

Reflections on the Future

Nancy Bebin

It is a great honor to have the opportunity to congratulate LATM and the editors, Dr. Tena Golding and Dr. Katherine Pedersen from Southeastern Louisiana University, on the first issue of the LATM Journal. Many people have already put in months of hard work in an effort to get the online journal off to a good start. I want to offer my best wishes and thanks to them for having the courage and perseverance to follow through with this worthwhile project. This is one more example of the many great things being done by educators in Louisiana.

A couple of months ago I had the privilege of hearing a talk by Margaret Cozzens, the Vice President and Chief Academic Officer of the Colorado Institute of Technology and the former Director of the Division of Elementary, Secondary and Informal Science Education at the National Science Foundation. During her talk, Ms. Cozzens mentioned what she thought were the three most critical abilities our students would need in the next generation. Those abilities are

- the ability to make moral and ethical decisions for themselves and for society,
- the ability to read, interpret, and analyze and summarize information, and
- the ability to solve problems, both simple and complex.

Ms. Cozzens emphasized the importance of those abilities with examples from medicine, finance, and other fields. I would propose that the changes in our world situation brought about by the events of September 11th have only served to support the accuracy of Ms. Cozzens' predictions.

As educators, and in particular as mathematics educators, we have an awesome responsibility to prepare students for a world in which their chances of living productive and

joyful lives will depend to a great extent on their ability to make decisions based on sound reasoning, not fear, and on their ability to make sense of an overwhelming amount of information. Much has been said of the destructive effects of fear. As educators we have seen the effects of fear in students who quit trying because they are afraid of failure. I have seen the effect of fear in teachers who are full of “yes, buts” because they are afraid they don’t have the ability or the resources to meet their students’ needs.

Our task as educators is first and foremost to believe without a shred of doubt that every one of our students is capable of learning the mathematics he or she will need to be successful. Our next task is to let our students know we believe that, and to set about convincing them of it, too. Our final task is to teach them the mathematics they need in a context that is relevant and that challenges the students to the utmost of their abilities. I have seen many teachers who don’t feel they are able to do much for their students because so much is needed. I believe that if you care enough about your students to do your best for them, you will have a very positive influence on them.

We have another task as educators: to support one another and to share our ideas. This new LATM Journal can be one of the primary means for Louisiana mathematics educators to share the great things that are happening in our classrooms and to support one another. I encourage all of you to submit articles and to encourage others to do the same.

I want to thank the editors of the LATM Journal for this opportunity to wish you all a great school year. Please check the Louisiana Department of Education web site, www.louisianaschools.net, a great source of information. Also, please contact me if I can be of assistance.

*Nancy Beben, Mathematics Program Coordinator, Louisiana Department of Education,
nbeben@mail.doe.state.la.us*