

She beamed with pride as I shared the news that I was a teacher. “I always remember our race track,” I shared with her. “Really?” she asked. “You know, Robin, *they* made me remove it several years ago!”

As an educator, I easily acknowledged the issues involved with the race track; I clearly understood why it was removed. I recognized why the task engaged me yet may have left other students frustrated. My teacher’s reaction to its forced removal, however, left me disheartened. As one of the “they” in central office, my race horse experience reminds me to empower teachers with the research and resources vital to making instructional decisions that are in the best interest of *their* students.

As I engaged my thoughts at the 2013 VASCD conference, my race horse experience resurfaced. From the keynote speakers to the teacher experts offering break-out sessions on current trends from STEM to “flipping” to student-led conferences, a unifying call to educators emerged across the sessions, a call to teach to the whole child. We were called upon to remain mindful of the diverse perspectives of the learners in our schools and the need to approach change as an opportunity to make a difference for all of our students. We engaged in dialogue, privately and collaboratively, to challenge our current ways of thinking. How do we as professionals continually question our practices in light of new research, new technologies, or new standards? How do we determine which practices will endure when we recognize *who* we teach is as important as *what* or *how* we teach?

Beyond the speakers and presenters, my race horse experience made me turn my attention to the teachers in the room. Our VBCPS English family was a large presence at the conference. For three days a smile spread across my face as I eavesdropped on their conversations which were filled with excitement and possibility. Here were the voices of teachers who do not vehemently defend time-honored practices; rather, they question their current methods with a willingness to adjust when necessary. Here were the voices of teachers who open their minds to the possibilities posed by new research, new technologies, and new sources of inspiration.

And now, here are the voices of a group of professionals eager to share their reflections on the conference with the hope of spreading their enthusiasm and commitment beyond the conference walls.