

Editor's Notebook: AT THE PARTING OF WAYS

by Jeff Cherry

The Road goes ever
on and on
Down from the door
where it began.
Now far ahead
the Road has gone,
And I must follow,
if I can,
Pursuing it
with eager feet,
Until it joins
some larger way
Where many paths
and errands meet.
And whither then?
I cannot say.

-J.R.R. Tolkien

For about 170 of us, the road we have traveled (or been herded along) for almost two years will soon split into many, many paths. The paths some have chosen are their's uniquely, while other paths are to be traveled by many. For most of this past year we have struggled to find a path we wish to follow. Now, for better or for worse, that time is past and, as Frost and The

Odyssey tell us, we must not dwell upon "The Road Not Taken".

Instead, these last days are a time for reflecting on this journey, this experience of the past twenty-two months called N.C.S.S.M. Almost all of us feel the excitement and anticipation of moving onward with new challenges to overcome and new horizons to explore. However, I hope most of the seniors share my feelings of sadness at leaving a place which has had such an impact on me. Whether you

love this place or hate it, you must admit it has changed you (hopefully for the better). If there are some among us who feel they have gained nothing from their stay here, then I can only pity them. They surely are filled with bitterness after wasting two of the most important years of their lives.

I believe my greatest gains have come from interacting with such a diverse and incredibly talented student body, not

from any attempt by the school to process me into a "Science and Mathematics career oriented" person. Our class has endured (and been victimized by) the school's transition from a new, exciting adventure to an established educational leader with a reputation to maintain. Our class has shouldered the burden of increasing expectations without having the newness/inexperience excuse to hide behind. Colleges no longer take the words "N.C.S.S.M." at face value as evidence of excellence, so a few more students came away disappointed from the Great Scholarship Sweepstakes. But the transition went a lot deeper than statistics can show. For the first time, the school community seemed to be hesitant, doubtful of what the right direction was. We survived responses, the creeping prep school mentality, and buying into the system as our administration groped for that right direction. Of course, the system had a

transition to make also. Money became a deterrent

for new ideas rather than an incentive. As a part of the school's expanding role in the state, new programs had to be create. Existing programs required revamping or enlargement.

Now we are almost to the end of our road (or perhaps our rope). We may not have solved all the problems, or fulfilled everyone's expectations, but these are not the standards against which we should measure the success or failure of our stay here. Rather, we must each weigh what we have gained these past two years against all we gave up to come here. The number of us that find this comparison comes up positive should be the only factor in determining whether this school has accomplished what it was meant to accomplish. The day this school loses sight of the student will be the day mockery is made of the intentions of its founders.

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rules and regulations even though some are obviously necessary.

Ted Sizer reminds us that schools are concentrations of people and thus are very complex communities in constant, organic change. "The most powerful spurs for learning--their motivation, the adaption of programs to their styles of learning; the expectations for each of them are humanistic, not mechanistic or programmatic; they are subtle and changeable. School reform, especially high school reform, is thus inevitably complicated, not only because school structures are intricate, but because of the rich variety of individual talents in each school. Serious efforts at school improvement are, therefore, necessarily exercises of wide scope--taking all of importance into account--and of extended time, and thus patience.

The topics in textbooks or in teacher's minds should be only the means, not the goals of instruction. Students need

teachers who understand conceptual approaches dealing with fundamental concepts like time, space and energy to provide what John Goodlad calls the conceptual glue which should hold together the succession of topics introduced.

Beyond a standard of core understandings and policy guidelines, I think students at N.C.S.S.M. should be encouraged to take charge of their own education and their own lives just as soon as they demonstrate that they have self-discipline and responsibility. This means maximum flexibility and freedom for students and for faculty, who must be diagnosticians, tutors, teachers, co-examiners or experimentors, and friends. Teachers must synthesize data about students into productive learning, both formal and informal. Teachers and students must be flexible in working out logical strategies for activities based on a diagnosis and on a theory of learning. Each week, in the time and space allotted, the teams must establish the expectations and provide the stimulation for divergent planning. We must jointly think beyond

the routine and standard systems, making living and learning better than ever.

At N.C.S.S.M. we believe that science instruction, carefully and sensibly delivered, can be a powerful vehicle through which to enhance and cultivate the reasoning processes that probably underlie good, clear thinking in virtually all disciplines.

N.C.S.S.M. trustee Wassily Leontief believes that the development of creative imagination through unceasing exercise of it is the most important and also the most difficult task of high school as well as more advanced education. "This is the essence of scientific training. In certain aspects, it has

much in common with the teaching of humanities and arts. Literacy and artistic creation involves to a large extent transformation of the keenly observed external and internal experience into the different world of creative imagination. The kinship between art and science has been often recognized by leaders in both fields. This is what our students should also learn to understand." Amen.

Tocqueville wrote that men may "refuse to move together for fear of being moved too far," and that they may not make, "when it is necessary, a strong and sudden effort to a higher purpose." A N.C.S.S.M. of our dreams will require a renewed "strong and sudden effort" by many men and women who are convinced that such a dream is worth the boldness and energy it costs.

As I admire the centralized GNOMON from the numerous perspectives provided on our campus, I find it reassuring, in the words of Beth Timson, that the very best hi-tech can do in our midst is to recreate Stonehenge.

That's a thought for examination and debate. Not a bad reflection as I leave the challenging and synergistic environment of N.C.S.S.M. Thanks to each of you for what you have given me of yourselves and contributed to my growth. Godspeed.

Borden Mace

(Editor's note: After years of service to N.C.S.S.M., both before and after the school's creation, Borden Mace will be retiring this summer.)