

From the Editor

You Can't Get Here From There

Like most everyone these days, there is an ever-widening location in my mind in which I place thoughts and emotions about the economy. At this point I can say with confidence that no one has been untouched by its tumble. Though I think about the effect that it has had on me personally, I also wonder what effect it will have on education. Schools in my area are already engaged in the usual behaviors that accompany budget problems – money remaining in budgets for programs like technology education is moved to other purposes, searches for new personnel are terminated, field trips are cancelled, and employees are asked to look at every possible way to conserve increasingly valuable resources. Plans for the next wave of budget cuts will likely include layoffs of support personnel and reduction in the work week for others.

“The older the wiser” is an adage that has a rather universal meaning in most parts of the world. At my age, I guess one could say that about me, but the truth is, whatever wisdom I might have had seems to be increasingly replaced by caution tempered with a bit of plain fear. Just like the cold chill that still runs up and down my spine when I start to slide while driving on ice, harking back to bad experiences I had as a teenage driver on wintry roads in Montana, the current economic situation produces the same chill as a result of some prior experiences. One great advantage of being a teacher is having the opportunity to work with young people. Their optimism, though arguably based on naiveté, is foundational to a positive outlook for those of us who might be teetering. It also brings credence to the strength of decision making when decision makers represent the full range of age diversity.

Those critical experiences, the ones that we remember for years after they occur, significantly shape our beliefs and resultant behavior. My father was just getting his dental practice started about the time the Great Depression began. I remember him relating how he sat in his dental chair, day-after-day, waiting for his first patient to make an appointment. It took over six weeks before that happened. Not long after that, the economic woes hit with a vengeance. For a long time he refused to put money in a bank. The only bank loan he ever had was for the house in which we lived, something he paid off in half the loan term. He saved in order to pay cash for a new car and as soon as he bought it he began saving for next one, methodically eight years down the road.

I never followed my father's economic example. As near as I can tell, none of my three children followed mine either. Across the three generations, each

was less conservative than the previous. I am confident, though, that because of his experience my father could weather another depression much better than any of his offspring.

Reflections about these critical life experiences that form our beliefs and forge our uncertainties have led me to a possible explanation for an enigma about which I have been puzzled for years. Permit me to illustrate with an example, embodied in a technology education professor fictitiously named Smith. Though the example is a professor, it could apply to virtually anyone in the profession. As you might suspect, at least some of it applies to yours truly. In any event, I have seen the scenario unfold many times throughout my career.

Smith has been teaching technology education for over twenty five years, now. While in high school he had a wonderful experience in industrial arts. He was especially fond of what he was learning in the use of tools and equipment, the emphasis of the classes he took. He especially liked woodworking. As a result he enrolled in an undergraduate program, preparing him to be an industrial arts teacher. He found in his collegiate studies the same emphasis on the use tools and equipment. Through his four undergraduate years, he honed his skills and knowledge in a variety of areas, but his favorite was still woodworking. He loved being empowered to make close-fitting dovetail joints, applying high quality finishes, operating machines with confidence, and using hand tools deftly. His desire and motivation to develop these same feelings in young people made him increasingly excited about the teaching career in which he would soon embark.

In his third year of teaching, he was presented with an outstanding teaching award. He encouraged his students to enter the projects they had made in his class into competition with students across the state. They began to earn the top awards in the competitions, bringing accolades from other teachers, the administration, parents, and members of the community in general. Many more students wanted to take his classes than there was space available. Smith got involved in state and then national organizations. He earned a master's degree. The same feeling that he had in high school that led him to become a teacher started to motivate him to become a teacher educator. He knew that he was a good teacher and had some unique talents. Increasingly he felt that he could make a unique contribution to preparing others to become good teachers. He applied for doctoral study.

While in his doctoral program, Smith increasingly reflected upon his career and how his values and philosophy had changed over time. He decided years ago that there is much more to technology education than simply developing tool skills and avocational interests. He did a lot of reading and followed very closely the changes that were occurring in his profession. The fire that he had in his heart to enter industrial arts in the first place was burning even stronger to become a technology teacher educator. With solid experience as a teacher, he was able to make sound decisions about the direction he felt the field should take and how he would convince his soon-to-be teacher education students of

the logic of the new directions in the field. He had the zeal of a religious missionary.

Armed with enthusiasm, experience, and knowledge, he continued his teaching career at a university. He could not wait until he met with his first professional education class. He expected that the students would be as excited to learn about the new curriculum in technology education as were the students in his woodworking class years earlier. He was disappointed. Though many of his students nodded their heads in affirmation of the ideas he was presenting, others were not accepting of them at all, challenging Smith in ways that sometimes bordered on disrespect. The air of his balloon of enthusiasm was nearly all gone, making him feel defeated, and at times even angry.

Smith thought that it would be a simple task to move his students forward to his philosophy. Despite the huge variability in the viewpoints of the students coming into the class, he felt that he could change their basic beliefs by giving them a didactic treatise, based in logic and substantiated by leaders in the profession. In doing so, he ignored constructivist theories of learning. He did not consider that what he believed quite likely occurred *because of* his early experiences – that these early experiences were foundational and essential to his philosophy. In other words, he could not get here with being there first.

I could not fully understand my father's economic philosophy because it was based on his direct experience with the Great Depression. He expected that he could transmit his economic beliefs to me by providing logical arguments relative to borrowing, spending, and saving. What he did not take into account is that the foundation of his philosophy was based on what he personally experienced in the Great Depression and there is no way I could relive those experiences directly to make me a "true believer."

So, the challenge then is to figure out how to get our aspiring teachers here from there, recognizing that we cannot provide them with the same direct experiences we had in the journey. We must recognize that "there" is different for each person. Not doing so is analogous to giving the same set of directions to a specific location to everyone, regardless of where they are in the world.

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