



Taking on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: Alignment, Recognition and Representation

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The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987 to develop and operate a system of advanced certification; including a set of high and rigorous standards of accomplished teaching and an assessment system designed to measure these standards. Utilizing a qualitative, case study framework, this research project was designed to investigate the meaning perspectives associated with the NBPTS certification process from the point of view of a National Board candidate interacting with the procedures, assessments and requirements necessary to achieve certification. The study asserts the candidate focused on the alignment of her teaching to the vision of accomplished practice set forth in the NBPTS standards, the possible recognition of being NBPTS certified, and the challenges with representing teaching practices through the assessment vehicles provided in the certification process.

“The mission of the National Board is to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a national voluntary system to assess and certify those teachers who meet these standards, and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools.” (NBPTS, 1989). In the opening statement from the document entitled, “Towards High and Rigorous Standards: What Accomplished Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do” (NBPTS, 1989), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) expresses its mission to create a set of standards that describe in detail the board’s vision of accomplished practice, and a certification system designed to assess and certify teachers who match this vision.

The NBPTS was initiated to increase the professional development of teachers, the status of the teaching profession and the quality of education

in America (NBPTS, 1987). By establishing high and rigorous standards, and developing an extensive assessment and certification system, it has been suggested that the NBPTS will have a profound effect both politically and professionally on the teaching community nationwide (Baratz-Snowden, Shapiro & Streeter, 1993). Because of the influence the NBPTS certification process may have on classroom teachers throughout the United States, it is important to understand the meanings teachers construct concerning the NBPTS standards, the certification process and its relationship to their classroom teaching practices.

The standards movement in education, of which the NBPTS is associated, has had an extensive effect on the way teaching, learning and professional development is enacted in public schools (Noddings, 1997). Like any standards based educational reform movement, the unifying influences and the assessments that accompany the NBPTS certification

process offer possibilities, as well as challenges, in both political and educational arenas (Eisner, 1998). As a relative newcomer in the professional development arena, the NBPTS process has yet to be fully documented and understood from the perspective of the teacher candidates proceeding through the certification process.

In numerous educational publications, classroom teachers that have gone through the certification process have written about the effects the NBPTS process has had on their lives and teaching practices (Cascio, 1995; Rose, 1999; Shapiro, 1993). These reports have been overwhelmingly positive, expressing the impact the NBPTS process has had on teachers' teaching practices, thinking processes, the enhanced status of the teaching profession and the improvements in the quality of education provided their students (Buday & Kelly, 1996).

Classroom teachers, university educators, state legislators and members of the business community have come together to create what the NBPTS describes as "high and rigorous standards" for a variety of teacher specializations within the teaching profession (NBPTS, 1987). The NBPTS certification process may represent a significant change in the way professional development and teacher certification is implemented, with all the inherent possibilities and challenges associated with such an endeavor (Petrosky, 1994).

In contrast to the testimonial evidence provided by various NBPTS candidates and certified teachers, this study seeks to add to the research literature by describing and interpreting the meaning perspectives associated with the NBPTS process, as constructed by an elementary classroom teacher seeking National Board Certification in the Early Childhood Generalist category of specialization. Working from an interpretivist research paradigm (Erickson, 1986), using a single-case study design (Stake, 1994), this research project was designed to gain access to the meaning perspectives associated with the NBPTS certification process from the point of view of a National Board candidate interacting with the procedures, assessments and requirements necessary to achieve certification..

A Brief History of the NBPTS

In response to recommendations made by the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, the NBPTS was created in 1987 to serve two distinct purposes: (a) the creation of an assessment and certification system to offer teachers an advanced certification, and (b) to establish a standards setting board to develop standards in as many as thirty-six separate teaching certification areas (Carnegie Forum, 1986). In addition to the standards and

certification system designed to recognize accomplished teaching, the NBPTS was initiated to provide a staff development model based on the high and rigorous standards created by classroom teachers and other educators, legislators, school board members, business community members and educational researchers (Carnegie Forum, 1986).

The NBPTS is governed by a sixty-three member board, a majority of whom are practicing classroom teachers. The NBPTS is described as a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that was initiated to respond to the claim that the teaching profession, unlike medicine, architecture or accounting, has not codified the knowledge, skills and dispositions that account for accomplished practice and that certain misconceptions about what constitutes good teaching continue to exist (Baratz-Snowden, Shapiro & Streeter, 1993).

Classroom teachers can apply for NBPTS certification in any of the twenty-four specializations, ranging from Early Childhood Generalist to Young Adult English Language Arts. Each of these certifications align to the NBPTS standards developed by teachers, for teachers, intended to create a unified vision of teaching across the United States (Ambach, 1996). The goal of the NBPTS in the next decade is to certify over 100,000 teachers, roughly one for every school in the United States.

Possibilities and Challenges

The NBPTS certification process and its accompanying assessment system have been touted as a model for professional development (French, 1997), a unique process for certifying accomplished teachers and attracting qualified individuals into the teaching profession (Shapiro, 1993), a vision of excellence in teaching that combines the wisdom of practice of outstanding teachers with consensus among the broader education community (Barringer, 1993) and a process that requires teachers to think and talk about their practice in ways they have never done before (Mitchell, 1998). Proponents of the NBPTS system suggest the certification process and the development of rigorous teaching standards will increase the professional standing of the teaching profession, create a sense of collegiality among teachers, develop teachers that are more reflective and cognizant of their practice, create a consistent, unified vision of accomplished teaching and instill in the general public a positive image of public education (Buday & Kelly, 1996; NBPTS, 1989). The positive outcomes proposed by supporters of the NBPTS certification system include: (a) an enhanced status accorded public school teachers, (b) the recognition of accomplished practice as represented by the NBPTS certification process, (c) the attraction

of qualified teachers to the profession, (d) the promotion of reflective practice, (e) enhanced collegial relationships among teachers, and (f) the use of new assessment procedures to capture the complexities inherent in accomplished teaching.

In contrast to the positive outcomes suggested by NBPTS proponents, other educators have levied challenges to the NBPTS standards, assessments and certification system. Educators have challenged the NBPTS process on the grounds that it will create a competitive atmosphere rather than the collegiality it purports to establish (Marshall, 1996), and will create unnecessary distinctions between teachers, leading to an informal hierarchy in the teaching profession, rather than the unifying vision the board proposes (King, 1994). Still other educators have claimed that the NBPTS standards and criteria are not consistent with what many scholars have described as culturally sensitive teaching pedagogies (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). Another challenge levied against the NBPTS is the trend that minority teachers, especially African American teachers, are achieving NBPTS certification in disproportionate numbers (Bond, 1998).

Finally, Labaree (1992) suggests that the standards themselves represent a normative force on teaching practices, when the teaching profession should be celebrating its diversity and creative differences, rather than a solitary vision of accomplished teaching. It is possible that the rigorous standards outlining the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice, and the reflective or systematic thinking that teachers engage in during the certification process, improve the quality of classroom teaching, whereas the assessment procedures utilized by the NBPTS are merely a traditional, numerical scoring device, designed to certify and normalize accomplished teaching.

A review of the literature revealed a sense of "skeptical optimism" about the future of the NBPTS standards and its assessment process. Although the NBPTS teaching standards may reflect a vision of accomplished teaching that more teachers may be able to demonstrate in the years ahead, one should remain cautious about the standards-based reform movement in general, the hierarchy of teachers that may result from NBPTS certification, the assessment system's ability to distinguish and certify accomplished teaching and the means of representing quality teaching given the vehicles provided by the NBPTS certification system (Serafini, 2002).

Research Questions

Interpretivist research designs are emergent and flexible, allowing for the construction of knowledge and changes in data collection and perspectives during the study (Erickson, 1986).

However, the following questions provided an initial focus for the study: (a) What are the meaning perspectives associated with the NBPTS process as constructed by an elementary classroom teacher involved in the NBPTS certification process for Early Childhood Education?, (b) How are the standards and the certification process interpreted by the candidate as the candidate progressed through the requirements towards achieving certification?, (c) How does the NBPTS certification process and the accompanying standards define the Core Proposition "thinking systematically about one's teaching and learning from one's experience?", and (d) What is the focus of the teacher's systematic thinking as the candidate progresses through the certification process?

Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted from the perspective of an interpretivist research paradigm (Erickson, 1986). It is a qualitative study designed to understand and describe the interpretations of a candidate going through the NBPTS certification process. Since the majority of studies conducted by NBPTS researchers are quantitative studies intending to understand the overall effects of the NBPTS certification system and standards setting process, this study focuses on an individual candidate throughout the certification process. This study was conducted to describe in detail the meanings associated with the NBPTS process from the perspective of a classroom teacher and to construct warranted assertions of the NBPTS process.

Based on the idea that individuals construct and assign meanings to the objects and events in their lives and act according to these constructions (Erickson, 1986), research methods were employed to describe and interpret the meanings associated with the NBPTS process by the teacher candidate attempting to achieve certification. Interpretivist research is based on the interpretation of naturally occurring events and the representation of those events to the public. It is a reconstruction of the meaning perspectives held by the actors in their natural settings. Merriam (1998) writes, "... reality is constructed by individuals interacting in their social worlds. Qualitative [interpretivist] researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed*, (italics in original) that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p.6).

Stake (1994) states, " a case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by methods of inquiry used." (p. 236). Cases are constructed based on the conceptual framework of the researcher, the physical and temporal distinctions of time and place, the theoretical frameworks brought to the study, and

the paradigms the researcher holds to be important (Ragin & Becker, 1992).

Participants and Setting

The researcher worked as a staff development facilitator at an elementary school in an urban center in the southwest United States helping classroom teachers develop child-centered and literature-based approaches to reading and literacy education. The researcher worked in approximately thirty different classrooms each week demonstrating approaches to literacy instruction, responding to various teachers efforts during their classroom instruction and offering resources and support for their professional growth.

It was in the position of staff developer that Jennifer, the National Board teacher candidate who participated in this study (all names in this study are pseudonyms) was introduced to the researcher. Jennifer's primary, multiage classroom (grades K-2) can best be described as a child-centered, multiage classroom. A workshop format was employed in language arts instruction. Math instruction utilized manipulatives and problem-solving activities, while science instruction included hands-on experiments and inquiry-based thematic units.

Jennifer's classroom contained approximately twenty-four students throughout the course of the study. The demographic makeup of her classroom was fifty percent Hispanic, thirty percent Caucasian, and twenty percent African American. The school in which she worked was part of the federal Title One program, with eighty percent of the school's children receiving free or reduced priced lunches.

In her sixth year as a primary grade teacher, Jennifer decided that she would apply for NBPTS certification. After learning of her decision to pursue NBPTS certification, the researcher approached her to participate in a research study focusing on the NBPTS certification process. Two factors were important in making the decision to select Jennifer. First, Jennifer was one of only twenty teachers applying for certification in the geographical proximity, and second, because of the working relationship that had been established between teacher and staff development facilitator, the researcher felt comfortable approaching Jennifer with this request. Stake (1994) explains that the primary consideration in selecting a case is opportunity to learn and access to the context to be studied.

Jennifer

Jennifer was considered by many of her colleagues to be an outstanding teacher even before she applied for the NBPTS certification process. Jennifer was a member of several professional organizations, including the National Council

Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, and had presented at several conferences prior to the onset of the study. The two principals that Jennifer worked for during her tenure as a classroom teacher had called on her to lead staff development workshops at their respective schools, had appointed her lead teacher for her grade level, and gave her exemplary teacher evaluations over her years working with them. In general, Jennifer was considered an outstanding teacher, one that had earned the respect of many of her colleagues and administrators.

Data Sources

This study involved the collection of five types of data: (a) interview transcripts, (b) journal entries, (c) NBPTS documents, (d) portfolio artifacts and interpretive commentaries created by the candidate for submission to the NBPTS assessors, and (e) observational field notes taken during support group meetings. However, the majority of data used in the study was collected primarily through a series of open interviews, where the candidate simply recounted any work and involvement with the NBPTS process since the last interview, and semi-structured interviews where a selection of questions were created before the interview and presented to the candidate during the interview.

Electronic mail (e-mail) was utilized to send Jennifer excerpts from the previous weeks' interviews in order to have her check the transcripts for accuracy. These email notes also served as prompts for our future interviews. In a sense, the excerpts from the interviews served as a "member check" during the course of the year long interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), allowing Jennifer to clarify and expand on her interview statements. Information from previous interviews was regularly used to begin subsequent interviews, allowing the candidate the opportunity to clarify particular statements or expand on any points she had previously offered. In addition, the candidate kept a reflective journal during the course of the NBPTS certification process to write about her thoughts and concerns. The reflective journal entries offered a unique perspective, one that was not always available in field notes or interview data.

Prior to the study, the NBPTS distributed, as part of its information campaign and public awareness efforts, many brochures, articles, web-site resources, and information packets outlining the intentions, procedures, and mission of the NBPTS certification process and organization. These sources of information were analyzed to investigate perspectives to the NBPTS procedures and intentions in addition to the one offered by the candidate herself.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures used in this study followed Erickson's interpretive model of qualitative research (Erickson, 1986). According to Erickson (1986) "the basic task of data analysis is to generate assertions that vary in scope and level of inference, largely through induction, and to establish an evidentiary warrant for the assertions one wishes to make." (p. 146). The researcher is looking for "key linkages" among various pieces of data, which can be described as patterns of generalizations within the case at hand.

Theoretical and research memos, written during the data collection period, provided an impetus for the data analysis to follow (Glaser, 1978). These memos were used as a resource for theorizing about what was observed and the data being collected. These memos were used to provide an initial foundation for the data analysis as it proceeded.

Data analysis procedures occurred in three consecutive phases. The first phase began as information was collected from interviews, support group meetings, NBPTS publications, and the candidate's reflective journal. The second phase began when data collection was completed and the entire "data corpus" (Erickson, 1986) was analyzed looking for key linkages and patterns of generalization. After reading through the entire data set twice, seven preliminary categories of data were constructed and the data was organized into individual computer files pertaining to each category. These categories were labeled: (a) Alignment, (b) Providing Evidence, (c) Standardized Reflection, (d) Tensions with Writing, (e) Recognition, (f) Tensions with Assessment, and (g) Support and Collaboration. The final phase of data analysis occurred as the final report was being written. Merriam (1998) writes, "...because data collection and analysis is continuous and simultaneous in qualitative research, there is no clean cut off - no time when everything else [analysis] stops and writing begins." (p. 220). Writing is as much an act of discovery and analysis as it is an act of transcription.

After the seven initial categories listed previously were constructed and detailed descriptions about each category were recorded in a research journal, analysis began looking for connections and relationships among the categories. The initial categories of Providing Evidence and Standardized Reflection fit better as sub-categories within the larger category of Alignment, rather than as separate categories. Although Jennifer provided evidence of her teaching practices and was required to reflect on her teaching, it seemed the primary impetus of these

activities was to align to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice.

The category originally entitled Recognition remained significant throughout the data analysis. The original category of Support and Collaboration was eventually constructed as a sub-category within the category of Recognition. Many aspects of the data labeled Support, was considered an act of recognition. In other words, the data labeled Support or Collaboration included information about various teachers, both NBPTS candidates and other teachers at Jennifer's school, who supported her during the NBPTS process. This evidence of support were considered a form of Recognition.

The category Challenges with Representation was constructed from the two initial categories: Tensions with Writing, and Tensions with Assessment. These categories, described initially as "tensions," referred to the candidate's challenge of representing herself as an accomplished teacher. The tensions focused on the candidate's ability to represent her level of teaching ability to the assessors through the assessment center exercises and portfolio entries. It is because of this focus that the category of Challenges was renamed Representation. Although every bit of data did not fit neatly into one of the three categories described, these three categories and the subcategories described provided key linkages to a preponderance of the data set.

Results

The goal of data analysis is to construct and warrant the assertions that arise from subsequent readings and re-readings of the data set. Erickson (1986) explains, "one of the basic tasks of data analysis is to generate assertions, largely through induction, by reviewing the full set of field notes, interview transcripts, journal entries and pertinent documents." (p. 146). Based on an extensive analysis of the data set, the following three assertions were put forth.

Assertion #1

The teacher candidate viewed the NBPTS certification process as one of aligning to the vision of accomplished practice set forth in the NBPTS standards documents. The teacher candidate viewed, as part of this process of alignment, her need to adopt the NBPTS standards as a vision of accomplished practice, to provide evidence of this alignment in her teaching portfolio and to focus her thinking and reflective processes on the criteria set forth in the standards documents for accomplished practice.

One of the central tenets of the NBPTS certification process is the adoption of the NBPTS standards as a vision of accomplished practice. This vision of accomplished practice is then used as a lens by the teacher candidates to assess and critique their

teaching practices during the certification process. From the outset of the NBPTS certification process, Jennifer believed it was her responsibility to provide evidence of her alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice through the assessment vehicles provided during the NBPTS certification process.

Assertion #2

The teacher candidate believed that she would be recognized as an accomplished teacher by achieving NBPTS certification. Jennifer viewed the NBPTS certification as a legitimate recognition of her accomplished teaching practice, believing that achieving NBPTS certification would lead to increased positive recognition of her accomplished teaching practices among her peers, the educational community and the public in general.

Jennifer believed that the NBPTS certification represented a legitimate endorsement of her teaching ability, one that would increase her status as a teaching professional. Since there are few, if any, formally recognized hierarchies among elementary school teachers, she believed the NBPTS certification could be used as a vehicle to allow her to stand out as an accomplished teacher among her peers. Jennifer also believed that achieving National Board Certification would lead to increased status for the entire teaching profession.

Assertion #3

The teacher candidate faced several challenges in representing herself as an accomplished teacher through the vehicles provided by the certification process, including the teaching portfolio and assessment center exercises. Jennifer often felt the written commentaries she included in the NBPTS teaching portfolio were unable to satisfactorily represent her level of accomplished teaching. There seemed to be various “tensions” or “challenges” associated with the assessment vehicles used to represent her teaching practices. Representing the complexities of accomplished practice through written, interpretive commentaries and videotape segments presented a considerable challenge Jennifer needed to overcome in order to achieve National Board Certification.

In order to further delineate each of the assertions put forth, each assertion will be described in detail and presented with data from a variety of sources to support these three assertions.

Aligning to the NBPTS Vision of Accomplished Practice

As teacher candidates begin the NBPTS certification process, they must become familiar with the particulars of the vision of accomplished practice as set forth in the NBPTS standards. This vision is set forth in the written language of the NBPTS standards

and candidates are required to interpret these written standards and demonstrate their alignment to the NBPTS vision in the written commentaries and videotape segments submitted to the NBPTS in their teaching portfolio. The standards are not delivered to the candidates on videotapes or by classroom demonstration; rather they are delivered to candidates in written statements from which candidates must interpret and relate these written standards to their classroom teaching practices. The standards are general statements about accomplished teaching, open to wide interpretations, represented in written language as de-contextualized propositions about teaching that require teachers to contextualize the NBPTS standards into their classroom context to determine what to include in the written commentaries and artifacts contained in the portfolio they submit for certification (Burroughs, Roe & Hendricks-Lee, 1998).

As Jennifer became acquainted with the NBPTS standards, she understood there to be an alignment between her vision of what it meant to be an accomplished teacher and the NBPTS' vision of accomplished teaching. Even before beginning the NBPTS certification process, Jennifer believed she possessed many of the qualities of accomplished teaching described in the NBPTS standards, and that she would be able to demonstrate them in the teaching portfolio she would submit for certification.

By reading through the standards documents on numerous occasions, Jennifer believed that she had become familiar with the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice. She began to use the written descriptions of the NBPTS standards as a lens to assess, critique and interpret her own teaching practices. After reading through the NBPTS standards documents provided to her during the initial phase of the certification process, Jennifer explained:

I really thought surely that there was something that I don't really strongly agree with, but I went back through, and I was looking through [the standards], there really isn't anything in there that I can disagree with. I know it was a group of Early Childhood teachers that came up with these. It must have been a really good group of Early Childhood teachers that came up with these standards because they are not fluff, and they are not cutesy, they just spell out what good teaching is and what it looks like in an Early Childhood classroom. I think that is why I like them so much. It's very broad and open and it touches on everything I do, so that is kind of nice.

As Jennifer began to produce the written commentaries and videotape segments required for certification, she referred to the NBPTS standards in order to make decisions about what aspects of her teaching to include in the portfolio as a representative sampling of her classroom practices. In other words, because of the space and time limitations imposed by the certification process, she had to decide what to include and what to leave out of the written commentaries and portfolio entries she submitted to the NBPTS. The assessments, the teaching portfolio and the written commentaries became the vehicles Jennifer would use to represent and demonstrate her alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice.

The promotional literature distributed by the NBPTS described the standards as a vision of what teaching should be like as we move into the 21st century. However, this vision is delivered to the candidate in the form of written standards. Candidates must construct their own interpretations of the NBPTS vision by reading through and becoming familiar with the standards documents. Candidates must decide how their interpretations of the written NBPTS standards relate to their local contexts and the teaching practices of their own classrooms.

Jennifer viewed the NBPTS standards as *the* standards of accomplished teaching available in the United States at the time of this study. Just as a lens on a camera focuses on certain aspects in one's field of vision, the NBPTS documents were used as a lens to focus on certain aspects of her teaching practice. This NBPTS lens is designed to help candidates focus on those aspects of their teaching practice that are included in the NBPTS' vision of accomplished practice in order to be able to write about them and provide evidence of this level of practice in their portfolios. In this sense, the standards limit the field of vision of the teacher candidate to what aligns to the vision set forth in the NBPTS standards, while at the same time providing a focus for the candidate during the certification process.

The expectation that candidates adopt and align to the NBPTS vision, temporarily setting aside any of their own criteria for accomplished teaching, was discussed at support group meetings during presentations by several NBPTS teacher facilitators and in various NBPTS documents. Jennifer consistently mentioned her willingness to forego any other standards of quality teaching she might have to focus on the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice in order to be successful during the NBPTS certification process.

Jennifer attended several meetings with other NBPTS candidates during the course of the

certification process. At one of the meetings, an NBPTS certified teacher that had worked as a scorer for the NBPTS evaluation team discussed what she felt was important for candidates to know about how their portfolios and interpretive commentaries would be scored. She told the audience of teacher candidates:

After working for a short time with these [NBPTS] assessors, I want you to know they knew exactly what they were looking for. Teachers, you need to remember and learn what each portfolio entry is addressing and what the standards are for each portfolio entry. Be sure to focus on the language of the standards. So when you look at the [lesson] topics be sure it addresses the standards you are looking at. It can't just be a wonderful lesson if it doesn't answer what that entry is looking for. The goals for the particular lesson must align to the NBPTS goals for what you are teaching. And how it fits in the big picture. It can't just be a good lesson, it has to align with the NBPTS goals and standards.

The facilitator was giving the teacher candidates advice on what to include in their portfolios and how to write better interpretive commentaries to submit for certification. Her advice hinges on the teacher candidates being able to demonstrate their alignment to the NBPTS standards.

In a reflective journal entry, written as Jennifer began to draft the interpretive commentaries that she would include with her portfolio entries, she explained:

My focus is on my goals and the standards pretty much, and I was trying to think about what Emily [an NBPTS teacher facilitator] was saying after we watched another candidate's video. She said, 'It's not about being able to show good teaching, it's about being able to, the standards are what you are supposed to be doing, and you can be doing good stuff in your classroom, but it may not be what the standards say you should be doing.'

In addition, Jennifer wrote the following entry in her reflective journal:

My primary purpose of going through [the NBPTS process] is to inform my practice. I want to see if others think my teaching aligns with the Standards. I am hoping by the end of this all, I am more knowledgeable about the standards and able to articulate them.

This process of aligning to the standards is also supported by the literature distributed by the

NBPTS. The following excerpt from a brochure entitled, "National Board Certification: A Guide for Candidates", published by the American Federation of Teachers, a teachers' union involved with the NBPTS, represents the kind of alignment that the developers of the NBPTS process believe to be necessary for achieving certification. It states:

The first step in approaching the National Board Standards is to adopt the right mindset- namely, that you agree with the National Board Standards and that you see yourself embodying these standards in your practice... In other words, there is no guesswork involved- the National Board Standards are the only standards by which your teaching will be assessed. (American Federation of Teachers, 1998, p.18).

Not only does alignment involve coming to know the standards, but it also involves learning to use the language of the standards in one's own writing. Jennifer was not only trying to understand the NBPTS standards, she began to use the language from the standards in the writing that she included in her portfolio submitted for certification. In an interview conducted after her portfolio had been submitted, Jennifer talked about how she went about constructing the interpretive commentaries that accompanied the video segments of her teaching:

I wrote to the standards a lot. I incorporated the language [of the standards] and made sure to incorporate words like, 'understanding young children' and made sure that I said enough about that in each of the entries that it required. And the standards just kind of helped me stay within their lines, to keep what was most important for the entry, incorporating those standards along with whatever I was teaching. The directions and all the advice I was given said to use the standards, use the language of the standards, and it doesn't say anywhere in the [NBPTS] directions that you should use their language, but it does say that you should refer to it, and make sure that your writing covers all those areas.

Teacher candidates may be thinking about their practice, but are directed to do so through the lens of the NBPTS standards. For Jennifer, the certification process became a process of representing her alignment to a set of predetermined standards of accomplished teaching, as described in detail in the NBPTS standards, through the assessment vehicles provided during the certification process.

Being Recognized as an Accomplished Teacher

In a variety of the literature provided by the NBPTS, including brochures, press releases, and the NBPTS web-site, increasing the professional status of classroom teachers has been described as one of the primary goals of the NBPTS certification and standards development process. In addition, the NBPTS standards and certification process has been purported to create a unifying vision of accomplished practice that experienced classroom teachers should aspire to achieve (Ambach, 1996). Because of the reported lack of formal structures for recognizing accomplished practice currently in place in the teaching profession, it is believed that classroom teachers will gravitate towards the legitimization of accomplished practice offered by the NBPTS (King, 1994).

During this study, it became evident that Jennifer was looking to have her teaching abilities recognized, not only by the educational community and the general public, but by herself as well. Because of this, data suggesting two types of recognition were identified: self-recognition and public-professional recognition. First, self-recognition is defined as the process of seeing oneself as an accomplished teacher. Jennifer came to believe that she could legitimize her teaching practices by aligning to the NBPTS standards. If she achieved certification, she believed that the certification would legitimize her standing as an accomplished teacher, that it would somehow make her quality of teaching more "official". Shortly before Jennifer was scheduled to receive written notification concerning her status as an NBPTS candidate, she wrote in her reflective journal:

My perception of myself as a classroom teacher is really wrapped up in this [NBPTS] process right now. I want to believe that this process will set the exemplary teachers apart from the mediocre teachers, and even more from the "sucky" teachers. I don't think my teaching practice has dramatically changed since going through the process, however, going into this year [the school year after the NBPTS process], I felt more confident about the way I run my room and set up the environment because I have the National Standards to back me up. I grow and change each year because I read and reflect on my interactions in my room. I don't think I did more of this because of the [NBPTS] process, it's just what I do.

Although, Jennifer believed that she was already an accomplished teacher before the NBPTS process began, she believed that aligning to the

NBPTS standards would legitimize her level of accomplished teaching practices and provide her with a nationally recognized criteria to support her perception of herself as an accomplished teacher. She believed that aligning to the NBPTS standards and ultimately achieving certification would set her apart from what she has described as mediocre, or “sucky,” teachers.

Jennifer believed that the NBPTS certification process was a challenging process to go through, on that no every teacher could handle, and ultimately the NBPTS certification would separate her level of teaching from the average teacher, She explains:

I don't think just any “Joe Schmoe” teacher could come through this and be able to meet the National Standards, at least for Early Childhood. I ask [myself], ‘Can I meet this level of teaching?’ Because, its a lot in those [NBPTS] standards, things that should be happening in your classroom, and to be making sure that you can do all of those things, its like a bar to see if you are reaching that level.

For Jennifer, the NBPTS standards were a “bar,” a level of challenge she was up to demonstrating in order to be recognized as an accomplished teacher.

The second type of recognition, described as public-professional recognition, refers to the recognition of accomplished teaching by other members of the teaching profession and the general public, including state and federal legislators, government officials, parents of school children and the business community. Being recognized as an accomplished teacher within the educational community and by the general public has been suggested as an important consideration in a candidate's decision to attempt NBPTS certification (Baratz-Snowden, Shapiro & Streeter, 1993). Teachers, like members of other professions, desire to be seen as accomplished members of their profession, and often look to external certifications, awards or exams to legitimize this recognition.

Many of the elementary school districts throughout the United States are currently offering monetary stipends for becoming National Board Certified. Ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, these stipends were described by Jennifer as a “nice bonus” for all of her efforts. In the district where Jennifer works, only five teachers were selected from those that applied to receive financial and clerical support from the district. She felt that being chosen to receive the financial support, and being offered a substitute teacher for up to ten school days in order to work on

her certification, was a form of professional recognition.

Jennifer felt NBPTS certified teachers deserved the recognition they received for their level of accomplished teaching. She viewed the NBPTS certification as an “elite club” that deserved the level of recognition she hoped would be forthcoming if she became certified. In an entry in her reflective journal she wrote:

Those that have achieved certification are part of an elite club. I suppose if they go through this process and are successful they deserve recognition. Honestly, part of the glamour of doing this, is that I am hoping that it will give me some sort of recognition.

At every meeting the researcher attended, whenever an NBPTS certified teacher was introduced they received a lengthy and enthusiastic round of applause. Teacher candidates seemed to acknowledge their accomplishments and spent time talking with them about the challenges they faced during the certification process. At one of the support meetings, an NBPTS facilitators stated: “This [NBPTS process] is all consuming. You basically put your life on hold. You are the best of the best! It is not like anything else you have done. It is all consuming.” She explained how challenging the process was and then introduced two NBPTS certified teachers, at which time the teacher candidates rose to offer the two teachers a standing ovation.

However, Jennifer also realized that the NBPTS certification was not as universally recognized as she would like. In an interview she explained:

As soon as I got my [NBPTS] standards, I tried talking to people, ‘What have you heard about it?’ Most people don't even know much about it [NBPTS]. Except, well in our research group [at Jennifer's school], they knew a little about it. To some people you say, ‘I'm going through National Board Certification,’ and they have no clue. They say, ‘What's that?’ And they're educators! It's kind of unfortunate.

Jennifer felt that teachers needed to be more aware of the NBPTS certification and process. If teachers didn't know about the NBPTS certification, the recognition she felt she deserved would not be forthcoming. For Jennifer, self and public-professional recognition was an important factor in her decision to apply for NBPTS certification. She valued the NBPTS certification process, and hoped that achieving certification would give her the recognition of teaching excellence she felt she deserved.

Challenges with Representing Accomplished Practice

The primary function of the teaching portfolio and the assessment center exercises is to provide an opportunity for teacher candidates to represent their teaching abilities to the NBPTS team of assessors. In fact, the teaching portfolio and the assessment center exercises were the sole artifacts used to represent Jennifer's alignment to the vision of accomplished practice set forth in the NBPTS standards. The portfolio and assessment center exercises were each scored to determine whether Jennifer would achieve NBPTS certification.

In the process of describing her classroom and putting into words those aspects of her teaching practice that Jennifer wanted to present to the NBPTS assessors, Jennifer was forced to represent her teaching through the written commentaries and video segments required by the NBPTS certification process. At a support group meeting before Jennifer began the certification process, a representative from the NBPTS told the group of candidates:

You need to show you at your best. A good lesson. The clearer you can make to them [NBPTS assessors] the practices you use and why you use them, the better off you will be. You want to give the assessor the best picture of your practice you can. Start using the language of the standards in your written answers to the portfolio prompts. Take your own subject and add the predicate from the standards documents itself.

As the NBPTS representative continued to explain the assessment process to Jennifer and the other candidates, Jennifer began to realize the goal of the assessment process was to provide evidence of one's alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished teaching through the assessment vehicles provided. Jennifer needed to learn to represent "the best picture of her practice" to the NBPTS assessors through the assessment vehicles she would be required to complete.

The assessors never met Jennifer face to face, conducted interviews or engaged in on-site, classroom observations during the certification process. The items contained in the portfolio, and her responses to the assessment center exercises, were the only artifacts used to represent Jennifer's teaching abilities to the NBPTS assessors.

The two primary challenges of representing her teaching practices Jennifer faced during the certification process were: (a) deciding what to include in the portfolio entries and what to discard, and (b) learning to write in an unfamiliar genre in order to represent her alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice through her writing. The

portfolio entries and assessment center exercises had rigid space, time and content requirements that Jennifer had to adhere to during the assessment exercises. In addition, the written interpretive commentaries that Jennifer was required to construct were a type of writing she had never encountered.

Choices must be made about what to include and what to discard since every aspect of one's classroom and teaching practice cannot be included. Candidates must represent their classroom teaching practices, which exists as a series of acts or performances that occur in a specific context, through a set of videotapes, written commentaries and assessment center exercises. Delandshire and Petrosky (1998) suggest that every representation of the act of teaching is a reduction of the contexts and actions of the actual teaching-learning event to what can be included in the assessment vehicles provided.

Jennifer struggled at times trying to describe her classroom context and her teaching in clear and concise language that fit the NBPTS entry directions, space limitations, and portfolio requirements. In an interview, Jennifer commented:

There is so much that goes on within the classroom that it's hard to get it down on paper, especially if they [NBPTS assessment exercises] don't ask the right questions for me to answer. There's not enough space to explain everything. It's hard to paint a clear picture. They ask very specific questions that lead you to respond in very specific ways, but it doesn't necessarily paint the whole picture.

Along with each artifact of student work and video tape segment selected, Jennifer was required to write an interpretive commentary according to the entry directions and writing instructions included in the NBPTS certification materials. Each of these written interpretive commentaries has its own requirements, space limitations and font restrictions, and is used as a representative sample of her teaching as a whole. In essence, the interpretive commentaries Jennifer constructed were a distinctive genre that she had to come to understand, and be able to write in, if she was to be successful in the NBPTS process.

These interpretive commentaries are a unique genre that may be unfamiliar to many classroom teachers. Burroughs, Roe and Hendricks-Lee (1998) state, "Because NBPTS discourse relies upon decontextualized propositions about teaching written for distant audiences, we hypothesized that teachers, who work in local, situated learning communities, might have difficulty negotiating the [NBPTS] Board's discourse" (p.34).

The NBPTS portfolio entries have explicit instructions, and come with an optional format that

candidates are invited to follow. Although Jennifer was provided with these explicit instructions and the standards that accompany each entry, she had never written detailed descriptions of her classroom or teaching practices for a certification process in this particular style or genre before. This created a challenge to her as she prepared the written commentaries to be included in her portfolio.

It is important to note that the NBPTS standards are broad, general statements regarding the vision of accomplished practice set forth by the NBPTS board. These standards are delivered to the teacher candidates in written format, and candidates must then interpret the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice for themselves. Teachers are required to, first, interpret the NBPTS standards of accomplished practice and, second, represent their alignment to these standards, in writing, using the assessment vehicles provided.

In the process of writing, audience and purpose are important factors in determining the structures, style and content of a particular piece of writing. Because of this, Jennifer became concerned about the audience of NBPTS assessors that would eventually read and interpret her portfolio and assessment center exercises, and the style and content of the interpretive commentaries she constructed. In an interview as Jennifer was preparing interpretive commentaries for several entries in her portfolio, she explained:

The directions and all the advice I was given said to use the standards, use the language of the standards. It doesn't say anywhere in the [NBPTS] directions that you should use their language, but it does say that you should refer to it, and make sure that your writing covers all those areas, the things in each of those entries. I did this so that it would be easy, completely clear for them so they [NBPTS assessors] could pick it up easy.

Jennifer knew that the NBPTS scorers were looking for specific things, for example the language of the standards, and was sure to include some of this language in her written commentaries. In an interview conducted while Jennifer was writing some of the interpretive commentaries for her portfolio, she discussed the challenges of finding the right words to describe her classroom and her teaching practices. She said that she would often refer to the actual language of the NBPTS standards documents to solve this dilemma. She explained:

I wrote to the standards a lot. I incorporated the language of the standards and made sure to incorporate words like, 'understanding young children.' The standards just kind of

helped me stay within their lines, to help me keep what was most important for the entry, that is, incorporating those standards along with whatever I was teaching. After I finished writing, I would go back and read through it and think, 'Oh, I can plug in these words from the standards, because it's the same thing, just said differently.' When I did my writing, I would answer the question, read about it, and just write down what I thought about it. If I got stuck on something I was trying to explain, wasn't sure how to put it into words, I would refer to the standards, find a piece that maybe talked about that [aspect of her classroom] and say, 'There's a thing to say.' or, 'I can plug in these words from the standards, because it's the same thing, only said differently.' I used a lot, a lot of their words because it was what they asked for, and I felt comfortable doing it. The directions and all the advice I was given [by the NBPTS facilitators] said to use the standards, use the language of the standards. It doesn't say anywhere in the [NBPTS] directions that you should use their language, but it does say that you should refer to it, and make sure that your writing covers all those areas, the things in each of those entries. I did this so that it would be easy, completely clear for them, so they [NBPTS assessors] could pick it up easy.

As Jennifer was trying to understand the requirements of the genre of interpretive commentaries imposed by the certification process and what kind of writing would help her to be successful in the NBPTS process, she often referred to her own writing capabilities and processes. She believed that being a better writer would help her score higher on her portfolio entries and interpretive commentaries. However, what Jennifer meant by "being a better writer", was being able to successfully negotiate the demands of the genres imposed by the NBPTS assessment process. Her view of quality writing was focused on the requirements of writing for the NBPTS assessors. In an interview conducted near the end of the certification process, referring to the process she was going through in her writing of these interpretive commentaries and classroom descriptions, Jennifer stated:

It's hard, I mean, I am trying to be a better writer. I'm trying to be more concise in my wording, but I'm not there yet. Lots of it [her writing] is just 'flowery' stuff that doesn't need to be there, lots of extra stuff. So, when I was reading through it [one of my entries]

it was like, that part needs to stay, and that part needs to go.

When asked if she was talking about being a better writer in general or just for the NBPTS requirements, she responded:

Both! It [the portfolio entry] requires you to be very concise, because you have a strict page limit, but I do find just becoming a better writer, in general, that you don't need all those extra words that I throw in there. Like I found a lot of 'in my classrooms' in there, which is, well, redundant right? So it's coming together pretty well now.

The presentation of evidence in the teaching portfolio is a rhetorical process, where candidates attempt to convince the NBPTS assessors of their level of accomplished practice and their alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice set forth in the standards documents (Burroughs, Roe & Hendricks-Lee, 1998). Teachers make a case that their level of accomplished practice, represented by specific samples of their teaching practices contained in the assessment vehicles, align to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice set forth in the standards documents.

Although Jennifer viewed the certification process, in particular the writing instructions and entry directions as "jumping through hoops" at times, they were hoops she was willing to jump through to achieve certification. She stated:

Being able to write to the questions [in the entry directions] is a big part of it. Being able to jump through these hoops. It's some hoop jumping for sure. The direction say write to the questions, so, I will write to the questions.

Jennifer spent an extraordinary amount of time, both in and out of school, preparing items to submit for certification. The NBPTS process requires a large commitment on the part of classroom teachers to complete the requirements during a school year when they are also in the classroom teaching. She hoped that her "hoop jumping" efforts would not go unnoticed.

Discussion

The NBPTS certification process and standards documents represented a vision of accomplished practice, a possible avenue for increased recognition as a classroom teacher, and an assessment system that required Jennifer to represent her level of accomplished teaching to the NBPTS assessors for scoring and certification purposes through the written commentaries and artifacts submitted. Beginning with the process of adopting the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice, and culminating with Jennifer's use of the NBPTS

language in her written commentaries, the certification process forced Jennifer to forego any personally held criteria about accomplished teaching and evaluate her own teaching solely in light of the vision offered by the NBPTS standards documents.

Because of its power to recognize and certify classroom teachers that demonstrate their alignment to a specific vision of accomplished teaching, the NBPTS represents an emerging authority within the teaching profession in the United States. With this emerging authority comes various possibilities and challenges due to the future directions and extent of the NBPTS' influence. Based on the evidence provided and the assertions put forth, the NBPTS process represents: (a) a process of aligning to a specific discourse community or community of practice, (b) a commodity designed to support the recognition of accomplished teaching, and (c) a vehicle intended to promote reflective practice.

NBPTS as Community of Practice

There is a close relationship among the NBPTS certification process, the vision of accomplished practice set forth in the written language of the standards documents, and the theory of discourse communities or communities of practice proposed by Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and other researchers (Gee, 1992; Smyth, 1992). Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as a situated activity dependent upon a process they call "legitimate peripheral participation." "Learners inevitably participate in community of practitioners [practice] and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.29). The NBPTS certification process represents a set of situated activities within a community of practice. Candidates participate in the activities of this community of practitioners and eventually, if certified, become legitimate members of the NBPTS community of accomplished teachers.

One of the most important activities that candidates engaged in during the certification process is the writing of the interpretive commentaries and portfolio entries submitted for evaluation. Extending Lave and Wenger's concept of communities of practice to include communities of writers, Beaufort's (1997) definition of a discourse community, which focused on the writing practices of a discourse community, stated that discourse communities are "...social entit[ies] within which a set of distinctive writing practices occur and beyond whose borders different writing practices occur" (p. 518). The writing practices associated with the NBPTS certification process focus on teacher candidates' ability to create written commentaries that

demonstrate an alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice in order to achieve certification. Throughout the certification process, Jennifer was shown how to write to the standards, frequently reviewed her drafts with other candidates to see if they were following the NBPTS entry directions and standards documents, adopted the language of the NBPTS standards for inclusion in her written commentaries, and aligned her descriptions of her classroom and teaching practices to her interpretations of the NBPTS values and practices. These activities demonstrate Jennifer's process of legitimate peripheral participation as she was apprenticed into the NBPTS community of practice.

Burroughs et al. (1998) described the NBPTS certification process as a discourse community to which teacher candidates were required to align in order to achieve certification. If NBPTS candidates are to be successful in achieving certification, they must assume the NBPTS discourse values and be able to represent these values in the portfolio they are required to submit for certification. It is the candidate's responsibility to interpret the values represented in the written standards of the NBPTS by becoming familiar with, and aligning to, the vision of accomplished practice set forth in the NBPTS standards documents (Burroughs et al., 1998). The adoption of the vision of accomplished practice set forth in the NBPTS standards, the focusing of the candidate's systematic thinking during the certification process, and the representation of the candidate's alignment to this established vision are all social processes that work to include participants in the NBPTS discourse and communities of practice.

Aligning to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice meant more to Jennifer than simply understanding the NBPTS standards. It meant using the language of the standards in the written commentaries she submitted, adopting the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice as her own, and learning to write and represent her teaching practices in language and formats the NBPTS scorers would recognize and value. Jennifer argued in writing that she had assumed the correct values, had adopted the language and writing practices of the discourse community, and was ready to become a legitimate member of the NBPTS community of practice. Certification remained the final step to legitimize her acceptance into the NBPTS community.

Burroughs et al. (1998) suggest that candidates that were not certified had difficulties adopting the NBPTS vision and aligning to the values of the NBPTS discourse community, while successful candidates were able to, "...assume the NBPTS discourse values." (p. 3). Jennifer was able to successfully accomplish this adoption of, and

alignment to, the NBPTS discourse values. In essence, Jennifer's representation of her level of accomplished practice was a process of moving from local, contextualized classroom events to the general, abstract discourse required by the NBPTS, using the standards documents as "mediating artifacts" (Werstch, 1991) in the process.

During one of the support group meetings, one of the NBPTS teacher facilitators told the group of candidates, "Welcome to the Club!" In essence, the facilitator was accepting the candidates' alignment to the NBPTS discourse values as the key to membership in the NBPTS club. The NBPTS certification process serves as a process of legitimizing candidates' alignment and acceptance of the NBPTS values and practices.

For a club to exist it must have members. Membership is predicated on one's ability to accept and demonstrate an alignment to the values of a particular club in order to be accepted as a member. The NBPTS is no different. The vision of accomplished practice set forth in the standards documents, represents a guide for candidates to follow to join the club. However, any membership in a club creates a distinction between members and non-members. It is this distinction that may create challenges in the teaching profession as the NBPTS gains in prominence. The allocation of teachers to higher and lower rungs on the educational hierarchy may disenfranchise certain groups of teachers and disrupt the sense of community among teachers the NBPTS initially set out to support and extend.

NBPTS as Commodity

King (1994) expressed his concerns about the NBPTS certificate becoming a valued commodity and the possible creation of a hierarchy of teachers because of the NBPTS certification. King (1994) wrote, "...the struggle for certification represents a race for certain qualifications that bring cultural assets. What national board certification is about, at least in part, is extending to teachers the symbolic struggle for cultural capital within their occupational field." (p. 103). Because of the authority given to the NBPTS to recognize and certify accomplished teaching, the certificate itself helps promote the recognition of a specific group of teachers over another.

Jennifer began the NBPTS certification process hoping to use the certificate as a symbol of her level of accomplished teaching, a commodity she could exchange in the educational marketplace for higher salaries and promotions within the educational hierarchy and as a symbol to set her level of teaching apart from the average teacher. In fact, not soon after successfully completing the certification process, Jennifer explained that she had been promoted to the

position of teacher leader at her grade level and given a substantial salary increase (personal communication, May, 2001).

One of the concerns Jennifer had during the certification process was how she would be perceived by other teachers at the school where she worked and in the educational community. She held little hope that the teachers at her own school would recognize her as an accomplished teacher. In fact, she was concerned that certain teachers would almost hold it against her, wondering, "Who does she think she is?" after achieving certification. However, she held out more hope for the larger educational community, stating in an interview, "someday, somewhere in the future, teachers will recognize how important this certification is."

In the variety of literature distributed by the NBPTS, ranging from promotional brochures to periodic newsletters, one of the primary outcomes of achieving certification suggested by the National Board is the status accorded NBPTS certified teachers. The ways in which this status will be given to teachers includes: (a) reciprocity across many states for recognizing teaching credentials and licensure, (b) assuming new roles in the teaching profession, (c) faculty adjunct positions at local universities, (d) being considered a spokesperson for the teaching profession, (e) mentoring responsibilities, (f) increased salaries and stipends, and (g) appointment to curriculum development and other administrative positions. It seems that there are many external rewards being associated with NBPTS certification. How these external rewards and the status given to NBPTS certified teachers effects the teaching profession will need to be investigated as the NBPTS expands its influence.

NBPTS Process as Standardized Reflection

In the literature distributed by the NBPTS and included in one of the five "Core Propositions" that serves as a framework for all of the certifications and standards documents, the NBPTS strongly suggests that the certification and assessment process promotes systematic or reflective thinking and teaching practices. Based on the evidence presented, the NBPTS certification process required Jennifer to reflect on her teaching practices, however, it did so on a limited, "standardized" basis. Setting the NBPTS standards as the lens to assess her practice and as the sole criteria of judging her level of accomplished teaching, the certification process narrowed the scope and dimensions of Jennifer's reflective processes to those that will help get her certified. Rather than reflecting on the standards, the NBPTS process promotes "standardized reflection" where the NBPTS standards documents become the only lens used to reflect on one's teaching.

Jennifer adopted the NBPTS standards as the sole criteria of accomplished practice during the certification process. She mentioned several times during interviews and in her journal entries that she was not involved in this process to critique the standards or look for other criteria to evaluate her teaching. She believed that it was her job to demonstrate the standards in her writing and her portfolio entries, period. When asked whether she disagreed with some of the standards, she said it didn't matter. She was here to demonstrate them, not challenge them. In other words, if it wasn't contained in the NBPTS standards, it was of no consequence to her during the certification process.

Because of the reduction of criteria of accomplished practice to the vision set forth in the NBPTS standards, it is possible that the certification process represents an alternative form of "technical rationality" (Schon, 1983), simply substituting one set of prescribed, universal teaching methods, for another set of contemporary, consensus standards of accomplished teaching. Rather than teachers adopting particular teaching methods designed by university researchers to be delivered in the classroom context as suggested by Schon's concept of technical rationality, NBPTS candidates are required to adopt a set of values, attitudes, practices, and visions of accomplished teaching to enact in their classrooms and demonstrate during the assessment process. Unless the standards remain open to negotiation, and teachers are able to reflect on the changes in their practice based on a variety of criteria, the NBPTS process may reduce its version of reflective practice to the same narrow version of reflection that it hoped to leave behind.

The NBPTS certification process may raise the level of accomplished teaching in America, however, it may also have a limiting, standardizing effect on the teachers that proceed through the certification process. This standardization of accomplished teaching may restrict the abilities of particular groups of teachers to be recognized for their individual talents. If the NBPTS standards are recognized by the educational community and the general public as the only set of teaching standards, and do not allow for alternative perspectives concerning accomplished teaching to be given credence, the standardization of teachers may diminish, rather than increase, the effects of the NBPTS certification process and assessment system..

Limitations

There are many possible perspectives from which to study the NBPTS certification process. A researcher could construct a written survey and administer it to a representative sample of NBPTS candidates or NBPTS certified teachers to understand

general trends concerning the certification process. It is also possible that researchers would select a sample of candidates to interview before, during or after the certification process to see what kinds of experiences they were having, or the meanings these candidates constructed concerning the NBPTS process.

This study focused on the experiences of one candidate as she progressed through the year-long NBPTS certification process. The qualitative, single-case design allowed the construction of an intimate understanding of the complex experiences and meanings constructed by the candidate during the certification process. Methodological choices were made to understand a single candidate in greater detail, rather than study a larger number of candidates in less detail. With any single case study, limitations concerning generalizability and credibility are expected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The credibility of this study rests primarily on the ability of other researchers and readers of this report to accept the relationships described among the data collected and the categories and assertions constructed. The utility of the study, the importance assigned by the readers to the descriptions, interpretations and assertions contained in the report, will, in part, determine its credibility. Constructing thick descriptions, providing quotes from interviews and journal entries, and including artifacts from the teaching portfolio, lend credibility to the assertions set forth and allow the readers of this report to understand the meaning perspectives constructed by the teacher candidate during her NBPTS certification experience.

The study initially intended to focus on the reflective practices, or systematic thinking processes, of a single candidate during the certification process. I chose this focus because the literature distributed by the NBPTS and the testimonials provided by NBPTS certified teachers suggested that the certification process was an effective vehicle for promoting reflective practice. I wanted to know what they meant by reflective practice, and how the NBPTS certification process promoted this type of thinking. During the initial interviews, however, I became aware of the challenges of focusing on such a small aspect of the NBPTS process without first understanding the process as a whole. I was unable to separate the candidate's reflective processes from the rest of her understandings and experiences concerning the NBPTS certification process.

As the study progressed, the direction of the study changed, and the content of the interviews focused on Jennifer's understandings of the entire NBPTS process, not exclusively the reflective aspects of the certification process.

Remaining open to the data being collected during the course of a qualitative study is crucial if researchers are, according to Peshkin (2000) "...to exploit the opportunities for learning that fieldwork makes possible. Such selection, together with ordering, associating and meaning making, is an element of interpretation. Stated otherwise, interpretation is an act of imagination and logic. It entails perceiving importance, order, and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is continually undergoing creation." (p. 9).

One of the primary concerns during the data analysis of the study was whether I found three assertions that simply fit my interests a priori, or whether I was able to divorce my predilections and motivations to construct assertions that connected to the data. In order to address this concern, I began the study by writing in my research journal about my understandings of the NBPTS process and its effects on the teaching profession I had been a part of for the past eleven years. I needed to bring to a conscious level the perspectives and possible concerns that I held intuitively about the NBPTS certification process.

Before going into the study, I admittedly had reservations about any process that claimed to create reflective teachers and was concerned about the rapid development of standards in the various disciplines of knowledge or content areas during the past two decades. Further, I was, and still am, concerned about the effect of the NBPTS teaching standards on the classroom teacher, and that the alignment to any standards of teaching practice, NBPTS or otherwise, will lead to a standardization of classroom teaching and the reduction of the content of the curriculum to what is included in the accepted standards.

Avenues for Future Research

Given the financial limitations imposed by the non-profit status of the organization, the board's concerns with creating and maintaining a legally defensible national certification process, and the time constraints imposed by the structure of the certification process, the NBPTS has strived to provide a variety of assessment vehicles for candidates to use to represent their teaching practices, educational philosophies and classroom contexts. The NBPTS process is required by design to result in a single decision, to certify or not to certify. Candidates are currently provided with limited feedback concerning the results of the assessment process. In general, they are simply provided with their final scores for each individual entry and an overall tally. In other words, the whole certification and scoring process is eventually reduced to a single decision, whether the candidate achieves National Board

Certification or not. Whether the reduction of the assessment and certification process to a single score is effective in developing accomplished, reflective teachers is an important consideration for future research. Reflective practice requires a teacher to be able to look back and evaluate their teaching and its effects. The limited feedback provided to the NBPTS candidates may be a possible deterrent to their reflective processes.

The NBPTS process reduces the representation of accomplished teaching to what can be included in the written commentaries and video segments. Future research will have to address the question, "Does the process of becoming an NBPTS certified teacher hinge on one's level of teaching ability, or one's ability to successfully align to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice, or discourse community, through the written commentaries, videotape segments and assessment vehicles provided during the certification process?" In other words, do better writers pass and poor writers fail regardless of their teaching abilities?

Another concern is the underlying assumption of the NBPTS process that accomplished teaching is measurable, and that the NBPTS assessment system is a credible and reliable process for doing so. Does NBPTS certification mean that certified teachers are more accomplished than other teachers, or that they are just more capable of representing an alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished teaching through their written commentaries and portfolio artifacts? I am also left with questions concerning the NBPTS assessment vehicle's ability to represent accomplished teaching, and the scorers' ability to recognize it when they review prospective candidates' portfolios. I know that decisions are being made, and that less than fifty percent of potential candidates are certified. However, whether accomplished teaching can be assessed, scored and tallied remains a primary concern.

As the number of NBPTS certified teachers begins to grow (there are approximately 10,000 certified teachers in the country as of the fall of 2000), the potential the NBPTS has for impacting the teaching profession will increase. Concerns have been raised about the effects of particular classroom teachers being recognized as accomplished teachers and given the financial incentives and leadership positions that may become, in part, associated with the NBPTS certificate, while other teachers are viewed as unaccomplished and relegated to a lower rung on the teacher hierarchy. It will be important to understand the effects of the NBPTS certification on the teaching community as more and more teachers become certified. The NBPTS describes its

certification process as an opportunity to build a sense of community among teachers. If the certification itself creates unwanted hierarchies, the NBPTS process may have the opposite effect on the communities developed among the next generation of teachers.

Concluding Remarks

Whether teachers can demonstrate the NBPTS vision of accomplished teaching through the written commentaries, videotape segments and assessment center exercises or not will determine whether they achieve NBPTS certification. The teacher candidate in this study believed that her NBPTS certification would eventually be recognized as a legitimate endorsement of her accomplished teaching abilities by the educational community and the general public. Although she had concerns about the NBPTS assessment system's ability to assess and represent her accomplished teaching abilities, she was able to set aside these concerns and created a portfolio that allowed her to achieve NBPTS certification. Jennifer is now a certified NBPTS teacher. What this certification will provide for her in the future as a classroom teacher remains to be seen.

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