

By Joan McLaren

*AECT is the largest professional organization on the North American continent concerned specifically with educational technology. It is generally representative of the growth and development of educational technology over the past fifty years, having had its origin in the Division of Visual Education begun in 1923.*

*AECT has to improve education through the systematic planning, application, and production of communications media for instruction. To this purpose it encompasses audiovisual and instructional materials specialists, educational technologists, audiovisual and television personnel, computer specialists and users, and teacher educators.*

*Much of the work, conference activity, and communication of AECT is directed to specific interest areas called "divisions". The divisions include Educational Media Management; Information Systems and Computers; Instructional Development; International; Media Design and Production; Research and Theory; School Media Specialists; and Telecommunications. Communication with members and the field is provided through publications of the organization which include the Newsletter, the Instructional Innovator, the Journal of Educational Communication and Technology, and special monographs and reports.*

*The impact of AECT's work in the fields of standards, ethics, and leadership in educational technology is evident. AECT has served as the agency for the development of standards for institutions and practices in educational technology; ethics for practitioners in education and technology; leadership activities within the field and for its own members; and communications and interaction with other associations and organizations concerned with the application of technology to education and instruction.*

*AECT holds an annual convention, the next one being in conjunction with NAVA (the National Audio-Visual Association) in April of 1983 in Louisville, Kentucky.*

*Dr. Elwood E. Miller president of AECT, has given CJEC permission to use the following narrative accompaniment to a slide presentation called "Mission Imperative".*

Regardless of the philosophical bent of those of us living in the 1980s, one has to express an admiration for the explorers and missionaries of an

The Profile Column, written by Joan McLaren, Director of the Instructional Media Services Branch of the Manitoba Department of Education, highlights one media organization or agency per issue to provide you with information and viewpoints on current activities and issues in educational technology.

earlier time who left their homes and their civilization to spend months travelling (to places that now take only hours) to establish missions to spread their branch of civilization across the world. There is a majesty and a grandeur associated with their commitment. It is impressive to study the ruins and remains of those missions built in Latin America and the southwestern United States now visited by thousands of people annually.

Another and much more recent phenomenon concerning "Missions" has been the race for space, the exploration of the heavens that started in the '60s and continues today. Despite the extreme cost of these efforts, all of us have been fascinated with the projects themselves, and again with the bravery and daring of the people involved. There is a commitment that requires missions of great magnitude and much imagination. There is also an activity that requires very exact and specific information concerning the missions as designed by leaders, scientists and engineers.

We live in a time of perennial change and refer to ourselves often as the change agents of the educational establishment. One only has to examine the economy these days, the change in birth rate, the change in world resources, the changes in geopolitical alignments, to realize that we are in a time of world-wide social and educational upheaval.

This phenomenon is illustrated best by some of Alvin Toffler's writing in *The Third Wave*. Toffler's premise suggests that "The First Wave" was the Agricultural Revolution, lasting for hundreds of years; The second wave, the Industrial Revolution, lasting approximately 100 years; and that modern society is currently on the threshold of a third wave, or the communication/electronic revolution of the perhaps two to three short decades ahead.

In the third wave, he suggests that there will be a drift away from what he refers to as Massification (large media, large business, large everything) to a much smaller concept of the way people get things done, including learning. Small is better and more beautiful, is his premise. He is not suggesting a retreat to "First Wave" agricultural-based smallness in which the family was the economic unit as well as the social unit, but rather a use of computer technology and electronic technology as a basic resource of tomorrow to give people the advantages of demassification or "Smallness".

A typical illustration is television, which is usually referred to as a mass medium. In his demassification of this mass medium, he talks of cables, discs, cassettes and of the user having an enormous number of options from which to pick and choose, to not only entertain himself, but to use as a learning or informal source. He suggests, in addition, that large factories (necessary during the industrial revolution) which also caused a need for uniform standards of time, of economics, and the like, might very well give way to a more "cottage-industry centered" approach in which the producers are electronically connected to a large organization, but nevertheless can work at their own speed, at their own level, and in their own time frame. Some evidences of this trend, such as flexible scheduling in large organizations, are already apparent.

The third wave that is currently upon us is the technological revolution. Such changes are likely to vastly change the way the educational process is carried on in the generations ahead.

No one is likely to deny the importance of the re-establishment and movement toward a major professional mission. Nevertheless, there is nothing quite so unfortunate as a large social organization working and moving in pursuit of the wrong or inappropriate mission. Because I believe that the wisdom of leaders in the past would be helpful in examining this question, I sent a questionnaire recently to all of the AECT and DAVI past presidents. I would like to share with you some of the thoughts of the dozen and a half who responded.

In a somewhat random form and illustrated with segments from their responses, I would like to share with you some of the things that they suggested. After we run through these, I will describe two or three categories and attempt to draw some conclusions that I feel may be important to us as we examine our mission in the rest of the 20th century.

Running commonly throughout most of the responses was the term, "The improvement of instruction". This has been a traditional mission for us and one that, there seems to be a little argument, should continue. In a very thorough, well thought out, and extensive response to my questionnaire, Charley Schuller stated that the notion of efficiency is extremely important. What pays off is all that can be tolerated in a time of declining resources and ever escalating needs, to put it another way, Schuller sug-

gested that to gain maximum returns from the money, energy and time invested is what we must be about.

A number of the past presidents raised the question of the current name that we call our association, and I will come back to that later.

Wes McJulien, president of the association two years ago, was concerned in his questionnaire with Budget control and accountability. That certainly is a concern that we are all aware of in our day-to-day management of our centres and our offices. Bob de Kieffer was concerned that we re-analyze our mission in light of reduced educational markets and increased opportunities in the business and industry field.

Carolyn Skidmore indicated that her concerns were problems of attitude and awareness toward the potential of our umbrella organization and field. Wes Meierhenry was concerned that we should be focusing upon the common elements of our widely scattered media professionals.

Don Ely indicated a concern that we embrace strengths and advantages of many of the disciplines and use them on behalf of our own communication problems.

Dick Gilky stated that we must learn to devise means for the delivery of instruction that is cost efficient and yields provable results.

John Virgis stated that he is concerned that we survive our current identity crisis as we face computers in the new technologies.

Walter S. Bell expressed a concern for the productivity of teaching and learning patterns.

Bob Heinich expressed a concern for our various interest groups, and how they fit together, and how to prevent territorial parochialism.

Mendel Sherman indicated that our mission is known, but it does need to be re-examined and even more so, to be implemented.

Mendel Sherman again indicated that we must learn to document that we truly make a difference.

Bob Gerletti expressed a concern for our umbrella group. Are we broad or really quite narrow in our outlook?

Jerry Thorlaksen suggested that we must take a look at the sociological impact of the Technology Revolution on the horizon.

There are several common threads running regularly through most of the replies of the past presidents and these common threads can also be identified at almost any cocktail hour or late evening bull sessions involving a group of professionals out of the educational media field. Included are a concern for the umbrella concept,

and how we take a group of professional people who are brought together by a common cause under the protection of an AECT umbrella in order to solve the problems of training, instruction, and education.

The second major issue indicated over and over again by the past presidents is the question of efficiency. How can we get more education and instruction out of stabilized or even diminishing resources? It has been the necessity to get more for less that has been the challenge of mankind throughout history. As we have conquered the oceans, mastered the air, increased the life span, attempted to feed a diverse worldwide population, and make mankind's lot comfortable, warm and reasonably pleasant, we now may find it necessary for professionals in education, and especially those of us concerned with educational technology, to begin to take some of the principles of the engineering professions and apply them to instruction and education.

Several problems are obvious. First, the extremely inefficient teaching methodology that Jim Finn used to call the "Chinese Coolie" method of teaching, in which the master teacher's voice was essentially the transmitter of information and ideas, must really begin to change. Technology can replicate, duplicate and broadcast information to so many more listeners that it becomes obviously a mechanism for increasing the efficiency of the communication process. Convincing the professors of my campus and teachers in your secondary and elementary schools will continue to be the most challenging single thing that we will face in the years ahead. Instructional efficiency has never been a popular cause in a labor-intensive industry.

We have a couple of models to follow, though, that means we are not inventing the wheel from scratch. Look at the library. The library still is the repository of most of the knowledge of mankind and we don't have to reinvent the fact that it is cheaper to make a thousand copies of a book than it is to handwrite one of them. So the technology of information storage, and to somewhat less degree, retrieval, is a model that we can examine. Our less than totally effective efforts to work closer with the librarian are still important in the solution of the instructional efficiency problem.

An additional possible model to study may be the model of the land grant university unique to the U.S.A. and unique to the educational process. The land grant university (in which

education is carried in quantities to people in the field) is practiced in certain institutions in nearly every state. The land grant model may very well give us some insights into ways and means of devising programs that can, in fact, increase the efficiency of the instructional process via the application of communication technologies.

The last issue that I wish to raise and one that I hear discussed regularly around the country is the name of our association. To us it has considerable meaning, but to others it does not. I do not wish to resurrect a great war of 1970, when we struggled for several years to come up with a term to replace DAVI (the Department of Audiovisual Instruction). Nevertheless, we are known by what we are called, and I would call on the association, the board of directors of the association, and the membership to examine carefully the term "educational communication and technology" and see if we can't come up with a more graphic, more descriptive, more fitting and more easy to sell name for our association. I will not suggest a solution at this point, but simply call for a serious examination of the "handle" that we have attached to our professional "kettle".

We stand at a unique crossroad in the profession and in our professional association. CommTex International in January of 1983 could be the focus upon which we all work to take a new look at our professional mission, how we practice and research that mission, and how we work to keep our personal commitment to our mission alive and healthy.

In closing, let me call on all of you for some specific actions in the months ahead.

First, re-examine your own professional role in your office, shop or resource centre and see if you need to take "thinking time" to re-define where you are going.

Second, work with your local affiliate association to study the mission of these important and life-giving support groups of AECT. Thinking time is in order at this level too.

Third, support your national officers and board of directors as they work to cope with the changes that are bound to come, along with the immediate problems of surviving the recession.

Fourth, write your ideas and share them with others within your association. The CJEC is a possible forum for sharing ideas.

Our professional mission is important. Remember Bob De Kieffer's profound comment . . . Any road will get you there if you are not sure where you are going. □