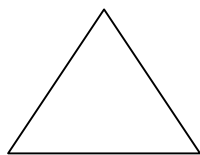
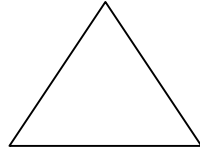


The Leverage of National Board Candidacy



An Exploration of Teacher Learning

The Leverage of National Board Candidacy



An Exploration of Teacher Learning

Jana Lynn Hunzicker

Foreword by Mary Ann Manos

Universal Publishers
Boca Raton, Florida

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An Exploration of Teacher Learning*

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To Anne, Barbara, and Jamie



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Foreword

Without a doubt, it was the most difficult task I have ever accomplished! The year I spent earning National Board Certification in Early Adolescent/English Language Arts demanded more professionalism, greater endurance, and heightened classroom creativity than 25 years in the public school classroom, a master's degree, the Texas Career Ladder, or my doctoral dissertation. I was stretched to the limit, and I reveled in it. I found that the NBPTS certification process offered several levels of challenge as well as support and influence.

Having been a faculty member of higher education for five years, I came back to the elementary school classroom to validate my teaching mastery and to renew my teacher's heart. As refreshing as the experience proved to be, I found myself running to keep up with daily instruction, discipline, administrative tasks, parent communication, and professional interactions. I also found the precise NBPTS writing criteria to be extensive and demanding. My first video tapes were a disaster! On the other hand, the encouragement of classroom colleagues surrounded me.

Well-wishers abound for NBPTS candidates, and they are swept along knowing that they are doing something very important. Interactions with other educators seem to take on a positive tone, far from the usual griping of the faculty lounge. I found the support from building and district administrators strengthening. Even the greater state and national educational community was aware that I was attempting a new level of professionalism. Support came from everywhere, even if some scratched their heads in bewilderment over a college professor who sought to earn the highest certification a classroom teacher can achieve.

Finally, I was certified. I stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the best in the nation, and I couldn't stop smiling. It took two years to accomplish my goal, but the effort was well worth the time I invested.

National Board certification opens many doors of influence. NBCTs who wish to stay in the classroom do so with a new sense of validation and expertise, their work proven by the most rigorous test any educator can seek. I congratulate them. Our children are greatly blessed through their service. NBCTs who want to stretch their influence into school and district leadership have that opportunity as they are sought out to mentor new National Board candidates. NBCTs who wish to investigate the forum of higher education find open doors to teach courses for others who seek graduate credit during their NBPTS certification year. Most state boards of education seek NBCTs as contributors to teacher certification or ethics boards, and national platforms are available for NBCTs as consultants with content area associations, higher education accreditation, or national standards design. Today, NBCTs design in-service sessions, conduct presentations at national conferences, and publish books – all on the basis of their National Board work. They serve at all echelons of American schooling and administration. Perhaps soon, a NBCT will serve as a school superintendent – taking teaching excellence into CEO leadership.

In *The Leverage of National Board Candidacy*, Dr. Hunzicker provides a detailed portrait of three teachers seeking National Board certification. Her scholarly work is unequalled in the precise description of outstanding teaching and accompanying thought processes of this incredibly difficult endeavor. This book must be read by all who are considering or attempting National Board certification, as well as by those who have earned the certification. The heart and wisdom of stellar teachers is written into every section of this text.

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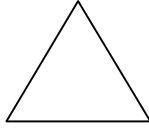


Author's Note

Social constructivism is the idea that individuals “make sense” of the world by attributing meaning to their experiences. Each new experience or interaction influences what we know and believe to be true. Because our exposure to new information is constant, we are in a continual state of learning, growth, and change. Of course, all information to which we are exposed is filtered through our prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs, causing individual quests for learning to proceed along varied paths and assorted timelines.

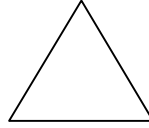
When new information or experiences align closely with what we already know or believe, our ideas of truth are reinforced. However, when new information and experiences conflict with our previous notions, we are not comfortable until we resolve the differences. We do this one of three ways: We deny the new information, we find data that supports what we believe so that we can disregard what does not align, or we modify our knowledge and/or beliefs to fit with the new information to which we have been exposed. This is how we learn.

The Leverage of National Board Candidacy is written so that the reader, individually or in collaboration with others, can construct her own ideas about teacher learning through the process of National Board certification. The opportunity for the social construction of knowledge is at the heart of this book.



***Part One:
Establishing the Context***

1



Approaching National Board Candidacy

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), founded in 1987, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independently governed body of 63 directors, the majority of whom are practicing classroom teachers. Created for the purpose of “delineating outstanding practice and recognizing those who achieve it” (NBPTS, 2004, p. v), teachers may currently seek National Board certification in 24 different specialty areas. To be eligible to pursue the certification, a teacher must hold a bachelor's degree and a valid teaching license, and have completed at least three years of teaching at the early childhood, elementary, middle, or high school level (NBPTS, 2004).

Guided by five core propositions, the NBPTS certification process involves two requirements: a performance-based portfolio and a written assessment. The portfolio consists of four entries that document classroom teaching through videotapes, samples of student work, and written analyses of teaching practice. The written assessment, a three hour, timed essay test where candidates demonstrate knowledge within their certification specialty, takes place at a NBPTS-approved testing center (NBPTS, 2003). The entire certification process takes a minimum of 200 hours to complete (NBPTS, 2003), although some candidates have spent 300 to 400 hours on the process (Hunzicker, 2003a; NBPTS, 2002).

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The standards of the NBPTS are "designed to capture the craft, artistry, proficiency, and understandings - both deep and broad - that contribute to the complex work that is accomplished teaching" (NBPTS, 2004, p. 3). In addition, research confirms that teachers who have experienced the process consider it to be an outstanding means of professional development. One team of researchers writes, "Teachers routinely rate the process as more powerful than that of advanced university coursework or short-term trainings, citing the sustained analysis and reflection of their teaching practice required to meet portfolio entry requirements" (Linguanti & Peterson, 2001, p. 4). Candidates who are not successful in accomplishing the certification during their first attempt can "bank" their scores and continue working toward the goal for up to two years. For this reason, National Board certification is considered a three year process.

The number of teachers seeking National Board certification has grown dramatically each year since its inception in 1993. As of November 2003, 65,000 teachers across the United States had voluntarily completed the certification requirements (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004). During the 2003-2004 school year, 19,742 teachers nationwide pursued the certification (Sandy-Hanson, personal communication, February 10, 2006), and by November 2005, the United States boasted a total of 47,913 National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) (NBPTS, 2006). By 2010, the NBPTS expects to certify 100,000 additional teachers, resulting in total certification of approximately 3% of the United States teaching force (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

Becoming a NBCT is not easily accomplished. Only about one third of candidates earn the certification on their first attempt. During the 2004-2005 school year, only 36% of first-time candidates nationwide were successful in earning the certification (Sandy-Hanson, personal communication, February 10, 2006), and the achievement rate is just slightly higher for candidates reapplying for the process. The relatively low achievement rate is a stark indicator of

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the rigor required in order to earn National Board certification.¹

Regardless of whether or not certification is achieved, teachers who have completed the process report that it results in strengthened teaching practice. In particular, teachers identify improved skills in:

1.) reflection and analysis (Bohen, 2001; Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning [CFTL], 2002; Chittenden & Jones, 1997; Lustick, 2002; Moseley & Rains, 2003; NBPTS, 2002; Sato, 2000; Tracz, Sienty, Todorov, Snyder, Takashima, Pensabene, Olsen, Pauls, & Sork, 1995; Tracz, Daughtry, Henderson-Sparks, Newman, & Sienty, 2005; Vandervoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004),

2.) increased collaboration with colleagues (Anderson, Hancock, & Jaus, 2001; Athanases, 1994; Chittenden & Jones, 1997; Kieffer-Barone, Mulvaney, Hillman, & Parker, 1999; Mitchell, 1998; NBPTS, 2001b; Sato, 2000),

3.) expanded methods of student assessment (Athanases, 1994; CFTL, 2001; Mitchell, 1998; NBPTS, 2001b; Tracz et al., 2005), and

4.) greater clarity of underlying assumptions and beliefs (Athanases, 1994; Chittenden & Jones, 1997; Sato, 2000) as key areas of learning.

Moreover, the first scientific study of teacher learning during National Board candidacy supports teachers' widespread claims that the NBPTS certification process is a worthwhile form of professional development. Lustick and Sykes (2006) found that teachers do indeed learn as a result of the NBPTS experience. In their study, 120 science teachers learned the most in regard to emphasizing the principles and practices of the scientific method in their daily teaching practice and utilizing ongoing student assessment to guide instructional decisions.

¹Some or all of the data in the research described herein was provided by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. All conclusions stated in this book are those of the author, and no endorsement by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards should be implied.

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While achievement of National Board certification requires a great deal of professional skill, intelligence, effort, and perseverance, teachers who make the choice to pursue the certification tend to be highly motivated to learn and grow professionally. Three such teachers, Anne, Barbara, and Jamie, sought NBPTS certification as Middle Childhood Generalists during the 2004-2005 school year.

Ranging in age from 42 to 55, all three Illinois teachers taught in financially healthy, large suburban school districts during their certification year. In order to explore their learning throughout the experience, the three teachers were interviewed seven times and observed teaching in their classrooms four times between November 2004 and November 2005. In addition, each teacher's principal and two students were interviewed, and samples of student work were collected. Through Anne's, Barbara's, and Jamie's experiences during National Board candidacy, we gain a great deal of insight regarding the learning that occurs for teachers during the pursuit of National Board certification. Their stories begin here.

Anne

Anne, currently in her sixteenth year as a teacher, did not begin her teaching career until she was 39 years old. Waiting until her children were in junior high and high school, she returned to college at age 36, earning a bachelor's degree in Psychology with state certification in Elementary Education.

Anne has always taught fifth grade. During her first two years in the teaching profession, she taught in a small, rural school located near her home in the country; but with two years of experience, she accepted employment in the nearby city of Knollcrest to earn a higher salary. Teaching in Knollcrest School District 802 for the next four years, Anne knew that she eventually wanted to teach at the district's gifted magnet school because of its outstanding reputation. When she transferred to Dickenson Gifted School at the beginning of her fifth year in District 802, she enrolled in a graduate program and earned a master's degree in Gifted Education.

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Anne's principal, who has worked closely with her for the past five years, describes Anne as well respected by others. "Students, parents, and colleagues listen to her, and parents request her because they believe their children will have a positive learning experience in her classroom," she comments.

The 2004-2005 school year marks Anne's tenth year at Dickenson. She describes Dickenson as a school that exposes students to music and the arts while at the same time providing academics accelerated by one grade level. Anne considers the Dickenson faculty to be a group of hardworking, knowledgeable professionals. "There is not one lazy teacher on the staff," she remarks. "As far as committee work and school improvement, we're all involved. The teachers here go above and beyond with everything they do. You constantly hear people talking and planning together, and since it's a small school everyone knows every child."

Anne describes her current class, made up of 24 fifth graders, as the most difficult group of students she has ever been assigned because they are less mature and of lower academic ability than students she has had in the past. "This is the class everyone's talked about," she notes. "As I've watched them come up through the grades, I've always thought, 'Oh, their teachers look so stressed', and now I'm their teacher!" One unique characteristic of the group is a significant gender imbalance. Anne's class consists of 17 boys and 7 girls.

Anne first heard about National Board certification when it was advertised by her school district. Teachers at Dickenson began talking about it, and Anne recalls getting caught up in the excitement of a new challenge when a colleague encouraged her to participate. "It seems like every four years I get itchy and want to make a change," she observes, pointing out that she has transferred schools, earned a master's degree, and become a teacher of gifted students in order to maintain a high level of professional stimulation throughout her career. "I wasn't willing to make a change that might take me away from Dickenson, so I

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thought National Board certification was a good opportunity,” she reflects.

A group of eight teachers, including Anne, made the commitment to pursue the certification during the 2003-2004 school year. “I went into it blindly,” she recalls, remembering that the process was much more involved than she had anticipated. Although she was ready to proceed, extenuating circumstances prevented her from completing the certification requirements during her first attempt. Due to the illness and passing of her father, Anne made the decision to formally withdraw, postponing her efforts until the following school year. When she began the certification process the second time, she felt much better prepared since she was already familiar with the requirements. “In addition,” she explains, “when I saw my class, I realized that even if state funding didn’t pay my registration fee I was going to do it because I needed help becoming a better teacher for this unique bunch of kids.”

“I know she’ll complete this successfully,” comments Anne’s principal in January. “Anne is a person who sets a goal and then goes forth and achieves it. When I think of National Board certified teachers, Anne is one of them. I can’t imagine her not becoming certified. If there were a commercial advertising National Board certified teachers, she’d be the person!”

Barbara

Barbara, in her nineteenth year of teaching in Knollcrest District 802, has taught all grade levels from kindergarten through fifth grade. While she has spent most of her career teaching third and fourth grade students, she also served the district as a reading specialist for seven years. Holding a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education and a master’s degree in Reading, she has completed 48 semester hours of graduate work beyond her master’s. Barbara is also trained in Reading Recovery.

While she has worked in six different schools in District 802, Barbara left the reading department to join the staff at Cady Stanton Elementary School when it opened in 2000. “I wanted to get back into the classroom, and I also wanted to

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be part of a school that was making a difference,” she explains. Barbara identifies a professional development experience that began during her first year at Cady Stanton as particularly influencing her teaching practice. “We’re a Ball Foundation school, and we decided to select a few teachers interested in making an impact on student achievement. I was one of four who volunteered to do that,” she explains. “Our goal was to teach using best practices supported by research, and we decided to focus on reading and writing workshop. We started by reading professional books, and then began trying things in our classrooms.”

“I’ve made a lot of changes in my teaching as a result of that experience,” Barbara reflects. “Especially because of the readings and the support of my colleagues in the group, I was able to make changes in my classroom that I’d wanted to make for a long time. After we implemented the workshop model in our own classrooms, our whole school followed suit because people liked what we were doing and wanted to know more about it. The voluntary style of professional development worked very, very well for Cady Stanton. I was on the ground floor of doing it, and I loved it!”

Barbara’s principal of three years, who knew her socially and worked with her on district-wide committees for several years before coming to Cady Stanton, describes Barbara as having an outstanding reputation as a classroom teacher. “Parents request her because she maintains close communication with families, and her fellow fourth grade teachers look to her for advice,” she remarks. “Her students achieve very well in comparison to the other fourth grade classes,” she adds. “In the area of literacy, Barbara’s students shine.”

The 2004-2005 school year marks Barbara’s fifth year as a teacher at Cady Stanton. Currently teaching fourth grade, she has a class of 28 students. “We have probably the strongest staff in the district,” Barbara describes of her colleagues. “The teachers here are interested in increasing student achievement and participate in lots of professional development; and our principal is very dynamic, very bright. She remembers what it’s like to be in the classroom, so she is always supportive.”

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Barbara recalls that about seven years ago, information about National Board certification was sent to all District 802 teachers via e-mail. "I thought it sounded like something I wanted to do," she remembers, "but I didn't want to take the written assessment. I don't like standardized tests at all, so that's what held me back. Plus, obtaining the grant money sounded like a real hassle." But six years later, Barbara reconsidered. Approaching retirement, she was interested in increasing her salary during the last three years of her teaching career. "The state stipend is \$3, 000 a year, and District 802 pays a percentage of the base salary," she explains, "so I found out more about it. I realized that I had the background experience to be able to accomplish it, and that gave me confidence. I decided to give it a try." After completing the registration process, Barbara was pleased to learn that another teacher at Cady Stanton had decided to seek the certification as well.

Barbara shares that she is motivated toward National Board certification because she believes it will increase her credibility as a teacher. "It will give me free reign in my classroom," she comments. "I will feel more comfortable trying things that I might not otherwise try. I might decide not to do a particular lesson just because it's in the textbook, and do something I feel is more effective instead. If I am NBPTS certified I can say, 'I am certified in this area, and I feel that this is a better choice.' It gives me that authority."

When Barbara's principal learned that she was pursuing National Board certification, she was very pleased. "I think Barbara will be successful because she perseveres," she predicts. "Barbara is a person who will work really hard at it. She's very organized, very detailed, and very well written. I don't think she'll have any trouble explaining what she does in her classroom every day."

Jamie

Jamie is in her twentieth year as a fifth grade teacher. "It's probably unusual to stay at one grade level all this time," she comments, "but I like fifth grade!" In her twenty years as a teacher, Jamie has always taught in Saxon School District 66. After spending 14 years teaching in one

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building, she became a member of the original Cassatt Grade School (CGS) faculty when the new school opened six years ago. "I wanted Jamie to be a part of opening our new building," her principal states. "She's a great teacher, and I think she's good for kids." Jamie holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

Her principal, who has known her for 18 years and been her principal for 11, describes Jamie as 100% professional. "She spends more time than anyone else at CGS on what she's doing in her classroom," he notes. "Jamie would be happy if every morning the kids came in and the rest of the world went away until 3:15 p.m. She just wants to teach kids." One reason that Jamie is devoted to teaching is because she enjoys it so much. She remarks, "When teaching is no longer fun, I'll find something else to do!"

"Jamie is a teacher who proves herself to parents over time," her principal describes. While parents rarely request her, they are usually pleased with their child's learning experience by the end of the school year. "The kids in Jamie's classroom do a lot of work, but her expectations are always well articulated to the kids and to the parents," he notes. "The work they do is very project-oriented, and Jamie's timelines for work completion are very reasonable. By the end of the school year, parents realize that their children learned a lot and that they're ready for junior high."

Jamie, in her sixth year at CGS, describes it as a friendly school. "It's very academically oriented," she comments. "We have a lot of camaraderie between the teachers, and that sets a positive tone for the whole school." While Jamie considers the CGS staff to be enthusiastic and easy to work with, she admits that she prefers to work independently. "Efforts to collaborate with others and work on committees are really not me," she explains. "I just like to teach and be left alone."

Jamie's fifth grade class consists of 23 students, 8 girls and 15 boys. Although in previous years she has been responsible for teaching gifted and learning disabled students within her regular division classroom, her current class is made up of students who fall within the normal

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range of academic ability. However, Jamie notes the immaturity of the class, commenting that she has to make extra efforts to keep them focused. "It has something to do with the fact that there are more boys than girls," she hypothesizes. "Also, there are no leaders in this group."

When two of Jamie's friends finished their master's degrees in May 2003, one of their professors encouraged them to consider National Board certification. "She told them that it would give them a chance to move up on the pay scale, and it would be wise to complete the requirements while they were still in school mode," Jamie recalls. "I wanted to take more graduate courses, but there weren't any left to take; and then, watching them go through National Board certification, I thought, 'Well, it's a good experience, and it's about the only thing I haven't tried yet.' I also liked the monetary incentive offered by the state, so I started looking for information about it."

Jamie learned more about the certification on the NBPTS website and then contacted her friends' professor at a local university to help her get started. She was pleased when the professor told her that another friend of hers had also decided to pursue the certification. "We're kind of doing this together," Jamie explains early in the 2004-2005 school year.

While the financial incentives offered by the state and her school district were appealing motivators in Jamie's decision to pursue the certification, she also hopes it will make her a better teacher. Moreover, Jamie likes the idea that the master teaching certificate held by NBCTs is valid in all 50 states, since she and her husband have considered relocating.

When Jamie's principal learned that she had decided to seek National Board certification, he was surprised that she was interested in pursuing something so high profile since she is a person who tends to keep to herself. But after he thought about it, the idea made sense to him. "When Jamie decides to do something, she goes after it until she's conquered it," he remarks.

Approaching National Board Candidacy

A Purpose for Reading

The Leverage of National Board Candidacy is organized into two sections. Capturing the teaching and certification experiences of Anne, Barbara, and Jamie during the 2004-2005 school year, Part One establishes a personalized context for exploring teacher learning through National Board candidacy. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 exemplify the teaching practices, guiding philosophies, and thought processes of the three teachers during their certification year while Chapter 5 illustrates the conditions, highlights, and challenges of each teacher's certification experience.

With a personalized context established, Part Two explores teacher learning through National Board candidacy as it occurred for Anne, Barbara, and Jamie. After detailing each teacher's personal account of learning during the certification process, Chapter 6 synthesizes the three teachers' learning experiences before comparing them to the findings of recently conducted research. Focusing on Jamie's difficult learning experience, Chapter 7 explores the varying nature and degree of the three teachers' learning in comparison to other studies. In closing, Chapter 8 assimilates the ideas presented in Chapters 6 and 7 by defining and describing the leverage of National Board candidacy on teacher learning.

By establishing a personalized context, considering each teacher's account of learning, and comparing these accounts to recently conducted studies on the topic, the reader will be prepared to construct her own ideas about National Board candidacy and the learning that takes place for teachers through the experience.