From the Editor

Random Encounters with Visions and Leadership

I realized as I reflected over 40 years ago upon my undergraduate education that much of what I had learned about the world and about life came outside of the planned curricular experiences that I had through the formal courses that I completed. When I finished my doctorate some 26 years ago, I made the same reflections and concluded that those random interactions and encounters in the hallways of academia with my professors and peers, as well as custodians and secretaries, were very significant learning experiences. I estimated that fully 25% of what I had learned in my doctoral study came from those unplanned encounters. At this point, I would argue that well over half of what I learned came this way. There is some logic for this change in proportion over time, for much of what I learned in the formal classroom environment has become obsolete and meaningless, but those informal interactions remain timeless, for they taught me to challenge my thinking, to hone my skills in defending a point of view, and to learn how other people think – and consequently to value the wonderful diversity of the human being.

With three children in school when I started doctoral study and no clear idea of how I was going to finance the endeavor, I certainly would have been a candidate for doing my degree via distance learning if that mode had existed. It undoubtedly would have been more convenient and cost effective than moving my family "back East" to Ohio State University from a small rural town of 13,000 in Oregon. Though there are arguments supporting the viability and opportunities for interaction using the technology of distance learning, I cannot imagine that it even "distantly" compares to what I enjoyed in my doctoral study, especially through those random encounters. Times and values have change, I know, but I am thankful. Enough said.

Those "random encounters" have occurred throughout my career and they have continued to help me formulate my thoughts, develop new ideas, and stay motivated and excited about this awesome field in which we work. After a few years of attending the ITEA conference, I realized that the random encounters there with members of my profession, akin to my conclusions about education, were often more significant than the planned special interest sessions. In fact, virtually every one of the From the Editors I have written between these covers came from these random encounters, albeit not always from "academics." Two of them I would like to share presently. The first occurred during the annual conference of the Technology Education Association of Pennsylvania last

November in a discussion with William Michael. I have known Bill for the past five or so years, prior to having any idea that I would one day end up in Pennsylvania with him. Bill is coincidentally a mentor to Mike Voicheck, one of my former students from Virginia Tech, who now teaches with Bill at North Penn High School near Philadelphia. In our random encounter, we ended up talking about vision – who in our profession has vision and who does not. This idea filled my mind for several days after the conference and continues to pop up today. Who among my colleagues have vision? How do I know if they have vision? Do I have vision? What is my vision? Do I need to have vision to be successful and contributory?

Most in our profession would agree that William E. Warner was visionary. His *Curriculum to Reflect Technology* (1947) is still considered to be a seminal document in moving our field to where it is today. It is still quoted and referenced in contemporary writings. Yet that document consisted of several sections and most of those sections was written by one of Warner's doctoral students at Ohio State. Certainly Warner influenced those students' thinking as he laid down the principal elements of a philosophy that guided their ideas and writing. At the same time, though, I have to think that the converse was true, that those students significantly affected Warner's thinking as well. Though some students of Warner remember him as a "lecturing professor" who tended to be a "fountainhead of knowledge" and rather egotistic as well, logic tells me that Warner had a very interactive side to him, especially when he was formulating new ideas. My "vision" of Warner's interactive style is evidenced in the initiation ritual for the Epsilon Pi Tau Honor Society in which it is mentioned that he and a group of graduate students gathered around a conference table and formulated the basic tenets of the organization he founded in 1929.

The other random encounter occurred with Perry Gemmill, the Chair of our department, in the hallway of the building in which we work. He mentioned some of the leaders of our field who were prominent when we were both fledglings in the profession and how awestruck we were about them. We then both wondered if leaders of this magnitude exist today. Had our minds become so calloused that we simply did not recognize them? Were they in our midst but they simply did not stand out? Did we take our leaders for granted? To what extent had we realized our own leadership potential, perhaps obligation, to the profession? Such a discussion is probably a rather normal occurrence when one matures in their career, wondering whether you are as good as those that came before and if those who follow are as good as you are.

The notions of vision and leadership began to come together in my mind. One of the first thoughts that I had was that every successful teacher is also a successful leader – leadership is simply a quality that good teachers have to have. Yet not all good teachers are good visionaries. Very good teachers/leaders are teaching obsolete content.

Likewise, there are wonderful visionaries who are not good leaders or good teachers. They have developed future-oriented ideas that make good sense, but

they cannot articulate them in a classroom or a conference presentation situation. Drawing an analogy from the business world, they did not know how to market their ideas. Then I thought about the professor who zealously espouses the idea that hands-on activities and problem solving opportunities are key to effective learning in our field, but then communicates this notion to students via a series of passive, dull lectures. I can also recall academicians presenting their visions of an ideal curriculum and laboratory facility at a conference, but when I had the opportunity to visit, there was no apparent connection between their vision and their practice. I also decided that there are lots of exceptional leaders out there who are not visionary, but support those who are by obtaining resources and providing encouragement for them – unsung, but certainly not insignificant.

I reflected about the people in our profession who were leaders and visionaries - the ones that Perry and I discussed in the hallway. Donald Lux, Willis Ray, Donald Maley, and Paul Devore are examples among several people who came to my mind. I pondered who might be their equivalents today. I also pondered how things have changed in our profession and in society in general, leading to some observations and contrasts. Each of these people was a philosopher. Each one was connected with a university and all were land grant institutions. They all spent nearly their entire careers developing, honing, and solidifying their respective philosophies. Their fundamental beliefs remained constant over time. They all published their works in both journals and in books. They all continue to be cited, as Warner is, in contemporary writings. All put their philosophies into educational practice either directly or through their students. All except one translated their philosophies into curricular documents that were readily accessible to the profession. The philosophies of each were controversial within the profession and generally incompatible with one another. In varying degrees, they were controversial. Most important, each of these individuals *believed in something* and was deeply *passionate about those beliefs*. What's more, their differences were exciting topics of conversation and analysis.

Things are not the way they were back then. The power and influence of professors in land grant universities, where new ideas are often incubated and fostered, has slipped dramatically. There are but a handful of technology education programs in land grants today and the number of faculty within these programs is but a trifle of what it was when my exemplars were in the zeniths of their careers. Regional universities have been increasingly emphasizing research supported by external dollars and rewarding scholarship in an attempt to fill the voids left by the land grants, but most are unwilling or unable to reduce the time they expect faculty to devote to teaching. What's more, most of the faculty in these institutions have a multitude of responsibilities outside of technology education and in many cases the majority of the students they teach are in other fields of study.

As the stronghold of the land grants began to slip, state departments of education began to take over some of the slack, moving from supporting the

dissemination of the new knowledge and practices that came from the land grants, to actually developing that new knowledge themselves. This phenomenon was relatively short lived, though, as federal funding to states dried up. There was no ebb in the need for curricular and instructional materials development, though, so the International Technology Education Association began to play an increasingly significant, corresponding role. Even before this, professional organizations, originally founded to support engineers, scientists, mathematicians, architects, and the like in their professional development, began to expand their outreach to the elementary and secondary schools. The objectives for these initiatives at first seemed to center on fostering the future of the professions they represented by engendering interest among students in related careers. Then they expanded into influencing the curriculum itself, with instructional materials and sometimes by even more direct means. Today virtually all professional organizations seem to have an elementary/secondary school outreach effort and resources allocated to it. Many organizations with a technical purpose are embracing the notion of technological literacy and some are doing so totally independent of us.

So I sit back and think about the contemporary leaders of our profession. I am convinced that there are top quality people leading us today and they are no less significant or capable than those in the past. Our professional organization, representing the members and the profession in general, has become one of the principal developers of new knowledge in the field. This is unprecedented in our history. The Center to Advance Teaching Science and Technology (CATTS) is a consortium of states under the auspices of ITEA and the membership. The states have input into what is being developed and those doing the developing cut across a wide swath of our profession, including international experts. It is truly a participative effort. In addition, the significant curriculum development going on outside of CATTS is more likely than not being accomplished by consortiums of several universities and a number of individuals within them, or by independent organizations.

The leaders of the past left a personal legacy with the profession. That legacy is recorded in history by their publications and by the impact that they had on the profession today. The test of their foresight and vision can be measured in part by citations of their work in contemporary literature. Helping to record that history is a wonderful legacy that results from the dedication and hard work of the Editorial Board members of this journal who have served over the years.

I wish conclude with some observations regarding leadership, vision, and legacy. First, the legacy for the future may well be left by organizations and the collective people within them rather than by individuals, contrary to what has been true to a large extent in the past. Second, preparation for careers versus the development of technological literacy is once again becoming an issue in the field, after years of relative reconciliation. Third, how we embrace engineering and include engineering concepts in our curricula are occupying much of the field's resources and energy right now and this represents the vision for quite a

number of people in the field. Fourth, with the exception of the two points above, the philosophy of the field seems to be reaching a nominal level of homeostasis, though the need for curriculum development will most certainly continue. Fifth, the contemporary leaders of our field have not had the consistency of focus of their predecessors due to the dynamics of the times and the increasingly faster pace of change in technology, society, and political climate. Due to a variety of pressures, many leaders have had to become opportunists, jumping after whatever seemed to look promising and had resource potential. This may explain why it seems increasingly difficult to understand what our leaders today really believe about our field compared to those in the past. Sixth, perhaps waxing optimism, those who leave a legacy to the next generations may well do so in their research rather than in their philosophical tenets and curriculum development. Drawing a parallel to the medical profession, Dr. Benjamin Spock comes to mind as a philosopher while Dr. Jonas Salk is a researcher. Seventh, perhaps the most lasting legacy will be left by those individuals and organizations that operate globally: collaborating, promoting, synthesizing, and further developing the collective efforts of those around the world. Finally, only the test of time will reveal who the visionaries and leaders of today really are. Erroneous visions and dead-end paths of leadership leave a legacy only if they caused damage. On the other hand, as Nanus (1992) stated, "There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long range success than an attractive, worthwhile, achievable vision for the future, widely shared" (p. 3).

JEL

Reference

Nanus, B. (1992). *Visionary leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Warner, W. E. (1947, April). *A curriculum to reflect technology*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Industrial Arts Association, Columbus, OH.