

Title: Adult Education: Supporting Educators and Learners

Description: In this episode, Adrienne Boggs discusses how her work supports adult education by creating curriculum resources that are aligned to standards, distance education, formative and summative assessments, and leadership for educators. This support to educators is crucial to serving adult learners.

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Fara Allen: Welcome to CETE Works, a podcast produced by the Curriculum and Training Team at the Center on Education and Training for Employment—a translational research center on Ohio State’s campus. We work where research meets reality. I’m your host, Fara Allen, a Program Coordinator at the Center. This podcast series will focus on the various approaches and supports that our center offers to educators of all learners. How do educators engage, nurture, and support their learners? Listen in on these discussions that highlight how educators can connect with and understand their learners! At CETE, we believe that everyone deserves to experience lifelong learning! To learn more about our work, you can visit our website CETE, that’s C-E-T-E, dot O-S-U dot E-D-U. Nationally, there are 65,000 educators in more than 2,000 local programs working with adult learners to provide numeracy and literacy skills, digital literacy skills, and workforce readiness. Right now, over 40 million adults in the U.S. cannot read above a 3rd grade level, and nearly 60 million cannot do 4th grade math. In addition, there are 28 million adults who lack basic digital skills and yet most of them are using computers every single day. Projections forecast that in just five years, nearly 80 percent of all job openings will require more than a high school diploma. Adult education programs are needed to provide a significant opportunity to bridge the workforce supply-and-demand gap. Helping to ensure that adult education students have opportunities for academic and career success helps them AND their communities improve. At CETE we’ve been involved in adult education for nearly 25 years. The Ohio Aspire Professional Development Network is a longstanding project at our center, providing resources, professional development, and technical assistance to practitioners of adult basic education, literacy education, and English language learning. Adrienne Boggs, a program manager at our center, joins me as our guest in this episode. Bringing more than 15 years of experience in adult education, she has firsthand experience from working at a career center, which empowered her to make an impact on a much larger scale. Adrienne serves the president of the Ohio Association for Adult and Continuing Education (OAACE) and is also co-lead of the Aspire Professional Development Network team at Ohio State. In this episode, Adrienne discusses how her work of creating training and resources to support educators ultimately serves adult learners.

Fara Allen: Hi Adrienne, were glad to have you join us on CETE works today. You're with us today to talk about how meaningful the adult education space is and probably more important in today's market. Can you start us off by leaning into the meaning of adult education and the importance of educators understanding what their learners need and how they learn best?

Adrienne Boggs: Sure Fara, thanks for having me. You know, so, even though I'm no longer in the classroom providing direct services, I still see myself as an adult educator working with and through our adult education providers to serve the students in Ohio. I feel the need to preface our conversation with that because I often speak about the students, as though I'm still in the classroom with them. Adult Education is going to take many forms, but through my lense, I'm looking at those adults who didn't finish high school. Those adults need to refresh their skills, maybe to return to a post-secondary education or training program. You know those in corrections. Those maybe who aren't native English speakers and want to learn English. Ultimately, our students are coming to our classrooms because they want to improve their lives. You know, for a whole host of reasons, a lot of our students are coming to us with barriers, maybe sometimes past traumas, and those have had a negative impact on their learning and personal growth. You know, it's so critically important that when a student first steps into the program before orientation or just to get more information that we begin establishing rapport and demonstrating that this is a safe learning environment. And by safe I don't just mean physically but emotionally because it takes so much courage for them to take those first steps towards change.

Fara Allen: I appreciate that insight, I think it helps our listeners to understand why CETE plays such an important role in the adult education space. Can you share with us how your work at the Center directly connects to adult education and how you got involved in it?

Adrienne Boggs: Well, like a lot of other folks I stumbled into the adult education world by accident, and I was working at a career center and then I just fell in love with the work and the people. You know. throughout my career I've been in service to people. I left the classroom so I can make an impact on a larger scale. So, working here at CETE and then working with programs all over the state. But, for me, I have to stay connected to the people we serve, I love seeing the training and the resources we create that help the adult education practitioners, and I know ultimately that serves our students.

Fara Allen: That's such an important topic, especially for our listeners, who are educators. So, can you tell us how this work benefits, educators and learners?

Adrienne Boggs: So, you know, we want to make practitioners jobs easier, a lot of our folks are part time and especially if you're new coming into this job might feel like they're trying to drink water, out of a fire hose, pause and visualize that for a second. You know, so we support them with onboarding to help them get acquainted with policies procedures and other elements that are specific to their role. We support them in areas like curriculum resources that are aligned to standards, distance education, formative and summative assessments, and leadership, just to name a few.

Fara Allen: Thanks for explaining how this work is crucial to educators of adult learners. But what motivates you to do this work.

Adrienne Boggs: Well, obviously I work with a great team at CETE and that goes without saying, but I'm gonna say it anyway. You know, knowing that we help practitioners and seeing the students when they succeed is what makes it all worthwhile. Seeing how proud they are when their accomplishments are showcased by the programs and the look on their faces. I remember what it was like in the classroom and how amazing my students were. Yeah, it's why we do what we do and it's as simple as that.

Fara Allen: I really appreciate knowing that you started in the classroom because you bring that real life firsthand experience and knowledge. And now that we have a look into what motivates you, how do you turn that motivation around to help and or inspire others in your work?

Adrienne Boggs: So, fortunately, with a lot of the folks I work with, we've been doing this work for a while and we're doing it because our hearts are in it, and you know when your heart's in your work and you believe in what you're doing it's not hard to sell it.

Fara Allen: Right.

Adrienne Boggs: And, you know, when you see the students and their success, you know, it's an easy reminder why you do what to do. And with any organization, you keep the work central to your mission, vision, and values. That's always going to help with your motivation, when the work is central to your mission, vision, and values there's not really a question as to why you're doing your work.

Fara Allen: Along the same lines of inspiration and support, we're learning organization with a learning culture at CETE, so I'm going to turn the table just a bit here. Can you share with us what professional development you participated in most recently and what your biggest takeaway was or how did you grow from that experience?

Adrienne Boggs: So, you know, one area I've been working on is social justice and I've had a lot of opportunities for professional development and personal growth. And there's a lot to take away from the sessions I've participated in and the books I've read. You know, if I'm to distill it down, I would say to folks lean in and listen. Even if it makes you uncomfortable. You know, there's a lot of diverse perspectives and histories that have not been amplified to the degree that they should have been. And we still have a lot to learn about others and ourselves, so you know, take a take a moment and reflect inward and that's hard to do.

Fara Allen: Thank you for letting us have a deeper look into your own learning. I do believe it's such an important time for continuous learning about ourselves and each other. I have one last question for you today, Adrienne. Is there any knowledge or skills that you sought out to gain during the pandemic?

Adrienne Boggs: Yeah, that's been a silver lining to this pandemic, there were so many great PD opportunities. So, you know, admittedly, I was like a kid in the candy store. At

times, I kind of got myself, from time to time, I did have to reel myself in because I was like oh and do this, I want to do this. Because I have pretty broad interests and there were so many different groups at OSU offering sessions and series, I took advantage of as many as I could it was fantastic. And I also took time to delve deeper into mental health wellness and trauma. Those are areas that I have a great interest in because that just affects so many facets of our work it's not just about how those areas impact or students. But just the folks our coworkers are people we work with and then, how do we manage ourselves care because we are in the middle of a pandemic, which is that's a very big stressful traumatic situation going on. And there's a whole lot of complicated layers there. So, yeah, that's been a big one for me.

Fara Allen: Well, I really appreciate that, and I agree with you. Thank you for taking the time to share your expertise, insights, and your personal story with us today. I appreciate your time, Adrienne.

Adrienne Boggs: Thank you for this opportunity it's been great talking to you.

Fara Allen: On behalf of the Curriculum and Training team at The Center on Education and Training for Employment, we'd like to thank our guest today. If you would like more information on this topic, please contact us at go.osu.edu/OhioState4Work. We would be happy to hear from you and share more information about our services and our work. Follow us on Twitter at OhioState4Work. See our description for details. Thank you for listening to CETE Works, we hope you enjoyed this episode. Be well and bye for now.