Jerry Balistreri

M any vocational education, technology education, and now technology and engineering education leaders have made their mark on our profession. Their legacy is something that members of the profession enjoy and have a responsibility to continue and build upon.

This is the twelfth in a series of articles entitled "The Legacy Project." The Legacy Project focuses on the lives and actions of leaders who have forged our profession into what it is today. Members of the profession owe a debt of gratitude to these leaders. One simple way to demonstrate that gratitude is to recognize these leaders and some of their accomplishments. The focus in this issue will be on Mr. Jerry Balistreri, DTE.

by Jerry P. Balistreri, DTE and Johnny J Moye, DTE

Jerry P. Balistreri, DTE

ITEEA Board of Directors, 1986-87, 1989-91
Council for Supervision and Leadership
Technology Education Supervisor of the Year, 1987
Technical Foundation of America "Fellow" 2000

Place of Birth: Beloit, Wisconsin

Degrees:
B.S. 1974, University of Wisconsin-Stout
M.S. 1977, University of Wisconsin-Stout
M.Ed. 1980, South Dakota State University

Occupational History:
1974-76: Taught industrial arts at Thorp HS, Thorp, WI
1976: Graduate assistant at University of Wisconsin-Stout

1977-79: Taught undergraduate and methods course in industrial arts at South Dakota State University
1980-82: H.S. Principal Wauzeka Public Schools, Wauzeka, WI
1982-85: State Supervisor of Industrial Arts, North Dakota State Office of Vocational Education
1985-89: State Supervisor for Technology Education, Utah State Office of Education
1989-2000: Local CTE Director, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, AK
2000: Retired after 25 years in public education
2000-Present: Trainer offering customized trainings and keynote speeches

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During the 1980s, you were an award-winning supervisor known for a contemporary approach to education because of your cutting-edge ideas. You worked in North Dakota, Utah, and Alaska, as well as being a national leader. Please provide us with your perspective related to your state and local supervision days. What were some of the more significant legacies during your tenure as a state and local supervisor of technology education?

There are a few perspectives from which I would like to address that question. As the nature of this article is a Legacy Project, let me first say that I am honored to be thought of as having left any possible legacy in our profession. As I contemplated this question, I asked myself, "Did I leave a better place than I entered?" Although the question of legacy can be approached in many ways, I wanted to respond in terms of how my tenure may have impacted student achievement and teacher development.

As it relates to North Dakota, Utah, and Alaska, I believe the answer was yes! In all three locations, spanning 19 years, there was significant change and success in addressing the hottest topic of the day—technological literacy. That is transitioning from industrial arts to technology education, i.e., our philosophy, content, delivery, laboratories, and assessments were far better at preparing students to leave our programs with a greater understanding, skill level, and appreciation for technological literacy. Students left better equipped to address and understand the impacts of technology on their lives, how to apply the technological process, how to assess technologies, etc.

Another perspective would be to address the teachers. In all three locations, I believe the technology education teachers came to know and expect that quality professional development was always available for them during my tenure. Teachers knew that anything asked of them in changing their programs and courses would be supported through quality professional development. Many of the teachers in all locations routinely won state and national awards for their work in technology education.

How did you define technological literacy during those years?

The "climate" during the 80s was an attempt to figure out just what technological literacy (TL) was and what our programs should do to contribute to a technologically literate citizenry. Few TL definitions existed at that time, and there was little agreement in the profession to settle on any one definition. As a result, I thought it necessary to develop a definition of our own. I didn't mean to do this in a vacuum, but wanted to create the definition based on solid research so that it could be defended with the most pressing question: "What would that mean for our curriculum, laboratories, assessments, etc., to achieve the definition?"

Luckily, around that same time, ITEA worked very hard with a few U.S. congressional representatives to get legislation sponsored with funding support to address the very issue of TL. Although I started working on this topic while in Utah, it wasn't until I was with the Anchorage School District that we responded to the national Request for Proposals and were one of four entities funded in the U.S. With the support of our application and accompanying federal funding, we completed the research needed to define TL and implement those features in several schools as a pilot program. We defined TL as the ability to use, manage, and understand technology. The challenge, of course, was to operationalize the definition to make sense to public education policy makers from outside our discipline, to gain support for program change as well as additional local funding support.
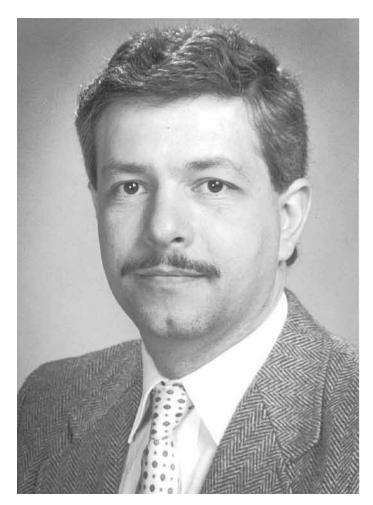
What did your shift from industrial arts to technology education mean in terms of content, labs, delivery, assessment, etc.?

Clearly this was an enormous task. Not only within the industrial arts community to embrace a new direction without a lot of concrete data and/or examples to follow, but also to the same public education policy makers noted above.

The shift from industrial arts to technology education meant first a philosophical change in content from a more specific skill-driven approach to a more broad-based use, management, and understanding of technology. It was a challenge to get some rather long-standing traditional industrial arts teachers to see the benefits and advantages of addressing technology education. Once we built a solid rationale, we started immediately with teacher professional development. Some of the pioneers and experts at that time helped us to see and understand better how to address technology education. Pioneers such as Les Litherland, Brad Thode, Kjell Rye, Don Maley, Don Lauda, Kim Durfee, Bill Dugger, Jim Benson, Ed Reeve, etc., provided professional development activities that furthered our knowledge and comfort level in moving forward.

With the enthusiasm built from the experts, we sought next to address content. Building such programs, courses, content, and activities was a breath of fresh air to former industrial arts teachers who saw a new beginning and a chance to start over with a new, updated program. As content and student activities were developed, it served as a quasi-professional development activity for teachers. That is, the teachers became excited about the content and learned from the development of the activities.

With a rationale, content, and activities in hand, we had to address the facilities. Most of the current labs were geared for the former industrial arts courses that addressed specific skill areas, i.e., welding, woodworking, etc. We transitioned those facilities into technology education facilities, using learning centers as a

way to address the content. One part of the facility was devoted to various communication-related technologies. Another part was dedicated to a fabrication area, and so on. Labs were well equipped with hardware that supported the content areas we identified to address.

Lastly, we always had the student in mind and addressed teaching delivery, student assessment, and program continuity. This was an exciting time in my career, having had the opportunity to work with fantastic teachers in North Dakota, Utah, and the Anchorage School District. We may have not gotten everything right, but we paid attention to the latest research, transitioned our programs based on defensible research data, provided quality professional development, converted laboratories to address the new curriculum, developed student assessment tools, and by the way—we had fun!

How did you attempt to organize content so the body of knowledge was not too large when addressing all technologies (medical, pharmaceutical, etc.)?

We recognized that addressing all technologies would be an unreasonable task in content, activities, equipment, laboratory work

stations, etc. We made a conscious decision to address what some would call "industrial technologies." We purposely limited our scope of content to technologies of modern-day industry, which helped us to stay out of other technological areas/topics that we had little training and/or understanding to address.

We knew our roots were industrial arts. We knew many teachers would have that background. We knew focusing on industrial technologies would bring a degree of comfort to the teachers, and our laboratories were somewhat aligned to address what the new curriculum needed, i.e., a fabrication area. Right or wrong, that was the decision of the day. Going 20 years hence and the continued development of technology and engineering, STEM, technological literacy, etc., I would probably advocate a different approach.

What type of public relations efforts did you use to make the case for moving toward technology education, and what buy-in were you seeking from teachers, parents, students, and administrators?

Public relations and marketing a new curriculum was daunting. Various approaches were used with different groups. First and foremost, I always had a very active advisory committee. Typical advisory committees contain subject-matter experts to advise on the technical aspects of a program. I did not have any "Joe the mechanics" on my advisory committee. Given that I served as both state and local supervisor, my advisory committees were comprised of the "E.F. Huttons" of the community. They were highly regarded in the communities I served. Many committee members were CEO types. When they spoke, others listened.

With the help of several dynamic advisory committee chairs, we set a course of action to inform the rest of the committee to secure their buy-in. When you have CEO types speaking around your community about the virtues of technology education, others take notice and get on the bandwagon. This group was absolutely instrumental in securing the buy-in and local funding for many projects, as well as helping parents to recognize the merit and value of addressing the shift in curriculum. I always knew my greatest "political" strength was not internal, but external to the organizations with which I was employed. That is, within state departments of education and local school district bureaucracies, there is usually stiff competition for scarce resources from other disciplines and normal school activities. I realized it was profoundly better to have advisory committee members appear at school board meetings, advocating and requesting funding for technology education.

With teachers the approach was a bit different. As noted earlier, my strategy was to support by providing the best quality professional development I could. This not only included bringing

nationally recognized leaders to us, but also supporting teachers to attend ITEEA conferences and related trainings. I always thought the role of the local and state supervisor was to not ask any teacher to do something I was not willing to do myself. Consequently, I was right next to all teachers learning from experts we brought in. I also offered numerous trainings where I rolled up my sleeves to show how many activities could address content, activities, student assessment, etc.

How did you merge technology education and still take advantage of vocational education funding sources?

Previously, Carl Perkins acts allowed for funds to be used to support vocational and prevocational programs. Industrial arts had enjoyed the benefit of being regarded as a prevocational program and was eligible to receive and use Perkins federal vocational education funding. Since technology education was the replacement for industrial arts, it was a foregone conclusion that technology education would enjoy the same benefit. Having served in two state departments of education that managed the Perkins funds as a flow through to LEAs, it was well known across America with all other state departments of education that Perkins funds could support technology education efforts. Most states that previously supported industrial arts with Perkins funds continued to support technology education efforts.

As noted above, a conscious decision was made to limit the curricular scope of technologies we would address to "industrial technologies." This meant we addressed technologies such as robotics, lasers, CNC, etc.

This too, helped to cement a close relationship for the new technology education programs as prevocational, supporting the more traditional vocational programs, i.e., welding, construction, machining, electronics, etc.

Although local funding was important and allowed us to do many things that Carl Perkins funds did not allow, the lion's share of funding support for technology education during my tenure was via Perkins funds.

Thank you, Mr. Balistreri, for your leadership and for sharing a small portion of your legacy. The Legacy Project has now interviewed 12 leaders who were very influential to the technology and engineering education profession. It is very beneficial to current (and future) leaders to read about the issues that existed and how they were addressed "back in the day." In a few months the next interview will appear in this journal. If you have a suggestion of a leader to recognize, contact Dr. Moye.

Jerry P. Balistreri, DTE, *was formerly a high school industrial arts teacher, Principal, local CTE director, and State Supervisor of Industrial Arts.*

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