

2018 Adult Education and Family Literacy Week Begins with Award-Winning Advice

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As we begin Adult Education and Family Literacy Week in California and across the US, we want to congratulate one of our colleagues for a recent recognition.

Elizabeth Detwiler, a teacher at Oakland Adult and Career Education, was selected as the 2018 Toyota National Center for Families Learning Teacher of the Year. With the award comes a \$20,000 grant for the OACE family literacy program. For more information about the award, you can read the [OUSD press release](#) announcing the event. Beth will also be presenting at the annual NCFL conference in Florida this week. The topic of her presentation is "Empowering ELL Family Engagement Through PACT Time."

OTAN asked Beth to share her thoughts about the adult students she sees in her family literacy program and about engaging the whole family in the adult ed classroom.

We assume our adult learners are tech-savvy and able to navigate the world of technology. Often, we see this is not the case. They may carry a smart phone and be able to find a location using their nav systems, but when asked how it works, they are at a loss. We want to prepare our students for the future world. The knowledge is not based in understanding how a specific app or program works, but being able to be critical thinkers and creators. In a world that is constantly changing and expanding technologically, being innovative and inquisitive is a powerful skill set.

- Technology is a tool in my classroom, never the content. If it doesn't aid in the learning process, then there is no reason to introduce it. We need to teach our students to be producers, not just consumers, of technology. There are many great companies and groups thinking about this process. With the tinkering and maker movement reaching into the elementary classrooms, students are engaging in project based learning and inquiry model classrooms where questioning strategies, group thinking, and collaborative work are all used to learn content area knowledge.
- Adult education has an opportunity to expand and grow in how it is teaching its students. This change is starting to happen. Currently, the new pathways programs in development across the country are reworking the traditional classroom instruction of grammar and language and instead to embed that in a cross-curricular format. It has never worked for me to teach reading and writing out of context. I enjoy and thoroughly love teaching units where all the content and skills instruction come together. The students are able to develop a deeper understanding of the material and have more opportunities to practice with the language and vocabulary.
- I do a tinker day most Tuesdays to build in these experiences for parents and promote critical thinking activities for families. Students read, write, and talk about the science experiment, building project or hands-on activity we are doing that day. The most powerful science experiment we did last spring was to discover why shadows move. My students learned the shadows changed based on the earth's rotation. That the sun wasn't moving across the sky was ground-shattering. It made me remember to not assume student background knowledge based on their age, but to inspire more of those "ah-ha" moments.
- In my classroom, many of my students have never been to school before. They often come to learn English so they can help their children in school. We build on that and bring in the K-12 curriculum so they can see and experience what their children are learning. Their own personal educational journey might be in step with their children and that is where we need to meet them.

Congratulations Beth on this outstanding recognition and good luck at the NCFL conference!