciplines. The umbrella, that is, the conference, should nurture the use of research as the primary tool to develop these emerging disciplines. The formulation of research agendas, the presentation of research results, and the acknowledgement of significant research contributions should be the primary conference activities.

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Reference

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The Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference (MVITEC) has a long and distinguished history. It was first established as the Mississippi Valley Manual Arts Conference. The original mission of the conference was “that the heads of manual training programs could get together where they could express all their heresies without being reported in the educational papers and exchange views on questions of vital importance” (Bawden, 1930). The purpose of the conference was for the exchange of information rather than policy formation (Evans, 1988). In his recount of the conference’s history, Evans reported that one of the oldest rules of the conference was “that there was never to be a conference position on policy issues and that it was intended that there is no chance that the conference will express support for your point of view or any other.” The conference’s original slogan was to “take with you what you can use, and leave the rest behind” (Evans, 1988).

The new vision statement, that the MVITEC will be the premier forum for technology teachers, raises some interesting philosophical questions. The statement refers to this organization as being the premier leadership for *technology* teachers and the mission statement refers to facilitating debate on the critical issues and problems of teaching and research about *technology*. However, the conference name is the Mississippi Valley *Industrial* Teacher Education Conference, not Technology Teacher Education Conference. Does this indicate that the members of the conference are unclear as to who they are or is it the intention of the membership that Industrial Teacher Education and Technology Teacher Education be synonymous? Is the name of the organization intended on being limited to industrial teachers while at the same time being the premier

leadership forum for technology teachers? Shouldn’t we, as leaders in the profession, be consistent in the vision statement and name the organization the Mississippi Valley Technology Education Conference?

In reviewing the mission statement for the conference, that of facilitating debate on the critical issues and problems of teaching and research about technology, to develop solutions, and to communicate them to the field and the public at large, also brings some questions to mind. Why are we attempting to establish another conference for the purpose of presenting, discussing, and debating critical issues and problems and then attempting to develop solutions for these problems and searching for a means of effectively communicating the outcome to the public at large? The discipline of technology education has several professional organizations whose primary mission or purpose is to provide what is being advocated in the new vision and mission statements. Many of the distinguished individuals who are members of this conference are also members of those organizations.

The International Technology Education Association (ITEA) mission, as stated in the recently completed *Technology for All Americans* publication, is to advance everyone’s technological capabilities and to nurture and promote the professionalism of those engaged in these pursuits. The ITEA seeks to meet the professional needs and interest of its members and to improve public understanding of the profession and its contributions. The Council on Technology Teacher Education (CTTE) has as part of its mission to provide leadership and support in the development of quality technology teacher education programs. These are only two of a number of organizations that provide leadership, facilitate debate on problems of teaching, develop solutions, and com-

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municate these solutions to the field. I do not believe that there is a need for another organization with the same mission.

The membership of this conference should reflect on what has been a very solid philosophy, purpose, and mission for the last 83 years, and determine if suggested changes are for improvement or are changes for the sake of change. I believe that the original philosophy, that of expressing individual views and taking with you what you can use and leaving the rest behind, be considered. If the conference is going to debate on critical issues, problems of teaching, and research about technology and to develop solutions and to communicate them to the field and public at large, I fear that

much of the conference will be spent on nit-picking, word semantics, personal biases, and individual prejudices, and thus the intent, the essence, the uniqueness of the conference will be lost.

In conclusion, I recommend that the MVITEC vision statement be revised to read, "The Mississippi Valley Technology Teacher Education Conference will be the premier leadership forum for technology teachers" and that the mission statement also be revised to read, "The Mission of the Mississippi Technology Teacher Education Conference is to facilitate debate on the critical issues and problems of teaching and research about technology."

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Jane Liedtke

The vision statement for the Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference is perfect for the organization. However, the mission statement does not match the vision statement! The vision statement includes a very key component, *leadership*, yet the mission statement in no way reflects a commitment to developing and providing for the ongoing leadership needs in the profession. If we follow the mission and exclude the vision, we have no forum to provide professional development or leadership development, or successors for the departments represented in the Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference (MVITEC).

Our mission is too short-sighted and misses the mark. It ignores a major void in the profession and replicates or overlaps the role of other key organizations (ITEA, CTTE, NAIT). I believe people will stop attending the conference if it does not attend to the issues faced by departmental and institutional leaders. General topics related to technology education such as elementary technology education, while important to be discussed by leaders in the field, are not going to hold the interest of individuals who on a daily basis are faced with hiring decisions, faculty evaluation, student recruitment, minority retention, budget concerns, administrative politics, and keeping a handle on the issues of departmental management.

It was appropriate in the past for our found-

ing fathers from this region to sit around the table and discuss curricular issues of the time, but the reality today is that we are a more mobile society and participate in many conferences/symposia devoted to curricular issues. None, however, are focusing on enhancing the leadership abilities of those with leadership responsibility, and none are in a better position than MVITEC to provide a venue for leadership development for the next generation. Our technology professions (technology education, industrial technology, vocational-technical education) are in a national leadership crisis.

Why do strategies fail? Is it planning? Is it leadership?

According to Picken and Dess (1996), "most strategic failures are avoidable, yet strategists seem to fall into the same traps over and over again. A flawed strategy—no matter how brilliant the leadership, no matter how effective the implementation—is doomed to fail."

The following are seven traps of strategic planning (Picken & Dess, 1996):

1. Failing to recognize and understand events and changing conditions in the environment.
2. Basing strategies on a flawed set of assumptions.
3. Pursuing a one-dimensional strategy that fails to create or sustain a long-term ad-

- vantage.
4. Failing to structure and implement mechanisms to ensure the coordination and integration of processes and key functions across organizational boundaries.
 5. Setting arbitrary and inflexible goals.

6. Implementing a system of controls that fails to achieve balance among culture, rewards, and boundaries.
7. Failing to provide the leadership to the successful implementation of strategic change.

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Picken, & Dess. (1996, November). The seven traps of strategic planning. *Incorporated Magazine for Growing Companies*, 18, p. 99.

I'll preface my perspective with a few statements on what I see as the condition of our universities today:

1. The university is a far different place than it was when this conference was founded, especially in terms of the leadership of our programs in technology and where the programs reside in the campus organization.

2. Teacher education overall has a less prominent role on our campuses. The "teachers college" is almost a thing of the past.

3. Our programs have changed dramatically during the past 40 years, from a focus on teacher preparation to an emphasis on industrial technology and industrial-engineering technology.

4. Our faculties who were primarily involved in teacher preparation are being replaced with faculty who have no teacher education background.

5. We have given a great deal of attention to the content and structure of our discipline during the past two decades while focusing much less on the teaching/learning process.

My position on the mission of this conference is that we must focus more on our role in teacher education, define what our role should be, and determine what leadership we will assume in that role. The name of this conference implies that we are teacher educators. If we are, then we should be a part of the teacher preparation process on our campuses. In view of what has been happening in recent years, we need to look at how we can reestablish effective teacher preparation programs in the study of technology on our campuses.

How many of us are really involved in teacher education? How many of us spend time in classrooms with teachers who work with primary and secondary children, or interact directly with school administrators? How many of us really understand what is going on in the schools where we are placing our graduates?

To establish effective programs in the study of technology, schools need leadership. Are we willing to provide that leadership first hand?

Teacher education programs are coming under increased scrutiny by accrediting agencies. They will change! Primary and secondary schools also are being challenged to change. Will our programs in the study of technology be included in those changes and contribute to them?

Field experiences that we provide for our teacher candidates need to be guided by us, not by teacher educators who are not familiar with our content or goals. We need to control our destiny in the schools. When we relegate that role to others by saying "now, we prepared the teacher candidate in the discipline, you prepare them in the process of teaching," we have given up our right to say what goes on in the school.

The issues involve such questions as the following: What delivery system should we use for instruction? How can we help to define the character of the whole school curriculum? How can we work more effectively with teachers in other disciplines?

So, what does this say about the Mississippi Valley Conference? It says, let's focus on teacher education and how best to prepare teachers for our discipline. Let us say we are really teacher educators and deal with the issues of how to make our programs an integral part of the university teacher preparation programs and processes.

The leadership and support of leaders in technology teacher education can come from this organization. At the least, it should focus on the condition of universities in the Mississippi Valley watershed and how to help them strengthen their technology teacher preparation programs.

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Paul E. Post

My perspective is that of a technology teacher educator. As one who prepares tomorrow's teachers, I see that they face educational systems that are vastly different than they were even five years ago. Though technology has changed in those five years, that is not all that has changed: academic cooperation now is on the rise. Programs such as Tech Prep; Science, Technology, and Society; MAST; and other math, science, and technology initiatives reflect a trend toward the convergence of technology education with other disciplines.

This has provided a tremendous opportunity for technology educators. Our colleagues in other disciplines seem to be supportive of our role in education. Technology teachers need to be willing to work with other teachers to show how technology education provides students with valuable opportunities to apply and integrate what they learn in other classes. We have known and been saying this for years; at last we seem to have an attentive audience. The transition from industrial arts to technology education has reached a point where at least other educators have a clue as to what our curriculum is. Administrators and the public, though often confusing us with educational technology, or limiting us to computer technology, do understand that knowing about technology is important. It looks like we may be entering a golden age of technology education.

With all this opportunity comes responsibility. We are responsible to produce the learning we have promised. There are several looming problems that we need to cope with in order for this golden age to come to fruition. One problem is the growing teacher shortage; if we don't get new teachers into the classrooms to replace the many baby boomers

headed for retirement, there may be no one left to do the debating. Second, we need to address the equity issues of our time. As I look around Ohio, I see great things happening in suburban schools but almost nothing in the urban and rural areas. I doubt that Ohio is alone in this. I see this as perhaps our greatest challenge. Third, we need to do a better job of evaluating our contributions to the educational process and then passing that information on to the decision makers. Fourth, classroom teachers need to be very proactive in promoting their programs. In this era of smaller, more localized government, we are seeing fewer state mandates and more local control of education. This makes it more important for local programs to let the public know what they are doing. Our graduates need to be prepared for this public relations role.

What is the role for the Mississippi Valley Industrial Teacher Education Conference in all this? I see technology education as a vital part of industrial teacher education. We need to maintain our linkages to vocational, technical, and industrial education. The conference provides an opportunity to jointly debate the issues and problems we face in common. Technology educators must also be debating issues with its partners in the other disciplines. Some of those debates should take place here, with colleagues from other disciplines here as guests with full discussion privileges. The rest of those debates should rightly occur elsewhere. Since our vision and mission statements call upon us to provide leadership, we should establish the conference as a forum to not only debate issues among ourselves but also to open the discussion to the greater educational community.

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