## WHERE HAVE ALL THE AUTHORS GONE?

An Editorial

As retiring executive director of TAA there is great satisfaction in looking back at what has been accomplished. Looking ahead, at all that needs doing, is at the same time almost frightening. Any author who thinks that membership in TAA is not very important simply doesn't understand the situation.

For this, my last editorial, I could write on any of a dozen major problems. I have chosen one on which we have not been able to make progress - the de-emphasis of authors, especially at the el-hi level. It is nonetheless one of the most important issues for the welfare of education. Let me begin by pointing out that in the AAP conference reported elsewhere in this issue the publishing executives did not mention authors at all. It seems that most publishers' view of how to create text materials is to have editors do it.

Twenty years ago authors' names were always printed prominently on the covers of textbooks, usually on the front at the el-hi level. Those names have gradually been moved, to the spine, then to the inside and in many cases they have entirely

disappeared. It is common today to find only a list of "consultants," rather than authors. Those whose names appear may have had little or nothing to do with the writing of the text, the actual writing having been done by development houses or employees of a publisher, many of them with questionable credentials.

The trend toward eliminating authors has been gradual, over a period of 15 or 20 years. It was gradual enough that it was not noticed much by adopters. Recently, though, attention has been drawn to the use of bogus authors. The National Council of Teachers of English passed a resolution condemning the practice. The fiasco in Texas, reported elsewhere in this issue, should at least raise questions about who really writes the books and who is really responsible for the errors. The elimination of authors also shows up at TAA headquarters. We have lost a number of members who have become former el-hi authors, when they were forced out by some means or other. About a year ago I noticed that reviews of el-hi texts in The Textbook Letter (TTL) carried no names of authors. When I complained to the editor he responded by saying that those purported to be authors probably weren't. Of course, he is right! There are a few publishers who still claim to be

"author driven," but there are only a few and those who claim to be may not be, in reality.

In older times, publishers offered authoring contracts to the finest teachers and researchers they could find. Adopters depended on authors and their reputations. Text content was then in the hands of professionals. It is sad but true, that educators quite innocently have gradually relinquished control of text content and hence of curriculum (whatever goes into texts becomes curriculum de facto). Who does control curriculum then? It is for the most part publishers' marketers and editors. Is that so bad? Do not the marketers carefully study what adopters say they want? Yes, they do, but as a result they try to concoct a text that offends no one. The end result is thus reduced to a "common denominator," bland and backward looking. The specifications in California and Texas are a large nationwide influence on text content today and they do represent a force toward keeping control of content in the hands of educators. The main trouble with those specs is that they are too restrictive and they allow so little time that many publishers feel they must rely on development houses or their own employees. Authors, real ones, get pushed further to the side. It is

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