

THE AMERICAN
BIOLOGY TEACHER

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Editorial

**Vision for a New Millennium of
Biology Education**

"The times, they are a-changing." Dylan's words couldn't be more true than they are today. Someone once told me that we live in the best of times—after the discovery of penicillin but before the oil runs out. I think that's still true, but times are changing. We can still cure many infections, but we also face drug-resistant tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases. We still have abundant energy resources, but the more we use them the more we degrade the environment. Global warming tells us that we're heating more than our homes, with visible consequences of El Niño and others.

Meeting the competing challenges of society to grow and develop while maintaining healthy personal and planetary environments, biology is emerging as *the* science for the 21st Century. And with it, biology education will become a vital centerpiece of the development of tomorrow's leaders and decision-makers, including every voter in the country. But biology education, like our larger social structure, faces its own set of competing promises and challenges. On the one hand we have the guiding principles of the *National Science Education Standards*, the invigorating inquiry-based and experimental ("hands-on, minds-on") lesson plans and block scheduling that allows the time we really need for laboratory experiments. On the other hand we face monetary challenges from continuing budget cuts and fiscal crises. (One teacher I know was rewarded for 20 years of service with a bus driver's course—the only way she could take her students into the field!) We also must confront conceptual challenges from creationism and animal rights, curricular challenges from integrated science that isn't, and block scheduling that's used to eliminate laboratory courses. Faced with such demands, how can you be an effective teacher and achieve balance between the opportunity and the adversity? Take an active role in NABT!

For 60 years, the National Association of Biology Teachers has truly been *The Leader in Life Science Education*[™]. Now, NABT is laying the future of biology education with our *Vision for a New Millennium of Life Science Education*, our Strategic Plan for the future of the association and the future of biology education. The Strategic Plan sets a bold mission for NABT:

The National Association of Biology Teachers empowers educators to provide the best possible biology and life science education for all students.

This mission and the *Vision for a New Millennium of Life Science Education* behind it are the culmination of a three-year planning process. NABT's Board of Directors began by researching the current state of biology education and identifying 14 critical planning issues that provide both impediments to and opportunities for our progress. They want NABT to address such concerns as national standards for science education, how to improve the supply of incoming teachers, the effects of a diverse and changing society on life science classrooms, and how technology will change biology education.

To meet these challenges head on, the Board established four goals for NABT:

1. To provide resources and opportunities for members to develop and enhance their professional performance.
2. To advocate the teaching and learning of the biological sciences based on the nature and methods of science and the best practices of education.
3. To attract, represent and address the concerns of the full spectrum of educators in biology and the life sciences.
4. To conduct NABT's operations with the highest possible levels of organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

A set of tasks or master strategies accompanies each of these goals. These master strategies (which may be found on NABT's Web site) form the

blueprint for achieving our goals. In addition, the Board of Directors set forth an ambitious list of Implementation Priorities for 1999 based on these goals and objectives. Some of the most important priorities for 1999 include conducting a needs survey among biology teachers to find out what the profession really needs, developing a new biology assessment for the profession to use as a standard benchmark to measure learning in state-of-the-art classrooms, continuing to build sound relationships with professional science organizations, and making NABT's World Wide Web site a rich source of content and ideas for biology and life science teachers.

Surely, as individual teachers in our own classrooms, we all share the goal of providing the best possible biology and life science education for our students. The best way to achieve

that goal is to become active in your profession—read journals, attend conventions, and work with leaders to get your ideas into the forefront. Of course, as the only national association dedicated solely to the concerns of biology and life science educators, NABT is the best place to take that action. Don't just *join* NABT, *be* NABT. Attend the best convention for biology teachers. Read the "premiere science education journal in the country." Work on the committees. Run for office. If you make NABT your professional priority, you'll not only strengthen the leading association for biology and life science education for all teachers, you'll continue to grow as an educator and your students will get the best possible biology and life science education—a momentous responsibility. NABT members teach one million students a year!

Letters to the Editor

Creationists' Clarification Sought

Dear Editor:

Thanks for the enlightening features regarding the Scopes Trial. I seek the help from creationists for my dilemma. Since Archbishop Usser (1650) determined the date of Earth's creation on Saturday evening, October 23, 4004 BC, I have the following questions:

What occurred on October 22, 4004 BC?

Should that date have actually been January 1, 4004 BC?

If so, when is my actual birthday (now 2-17) so I know when to celebrate.

Frank Girolami
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Submersible Light Sensor Correction

Dear Editor:

My article "A Submersible Light Sensor for Aquatic Ecology" [Tatina. 1998. *ABT* 60(7), 520-523] contains an error in the formula for calculating the light extinction coefficient. The formula on page 522 is incorrectly shown as " $E = \ln(I_a/I_b)/d$." It should be $E = \ln(I_a/I_b)/d$.

Robert Tatina
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