

From the President's Pen



It is difficult to believe that nearly half the school year is over. I have been thinking about what I believe about MCATA's mission statement, "Providing leadership to encourage the continuing enhancement of teaching, learning and understanding mathematics," and I wish to share some thoughts with you.

This statement evokes many interesting ideas for consideration and discussion. Throughout this year, I will share my thoughts about this mission statement. While I will probably leave you with more questions than answers, I hope that they will stimulate you to think about this mission statement in the context of your professional life as a mathematics educator.

First, we need to think about what it means to "encourage the continuing enhancement of teaching." So what does it mean "to teach"? I think the whole definition of "teaching" is evolving. Think about what society thought about teachers and teaching many years ago. Quite often, the teacher in the community was one of the individuals with some "schooling"—either the teacher had completed grade school and possibly higher or he or she had experienced some type of schooling outside the community. During that time, our society also equated knowing "facts" with

knowledge. Is this not the same perception that a large segment of society holds today about teachers and teaching? When I think about this perception, I am reminded of many family gatherings in which I've heard the statement, "Go and ask Florence, she'll know. She's the teacher!" I think that many students who are entering teacher education programs also have this perception about teachers and teaching. So, how can we as members of MCATA help society become aware of the evolving definition of teaching?

Teaching implies that there is a learner, and our role as teachers is evolving from one that solely gives information to one in which we are enabling our students to develop an understanding of concepts. This has a significant effect on our lives as teachers who teach students mathematics. The new mathematics curriculum is showing us that even what we knew as mathematics is changing. It no longer appears to be a fixed body of knowledge that never changes. So, how does this affect our teaching? We have technology, calculators and computers that can do many of the routine procedures that we once taught and on which we spent many hours during *our* teaching and learning of mathematics. How do these tools fit into this evolving definition of teaching?

I believe that mathematics is a way to describe patterns and relationships in the world—in the same way that painting, music and stories can be used. I believe that one way we can help society come to understand teaching students mathematics differently is for our students to think about it. Have you ever asked your students what they think teaching is? Have you ever asked your students what they think mathematics is? I think that we would have interesting ideas to ponder if we could hear the thoughts of our students. I would love to hear what you discover, so write to me and share what you have learned and discovered about our profession called teaching.

Florence Glanfield