Happy September, everybody. Whatever your role might be in biology education, we are glad you are a part of this community. The work you do is very important. Individually we make a difference and as a collective, lives are changed. Biology educators and biology education as a whole face the daily challenge of engaging students in significant learning experiences. “The point is to develop the childlike inclination for play and the childlike desire for recognition and to guide the child to important fields for society. Such a school demands from the teacher that he be a kind of artist in his province” (Einstein, 1993).

We have an expanding volume of information, external agencies at all levels setting student performance expectations, and significant diversity within individual classrooms. There will be no permanent solutions offered in this writing although there are approaches in the classroom that work better than others in certain situations. That is the crux, isn’t it? Having the knowledge and skill to adjust as classroom conditions, both internal and external, change?

Think of it from a “This Old House” point of view. Two equally skilled and experienced carpenters remodel and add on to an existing house. One has all of the latest power and pneumatic tools, gidgets, and gadgets, while the other has a hammer and a handsaw. The types of changes, especially within time constraints, are limited by the tools available. In another scenario, two equally equipped carpenters, one highly skilled and experienced, the other with experience limited to leasing an apartment, attempt the remodel project. Demolition may proceed, but integrating the changes into the existing framework of the house would be a problem with no skills and experience. The key is a well equipped toolbox along with the skills and experience to use it.

Those of you who have watched a learning experience between a student and educator with the knowledge, skills, and experience to change instructional approaches on the fly know what I am perhaps poorly describing in the analogy above. When you peel away all the barriers to student learning, the one consistent indicator of student success is the quality of the teacher. Our mission at NABT is to assist educators in achieving that quality by tapping into the best human and educational resources that biology education has to offer. It really is a “collective” endeavor and a national organization is a way to bring the best tools, skills, and experience together for a common cause. Membership is how an individual can have an impact as part of the collective. Come join us in Memphis next month and you will have ample opportunity to add to your toolbox and skills while drawing on the experience of others.

Todd Carter
NABT President – 2008

Reference