

NATIONAL BOARD

for Professional Teaching Standards®

Luke Correia-Damude:

Welcome, everyone. We are so excited to have you back here for our fourth episode. National Board Conversations is a podcast where I, Luke Correia-Damude, your host, interview educators, and teachers from coast to coast. We discuss their National Board certification journey, their process, their experience, tips, tricks, and bits of wisdom that they might have to offer you as well as their thoughts on education and life as a teacher. On Today's episode, I had an amazing conversation with Dr. Doretha Allen from Dallas, Texas. She is an inspiring woman, mother, teacher, and I was just so intrigued and happy that I got to talk with her. So without further ado, let's get going. Here's Doretha. I hope you enjoy.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Hi, Doretha thanks for joining us.

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Hi Luke. Thanks for having me.

Luke Correia-Damude:

It is an absolute honor to have you, so why don't we jump right in, introduce yourself to our audience.

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Okay, well, hi everyone. I am Dr. Doretha Allen, a National Board certified teacher here in Dallas, Texas. This is my 21st year in the profession. I'm a mother of two and currently, I am working remotely and I am helping my two children as they navigate virtual school. So it's quite an adventure.

Luke Correia-Damude:

This year has brought up some really unforeseeable and distinct challenges for people. How are you dealing with everything?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

I have found myself learning things and having to do them at a high level. All at the same time. It's been a lot of pivots and quick turns. Not only for me but for my kids as well. So I've learned to extend lots and lots of grace to myself and to them. That's the message that I really try to share with teachers, extended grace. It's okay.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Well, I think I'm going to remember that every day. That's a really good piece of advice. All the more reason to be having a podcast, people are at home. People are spending more time inside. So give them something to listen to. How are you feeling about being on the show?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Man! I am so over the moon, super excited, peacock, proud. I came to National Board learning about it on my way to work on a drive listening to NPR. It was on a podcast where I learned about this National Board certification process, where teachers spend hundreds and hundreds of hours analyzing their practice so they can be the best teacher for their kids. So here I am many years later doing a podcast about National Board. So, it's really full circle for me.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Well, this is kind of a serendipitous moment then, I guess maybe a little surreal too. Why don't we take a step back and you can tell me about how you became a teacher. Tell me about the history behind that.

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Well, first I think I'm one of few educators who actually went to college to be an educator. So my undergrad is in elementary ed. I minored in English and I spent lots and lots of time in classrooms as part of my undergrad program. Then I actually moved back home to Dallas after graduate school and started working in the neighborhood that I grew up in. So that was fun because I instantly had street credit because I had the kids of my classmates and the people I grew up with. So I've been doing it for 21 years and I'm still teaching every day, even though my profession has taken me out of the classroom, into instructional coaching roles in the central office and now, the office of transformation innovation. I'm still teaching principals, teachers, and students, whenever I get a chance because it all impacts kids. So I'm very much connected to my teacher role.

Luke Correia-Damude:

You were teaching in a community that you knew. Do you think that that was a benefit for you? Do you think that had something to do with the development of your teaching style and your identity as an educator?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Yes, I think so. Being from the neighborhood, I was in an area that is kind of resource-deprived, low socioeconomic status, and there were just not a lot of resources, but I always had human capital that I tapped into back then. In those early days of teaching, I don't know if I really considered it as human capital. I think National Board really helped me name the things that were around me that I was doing. So if there were events coming up and we didn't have resources to take kids on a field trip, but I knew a parent that had a skill set, let's say a parent that was a barber or a parent that was a beautician or a parent that was a plumber. I would ask them to come up to the class and share their expertise. So in that way, bringing the real world into our classroom, and I always had parents who were willing to share their expertise, they may not have had the money or resources, but what they had was their time and their talent and they readily shared it. I was kind of surprised that they were very honored because they never had been asked to share that before. So in that way, I built those relationships.

Luke Correia-Damude:

You went there, you were teaching in your old neighborhood. At what point did you decide I'm going to be an NBCT, you'd already done your masters you said, when did you decide to start this National Board journey?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Well, it was after I completed a second masters, after I had been Teacher of the Year, after I had been the English Language Arts Teacher of the Year. So when I was on my way to work and I heard this story about the gold standard of teaching, the top 2% of teachers, I really kind of was like, wait a minute, I don't know about this, but I'm definitely trying to get that gold star, that badge of honor, I wanted to be at the top of my profession. So I did a little research. I saw all the work that it took and you had to analyze your practice and you had to record yourself and all of these things. I was not scared of work, Luke. I am not scared of work and I wanted to be the best. It was shortly thereafter that an email came out from my district, that they were starting a National Board cohort. So I immediately jumped on that opportunity.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Wow. Yeah, you definitely aren't shy of hard work, two masters, a PHD and National Board certified, any other huge feats of your career that we should know about?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

You know, the largest of them all is really the one I'm currently doing, which is mothering, working, and trying to maintain my sanity during the pandemic and trying to be a good wife. I failed to mention my husband. He is the supporting character in all of these tales, often the unsung hero. So shout out to my husband of 18 years, Sheldon.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Wow. Sheldon, lucky guy, listen to that. That's very touching. You've done all of these certifications and degrees. How does the National Board stack up to a masters or the PHD?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Man, let me tell you, Luke, nothing impacted my profession like National Board certification, not one professional development. And let me tell you why, in education, lots of people come from the outside consultants telling educators do this one thing and they'll make your life better, do this one thing and you'll change how your students respond, use this one product. It's better than sliced bread. That happens a lot. You go to school and you study theories and you try to apply those theories in your class and you study these researchers and all that other stuff and all that's fine, right? Lots of people get masters degrees and doctorates. I don't want to discourage people from doing that because that has its place, but National Board certification changed the game. This is why the standards work. When you read the National Board standards, you will read over and over and over again, accomplished teachers know, accomplished teachers do, accomplished teachers recognize, accomplished teacher incorporate, it's all about the accomplished teaching practice.

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Then you apply those standards to your teaching practice. So it's this real live action research. This is a big shift in teacher practice before national board. When I had a great day and everything went off perfectly, I would say, man, I did it today. I would pat myself on the back when they had an off day and everything just kind of went off the rails, and teachers listening, you know what I'm talking about when you have those lessons and it kind of goes off the rails? I would say, man, I don't know what's wrong with my kids today. Now after National Board, when there was a good day, it was because I planned for every single part of it and when it was a bad day it was because I planned for every single part of it. Their success and failure was all on me.

Dr. Doretha Allen:

I had to own it. Good, bad, and ugly. That is the shift that I walked away with from National Board. Every instructional decision is connected and must be articulated. That's what accomplished teachers do. Everything is based on knowing your students. Every instructional decision and students are different. They are not a monolith. So you have to drill down and really know them. I'm not talking about, know them in an academic sense you do have to know them in an academic sense, but that's just one way of knowing them. They are not flat two dimensional numbers on a page, but they are three-dimensional multifaceted with varied interests and hobbies and curiosities that we have to tap into. As a teacher, only National Board has taught me that. National Board taught me that for every instructional decision I have to be able to articulate it and make the connections.

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Everything is intentional. For example, I taught reading. So I lived at the small group table, pulling groups of kids, working on reading. In reading, there are different levels of reading and there are books for those levels. So you get a kid, a book right above where they can do it and that's their instructional level. You help them through that to build their fluency and comprehension. Well, National Board taught me if this group of boys doesn't like reading, but I know they play football because I know my students, which is a big core prop in National Board, know your students. Then let me find a text that will engage them and then I can hook them in. So everything is connected, nothing is by chance. National Board taught me that through practice.

Luke Correia-Damude:

During the journey to getting certified, did you have a cohort? Did you feel like you had a community to fall on?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Yeah, I'm just so grateful for the insight of the leadership at that time in the district that really put support behind National Board and we had a cohort. So we met once a month in the evenings. The professional development department, they led us through and they talked to us and taught us about the five core props, the double helix, which is the architecture of accomplished teaching, the standards, the three different kinds of writing for national board, descriptive, analytical and reflective. They taught us those things. In-between, we had to put our hand to the plow and do the work we had to read, we had to study, we had to record, we had to plan. We had to gather student work samples. When we came back together, we were able to talk about our struggles. If I didn't understand part of the directions, What? Did y'all get that? It was like a family. I cannot underscore enough the moral support, the content support that cohorts offer. It's an affinity group within itself because they're in the same struggle as you are at my campus. No one really got it. They questioned while I was doing all this extra work but the people who were in that group with me understood, and we didn't have to talk about it because they were at the table. Just having that shared experience is so valuable.

Luke Correia-Damude:

So you not only got a lot out of being a part of a cohort but now you facilitate cohorts. Can you tell me why you feel it's so important to keep this going and to support teachers like this?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

It is because I think about when I look back over my educational professional career, I think of all the people who have helped me, even as a child coming up in education, many doors were open to me for greater opportunities because of teachers who saw something in me, this is my way of paying it forward because I know if a teacher is better and I help them become better, it not only impacts the students that they have right now, but it impacts every class of students that each teacher has for the rest of their career. So we're talking about hundreds and thousands of kids being better because of something that I'm able to do with a group of 30 today.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Are you aware of any misconceptions that you've heard from people that are starting out on the certification journey?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

I think that the biggest challenge or misconception when people come to the process is that they think it is a certification, like a state certification where you take some classes and you pass a

test and then that's it, that's a very flat view of it because it is so much more than that. They think it's a pass or fail. In national boards circles, we don't say pass or fail. We say you've accomplished or haven't accomplished yet. So, it's a shift, it's not about opening this book and going to this page and reading this theory and regurgitating it theory and passing a test and checking the box. That's not what it's about. It is about taking a deep dive into the standards, into the architecture of accomplished teaching the five core props and holding your professional teaching practice up against that, and making instructional decisions based upon it.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Right, and for you personally, did you accomplish all of the modules on your first try?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Oh, no, no, I did not. As a matter of fact, missed it the first go-round and talk about defeated. I was looking around and I was thinking to myself, man, these people don't know who I am. I had a bit of pride and I needed to humble myself to the process. It's then in that second year when I came back and re-did an entry that it really clicked for me, everything I did before I was focused on me and what I did and what Dr. Allen did. I made this lesson and I made these anchor charts, but it was really about my student's response because you can do all of that but if your kids don't respond, then you have to do something different. That's what I learned that second year.

Dr. Doretha Allen:

So if people aren't successful the first time, I say that gives you more opportunity to be reflective. I really am thankful that I didn't make it the first go-around because I would have missed the lesson. The lesson that I needed Luke, was that it's about my students. If they are receptive and if they learn from what I taught, because if they didn't, then it's not their fault. It's my fault and I have to do something different instructionally. I need to do something different. That has been the game-changer for me as a teacher.

Luke Correia-Damude:

So that's an important lesson for the listeners. Even someone with two master's degrees has to be reflective and has to sometimes take these things a second time around to make sure it's successful. Right?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

Right, because it doesn't matter if we taught it and how we taught it. It only matters if the kids got it. That's what matters did they get it? How do you know? If they got it, good, what's next. If they didn't get it okay, not good. What's next? What do you do to make sure they get it? So if people don't hear anything else that we've said please hear that National Board makes you teach in a way, so your kids get it. If they don't, then you know, as a teacher, you need to do something different. The kids don't need to change. We have to change.

Luke Correia-Damude:

That's a great piece of wisdom to maybe sign off on. I think that is a great finish to this. Maybe the last thing I will ask you is if I was about to embark on this journey, if I was with a prospect and I was thinking about getting my certification, what kind of advice would you give me?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

I would give one. Know that, it's a huge commitment of time and you need to schedule time for it every day, every week. Build that time. I would also say, talk to those around you and let them know what you're doing. I would talk to your spouse. I would talk to the kids. I would talk to the

coworkers. I would especially talk to your principal and say, I'm embarking on this journey. I need your support because everything that they ask takes your energy and time. The more you can focus on just doing your certification process, the better. Then it helps, once a teacher has become an NBCT, it just spreads like wildfire throughout the building. I think I would share the pros of it with my principal. This is why this is a good thing, this is why you should support me, etc. Think of all the things I'm doing now and imagine the notoriety we can have at our school, imagine how many other teachers will follow my path. So I would definitely say, alert the team because you need the support of those closest to you.

Luke Correia-Damude:

What words of wisdom do you have for candidates on their journey right now?

Dr. Doretha Allen:

So I would encourage them to go for it and find help. There are lots of people who will help, as a matter of fact, I'm on the Texas national board coalition for teaching, and we are connecting people who are going through the process by themselves with National Board Certified Teachers to be their mentor and in a pandemic, everything is virtual. So they're a zoom away from support. So sign up today.

Luke Correia-Damude:

That was a good promo there. I couldn't think of a better thought to go out on. That was a really inspiring conversation. I was so happy to speak with Dr. Doretha Allen and I thank you all for listening. Our next episode is coming hot on the trail of this episode, but in the meantime, if you want to learn more about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, check out the website at www.nbpts.org. My name is Luke Correia-Damude signing off until next time. Cheers.