

Moving toward a Research Agenda: Key Questions for Teacher Educators on the Role and Impact of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

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Immediately upon its charter in 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) began work on a policy statement reflecting the Board's vision of effective teaching and accomplished practice. Released in 1989 under the title "What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do," the Board's vision has earned its place as a seminal work on teaching and teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, it has impacted program development and student achievement at all educational levels P-16 with strict adherence to its mission of advancing "the quality of teaching and learning by maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet

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these standards, and advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001).

With a clear mission and comprehensive plan of action, the NBPTS has fulfilled a well-defined role in the professional development of inservice teachers. Furthermore, a focused research agenda has evolved to determine the impact of the National Board certification process upon NBPTS candidates, their students, and P-12 program development. Not so clearly defined is the role of teacher preparation programs in the NBPTS process. Even less obvious appears to be the impact that NBPTS has had upon teacher preparation. Using the documented positive impact that the NBPTS has had upon P-12 education, teacher educators have reason to “believe” that NBPTS has a role in preservice teacher preparation.

As teacher educators move toward a comprehensive research agenda on the role and impact of NBPTS in higher education, four keys help to define and focus that agenda: (1) program design, (2) professional development, (3) personnel, and (4) student (P-16) learning and achievement. A review of existing literature reflects an emphasis upon the role of NBPTS standards and activities in P-12 education, but fails to yield adequate references to the NBPTS impact upon teacher education institutions and programs. Following a summary of the literature supporting these findings relative to P-12 education, questions related to the four key areas are presented with the goal of providing encouragement for and direction in the establishment of such an agenda for teacher education. Also included are suggestions for immediate action on behalf of teacher educators to ensure that a research agenda becomes imbedded in the development, delivery, and evaluation of programs based upon NBPTS standards.

Impact upon P-12 Education

Studies of the work of the National Board support the premise that the certification process benefits the candidates and their students. A review of the literature on National Board certification reveals three recurring areas of impact on P-12 education: professional development of candidates, including reflection and collaboration; leadership development of candidates; and student achievement.

Professional Development of Candidates

Falk (2000) reported that National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs)

found the process itself to be a valuable professional development experience. Having achieved NBPTS certification as a Middle Childhood Generalist, Jenkins (2000) supported Falk's observation: "My newfound knowledge has helped me recapture the enthusiasm of my early years of teaching, the 'I can make a difference — I can conquer the world' enthusiasm, couples with 29 years of experience" (p. 47). She continued, "For me, the benefits of completing the Board process were evident even before I learned that I had earned certification . . . Earning National Board certification has been the most valuable professional development activity of my career" (pp. 47-48). The professional development and service component is consistently identified by NBCTs as one of the most gratifying components of the process (e.g., Davis, Wolf & Borko, 2000; Helms, 1999; McReynolds, 1999; Rotberg, Futrell & Lieberman, 1998; Sumner, 1997; Swain, 1999; Wiebke, 2000).

Integrally linked with professional development is the reflective thinking component of the process. Roden (1999) echoed the thoughts of many candidates, even those who did not earn certification, when he identified reflection as one of the two most significant lessons in the process, the other being collaboration. Specifically, candidates become active participants in their own learning by collecting and analyzing data on their own teaching. Reflective writing leads them to examine the effectiveness of their own teaching and to outline, as necessary, plans for improvement (Benz, 1997; French, 1997).

As candidates progress through the process, they seek support and guidance from each other. They benefit from collaborative activities and participation in a learning community (Areglado, 1999; Mitchell, 1998). One area of concern expressed by NBCTs is the lack of support throughout the process; to compensate for this, candidates form both informal and formal support groups (Rotberg, Futrell & Lieberman, 1998). They become both mentors and mentees, often alternating roles throughout the process. These experiences and relationships have a lasting impression upon their professional growth and identity (Swain, 1999).

Leadership Development of Candidates

A recent Teachers Survey Data Report (*Data Summary for National Board Certified Teachers Leadership Survey, 2001*) provided a detailed look at the impact that earning national certification has had on NBCTs ability and willingness to move into positions of leadership. Summarily, 99.6% of NBCTs are involved in leadership activities ranging from mentoring of new teachers to developing evaluation programs and models. When asked if becoming a NBCT led to additional professional opportunities, 81% of the respondents agreed that it did, while 92%

agreed that their NBCT status has given them more credibility in the education profession.

Petrosky (1998) effectively used the metaphor of “insiders and outsiders” in describing the positive effect that achieving National Board certification has had upon classroom teachers and their increasing involvement in administration, program development, and evaluation/assessment development. Recognizing that the National Board process may enable NBCTs to develop their leadership potential, some states such as New Mexico incorporate the process into their leadership training programs by identifying and encouraging classroom teachers with leadership potential to pursue certification (Johnson, 2001; Mitchell, 1998; Olson, 2000). As reported by NBPTS, “NBCT leadership is making a positive impact on NBCTs themselves, on students and schools, and on the teaching profession. As a result of their leadership, NBCTs often experience increased satisfaction and an increased desire to continue teaching . . . In all, NBCT leadership is worth encouraging” (*Leading from the Classroom*, 2001).

Student Achievement

A third and most important area upon which National Board certification has had a positive impact is that of student achievement. As French (1997) pointed out, the certification process is designed to help teachers identify and develop students’ abilities, thus raising their achievement as evidenced by increased test scores. Additionally, the process provides opportunities for NBPTS candidates to first use a variety of instructional approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles and then to document their impact upon student achievement (Areglado, 1999; Benz, 1997).

In the *Data Summary for National Board Certified Teacher Leadership Survey* (2001), answers to the question “Do teachers certified by NBPTS differ significantly from teacher candidates who did not earn certification in terms of the quality of work produced by their students on classroom assignments and on external modes of student assessment?” revealed a difference between instructional effectiveness of NBCTs and that of non-certified teachers. Specifically, NBCTs appear to have a clearer understanding of factors that contribute to student success (or failure), engage their students more frequently in developmentally appropriate learning tasks, and exhibit the ability to anticipate and plan for challenges that students may face when exposed to new concepts or ideas. Furthermore, based upon the evaluation of student responses to teacher assignments, students in classes taught by NBCTs appeared to exhibit higher levels of understanding, especially of abstract concepts, than their peers

in classes taught by non-certified teachers. Although the study revealed significant differences in achievement, the research team acknowledged difficulty in comparing standardized test scores and recommended additional study in the area of student achievement.

Impact upon Teacher Preparation Programs

In recent years numerous teacher preparation institutions have incorporated the work of the NBPTS into their programs as evidenced by the self-reported list on the Higher Education section of the NBPTS website. "Their efforts include redesigning advanced degree programs, creating support programs for candidates seeing National Board Certification, and recruiting National Board Certified Teachers as clinical faculty" (NBPTS: Higher Education, 2001). Likewise, the NBPTS has emerged as a major impetus in the development and redesign of advanced teacher preparation programs (Tom, 2000; Wise, 2000-2001).

After analyzing selected master's degree programs designed or developed to support NBPTS candidates, Blackwell and Dietz (1999) concluded that to effectively meet the needs of NBPTS candidates such programs must be aligned with NBPTS beliefs and standards and must reinforce knowledge, skills, and dispositions espoused by the NBPTS. The alignment of standards is the foundation of a school/university partnership housed at Ashland University in Ohio (Arnold & Sikula, 1999) and of a partnership between the George Washington University Graduate School of Education and the Fairfax County, Virginia, School System designed to provide support for National Board candidates (Browne, Auton, Freund & Futrell, 1999).

Despite the evidence of collaboration and influence, studies showing the impact of NBPTS involvement upon teacher preparation programs appear to be limited both in number and scope and to focus primarily upon program development. These studies have made an invaluable contribution to the knowledge base; however, a need exists for studies designed to evaluate the impact of NPBTS upon the quality of teacher preparation programs. As previously stated, the identification of four key areas with related sub-questions assists in moving teacher educators toward a more comprehensive research agenda on the role and impact of the NBPTS.

Area I: Program Design

To ensure linkages between P-12 and higher education, NBPTS standards should be considered in the design of professional education programs. The following questions provide guidance in establishing a

research agenda on program development, implementation, and on-going assessment of professional education programs.

- ❖ To what extent should NBPTS propositions and standards be incorporated into pre-service teacher preparation programs? Into in-service [or advanced] programs?
- ❖ How can NBPTS propositions and standards inform and impact educational leadership programs? for principals? for superintendents? for other instructional leaders?
- ❖ How can NBPTS portfolios serve as a model for those required in pre-service programs?
- ❖ How can programs be tailored to meet the needs of teachers in urban, as well as rural, settings?
- ❖ How can programs be designed to ensure appropriate content and experiences in meeting needs of students and candidates with exceptionalities and from diverse cultural and social backgrounds?
- ❖ How do the NBPTS standards align with certification or licensure standards within each state?

Area II: Personnel

Cooperative sharing of human resources is necessary both to provide adequate support for NBPTS candidates and to utilize the expertise of NBCTs in program design. To determine the most effective use of personnel, the following questions should be considered.

- ❖ How can teacher preparation programs effectively and adequately utilize the expertise and experiences of NBCTs?
- ❖ How can existing school/university/community partnerships be used to promote collaborative planning and teaching?
- ❖ What are appropriate compensation structures for NBCTs who teach as adjuncts in teacher preparation programs? as student teacher/intern supervisors?

Area III: Professional Development

Appropriate professional development opportunities are essential for NBPTS candidates as they progress through the certification process and for teacher education faculty as they fill various roles (i.e., mentors, evaluators, readers) throughout the process. Answers to the following

questions provide a framework for teacher educators both to offer and participate in professional development initiatives focused on NBPTS.

- ❖ What is the role of teacher preparation programs in providing support for NBPTS candidates?
- ❖ What types of professional development opportunities and supports are the most beneficial for candidates? the least beneficial?
- ❖ How can teacher preparation institutions offer professional development opportunities and supports for NBPTS candidates without “skimming” resources from existing programs?
- ❖ What impact does teaming with a NBCT have upon the professional development of college and university faculty?

Area IV: Student (P-16) Learning and Achievement

The learning and achievement obtained by K-12 students and preservice candidates should be investigated and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of NBPTS in comparison to other programs. In doing so, attention should be paid to the following questions.

- ❖ How does the achievement of pre-service candidates who are placed with NBCTs to complete their student teaching or internship compare with the achievement of those in other placements?
- ❖ What impact do placements with NBCTs have upon the ability of preservice candidates to reflect upon and analyze their teaching effectiveness?
- ❖ What impact do placements with NBCTs have upon the ability of preservice teachers to meet the needs of *all* learners? to ensure equity for special needs learners?
- ❖ What impact do placements with NBCTs have upon the ability of preservice teachers to analyze student achievement data and to make adjustments, as needed, in instruction?

Final Thoughts

After reflecting upon the key areas, teacher educators must now provide answers to “How do we move the research agenda forward?” First, each institution must identify key areas and sub-questions appropriate to their setting; the ones discussed above are representative of a much larger pool of questions. Second, teacher educators should not

attempt to re-do what has already been done or to duplicate efforts unless substantive reasons exist for doing so. If the goal is to move toward a more comprehensive research agenda, then researchers must focus upon questions and issues not previously addressed in prior studies. Investigating a program such as the NBPTS is a monumental task; collaboration among teacher educators/researchers is crucial. Because of the limitations of time and resources, research consortia offer viable, manageable options for accomplishing the tasks and answering crucial questions within a reasonable timeframe.

As noted from this brief review of literature, a strong body of literature exists to support the positive impact of National Board certification upon P-12 education. Even though first-person accounts of candidates make up a significant portion of the literature, data-driven studies are also available. Furthermore, those areas such as student achievement for which minimal data exist appear to be a priority for future research. With many questions related to P-12 education now addressed, the time has come to identify not only the role of the National Board in teacher preparation but also to investigate its impact upon teacher preparation programs, including the impact upon student (P-16) achievement. By identifying key areas and focused questions, teacher educators can move toward a research agenda, thus filling the existing gaps in NBPTS-related research.

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