



Classroom and Olympic Parallels

...Sherrie Dame, OEA Exec. Bd.

I LOVE the Olympics. From the opening ceremony to the closing ceremony I spend more time watching television than I normally do.

This year as I watch the Olympics I can't help but find myself comparing these sporting events to teaching. The opening ceremony was wonderful until it came time to light the torch. Of course, we arrive at the most important part of the evening and one of the arms to the torch malfunctions. This problem immediately called to mind something in our own teaching lives. Ogden School District has AARA days. The district has stated that to be paid for these days we must attend professional development training. I don't know what the secondary training is, if any, but for the elementary schools it is intense and organized down to the minute. The problem with this plan is that not everyone has attended the AARA days, so the schools can't completely implement the training. As with the lighting of the Olympic torch we adjust, but the expected outcome is just not quite what is expected.

The Vancouver Olympic committee wanted to go "green" and save

money instead of using the tried and true Zamboni to prepare the ice for short track and long track skating, so they contracted to use a different machine. The first few days of skating was encumbered with delays due to the ice not being ready for the races. It was only after the Olympic officials brought in Zambonis that the ice was properly prepared for the races. I realize that we as teachers must constantly learn and improve. However, the "one size fits all" approach to discipline (PBS Model) does not work with all age groups or all students. Let's not eliminate, but incorporate some tried and true methods of discipline into any new program that is supposed to fix all the discipline problems.

Along with the glitches at the Games there have been some exciting and wonderful moments. Shaun White's half-pipe performance was amazing. Snowboarding is a relatively new Olympic event, and, despite some initial criticism, has proved to be a very successful addition to the Games. I do believe in improving our classrooms with new and innovative methods, but we need to give more consideration to the programs they are expected to replace.

One new program that has excited me is *Making Algebra Child's Play* which was presented to 4th, 5th, and 6th grade teachers. It teaches children a visual, hands-on way to learn basic algebra, rather than by abstract memorization. (Any beginning Algebra teacher should contact these elementary teachers.) This program is intended to be incorporated into the existing curriculum rather than to replace it.

The ultimate goal for Olympic athletes is to earn Gold Medals. In fact, any medal is a tremendous accomplishment. Teachers don't get Gold Medals. We get other awards (rewards). On February 17th, I was at



my school watching the 6th grade play when two sweet Hispanic mothers came up to me and in their broken English thanked and hugged me for teaching their children. For me that's more important than a gold medal.

Our awards are not monetarily valuable or carry much prestige or recognition, but are intrinsically worth much more. Like the Olympic athletes, we work extremely hard, we fall, we sometimes fail, we cry, we get frustrated, and sometimes we are unhappy with our "coaches." In the end we chose our profession and we will continue to work and do the best we can.