In medicine, lives are lost in the slim margins between good and great," surgeon and Atul Gawande told conference attendees at the second general session of ASCD’s Annual Conference. Gawande, who has written several articles and best-selling books, including The Checklist Manifesto, has spent his career mining the nuances that separate competence from excellence. During his talk, he investigated a core dilemma common to helping professionals in fields like teaching and medicine: despite expertise, "we all get different results."

To illustrate this point, among the clinics specializing in caring for patients with cystic fibrosis, there is a 13-year difference in life expectancy rates between patients at the very best clinics and those at good clinics. On the surface, Gawande saw no difference between these clinics. But by observing the practitioners at work—in particular, a doctor in consultation with an especially reticent teenage patient—Gawande uncovered the roots of tenacity, bedside ingenuity, humility, and teamwork that drove all members of the clinic’s medical community.

"Genius doesn’t make you great; how you work in a system does," he observed.

One doctor or teacher might make a difference, but not for long; going it alone is a recipe for burnout or reaching a plateau. Not only do the best in their field get better by working as a team and continually planning for improvement, but they also employ a set of "external ears." He related that even renowned violinist Itzhak Perlman acknowledges that "the great challenge in performing is hearing yourself," and so he uses a coach. Paradoxically, seeking this kind of help is perceived as weakness in many professional circles. "We’ve adopted a training ethic of self-perfection," he explained. "It’s not only how we teach kids [to go to school, graduate, and then improve on your own], but how we teach ourselves." That’s a narrow road to success, Gawande argues.

In the world of athletics, they too believe that this model of teaching is a naïve approach to the human capacity for self-perfection. Consider that six months after a workshop, less than 20 percent of educators actually use the skills learned there. In contrast, if you pair your professional learning with a colleague who observes and reflects with you on your practice, studies show that 85 percent of educators are still using those skills six months later. That’s the difference a coach makes. They identify the small stuff that make good teachers great, Gawande related.

Autonomy is highly valued in both the medical and education professions, Gawande said, but "self-sufficiency in a world of complexity will only get you so far." When children’s success depends on a multitude of people involved in their lives, it will fall apart if each of us is doing our own thing, he added. We’ve made sure we are our best, now, for the whole child, and we must help one another do our best, he said.

“We are cowboys,” he concluded, “but we need to be pit crews.”

The faculty here at Harry S. Truman High School is focusing on aligning tasks to the Common Core Standards. As I walk around observing classes, I can see and hear the engagement among students during class discussions. The type of discourse that I am witnessing is proof that students are not just memorizing facts and concepts, but that they are understanding, debating and questioning various types of material.

The new standards, which all schools are beginning to implement, emphasize analytical skills, nonfiction literature and mathematical word problems. For example, in an English class, students are discussing the power of the media, and besides forming their own opinion based on their personal experiences, they are examining different sources such as video clips, research and other informational texts, so that they can critique other people’s views and arguments.

While this thrills me as a principal, I also have high-stakes tests, such as State Regents exams, on my mind; will students be able to transfer this type of understanding to the Regents and A.P. exams? The truth is that when we teach for true understanding, our students will not only be prepared for any examination, but they will retain information far beyond June. Students are engaged when they see that the material they are learning is relevant to the real world, and moreover, relevant to them directly. Once educators — including administrators — see the powerful changes in students when they are engaged, the idea that test-preparation courses entail “teaching to the test” will diminish.

What do all people remember so vividly, even as time goes by? We remember our fondest or worst experiences — because they stir us, and they reach us at the core. When we teach students, we should stir them, reach them at the core and provide them with an educational experience that allows them to see the relevance in learning across all content areas.

As a person with a science and math background, I do not agree that our students should be robotic persons focusing on only mathematics and technology — only a strong liberal arts education that holds all content areas as important will allow students to be ready for the 21st century world. Our students will be able to make a smooth transition to college because the academic rigor that is required of them as university scholars is present in a mentally engaging high school classroom; they will also make wise decisions when choosing careers because they will use these fundamental thinking skills to make professional and personal choices. Moreover, we can count on well-rounded youth with highly developed thinking skills to be active participants and leaders in an ever-changing society.

Sana Nasser is the principal of Harry S. Truman High School in the Bronx and was a 2006 Cahn Fellow at Teachers College, Columbia University.

http://www.nytimes.com/schoolbook/school/592-harry-s-truman-high-school
BTSA State Surveys are in full swing!

Participating Teachers and Support Providers look for your ID numbers on BTSASupport.com. If you have not done so already...Please use your BTSA State ID number to complete the survey and your milestone before the required date listed below!

The CA State BTSA website to complete the survey is located:

http://www.btsa.ca.gov/

**BTSA State Survey opened...** March 22, 2012 for:

Administrators, Support Providers, and Participating Teachers

**BTSA State Survey closes:**

May 1st for Support Providers
May 8th for Administrators
May 11th for Participating Teachers

---

**Leading Every Day:**

“When there is inquiry and advocacy creative [group] outcomes are much more likely.”

Peter M. Senge

---

**Five Quick Classroom Management Tips for Novice Teachers**

1) Use a normal, *natural voice*
2) Speak only when students are quiet and ready
3) Use hand signals and other *non-verbal communication*
4) Address behavior issues *quickly and wisely*
5) Always have a well-designed, *engaging* lesson

By Rebecca Alber

Edutopia 3-13-12

---

Rebecca Alber instructs online teacher-education courses for Stanford University and assists teachers and schools in meeting students’ academic needs through best practices. Please click the following link to see her entire article on Quick Classroom Management Tips.  http://www.edutopia.org/blog/classroom-management-tips-novice-teachers-rebecca-alber

---

By Rebecca Alber

Edutopia 3-13-12
BTSA Induction Goals

- Improve beginning teaching performance
- Improve teaching of students from diverse backgrounds
- Improve learning for all students
- Increase new teacher satisfaction
- Retain capable new teachers

Provide professional development to new teachers in order to satisfy CLEAR credential requirements of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Vision Statement

SCUSD’s BTSA Induction program will guide and support participating teachers by providing flexible individualized support, implementing a structured curriculum and offering guidance through induction specific standards; yet will remain flexible enough to address unique issues faced by beginning teachers.