

NATIONAL BOARD

for Professional Teaching Standards®

Luke Correia-Damude:

Welcome everyone to National Board conversations. This is episode eight, our final episode of the season. We're so grateful to have been able to provide this programming for you. We thank you for tuning in. It was a really great opportunity and we had so much fun connecting with all these National Board certified teachers and educators, and we're just really proud of our teachers in America. So thank you for listening. If you're a fan of the podcast, share it around, tell your friends, colleagues, other educators, and teachers. Our hope is to get these talks to as many listeners as possible and help them on their journey to National Board certification. Today's guest is Jonathon Medeiros. He is a National Board certified teacher based in Hawai'i. Our conversation centered a lot around self-reflection, which is a major tenet of the National Board process. We talked a lot about how we can be self-reflective and be nimble in order to pivot so that we can service the students and offer a really enriched and dynamic educational experience. The ideas we discussed seemed even more relevant considering the pandemic that we're all living through. It was so refreshing to get his perspective on all this stuff and just chat with him about education and get his take. So without further ado, here we are...

New Speaker:

Jonathan. Thanks for joining us. How are you?

Jonathon Medeiros:

I'm well, thank you. How are you doing?

Luke Correia-Damude:

I'm great. I'm great. When we were talking just before we started, I could hear the birds chirping in the background. Tell us where you are that you have these beautiful birds singing?

Jonathon Medeiros:

I'm at my, I mean, my classroom on Hawai'i at Kaua'i high school. So we're surrounded by a variety of birds.

Luke Correia-Damude:

That's great. Why don't you introduce yourself to them?

Jonathon Medeiros:

All right. Yeah. My name is Jonathon Medeiros and I am a public school teacher here at Kaua'i high school. I was born and raised here, actually graduated from this high school. I've been teaching here now for 15 years. I'm a National Board certified teacher and I first certified approximately 10 years ago and I just finished my maintenance actually. I'm more than just a teacher. I like to spend time getting out with my family and going on walks or spending time at the beach or in the water as much as possible.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Yeah. And you, and you have that beautiful Hawaii water and sand. So that's a real plus during pandemic time. That's great. So tell me, how did you get into teaching?

Jonathon Medeiros:

So the short and glib answer is I became a teacher because of a girl, I had never really planned to be a teacher, certainly not public school, high school level teacher. I taught a couple of graduate classes, like in my mind, that's where my eye was going. I studied language arts and philosophy. I have a master's degree in literature and then I met this awesome person. In the beginning of our relationship, at one point, she said, "hey, by the way, I'm going off to grad school to become a teacher." The implication was, she's moving away. I was like, Oh, maybe I could do that. So she encouraged me. I followed a girl and then it turned out that was an amazing decision because I love this job. I love teaching. I get to learn every single day. Also side benefit is I love that person and so I got two great things out of that.

Luke Correia-Damude:

That's great. So you did find a love. You didn't end up marrying this person, did you?

Jonathon Medeiros:

We are married. This is the mother of my children. She's an amazing teacher and inspiration as well. So she really saw that in me, I guess, you know, encouraged me to be more serious about it. Yeah.

Luke Correia-Damude:

That's a real, a real win-win there. You got two loves out of it. That's the best case scenario for that story. That's great. At what point on this journey, did you go for National Board? How did you find out about the National Board and what made you want to do it?

Jonathon Medeiros:

I had been teaching three or four years by the time National Board certification was on my mind regularly. I believe a kind of an expert veteran teacher, Tracy, who heads up National Board work in the state of Hawai'i. Now, similar to my wife, Tracy saw something in me, you know, she said, you need to do this. I asked her, what is that? She told me all about it. I kind of pushed back or brushed her off for a year. You know, I was not ready for that. We kept running into each other. She works on a different Island, but we kept running into each other, which I think kept tugging at her mind. This guy is kind of in

everything and wanting to learn. So she encouraged me to seek National Board certification 10 or 11 years ago. When I did, I was the only person in that year at my school who was seeking certification. I believe there was one other person on my Island. There were very few pathways to connect each other. So I felt kind of alone when I was going through it the first time, except for Tracy who we, you know, we emailed a lot during that 18 months that it took me to get my act together and get my certification done the first time.

Luke Correia-Damude:

And how was the journey? Like what was National Board certification? Like?

Jonathon Medeiros:

It was daunting at first, but I took it one piece at a time and went through it slowly. The way that the National Board certification process forces, self-reflection really kind of jived with the way I live my life. I'm always taking in the experiences around me and asking questions like, well, "how can I do that better?" So that felt natural to me and I really learned a lot through that self-reflection part of the National Board process. So in the end I felt like I had gone through a whole other graduate program with some of the best professional learning that I've ever gone through even today. It was the most I've grown, I think in the shortest amount of time as a professional, really set the foundation for me for the rest of my career.

Luke Correia-Damude:

So for you, what do you think the most beneficial part of earning this certification was? What, what part sticks with you the most?

Jonathon Medeiros:

So going through the National Board process as a language arts teacher really forced me to reevaluate lots of preconceived ideas that I had. One of them specifically was this idea of texts because the National Board process is asking me and some of the evidence they're asking me for is non textual evidence. That idea just really stuck with me. I immediately saw how much bigger I could make my classroom, how confining the idea of texts had been up to that point. You know, I looked back on the first four years there and saw my smaller idea of texts, being something written that's inside of a book with covers really limits us as teachers and students have limits as to what we can think about what we can read and how we can show our learning, having the National Board process, made me really focusing on that, expanding that idea of texts has stuck with me in my class over the years and I've grown because of it. We spend time every year, literally questioning what texts can be, and you can see it on the students' faces too, when they start to realize, "Oh, there are less limits here." I can express my learning in so many more ways. It helps them be more connected to school, I think.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Right. And why don't we talk a little bit about how there's the smaller idea of the classroom that's totally exploded with COVID and the pandemic and how are you taking the same idea process to reevaluating the classroom?

Jonathon Medeiros:

Yeah, that's a great question. I actually hadn't realized that until this conversation, so I'm glad we're talking about it, Luke. What I went through with that concept of text was like a 10 year ago, version of the same thing that we're thinking about now. I've been saying a lot that we need to question these ideas. So right now, even what is a class or a classroom is a question we should be asking ourselves. The pandemic has forced many teachers to confront that question and all kinds of other related questions. How do I make a learning space when 90% of my students are in places that I can't see, and I can't control the comfort or safety of those places. So how do I, how do I build a classroom that covers, you know, my whole Island at this point, but I'm glad for my experience with National Board, 10 or 11 years ago, struggling through those ideas of how do I show that I can teach writing without textual evidence. I'm glad I went through that because it better prepared me for this moment to ask those other questions. How do I make a classroom that doesn't have walls? I felt better prepared to ask those difficult questions.

Luke Correia-Damude:

So this journey already started as a result of the self-reflection you had from National Board certification. It kind of armed you to be ready for this unforeseen change in education.

Jonathon Medeiros:

Exactly. Yeah. I certainly felt I could see a connection. I feel better prepared. This National Board process made me be flexible and creative and self-reflective. So I had built those muscles already. Right.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Because of this training that you've gotten and the way that you've manifested it into your pedagogy you've been thinking about this for awhile. So I'm just wondering what kind of things do you think about to open up your mindset and blow the walls out of the classroom and make it an open space?

Jonathon Medeiros:

Yeah. I have been thinking about these things for, for awhile. So have many people. I'm not special because I'm thinking about the purpose of homework, for example, or how to do attendance differently. Those are some of the kind of bigger picture questions that I still think are important to ask. Like I would say it's always important for teachers to ask themselves the simple question, why? For any action that they are going to ask their students to take we need to ask why, what do I want from the student? The answer can't be, and I've heard this answer from colleagues, which is sad and the answer can't be so that I can give them a quiz and put a grade in the grade book that obviously can't be the answer. We

need to really investigate the purpose for every action. There needs to be a straight line between our teacher actions and positive student result. I think it's very important for the teacher to be crystal clear about those purposes. So that's one question that I would always, and I do always ask or ask teachers to ask themselves, why am I doing this thing? Get really clear on that. Then I think another good question to ask is how can I do this more simply, how can I be more efficient? How can we be as efficient and simple as possible?

Luke Correia-Damude:

Yeah, totally. And for teachers, I mean, it's pretty clear from our conversation right now, but let's lay it out a little bit more. Why is it important to be open to a pivot or to be open to this self-reflection, to throw away your lesson plan?

Jonathon Medeiros:

I mean, the short answer is it's important because your class changes by necessity, right? You can't just do the same thing all the time. You can't just have the same idea of what's the best way to teach simply because you're going to have different students every single year. So we have to be ready. In my opinion, the world is changing. The job is never the same because the people in your classroom are never the same

Luke Correia-Damude:

Students evolve throughout the year, too. Right? So your classroom is always on.

Jonathon Medeiros:

I start the year by telling my students about failure. I talked to them about the joys of failure. I promise them that they will fail and that's amazing and awesome. That their only goal is to be different by the end of the year, we should change. We should think from the very beginning that the goal is to change and we'll do more learning that way.

Luke Correia-Damude:

For you, you know, 10 years, you were National Board certified teacher, you're going in to maintain your certification. That could be really daunting. There's a fear of failure in that. How did you think about that when you were going into that process?

Jonathon Medeiros:

There really was a fear in the back of my head. So I could see it coming from a few years away. I was right at the end of the timeline where I knew that I was going to have to be doing maintenance under the new system. That added an extra layer of fear to me. Like, you know, I don't know this quite as well but, naturally, I embraced those unknowns and those challenges. So I was nervous, but I decided to try to live what I tell my students that seeking out risks or challenges is important and seeking out struggle

is important because that's where we learn. So I easily could have decided, you know, here I am at year 15, I've already certified. I can kind of coast for awhile, but that's not a satisfying place for me personally, to be, I always want to change. Taking a risk head-on or a challenge head-on like maintenance is a great way to force myself into a little growth spurt as it were, I think, related to this idea of being self-reflective and I'm and seeking challenges and knowing that you want to grow and change. I think related to those ideas is the idea of curiosity. That's a whole other topic that I'm really passionate about. I think there's a lot of power in teaching students to be curious and modeling curiosity, even on a very simple level. Luke, if we can be curious about the world around us, if we can be curious about each other, we can end up building empathy for each other. I feel like that sounds to be too hippy-dippy but I feel like that's an important thing to build. Our world could use a good cup of empathy right now. So any way to build that I think is important. So that's something I would leave us with building that empathy is important

Luke Correia-Damude:

So let's honor Jonathon's words. Let's all be curious. Let's look around us. Let's think of others. Let's meet people and have meaningful experiences and we'll raise our cup of empathy. We'll raise a glass and a toast you for listening to National Board Conversations, season one, it was such a pleasure. My name is Luke Correia-Damude. I've been your host. Again, if you've liked the podcast, please share it around with teachers, colleagues, friends, leave us a review, leave us a rating, let us know how we're doing. Give us some tips and pointers we'd love to hear from you. We're just really happy to be able to be sharing these stories with you. So thank you again, if you'd like to know more about the National Board certification process, please visit the website at www.nbpts.org in the meantime, stay safe and we'll talk to you again soon. Cheers, everyone.