



From the President

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NABT President – 2014

Conference Reflections

Past President Mark Little refers to our community as the “NABT family.” The community atmosphere, along with our focus on teaching, elevates NABT to my primary professional development group. I occasionally attend professional conferences that focus on narrower subdisciplines of biology that feed my curiosity. The education sections at these conferences, while improving, lack critical mass and a celebration of teaching. NABT is different. I think of all of you as my teaching siblings and cousins who support me, cheer me, challenge my assumptions, tease me, but always improve me professionally. Here is my story of building my NABT family.

I attended my first NABT Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1996, when an expert instructor encouraged me to co-present. In my first year of full-time teaching, I had a little knowledge of professional development but certainly no formal career-development plan. I ended up presenting by myself after my co-presenter canceled. I worried that everyone could tell how nervous I was, presenting a DNA fingerprinting activity to people with many more years of teaching experience than my five terms of part-time gigs. Either I missed the First Timers Breakfast or it simply didn't exist. I came late and spent most of my time by myself, outside of the conference proceedings. As a result, I failed to connect with anyone at that first conference.

During my formative teaching years, I discovered biology education research. With my limited professional-development funds, I could attend one national conference every other year. NABT lost the competition for my attention as I explored other opportunities. I felt lost at these meetings and never formed a network that encouraged me to return to next year's conference.

As I developed into an expert teacher, I returned to NABT as an attendee and finally found a home. I heard keynote talks about current biology and classroom research at the conferences. I read articles in *ABT* that inspired improvements to my curriculum. I contributed back to the community by presenting my work. I started building my NABT family.

The first members of my NABT family were a group from New Jersey who took me into their fold at the banquet. They were loud, boisterous, and welcoming. I learned that teachers returned year after year to celebrate the hard work they did. I remember them as my “wild cousins” who dared me to come out of my shell and meet more people.

Next is my big brother, Dan Ward, aka Sasquatch. Dan chaired the Two-Year College Section at the Portland, Oregon, conference in 2003. Unbeknownst to him, the last-minute-replacement dinner speaker was a true cryptozoologist who presented his evidence for Bigfoot. My Pacific Northwest colleagues were aghast. I found the talk highly entertaining. Much like the beast, the story has become lore and I can't resist ribbing Dan at every conference.

My larger group of siblings is the Two-Year College Section, which welcomes new faces every year to their reception. I look forward to the chance to “talk shop” with people who understand the challenges and opportunities I deal with back at home. We are a network that carries our message proudly at national Vision & Change, PKAL, and ABLE meetings.

My NABT family grew exponentially as I became more active in NABT leadership. We share a love for teaching introductory biology, which I have discovered by making friends in the AP and Four-Year sections. Local implementation always depends on our unique audiences, but we teach the same concepts and skills.

Our journal, the *American Biology Teacher*, is my invitation to new family members. Each issue is like a page in our family photo album, capturing our collective work and sharing it with the world. Like my personal photos, the journal will be viewable in tablet format this fall, so I will be able to show off NABT's work anywhere, any time.

In the age of social networking, I cannot forget how many of my NABT colleagues make my “friends” list on Facebook. I enjoy seeing the photos from international field trips and the celebrations of our personal families, some even multigenerational NABT members. I use the official NABT group as a place to share resources and pose questions to you all, between conferences. Facebook is not a complete drag on my work productivity, but a place to post ideas, ask for help, and discover new science daily.

NABT members translate scientific discoveries into classroom experiences. That is our highest goal. NABT members support and promote professionalism in biology education. That is our highest mission. NABT members strive to teach the best possible life-science and biology education to all students. That is our highest honor.

We gather in Cleveland in a few weeks for our annual family reunion. Families change between reunions and new members show up, much like me all those years ago in Charlotte. Let's make sure to connect people to their new NABT family. Help them navigate the huge program of activities and opportunities. Invite them to the First Timers Breakfast. Point out the section's reception and introduce them once there. Take time to tell your NABT family story.

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