Minority Representation Among

National Board Certified Teachers

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Minority Representation Among National Board Certified Teachers
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I would like to acknowledge the debt I owe to the teachers who informed my study. Teachers have so many demands upon their time, yet they were willing to share some of that most valuable commodity with me. Without them there would have been no thesis.

I also want to thank my sister Sunny for reading this and for her editing suggestions: the things sisters ask of one another!

I forever greatly appreciate the support I received from my husband and children. Knowing they believe in me and are proud of me is the music of my heart.
Abstract: A case study examines the experiences of six teachers who have been candidates for certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Teachers needed specific kinds of support from the NBPTS, their school districts, and county-organized support groups, which were not fully met. Needs of minority candidates, in particular, are unfulfilled, leading to an inequity in the certification rates of minority candidates.
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Chapter 1

The Path to Where I Am

Background

As a third grade student in southern California in the late 1950s, I was blessed with an enlightened teacher who began to teach my class Spanish, “just for fun.” I loved learning a new language, especially when the teacher explained to us that the words to the song “Piel Canela” couldn’t be faithfully translated into English because some things in Spanish simply cannot be expressed in English. I was amazed and thrilled at an idea that I now realize applies to all languages. That experience convinced me that I would never be satisfied to be confined to one language (and by extension, one culture).

As an adult, I married a man from a middle-eastern country, whose culture and language are vastly different from my own. He is deeply connected with his culture and language. After 32 years of marriage and raising four children together, I cannot even consider myself nor my children apart from the profound influence of his language, art, music, foods, customs, and other components of culture. It does not detract from my culture, but adds to it, and my children have vastly benefited from the joy of a truly multicultural upbringing.

Coming from such a devotedly multicultural perspective, I am very interested in studying the schools in the counties surrounding where I live and teach because of the richness of the diversity of the student population. I know that diversity in the teacher
population would serve students’ cultural, social, and educational needs, but I see little diversity among my teaching colleagues and that makes me feel that our students’ needs are not being met as well as they could be. Consequently, I am interested in examining the population of teachers in these counties seeking certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

I have been an elementary school teacher for twelve years. It is a passion for me, and I have regularly sought to improve my skills and keep up to date by participating in professional development. While pursuing a Masters Degree in Education, and in the process of searching for ways to grow professionally and to evaluate my teaching, I was informed about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) by the Assistant Principal of the school in which I teach. Through further inquiry, I found that there is a process by which teachers can be certified by the NBPTS. Certification by the NBPTS is recognized throughout the United States. I was encouraged by the administrators of my school site to pursue certification by NBPTS.

Since its inception in 1984, the NBPTS has been designed to help improve the quality of teachers in the United States. The stated purpose of the NBPTS 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 teachers who meet these standards, and to advance related
education reforms for the purpose of improving learning in American schools”
(NBPTS, 2001d, p.7).

The certification process involves the teacher’s ability to demonstrate a high level of proficiency relating to the five core propositions set by the Board. Those propositions are:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities (NBPTS, 2001d, p. 7).

The certification process is intense and is expected to take the candidate the better part of a school year. The process requires the candidate to develop a portfolio consisting of four parts, which include student work, videotapes of classroom interactions during lessons, professional development, contributions to the learning community, and, most importantly, written reflections on all of these aspects. Besides the portfolio development, candidates must go to an assessment center for a written demonstration of a high level of competence in content and pedagogical knowledge in the areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, the Arts, and Health. These assessment center exercises can be done by hand or on computers and take about half a day.
I was intrigued by the challenge of such a thorough examination of and reflection on my teaching practice. Although the fee for the examination is considerable ($2300.00), my school district was willing to pay $1500.00 and the state in which I live (California) provided a grant for the remainder. The state and my school district also offer financial incentives to those who are successful in the certification process.

There are currently 24 areas of certification available, with more presently in development. Areas of certification are specific to content, age and/or grade levels. Over 90 percent of classroom teachers should be able to find a certification area that fits their subject area and student development level (NEA, 2001). I presently teach third grade in a self-contained classroom, and my previous experience included grades four, five, and six, so I felt that the certificate area called Middle Childhood /Generalist was the most appropriate for my situation. The Middle Childhood/Generalist certificate applies to teachers who teach students ages 7 – 12, who know the range of middle grades curriculum and practice in a manner designed to advance their student learning in two or more subjects.

Teachers are eligible to attempt the certification process if they have at least three years' teaching experience, a baccalaureate degree, and a valid teaching license (if one is required by the state in which they teach). Upon submitting the completed application, proof that I met the requirements, and $300.00 of the fee, I was accepted as a candidate and was sent the materials and instructions for assembling the portfolio. These materials
arrive in a blue and white box, which must be used to return the completed portfolio to the NBPTS. It is therefore known among NBPTS candidates as "The Box".

I was somewhat intimidated by the contents of the box, because the instructions alone filled an entire two-inch binder. Added to that were the coded envelopes for each entry, cover sheets for different sections, the booklet of the standards for my chosen certificate area (about 50 pages long), and several pages of labels and bar codes to be attached to various pages of the entry. Furthermore, there were numerous warnings and admonishments to be sure to follow all instructions **exactly**, to guard every paper carefully, and to make absolutely no alterations to the box. Any error or failure to follow all specific instructions could result in the invalidation of one or more of the entries.

I received my box in late August, about a week before the start of the school year. I immediately read through the overviews for each entry, in order to get an idea where I would plan to gather all the entries. I was able to begin on the professional growth and community involvement entry immediately, because the material could be representative of the past five years, except for work with the students and community, which had to be from the current year. The other three entries required student work and lessons that had to cover some time during the current year and would need much more time to complete.

At this point I began to think about finding some support in this project. I talked several times with the one National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) in our school district, and she was very good about reading my lists, going over my ideas for the
various entries, and offering advice on how to organize my thoughts. However, her
certification area was different from mine, and the certification process had changed in
several important ways between her certification year and the current one.

The county office of education offered a support group that met once a month in
the after-school hours. I began to attend those meetings, and found that there was another
teacher from my district attempting certification in the same area as I. We thought we
could support each other, but she had applied late and had not yet received her box. In
the end, she came to the meetings, but had not yet read any of the materials by the mid-
December meeting. By that time, we were going on a three-week winter break from
school, and I would have only about six weeks left after we returned to school to
complete and send in the portfolio, which was due in Texas by March 15. Portfolios
returned after that date would not be scored.

It became clear to me that I would need to finish the process more-or-less on my
own. Although the support group offered to read and help edit the entries, there remained
only one meeting date before I would have to submit my portfolio. I needed more time
for the writing and had completed all but one of the entries, planning to do the writing
over winter break. The support group would not be able to help me finish the writing in
time for the submission date for my portfolio (March 15). However, I did benefit from
viewing videotape entries brought in to the meetings by some NBCTs. I was able to get
tips from watching these videos that had successfully passed the assessment criteria that I
could use in producing my own videotapes. Since planning, videotaping, and appearing in video entries were very stressful for me, this was for me the most helpful aspect of the support group.

During the support group meetings, we also discussed the assessment center exercises. Again, this was an area of some confusion because the tests and procedures had been substantially changed from the prior year, and no one had ever actually experienced the current conditions or tests. The assessment center exercises, though, were very much on the “back burner”, always referred to as the “summer tests”. In January, however, I was surprised to find out that the testing dates for my specific certificate area were in March! I very nearly missed this part of the assessment process because of misinformation.

The Box was shipped off, heavily insured and certified, and then I prepared for the assessment center exercises. After setting my appointment for the center, I received yet another booklet (150 pages) of detailed instructions and warnings to follow all details exactly. The penalty for failure to follow every specific instruction could again include loss of the scores for any and all of the exercises.

As described in the orientation booklet, there were six timed questions (30 minutes each) to which I was required to respond. They related to the content and pedagogy of 7 to 12 year-olds, and I chose to respond on the computer, although I had the option to write in long hand. The questions were appropriate to the age group and
development of 7 to 12 year-olds and concerned scenarios that I could easily relate to, based on my experience with this age group.

Although it was intense, I felt that this part of the whole assessment was much more straightforward and clear-cut than the portfolio. The scenarios given were very specific and, given that each question had a strict limit of 30 minutes to respond, there was no time for the in-depth reflection and analysis required for the portfolio entries. I left the center feeling that a huge load had been lifted, and marveling that I had finished such a complex and encompassing assessment.

The process of assessment for National Board certification was a profound experience. Like many teachers who complete this intense self-analysis, I feel that this has been the best professional development activity of my career. Although I won’t know for several more months whether I was successful in my attempt, I already know that it was well worth the immense effort for I strongly feel that I am a better teacher as a result of the reflection on my practice.

Purpose

At the same time that I was reflecting on my own teaching practice, I began to reflect on the NBPTS assessment process, how it affected me, and how beneficial this process was in terms of professional growth. I had noticed that minorities were not well represented in our county office of education support group, even though our county
serves a highly diverse population and there are many excellent teachers of minority ethnic origin. In fact, according to California Department of Education statistics for the latest year reported (1997), almost 20% of the 2949 teachers in my county identified themselves as members of ethnic minorities.

I also came across the statistic that there were only approximately 1,000 teachers of color among the 16,038 NBPTS certified teachers nationwide (Archer, 2002). Upon further inquiry into this phenomenal fact, I found that one of the stated goals of the NBPTS is to encourage minority teachers to seek and gain certification. However, only an extremely small percentage of NBCTs is composed of ethnic minorities, and the passing rate for minority teachers is lower than that of Caucasians (Archer, 2002; Bond, 1998).

These facts led me to question why it was that there was a disproportionately low representation of ethnic minority teachers achieving National Board Certification. Was it because of a lack of available information concerning the process and how to pursue it? Was there something inherent in the test itself that made it harder for minority teachers to pass? What is being done to support teachers, especially teachers of color, through the certification process? Although I felt that it was a highly beneficial experience in terms of professional growth, and the literature supports that finding, I found that there are disincentives as well. Are those disincentives different and/or more significant for teachers of color?
In my search for answers to these questions, I found more questions that needed to be answered. I also found that there were some persistent needs for support and information. The NBPTS is actively seeking input and research in these matters, as are many school districts and Offices of Education. The goal of the NBPTS is to have 100,000 NBCTs, or at least one for every school in the nation by 2006 (NBPTS, 2002a). They are also interested in researching the effect that this type of professional growth has on the teachers and on their students and have called for input through their publications and on their web site (NBPTS, 2002b).

This background information regarding the low passing rates, especially for teachers of color, was the driving force for my study. Through my research I wanted to find answers to the following questions:

1. Why aren’t teachers of color represented in proportionally higher numbers among NBPTS Certified teachers?

2. How available is information pertaining to NBPTS Certification and in what ways is that information distributed?

3. Who is considering NBPTS Certification and why are teachers opting to go through the process or choosing not to?

4. What support is available and/or desirable for NBPTS Candidates, and what is the most or least effective support?
Through researching these questions, an attempt was made to add to the body of knowledge about this fairly new assessment process, and thereby help other teachers, especially teachers of color, in their quest for becoming National Board Certified. In addition to a review of the literature, I undertook to interview a number of teachers who have been involved in the NBPTS assessment process as candidates for National Board Certification in order to evaluate their input on my questions. Through an analysis of their responses, I attempted to identify some specific areas where useful support can be developed. For future application, I expect to be able to work with those currently providing support for NBPTS candidates in order to change current support practices and to provide the types of support suggested by those I interviewed.

**Definitions**

Assessment Center – This is a designated testing center equipped to administer written tests under very strict controls. Test takers are required to provide picture identification and are assigned to a testing station, usually a carrel with a computer. Candidates are not allowed to take anything into or out of the testing area and are closely monitored by a test administrator. Test sessions are also videotaped.

Banking year – this refers to the year during which a Candidate is retaking some parts of
the assessment for which he/she did not receive passing grades. The term comes from the fact that candidates can “bank”, or retain and save, previous passing scores and only retake the part or parts with low scores. This can actually be longer than a year, because scores are good for two consecutive years from the date of initial score notification. It is important for candidates to know that retake scores are the ones recorded, even if they are lower than the original scores for that entry.

The Box – This is the cardboard box in which the materials needed for assembling the portfolio sections of the NBPTS assessment are delivered to candidates. It is also used for returning the completed portfolio to the NBPTS Center in San Antonio, Texas. It is mostly blue and white, and measures about 9” by 12” by 4”. It is the only accepted container for the materials and may not be altered in any way (such as enlarged or cut down). To do so invalidates the entire portfolio. It becomes a symbol of the whole process for candidates who put hundreds of hours into the portfolio, and it is guarded, packed, and shipped with the greatest of care.

Candidacy year – This refers to the school year in which the teacher is actively working on the assessment process and assembling the portfolio.

Candidate – This is a teacher who is going through the NBPTS assessment process.

NBCT – This is a National Board Certified Teacher. This is a teacher who has successfully completed all of the sections of the assessment process and has met
the performance score of 275 points or more. NBPTS Certification is valid for a period of ten years, and can be renewed by a process yet to be determined. NBCTs are considered to have demonstrated a very high level of competence in the profession.

NBPTS – This is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Created in 1987, it is a “coalition of teachers, policymakers, academic and corporate leaders” (NBPTS, 2001d, p. 1). The purpose is to develop standards for the teaching profession, assess teachers’ performance against those standards, and certify those who demonstrate a high level of accomplishment. It is supported by a number of government entities and teacher groups, and teachers make up the majority of the NBPTS board of directors.

NBPTS Standards – These are the sets of standards developed and adopted by the NBPTS for each of the certifications. The standards are not considered entry level, but are considered to be very high standards that demonstrate accomplished teaching, thus the requirement that candidates have a minimum of three years of successful teaching experience.

Propositions – These are the statements of beliefs that are the foundation of the NBPTS.

Support Groups – These are formal or informal gatherings of people with a common purpose or goal. The purpose of the gatherings is for the members to provide support for each other through the duration of the process. In the case of NBPTS
support groups, the purpose is for past and current NBPTS candidates, National Board Certified Teachers, and facilitators to aid the current candidates in the completion of the portfolio and preparation for the assessment center exercises.

Limitations

My study was limited to interviewing teachers from the central coastal area of California. The resulting sample size, though small, represents the ethnic diversity of teachers and their students in this area. Although I do not believe that I can draw any broad generalities for all teachers, I believe I was able to identify areas of concern regarding the NBPTS certification process as it relates to minority candidates. These will assist me and my colleagues in the development of support systems and practices that may contribute to the success of minority candidates for NBPTS certification in the future.

Overview

The following chapters will deal with the study I conducted with NBPTS candidates. Chapter Two will review the literature relating to the background and history of the NBPTS, historical concerns relating to assessment and models of support for NBPTS candidates. Chapter Three will describe my research design and methodology for analyzing the results of a case study. Chapter Four will present the results of my
study, including major points derived from analyses of respondent interviews. Chapter Five will discuss the results and the implications of my study and I will offer a plan for changing or adding to the current available support for NBPTS candidates.
Chapter 2

Those Who Have Gone Before Me

There were several avenues for research and review of the literature. I wanted to investigate the background and history of the NBPTS, to see how it was developed and why the standards and assessments were developed as they were. I felt it was important to review literature relating to the historical disproportion of minority teachers to students. I also wanted to look at historical concerns relating to assessment in order to get a sense of where in the assessment difficulties might lie for minority candidates. Additionally, I wanted to review models of support for candidates, in order to gather information on what kinds of support seemed to be the most efficacious.

Background and History of NBPTS

Having just completed the assessment process for National Board Certification, I was interested in the history of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), and in the associated literature and statistics. The standards set by the NBPTS are considered to be of the highest order (Barone, 2002; Budy and Kelly, 1996; Carmon, 1996). The rigorous assessment process, although time-consuming, is considered to be a very effective professional development activity for the candidates (Dorka & Dorka, 2000; Grasmick, 2002; Larsen, 2000). Indeed, the stated mission of the NBPTS 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 teachers who meet these standards, and to advance
related reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American
schools. (2001d, p. 7)

Multiple sources (Steeves & Browne, 2000; Pershey, 2001; Needham, 1994) would agree
that these are the foundations of the certification process, and that the standards reflect a
learner-centered orientation.

The NBPTS and its certification process came about as a direct result of the 1983
report A Nation at Risk, which led to the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a
Profession. Their recommendation, in their report A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the
21st Century, brought about the formation of the NBPTS (Buday & Kelly, 1996). The
purpose, as expressed by NBPTS President Betty Castor (2000) "is concentrated on the
heart of education – the teacher." Buday and Kelly (1996) would agree that teachers and
their daily interactions with students in the classroom are central to any education issues,
and that "leaving teachers out of the equation for improving student learning has led to
less than satisfactory outcomes for many reforms."

I found that NBPTS certification and the standards upon which it is based are
supported and endorsed almost across the board in the United States. Bill Clinton
mentioned the NBPTS in his 1997 State of the Union address, while commending its
work (Rothberg, et al, 1998). NBPTS has been endorsed by the American Federation of Teachers and by the National Education Association, which has members on the Board (Carmon, 1996).

State and district level support for the certification process has increased on a yearly basis, as well. One of the founders and the Chairman of the Board at its start in 1984 was Governor James Hunt, Jr. of North Carolina (Carmon, 1996). As a result of his involvement, North Carolina has by far the highest number of certified teachers with 3,660, according to the NBPTS website News Center (NBPTS, 2002c). Currently, 47 states offer support for National Board Certification, and more than 280 school districts offer financial incentives to encourage teachers to seek certification (Archer, 2002). Such support, especially financial, is necessary because of the cost of the assessment process. For the 2001-2002 school year, the cost was $2300.00 per teacher.

Buday and Kelly (1996) note that the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future recommends that the profession should aim to certify at least 105,000 teachers by 2006. This coincides with the goal of the NBPTS, according to Castor (2001), who says that number is meant to represent one certified teacher for every school in the nation. By 1996 there were 380 board certified teachers nationwide (Carmon, 1996). In 1997 there were 912 NBCTs, and that number increased to 4,804 in 1999 (Pershey, 2001). According to the NBPTS Web site (2002) the number of National Board Certified Teachers now stands at 16,038.
Sources agree that there are many benefits to teachers who attain certification (Carmon, 1996; Needham, 1994; Pershey, 2001). Aside from financial incentives, which vary from state to state, and even from district to district, certified teachers gain recognition, prestige, and a sense of strength of voice. Budy and Kelly (1996) assert that certification allows excellent teachers to stay connected with the students while receiving incentives and rewards previously offered only to teachers outside of the classroom. They contend that, because of the stronger respect and support from the public, administration, and state that certification brings them, certified teachers take on a more active role in curriculum development, coordination of instruction, professional development of colleagues, and special projects, such as school restructuring programs and state standards-setting panels. Pershey (2001) would add that the role of mentoring becomes more valued, especially in regards to colleagues who are attempting to gain certification.

There are disadvantages as well as advantages to National Board Certification, which may contribute to there being only 16,000 certified teachers after nine years of administering the tests. One such disadvantage is the expense, although there are many options available for helping with this, up to and including low-interest loans (NBPTS, 2001d, p. 10).

Another major consideration is the number of hours required to complete the NBPTS process, which is a very individual aspect of the assessment. Rothenberg, et al
(1998) stressed that the process is lengthy and difficult, requiring a commitment of many hours through a school year. Rotberg, Futrell, and Holmes (2000) mentioned that teachers will spend on average 120 hours on the development of the portfolio entries, while other estimates range between 150 and 250 hours on the portfolio entries. Larsen (2000) reported that she spent almost 300 hours. Since this is a substantial amount of time for a teacher who is already working full time in the classroom, several sources stressed that this must be a serious consideration (Larsen, 2000; Dorka & Dorka, 2000). Larsen (2000) and McLean (1999), both teachers who were successful in gaining certification, agree that the candidate year is not a time to take on other responsibilities or projects. Pershey (2001), who conducted a support group for candidates, also is adamant that the time must be right for seeking certification, and adjunct responsibilities should be kept to a minimum.

Along with the time and expense involved, research shows that many candidates find the process frustrating in the end. The passing rate, according to Rotberg, et al (1998) was only about 35% in the first three years of testing, although Pershey (2001) puts it at about 25% for 1987 through 1997. According to Rotberg, et al (1998), this rate has improved to about 45% passing rate currently. Many candidates (about 55%) who have put such a significant effort into the process can expect to fail, which is a very discouraging and daunting prospect.
It also appears, according to Archer (2002), that passing rates are lower for minority candidates, which attributes to the fact that fewer than 1,000 U.S. teachers of the more than 16,000 now certified by the NBPTS are teachers of color. Bond (1998) puts the passing rate of minority candidates at just 11%. This is in spite of the fact that Rothenberg et al (1998, 2000) mentioned that a goal of the NBPTS is to increase the supply of highly qualified teachers, "with special emphasis on teachers from racial and ethnic minority groups."

This raises questions about the equity of the assessment process. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) has determined that "if the selection (or passing) rate of a particular group is less than 80% of the rate for the group with the highest rate, this can be viewed as evidence of adverse impact" (Hood & Parker, 1991, p.607). By these guidelines, minority candidates should have at least a 36% passing rate (80% of 45% passing rate for Caucasian candidates) for this assessment to fall within EEOC guidelines.

Another disincentive to seek certification by the NBPTS is a perception among some teachers, according to Larsen (2000), that it is elitist. Given that the passing rate is so low, and that it is even lower for minorities, a certification process that is taken as a way to identify the "best" teachers may tend to make some people wary. Unfortunately, according to Rotenberg et al (1998), with such small numbers of teachers certified, NBPTS certification functions as if it were based on a master teacher concept, again reinforcing
the concept of an elitist group. Other sources are agreed that part of the responsibility for
this perception of an elitist concept lies in the fact that information is not widely or
evenly disseminated (Archer, 2002; Steeves & Browne, 2000).

According to McLean (1999), some states, such as North Carolina, have made the
certification process a part of its education reform policies. As previously mentioned,
that has to do with the involvement of former North Carolina Governor James Hunt, Jr. in
the formation and direction of the NBPTS. Pershey (2001) reports that the state of Ohio
funded a program to mentor almost 100 candidates over three years. However, studies
Washington, D.C., found that there were “significant differences in the amount and
quality of information available to candidates.” They found that such circumstances
limit equitable access.

Studies have also found that only a very few candidates receive expert guidance
and support through the process, in spite of President Clinton’s urging governors to
develop a system to support teachers seeking National Board Certification (Buday and
Kelly, 1996). A related concern expressed by Rotberg, Futrell, and Holmes (2000) is that
the districts with the fewest support services (financial and otherwise) will be in the
poorest areas, or in isolated areas. These are the districts, Rotberg et al assert, that tend to
have the highest proportions of teachers and students from minority groups. This
situation makes the issue of equity rise again.
Several sources, such as Archer (2002) and Barone (2002), compared the NBPTS certification process to other professional organizations' attempts to hold their members to the highest of standards. Unfortunately, Rotberg et al (1998) agree that a main difference is that there are study guides for all other national examinations (such as for medicine, law, college admission, teacher licensure, etc) but none for NBPTS certification. Support groups such as the one reported by Pershey (2001) are addressing this situation at the local level. They use videos and essays from portfolios that have "passed" as samples for study and discussion.

NBPTS is addressing the problem of lack of study materials by offering for sale Portfolio Samplers, with sample portfolio entries and a sample video. They also offer assessment and scoring kits, with practice exercises and selected scoring materials (NBPTS, 2001d).

Additionally, sources such as Shulman (1986) and NBPTS (2001a) report that there exists a gap between what teachers are being trained to do and what is expected of teachers who are seeking National Board Certification. Rotberg, et al (1998) warn that "beginning teachers lack the preparation for the assessment, and they often do not gain that experience as part of their teaching responsibilities or in subsequent professional development programs."

In particular, the analytical writing and the videotaping requirements were tasks that Rotberg, Futrell and Holmes (2000) found were especially difficult for teachers.
These are skills that are rarely, if ever, used in the course of day-to-day teaching. The reflective writing is a tool that, while valuable for teacher growth, is time-consuming in the detail required, and is also not encouraged by a teacher's normally hectic daily schedule. Pershey (2001) also found that analytical writing, videotaping, and reflective writing were areas of particular need for support.

Burroughs, Schwartz, and Hendricks-Lee (2000) reported on a case study they conducted of four teacher/NBPTS candidates. Their study showed that the analytical and reflective writing was the source of most of their difficulties. Burroughs, Schwartz, and Hendricks-Lee found that teachers' working knowledge (the practical knowledge used to practice their profession) "is local, contextualized, personal, relational, and oral" (p. 345) whereas the NBPTS assessment relies on "knowledge that is decontextualized, written, formal, and composed for an imagined audience" (p. 346). The informants in the Burroughs, Schwartz and Hendricks-Lee study were three white teachers and one African American teacher. The three white teachers passed the assessment and were certified, but the African American did not.

Since the NBPTS certification centers around a highly developed set of standards, which are the focus of the performance-based assessment, it is also important to align teacher training to those standards (Shulman, 1998; NBPTS, 2001a). Aligning teacher training to NBPTS standards is especially significant since there is extensive agreement upon these standards among educators, business, and government. In fact, Rotberg,
Futrell and Holmes (2000) suggest that discrepancies between NBPTS standards and the common practices in colleges of education, professional development, and school districts must be reduced. Working toward coordinating teacher training with NBPTS standards leads in turn, stress Rotberg, Futrell and Holmes (2000), to addressing inconsistencies between National Board Standards and certification tests administered by states and school districts.

As Buday and Kelly (1996) mention, NBPTS certification establishes advanced standards for teachers, which the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future acknowledges as foundations for teacher professionalism. If teachers are not prepared during their credential preparation to understand and work toward NBPTS standards, and nothing in their professional development prepares them for expertise in those standards, Rotberg et al (1998) insist we will not see the hoped-for substantial increase in numbers of nationally certified teachers. The gap between teacher training and the NBPTS standards is the basis for the call by many teacher and NBPTS advocates for schools and school districts to include preparation for NBPTS assessment and training in the NBPTS standards as a regular part of the professional development offered to teachers. As reported by Buday and Kelly (1996), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) “strongly encourages colleges to examine how their programs can foster the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for beginning practitioners that are compatible with the National Board’s statement of accomplished practice.”
Pershey (2001), Buday and Kelly (1996), and Rotberg, et al (1998) all agree that the universities, as the training grounds for teachers, need to be at the forefront of the preparation of teachers who will qualify for National Board Certification. Indeed, this is already happening in some instances where universities are rethinking their teacher preparation programs to include NBPTS standards and assessments. The University of Texas at San Antonio (NBPTS 2001e), George Washington University in Washington, D.C. (Rotberg, Futrell and Holmes, 2000), Cleveland State University of Ohio (Pershey 2001), eight State Colleges of Minnesota (NBPTS 2001e), and the University of California at Los Angeles are among many other universities and teacher preparation schools that are now or in the process of integrating the NBPTS standards into their curriculum. (Buday & Kelly, 1996; Tell, 2001). The Carnegie Foundation and Stanford University are strong supporters of the NBPTS standards and are designing them into teacher training. From my own experience I know that California State University Monterey Bay is among the universities developing ways to prepare teachers for careers that will lead them to attain the high levels of standards developed by NBPTS.

In the interest of furthering the goal of advancing teaching as a profession, the NBPTS, among others, has called for research on the impact of NBPTS certification on schools, students, teachers, policies, and reforms (NBPTS 2002e). Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, says that NBPTS certification places proven teachers on a pedestal and is "one of the best ways to assure that students receive the

The NBPTS reports that, according to a recent study by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, “Students of National Board Certified Teachers demonstrated a deeper understanding of key concepts they were taught at and understood those concepts at a deeper level than those taught by non-certified teachers” (2002b, p. 2). Betty Castor, President of the NBPTS, asserts that the fact that North Carolina has the largest number of NBCTs has had a direct impact on student test scores. In the early 1990’s, North Carolina was near the bottom rank in test scores, but now scores well above average in reading, and huge gains have been made in math (NBPTS 2002a). Archer (2002) reports that William Sanders of the SAS Institute of North Carolina has been hired by the NBPTS to study the value of NBPTS certification as well.

The NBPTS has been developing assessments for certification of teachers according to standards that are widely accepted as top notch, and are being included by many teacher-training organizations as part of credential preparation. The process of assessment is lengthy, rigorous, and expensive but is considered by many to be an excellent professional development experience. It is clear, however, that minority teachers are not represented in proportionate numbers among NBPTS certified teachers.
Concerns and issues of minority representation

As previously mentioned, a goal of the NBPTS is to increase significantly the numbers of Nationally Certified teachers of color. This is predicated on a substantial body of literature that indicates there are benefits to students, especially those from ethnic minorities, which come from having teachers of color as role models. Noguera and Akom (2000) say that it is important to “assure that poor children have access to well-qualified teachers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.” This stance is reinforced by the fact that “Children of color are the majority in a growing number of the nation’s largest urban school districts and will be the majority of the public school student population in the year 2040” (Murnane & Levy, 2001).

Nationally in the year 2000, 38.7% of all students were minorities, while only 12.2% of teachers were ethnic minorities (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). In California, populations of students of color are growing at an even faster rate than the national average. According to the California Department of Education (2002b), the percentage of students who identify as white, not Hispanic has dropped steadily over the past twenty years, and in 2002, white students only account for 35.9%. In the meantime, the percent of students who identify as Hispanic has steadily risen, until in 2002 they outnumbered whites at 43.2%, and the percentages of other ethnicities has remained fairly stable. These percentages vary even more within counties and districts. For
example, the district in which I teach serves a student population in which 95.4% identify as “not white” and the teaching population is 79.8% white (CDE, 2002d).

In this same time frame in California, according to the California Department of Education (2002c), the percentage of teachers who identify as white remains disproportionately high at 74.5%, although that number has steadily declined over the past twenty years, from 83%. During the past twenty years, the percentages of teachers who identify as Hispanic (12.9) and Asian (4.2) have slowly increased, while the percentages for Blacks and other minorities have remained stable. However, California is the exception in the United States. As Boyer and Baptiste point out, “Although the (national) student populations are becoming more diverse, the teaching population is becoming less diverse” (1996, p. 783).

When considering the NBPTS passing rates for teachers of color, we come back to the question of equity. As Gordon puts it, “We are faced with a situation in which our professional practices and the assessment of these practices may get in the way of the ends that are the purpose for their existence” (1995, p. 367). We have data to show that minority children benefit from exposure to and association with minority role models. However, "the (gap) between the diverse population and the mainly homogenous population of teachers makes it difficult for all students to have role models in school with whom they can readily identify” (Latham, Gitomer, & Ziomek, 1999, p. 23).

Another benefit to diversity among the teaching force is that teachers of color bring
knowledge of communities of color to the classroom (Ladson-Billing, 1994). Such knowledge is less likely to be brought to the students by white teachers.

Other concerns arise over the disproportion of minority teachers to minority students. Boyer and Baptiste (1996) note the disproportion of males in the overwhelmingly female population of teachers creates the classification of male teachers as minorities. Boyer and Baptiste consider this disproportion to be a crisis that “involves the recognition of the significance of modeling within the classrooms. The absence of males in elementary classrooms is equivalent to the devaluing of the academic experience for all males” (p. 787).

Gillis (1990) expressed concern over the fact that the numbers of minority children are increasing at the same time that the numbers of minority teachers are declining. The concern is that, Many of these minority children may be denied exposure to minority teachers during their school years, and thus will be deprived of successful professional role models in education and convinced that educational achievement is “off limits” to them. Majority children will also be denied exposure to competent minorities in professional roles, thus continuing the stereotypical notion that minorities do not achieve professional status (p. 24).
Su (1996) agrees that the disproportion may mean that a student may complete an entire 12-year public school education without ever having a single teacher of minority background. Su maintains that

There are fewer social and cultural barriers between students and teachers of the same ethnicity and these teachers have higher expectations for the students. Moreover, teachers of color will be more likely than their White counterparts to advocate for students of color, thus increasing their voices in educational decision making. In reality, all children, not just minority students need to experience and can benefit from a multiethnic teaching force (pp. 117-118).

Quirocho and Rios (2000) likewise insist on the value minority teachers bring to the profession. Because teachers have demonstrated success in school, they can be presumed to have developed cultural mediation skills in crossing the cultural and linguistic boundaries in school contexts. Such skills add strength to their potential in teaching. Quirocho and Rios (2000) made this determination:

The lives of students will be enriched beyond measure by experiencing the power of the presence of teachers from minority groups. Students can benefit from broadened perspectives of culture and the sense of social justice that is nurtured by spending time in classrooms with teachers from minority groups (p.524).

This dichotomy between what we know to be in the best interests of a growing percentage of our students and what they actually experience in public schools is not a
trend that is likely to change course. According to the Teachers of Color Program (2002), nationally, “The population of teachers of color is projected to decline while the population of students of color is projected to dramatically increase in the years to come.” Hood and Parker (1989) assert that “the validity, reliability, item bias review procedures, and other elements of the test development and implementation process have served to decrease the already low pool of potential minority teachers” (p. 511).

Latham, Gitomer, and Zlimek (1999) found agreement for the projected decline in the population of teachers of color, in that they found candidates taking the Praxis I and II tests in applying for teaching licenses were 85% white, 7% African American, and 2% Hispanic. They further found that, among those taking the Praxis- I and II (tests of content and pedagogical knowledge that are used by 37 states and Washington D.C. to grant initial teaching licenses), there was a noticeable disparity. In fact, 91% of whites taking the tests passed, compared to 69% of blacks and 48% of Hispanics.

In another related study, Mercer (1983) found that, in Florida, where education majors must make a minimum passing score on four subtests before they can be certified to teach, the passing rate for students at majority white institutions was 90%; the passing rate for blacks has been approximately 35%. In fact, “ample research evidence demonstrates that educational testing works to the disadvantage of various minority groups” (Howe, 1994, p. 27). Fewer black teachers in our classrooms will mean fewer black role models for students. The importance of this fact for blacks and other
minorities is that, “The meaning and value students associate with school learning and achievement play a very significant role in determining their efforts toward learning and performance.” (Ogbu, 1992, p. 7)

As Garcia (1999) puts it, from the perspective of a minority, “How I am constructed and how I construct reality are not separate.” She goes on to explain that the value for minority students of interacting with minority role models is especially significant in the area of schooling, where lifelong attitudes about learning and construction of knowledge are formed.

Banks (1993) asserts that “Knowledge is not neutral, but is influenced by human interests, that all knowledge reflects the power and social relationships within society” (p. 79). The educational system in this country is based on northern European models, which have been shown to inadequately serve the vast numbers of minority students. This is especially apparent in the dilemma over standardized test scores. Non-Asian minority students consistently score lower than their Caucasian peers score on standardized tests. There was a narrowing in the achievement gap between blacks and whites in the 1970’s and 1980’s, but the gap leveled off or enlarged in the 1990’s. During that same period there was little change in the Hispanic/white gap. (Lee, 2002: Murnane & Levy, 2001)

There has been a great deal of research into the causes of these gaps in test scores. Ogbu (1992) maintains that one reason for the discrepancies in test scores is that
“Minority status involves complex realities that affect the relationship between the culture and language of the minority and those of the dominant groups” (p. 8). This is antithetical to the testing practices used so widely in the United States, with ever more emphasis being placed on “high stakes testing” as measures by which to judge schools and teachers. As Sarouphim (1999) puts it, “The majority of [tests] adopted by school districts in most states were normed and standardized on a sample of white middle-class students. This practice renders their use with minority students questionable” (p. 245).

There is wide agreement that assessment on any level needs to be culturally fair, bias free, and ideally in the language of the one who is being assessed. Farrell’s (1997) case study found that “Literacy, relevancy, and refinement are all subject to cultural interpretations. Students that possess cultural backgrounds different from examiners are at a disadvantage.” Historically, minority students have not been assessed validly. As Pollock (2001) puts it, there is “a fundamental American association between race and school” (p. 2). Sarouphim (1999) emphasizes:

Several studies on standardized tests have revealed gender, ethnic, and cultural bias. Sources of unfairness were attributed to the norms used for test interpretation, inadequacy of formats, bias in content, and linguistically loaded items (p. 245).

Hernandez (1994) insists that the issue of language is a particularly troubling one when it comes to testing.
Tests are biased with regards to the culture in which they were developed. All [tests] have an inherent bias because in their design and construction they reflect the uniquely specific elements of the culture that produces them. The inherent biases in tests are unavoidable and that is why it is not possible to produce a culture-free test.

While testing is becoming more heavily weighted for most American school children, scant attention is being given to the biased content and norms which reflect the values and experiences of the white, English-speaking, middle class population.

In California, where more school children are Hispanic than white, the question of language looms even larger, especially when it comes to writing tests. The English language is much more linear in structure than Spanish. According to Plata (1995), “This means that Hispanic writers who are proficient in Spanish and who are influenced by their culture must cognitively change style and beauty of language for logic, clarity, and brevity – a formidable task, indeed.” There comes into question, then, how much the writing of Hispanics will show the effects of the Spanish language or their cultural norms. Additionally, how will those effects impact the scoring of their writing against norms based on white, English-speaking middle class students? While these questions have implications for students of color, they also have implications for teachers of color who are assessed in standardized programs such as the NBPTS.
The literature revealed many implications regarding testing procedures and the low proportion of successful minority NBPTS candidates. In particular to the topic of this research, this question of written language applies to the fact that many students in our highly diverse population are taught for all or part of the school day in their native tongues, by bilingual teachers. However, the NBPTS assessment allows the submission of student work samples only in English or Spanish, with the exception of "brief expressions or phrases" in any other language (NBPTS, 2001d, p. 51). Further, all written commentary, analyses, and reflections must be submitted in English. According to Duran (1989), "For a non-native English speaker, and for a speaker of some dialects of English, every test given in English becomes, in part, a language or literacy test."

Moya and O'Malley (1994) agree that standardized tests in English become tests of language, rather than ability. Further, because they show consistently low scores for minority students in all skill areas, such tests are inappropriate in that they do not identify strengths upon which we can build. Moya and O'Malley suggest that:

Language proficiency must be viewed as a composite of many levels of knowledge, skills, and capabilities. A varied approach to measurement, including both test and nontest methods is, therefore, needed to ascertain student strengths and weaknesses in all critical areas. Portfolio assessment encourages the use of multiple measures.
In spite of efforts to conduct fair assessments, the fact remains that "it is not possible to think and act independent of culture." (Smagorinsky, 2001) Since the NBPTS submissions are required to be in English, the evaluation of Hispanic and other minority teachers whose primary language is not standard English is complicated by "the issue of cultural knowledge and its pervasive influence on how people interpret situations and guide their communicative behavior as a result." (Duran, 1989)

To return to a study mentioned earlier, Burroughs, Schwartz, and Hendricks-Lee (2000) found that teaching is a profession of performance, defined as "an act or series of acts" (p. 349). That is, teaching is a performance task, but the heaviest weight in the NBPTS assessment is placed on the written analysis and reflection. Their conclusion was that NBPTS candidates are certified or not certified "based on their language about their teaching, not on their teaching itself" (p. 349). Serafini (2002) also questions "Whether the assessments are capable of distinguishing between mediocre and accomplished teaching, and whether they are capable of capturing the complex nature of the act of teaching" (p. 318).

The implication is that unless teachers can express themselves adequately in the style of English that is most comprehensible to the scorers (mostly white, middle class females, as determined by the national pool of teachers), they are at risk of not passing. According to Cochran-Smith (1995):
It is widely acknowledged that we are most able to understand, make accurate predictions about, and provide strategic support for those who are most like us in culture, race, and ethnicity. Any given instance of teaching occurs within a particular historical moment and is embedded within nested layers of context, including the attitudes, values, beliefs, and language uses of the community (p.513-514).

Cochran-Smith delineates the rationale for using native languages in education in the first place, a school of thought that clearly indicates the need for minority role models in the schools in contact with the children on a daily basis. This school of thought also highlights some of the possible reasons for the low numbers of teachers of color who have achieved National Board Certification. As reported by Burroughs, Schwartz, and Hendricks-Lee (2000), the African American informant in their study explained her frustration thus; “I can do it, and I can say it, but I may not have written it so that you can see it, or you may not see it in the video” (p. 359). The researchers insist that she was an accomplished teacher, but she felt that writing was incapable of capturing what was really going on in her classroom. As previously mentioned, she did not pass the assessment.

Although performance-based assessments have been advocated for use with culturally diverse groups (Sarouphim, 1999), and teaching is a performance-based profession, it appears that "tests that rely heavily or exclusively on language proficiency are very different from natural communicative activities" (Duran, 1989). This is
especially true for those whose assessments are conducted in a language or dialect that is not their own native language. A discrepancy between the native language, culture, and ethnicity of the teacher and that of the assessors arises. According to Banks (1993):

The concepts, explanations, and interpretations that [people] derive from personal experiences in their homes, families, and community cultures constitute personal and cultural knowledge. [These] are used as screens to view and interpret the knowledge and experiences that the encounter in the school and in other institutions within the larger society (p. 76).

Another issue relating to inequality in testing that I encountered in my review of the literature was identified by Steele and his associates in a series of studies conducted at Stanford University. Called “stereotype threat”, it is “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 1999). While Steele and his researchers found that stereotype threat applies to any person who is in a situation where negative stereotypes might apply (such as women in high-level math courses, or older persons in situations where youth is perceived as advantageous), they found it particularly applies in testing situations.

Steele and his fellow researchers found that when black students know that they are especially likely to be seen as having limited ability, negative stereotyping becomes more relevant to them. Groups not as likely to be seen as having limited ability don't
experience the extra intimidation of stereotype threat. This indicates that the threat of failure for those minorities increases due to the fact that there are few minority candidates who have achieved National Board certification, and that the passing rate is substantially lower for minorities.

It might be claimed that minority teachers, by virtue of the fact that they have completed higher education and managed to attain valid teaching certification, have been able “to cross cultural and language boundaries and succeed academically” (Ogbu, 1992, p. 6). However, Steele (1999) reports:

But in all our research the most achievement-oriented students, who were also the most skilled, motivated, and confident, were the most impaired by stereotype threat. A person has to care about a domain in order to be disturbed by the prospect of being stereotyped in it.

What that means for minority candidates for NBPTS certification is that the best teachers, the ones who care the most about their profession, are precisely the ones most likely to be negatively affected in their assessments by stereotype threat.

This possibility is again upheld within the study done by Burroughs, Schwartz, and Hendricks-Lee (2000). Although all of their informants struggled with their assessments, only the African American felt that the videos and writing were unable to show her true performance. They report that part of the difficulty for her was that she felt there was a “right way” represented in the standards and she said, “You’re thinking they
want to see everything right” (p. 361). She felt “compelled to force a teaching episode into the framework of a standard and to ignore the value she found in the learning experience” (p. 361). This could possibly be reflective of Steele’s theory of stereotype threat, insofar as it reflects a subjugation of her own sense of teaching, developed through 25 years’ experience in favor of what she perceives as the tests’ “right” answer.

Clearly, NBPTS has made great efforts to create an assessment process that is valid and reliable. The use of the portfolio model, based on the performance of the teacher/candidates is considered to be the most authentic type of assessment. However, Gordon (1995) cautions that such assessment:

demands awareness that authenticity may vary not only with population characteristics but also with varied contexts. Class, culture, racial, ethnic, gender, and language diversity are all possible influences on the manner in which knowledge is acquired and the manner in which academic attitudes and knowledge are produced in assessment demands.

Support, Models, and Incentives

Some types of support might mitigate issues of inequity in the assessment process for teachers who are candidates for NBPTS certification. Therefore, I explored the available literature for evidence of support currently available to candidates, and to
determine what strategies, if any, were particularly effective. I also looked for literature concerning how support and information are disseminated.

As previously mentioned, many states and school districts offer financial incentives for teachers to attempt to gain NBPTS certification. First among those is to subsidize the cost of the assessment. According to a September 2001 survey conducted by the NBPTS, this form of support was rated as important or critical to 82.9% of teacher/candidates responding (NBPTS 2002c).

Other support, however, seems to be an important factor in the success of many candidates. The NBPTS recommends working together, according to many of their publications (2001c,e; 2002b). Based on cooperative learning models, the NBPTS has established centers in North Carolina, St. Paul, Minnesota, San Antonio, Texas, and Starkville, Mississippi, to recruit and reinforce the efforts of candidates for National Board Certification (NBPTS, 2001a, e). There are also support programs associated with Georgetown University in Washington, D. C. (Rotberg, Futrell & Holmes, 2000), the University of Nevada, Reno (Barone, 2002), and Cleveland State University (Pershey, 2001) among many others. Stanford University has one of the most successful support centers for NBPTS candidates. WestEd (one of the United States’ Regional Educational Laboratories) assists in the preparation and functioning of many NBPTS support groups. In addition, many state, county, and local offices of education, alone or in association with state departments of education, offer various supports for candidates.
What is very clear, from all sources, is that undertaking NBPTS certification is recognized to be a very demanding process. There is evidence that a support network that includes the effective contributions of mentors can increase the passing (or certification) rate of candidates. Where a structured support system exists, according to the Cleveland State University study reported by Pershey (2001), the passing rate of candidates participating rose to over 50%. In fact, Neill (1999) reports on two teachers in New Mexico who worked together to achieve National Board certification in 1995. Since then these two teachers have encouraged 23 others from their district and 18 of those have been successful, an achievement rate of 78%. The two teachers mentioned have personally mentored nine other teachers and eight of those were successful in their attempts, for a phenomenal passing rate of 89%.

The kinds of support offered vary widely from state to state, and even from county to county. For example, two of the three counties in my general area offer support groups through the County Offices of Education. The third offers no program, and the superintendent of schools was even unaware that there was a National Board Certified Teacher in the county.

Of the types of support available to candidates, the simplest are very informal, and rely on candidates finding each other, talking together, and reading each other's writing. Candidates working with this type of minimal support can sometimes turn to unions for help, as in Long Beach, California (NEA, 2001, p. 27). Such union-backed
support frequently involves summer institutes, two- to three-day symposiums, and mentoring by NBCTs within the union. According to the NBPTS candidate survey of September 2001, 17.1% of candidates received support organized by teachers' unions.

The support model proposed by the NBPTS (2001e) in its four centers involves a multi-year commitment. First there is a Pre-candidacy year. The following year is the Candidacy year, and the third year is the Candidacy Support year, or the Banking year.

In conjunction with this type of support program are those offered in and through the schools of education. In an extension of the pre-candidacy idea, some schools, such as Illinois State University, offer courses in the NBPTS propositions and practices, as well as mentorship (NBPTS, 2001a). Such courses include weekly meetings during which standards are examined, portfolio entries are read, and candidates collaborate with NBCTs (pp. 38 – 40). The NBPTS Candidate Survey (September, 2001) found that 22.8% of respondents received support organized and/or facilitated by local colleges or universities (NBPTS, 2002c).

More frequently, it is left up to county or local offices of education to develop support for candidates. Support of this type generally evolves according to the demands of the school districts and/or the teachers who want to attempt certification. Responses to the NBPTS Candidate Survey (NBPTS, 2002c) indicated that almost half of support received by candidates was organized or facilitated by National Board Certified Teachers. Another 18% were organized and/or facilitated by candidates themselves.
The two counties near me that offer support both hold monthly meetings during the school year. These meetings are voluntary and are attended by candidates, NBCTs from the county, and support providers associated with nearby university schools of teacher education. Candidates have the opportunity to raise questions and specific areas of discussion, view and discuss videotapes of other teachers and NBCTs, and share their writing. Members of a writing consortium work with teachers on editing and revising their responses and analyses.

Although such county office support programs do not follow the multi-year models, efforts are being made to recruit NBCTs into coaching roles, and some districts are offering financial incentives for those teachers. (NEA, 2001, p. 18) Further, all teachers are welcome to attend, and those who are retaking parts of the assessment come to the meetings, similar to the “banking year” in the NBPTS plan.

Facilitation of the meetings and scheduling of the activities in support of the candidates is key to raising passing rates. NBPTS offers institutes each year for those who wish to take on the roles of facilitators and mentors. This training is in three parts, which include information on scoring and the opportunity to examine sample portfolio entries. (NEA, 2001, p. 19)

Administrators are key to the recruitment and success of the certification process. That is why Rotberg et al (1998) are concerned with the fact that “National Board Certification is rarely one of the primary options considered when teachers and
administrators seek opportunities for professional development." There is great variety in the support from local administration regarding release time, videotaping help, and even equipment available to candidates (such as video cameras and microphones). In a process that is arduous to begin with, the necessity of completing the whole process without any release time from teaching duties, and the need to locate equipment and people to videotape can be an added burden.

Additionally, the fact that videotaping is something outside the expertise and daily activities of most teachers points to another area where support is suggested. Pershey (2001) scheduled videotaping training and practice in her support group. One of the two local county offices of education offered the loan of video equipment, and had some personnel who were available on a limited basis to come to the classes to videotape.

The importance of having administrators in supportive roles has been amply demonstrated in North Carolina and Texas, where the states have taken a strong position in support of NBPTS certification. Following this lead, local school district superintendents and principals have committed time and resources to the candidates (NBPTS, 2001e, pp.7, 11). Lee Shulman, one of the original members of the NBPTS, sees a possible solution to assuring that principals support the NBPTS process. He says, "One of my dreams is that a day will come when no one will be considered for a principalship who is not first a National Board Certified teacher" (Tell, 2001).
As a result of my survey of the literature, I found that there is general agreement that the NBPTS standards represent very accomplished teaching and that the process of certification is rigorous and demanding. However, a substantial body of literature raises concerns about the validity of the assessment process, particularly in regards to minority candidates. The literature suggests that a support system improves the passing rates for all candidates, both for people of color and Caucasians. In the next chapter I will explain my methods for collecting and analyzing information for my case study of teachers who are involved in the NBPTS assessment process.
Looking for a Path

Process and setting

This research involved a case study of six teachers who had recently been involved in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) assessment, a year-long process. The teachers were from three central California counties, which are culturally diverse in population. The main economy of the three counties is centered around agriculture, with a significant proportion of schools serving very low-income families. The teachers interviewed worked in a variety of school settings. Two taught in large urban schools of over 800 students. Three worked in slightly smaller schools of around 500 students, located in small cities. One teacher worked in a very remote rural school of ten students.

I visited NBPTS candidate support groups in the two counties that offered them. These meetings were held outside of school hours, one in the afternoon on a weekday, and the other on a Saturday. I explained my project to the support group facilitators of each of the County Offices of Education and was given permission to address the participants of the support groups. I explained my interest, and asked for teachers who were willing to respond and who would be willing to be part of my study. Through subsequent contact with the dozen teachers who volunteered, I was able to arrange interviews with six, who were able to meet with me and respond to my inquiries.
These six respondents were representative of the candidates in my focus counties. All of my six respondents are women, two of them Hispanic and the other four Caucasian. Very few candidates attending the support group meetings were teachers of color, and only two were men. Of the two men, one was unable to arrange time to talk with me and the other had moved out of the classroom even before the end of the school year in which he was a candidate. There were only two other Hispanic teachers at the meetings, and they were both unavailable due to the births of new babies during the summer after their candidacies. Therefore, although the focus of my research is on teachers of color, the disproportion represented by my sample is reflective of the candidate group as a whole. They

Research Participants

The six participants who volunteered to be interviewed for this study are Stephanie, Amy, Kathy, Carolina, Peggy (who all gave permission to use their real names) and Oo (a pseudonym).

Stephanie is the only teacher interviewed who already knew at the time of the interview that she had passed the assessment and had been Nationally Certified. She is Caucasian, in her early thirties, and has been teaching for over ten years in kindergarten, first and second grades. Stephanie received her certification in the area of Early Childhood/ Generalist, which is for primary grades Kindergarten through third, and
applies to teachers of self-contained classrooms. Stephanie teaches a bilingual
(Spanish/English) first grade in a Title I school, which indicates that all of the students
receive free breakfast and lunch, based on an average income level below the poverty
level throughout the school’s service area. The vast majority of students in her school
begin school speaking no English.

Amy is Caucasian, in her twenties, and had been teaching for only three years (the
minimum service period required for acceptance into the assessment) when she
undertook the assessment process. She was teaching first grade in a school that serves
mostly middle income students, in an English only classroom. Amy had previously taught
Kindergarten and reading at the same school. She had applied for certification as an
Early Childhood/ Generalist.

Kathy is Caucasian and had been teaching for five years in a “one-room”
kindergarten through eighth grade school. It is in a very rural area, 45 minutes’ drive
from the nearest large town, and she had only 10 students for the year during which she
undertook the certification process. She applied in the area of Early Childhood/
Generalist because she had enough students in the required age range to qualify for
assessment in that area.

Carolina is Hispanic and has been teaching for 21 years, all of that in kindergarten
and first grades. During her candidacy, she taught a bilingual (Spanish/English)
kindergarten class in a small city, at a school with a population of about 500 students.
She was a candidate for certification in the area of Early Childhood/Generalist emphasizing in English as a Second Language, because all of her students come to school with little or no English.

Peggy is Caucasian and was in her 19th year of teaching. During her candidacy she was teaching first grade in a Spanish-English dual language immersion program at a charter school. The school serves a very poor, highly migrant population, the majority of which enter school with no English. Her certification area was Early Childhood/English as a New Language.

OO is a pseudonym chosen by the respondent. She was insistent that her real name not be revealed and said, “I want to be known as double O.” She is Hispanic and has been teaching for many years. She currently teaches a bilingual (Spanish/English) second grade at an “under-performing” school, which serves a very poor, migrant population of over 700 students. Most students enter this school with little or no English. She will be undertaking NBPTS certification during the current school year, and has selected the Early Childhood/Generalist area as her certification goal.

Data Collection

All of the participants responded to a prepared list of basic questions (see Appendix A) which were designed to be as open-ended as possible. The questions were about their experiences relating to the NBPTS assessment process. Interviews were tape-
recorded and then transcribed. Interviews took place in locations chosen by the
respondents, such as a coffee shop, bookstore, participant's home or my home.
Participants were encouraged to add any ideas that came to mind and not to feel that they
had to stay within a structure of questions.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were completed and transcribed, I used grounded theory to
apply selective coding. I used color coding to identify what seemed to be meaningful
themes; that is, themes or ideas that candidates stressed were important to them. I
compiled the coded themes and examined them to see if they were recurrent among
several of the respondents, or isolated to one respondent. Then I contacted the
respondents again, by phone or e-mail, in order to verify that the themes identified were
valid reflections of their expressed experiences. After receiving their feedback, I
compiled the themes for this investigation, grouping the teachers' comments according to
categories that seemed to be appropriate. Those compiled themes are presented in
Chapter Four.
Chapter 4

Teachers Speak

The six teachers interviewed in depth for this research project were diverse in many ways. They ranged in age from mid-twenties to early fifties. They taught in a variety of school settings, and at varying grade levels. Two teachers are of color; the other four teachers are Caucasian. A number of themes ran through their responses to my inquiries about their experiences related to certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). I was able to identify themes pertaining to the availability and dissemination of information relating to the assessment process itself, their motivations for seeking certification by the NBPTS, the types of support they received (or would have liked to receive) during the certification process, the stresses and difficulties they encountered, the benefits and values they perceived regarding this certification process, and changes they felt should be made to the certification process.

*Information Pertaining to the Assessment Process*

Four of the six teachers first heard about the NBPTS and its certification process by word of mouth, either from other teachers or from the principals of their schools. The other two first heard about the process through written information sent to them by their County Offices of Education. For all of these six teachers, the beginning of their certification process was almost accidental. Kathy, who teaches at a rural school far
from any city, mentioned that the only reason she knew that it existed was because she also does the secretarial work for her one-room school. Kathy therefore happened to open the mail that contained a flyer from the County Office of Education inviting teachers to an informational meeting. All of the respondents mentioned that the information they were able to find was very vague, and that they finally received much more complete information about the process when they attended meetings at County Offices of Education. Oo (a pseudonym chosen by the teacher, who asked to be referred to as “double O”) and Amy also made extensive use of the Internet to learn more about the process. Oo further mentioned that she saw classes related to the NBPTS Certification process in a course catalog offering summer courses at a local university, with credit that could be applied to a Masters Degree in Education.

Interestingly, although the information these teachers had was vague, five of them mentioned that they were aware of the process for at least a year before they decided to attempt NBPTS certification. Kathy wanted to participate in the process the year before her actual candidacy, but did not have sufficient numbers of students in specific grades in her tiny rural school to qualify for any certification area. Amy also intended to attempt certification the year before her actual candidacy, but had not completed the required three years of full-time teaching.

For Carolina, Stephanie, and Oo, their decision to attempt NBPTS certification was determined by their personal situations. As Carolina put it, "I was interested but
scared. I put it off until I felt my personal life could handle it, until my kids were older and I only had one 19-year-old at home.” Stephanie agreed, saying,

I felt the time was right for me because things are always changing and life is always changing. I found out in the middle of it (her candidate year) that I was pregnant, so it was the right time for me, because my life really did change after that.

As they began their certification attempts, Carolina, Amy, and Kathy all made an effort to share information with other teachers who might be interested in NBPTS certification. Carolina also contacted her union representatives about providing information and support for prospective candidates. Kathy, although she lives remote from any town, offered to speak to prospective candidates at County Office of Education meetings.

Once they began the certification process, several of the teachers responding to my questions mentioned that they continued to find it difficult to gather information or get answers to questions they had regarding the requirements and directions. Amy was able to find a “web ring” on the Internet (a group of people who follow and add to a topic of mutual interest) that was more responsive to her questions about her Early Childhood/Generalist certification area than the NBPTS itself. In fact, Amy, Carolina, Peggy and Kathy all expressed that they had great difficulty in finding clarification and answers from the NBPTS. Peggy had this to say,
The worst thing for me was trying to get answers about the instructions. We needed clarification on the instructions, and no one at the District Office had even a clue. No one in the (support) group had even a clue because no one had done the English as a Second Language Certification. I wrote back and forth to the National Board Candidates' Inquiry Service and I couldn't get a straight answer from them. It seems the people who answer the phones weren't the experts. E-mails weren't signed, so there was no accountability. We even tried to call the people whose names were on the book of the standards, because they made up these standards. But we weren't successful in getting hold of those people, either.

Carolina, Oo and Kathy found some of the information provided by the NBPTS to be contradictory, as well. All of them expressed that they were unsure of the certification areas. Carolina and Oo both had a difficult time determining whether to choose to follow the English as a New Language (ENL) path or the Early Childhood/Generalist certification area, because both seemed to cover their classes in age and content. Carolina regretted that she chose the ENL path, a decision mostly based on the later due date for the portfolio. She felt that the description wasn't clear, and that she thought the NBPTS "hadn't really worked out yet" what the requirements would be, so that "We thought it (the requirements) changed in the middle (of the process)."
For these same reasons, Oo decided to choose certification in the area of Early Childhood/Generalist, even though a very important part of her curriculum is developing English as a new language. She felt that there were more requirements for the ENL path, and that the directions were less clear.

Kathy had a more general complaint regarding the information directly related to the assessment. She felt that the NBPTS doesn’t make it clear that successful certification, at least in the Generalist areas, requires a wide variety of knowledge across grade levels. She said, “People were shocked that they had to know this and that from all the grade levels. What is their goal for teachers? Is it to specialize? Or is it to be broad, to have a broad spectrum of grade levels to teach from?”

In summary, these teachers felt that information regarding the assessment process was limited. This, they felt, was not only the case with preliminary information about how to pursue NBPTS certification, but also that the NBPTS was not very forthcoming with clarification and information for actual candidates. Several of these informants found some assistance on the Internet, and some of them made it a point to offer information to other teachers and candidates as they found it.

*Motivations for Seeking NBPTS Certification*

Although all of these teachers teach in the state of California, which has in place large financial incentives (a total of $30,000.00) for teachers to become certified by the
NBPTS, only one of the six respondents in this research project (Peggy) said that these incentives were a major motivating factor for her. Peggy had a daughter recently starting college and wanted the opportunity to get the extra money. She said, “I thought it would be a pretty good return on the time investment if I got the $10,000.00 (from the state) plus $5,000.00 a year for four years (for National Board Certified Teachers teaching in “underperforming” schools). I thought it was worth it.” Although she was moving to another part of the state, and leaving her current position in a school classified as under-performing, she was confident that she could get the extra four-year stipend because “there are under-performing schools wherever there are low-income people of color.”

All of the other five teachers interviewed mentioned that the money was a nice added incentive, but that there were other factors more important to them. In fact, Amy specifically said, “I think that’s the misconception where some people might want to do it for the money, but it’s not worth doing it for the money. It’s worth every cent that they give you, because it’s not really easy at all.”

A number of other motivations for undertaking the NBPTS certification process were mentioned by the teachers I interviewed. Carolina and Kathy both felt that certification by the NBPTS was a way to prove that they were good teachers. Kathy wanted to prove it to herself, saying, “It was important to me to say that I am a professional teacher. It’s not just my job. I wanted to prove that this is the real thing.” Carolina said that she felt that, “I publicly deserve this kind of recognition. I am an
accomplished teacher.” Carolina chose this method of proving herself publicly because 

“I felt that the standards were the best I’ve ever read. They validated what I believe 

about teaching.”

Amy and Stephanie felt somewhat the same way. Amy thought the NBPTS certification process “sounded like it was challenging and it was rigorous and there were 

higher standards to reach for. I won’t be happy until I’m passed.” Stephanie also was 

interested in professional growth. She said, “I wanted to go to the highest level I could. I 

already had my Masters Degree. I thought (NBPTS certification) is really the top, the 

best that a teacher can be. That’s the highest level (of certification) for teachers.”

Oo had a slightly different motivation. She said that she has had NBPTS certification as part of her professional development agenda, along with pursuing 

Reading Recovery Certification and eventually a Masters Degree or Ph.D. She thinks 

NBPTS certification will look good in applications for other goals she has in mind, such 

as seeking a Fulbright Scholarship for summer travel abroad in education. She feels that 

NBPTS certification would be a very strong endorsement that could help her attain such a 

competitive scholarship as the Fulbright.

As a minority teacher, Oo also feels that NBPTS is a tool that could be 

empowering for minorities. She said, 

It’s empowering to articulate your voice. And I think that the people reviewing 

(the assessment and portfolio) will be hearing what I have to say. I want the
voices of minority teachers to be heard by the reviewers, who are people that are going to be in positions of power. I want their voices to go into studies and statistics and Masters’ Theses and Ph.D. (Dissertations), so there is some recognition of a) the value of bilingual education and, b) really and truly what are the things that get in the way of a good bilingual program.

Oo also foresees a time when this type of certification will be mandatory, especially for teachers in the primary grades who are responsible for developing beginning reading skills. She has formed this opinion, she says, “Because if you really want to be a professional in the profession, you know, this is what it takes.”

Therefore, the motivations of these respondents for undertaking the NBPTS certification process varied. For one, the financial incentives were primary, but others cited different factors as more important. Among those factors were the high level of professional development, recognition of their accomplishments as teachers, and an empowering opportunity to use their voices.

Support for Teacher/Candidates

Respondents reported a range of support they received during their candidacy, and had some ideas about the types of support that would have made their experiences, if not easier, at least a little less stressful. First among the forms of support was the subsidizing of the fees for taking the assessments. The cost ($2300.00 per teacher for the year in
which most of the respondents were candidates) was at least partly deferred for all of the respondents to this study. Peggy, Carolina, and Oo, received a combination of funds from the state and federal governments, while Amy’s school district paid all of her fees. Kathy, Stephanie, and Oo also had part of their fees paid by their school districts. In fact, Kathy negotiated the payment of half of her fee as a part of her contract for her candidacy year.

All of the informants of this research also received support from the groups organized by facilitators at County Offices of Education, although Kathy had none in her home county. In fact, Kathy said that the Superintendent of Schools in her county had been completely unaware of the NBPTS certification process, as well as unaware that there was already one National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) working in a school in the county, until Kathy informed him. Although her county was beginning to try to recruit and organize support for NBPTS certification, Kathy had to go to a support group offered by neighboring counties. Since the distances involved were so great, she actually had to go the night before the Saturday meetings and stay in a motel in order to be able to attend the support group meetings.

The reaction from these teachers to the help provided by the support groups varied somewhat. Stephanie found the support group was helpful during her candidacy year because there were four other teachers in the group working on the same certification area as she. However, Carolina and Peggy here both working towards a
certification area that was new in their candidacy year, and therefore found limited support. The facilitators and support providers simply did not know anything about it.

All of the teachers informing this project said that the support groups were valuable to them, especially because they provided opportunities to have other teachers, facilitators, and writers review and critique the portfolio entries. Although Kathy feels she is a strong writer, she is convinced that, "I don't think I could have passed without people at the group to read my papers", especially given her remote living situation and the fact that she had no ready access to other teachers outside of this support group.

Peggy and Carolina found support for the writing aspects of the assessment process through joining the Northern California Writing Project. Peggy explains that this is a group organized to support writing about education. She specified that the help was limited because the writing for the NBPTS Certification is so prescribed that anyone who has not read the 200 pages of instructions would not know exactly what was required. The participants in the Writing Project, however, were helpful to Peggy and Carolina as readers of their writing would comment and provide suggestions.

The respondents all reported receiving what they termed "moral support" from members of the staffs at their school sites. They felt it was positive to be asked, "How's it going?" and "How are you doing?" Peggy mentioned that it was comforting to have another teacher at her site who was going through the certification process at the same time, even though their certification areas were different. Peggy felt that it was nice to
know that someone else really understood what she was doing, and that they would read
and comment on each other's writing. Kathy specifically mentioned that the children and
parents in her tiny rural school were very supportive "It was like a gift they gave me," is
the way Kathy put it.

Of the five teachers in this study who have completed the assessment process,
none of them received help from site administrators, such as principals, beyond the
aforementioned "moral support." In fact, Carolina was told by her principal that the
assessment was a "personal endeavor," and as such Carolina was "on her own."
However, four of these five teachers reported that they had received some assistance from
other members of the staff, such as classroom aides, other teachers, and vice-principals.
Most of this assistance came in the form of help with the videotaping of the class for the
two video segments required for each portfolio.

Some support was also reported by several teachers in the area of videotaping
equipment that was loaned and/or purchased by the school sites. Only Kathy had to
purchase her own video equipment, although she was hopeful her school board would
eventually purchase it from her for use at the school. Carolina was loaned a camera by
her school, but it was stolen from her room before the taping was done and she had to use
an old camera from her daughter. Amy's school district provided a high quality video
camera as well as a boom microphone.
Except for Kathy, who was forced by circumstances to work primarily on her own, all the teachers in this project reported that it was crucial to them that they formed a "buddy" system with at least one other teacher. Amy, Carolina and Peggy specified that it was their close work with another teacher that made it possible for them to complete the assessment. Although none of them had a partner at her own school site, they worked together with their "buddies" on a regular basis, read each others’ writing, viewed each others’ videotapes, and discussed all aspects of the assessment frequently. In Amy’s case, she and her "buddy" teacher did the videotaping for each other. Stephanie also reported that she worked with a group of teachers who were working on the same certification area, and that it was a tremendous help to have them to relate to.

Another kind of support mentioned by only Amy was that her school district granted her four days of paid release time (time away from the classroom with a substitute teacher which is not counted against a teacher’s earned personal leave or sick time). Amy is the only teacher responding to this inquiry who was given release time to pursue NBPTS certification. Two of the days granted to Amy were designated for videotaping and the other two were for working on her writing for the portfolio reflections. Amy took an additional five days of personal leave time during the school year to work on her portfolio, as well as five days of leave time during summer school classes in order to prepare for the assessment center exercises.
The other teachers mentioned that time off from the classroom would have been very helpful, especially during the last few weeks before the portfolio entries were due, but that they were not offered release time by their districts. Kathy reported that she would very much have liked to have been able to take some time away from her class, but was unable to, due to the great difficulty of securing the services of a substitute teacher for her situation.

These respondents, then, mentioned a number of forms of support they received during their NBPTS candidacy years. They all mentioned financial support for part or all of the fees involved. All of them attended support offered through County Offices of Education and input they received from others regarding their writing. They particularly benefited from a close "buddy" relationship with another teacher, if such was available. All mentioned that they needed assistance with the video equipment and videotaping. Several mentioned that they would have liked to have had some time off from the classroom to work on the portfolio or prepare for the assessment center, but only one was given that benefit.

_Difficulties Encountered_

All teachers responding to my inquiries reported that they encountered a variety of difficulties during their attempts at NBPTS Certification. These difficulties can be roughly divided into those relating to logistics and/or processes and those relating to
personal stress factors, although there is some overlap. Most of the overlap seemed to be
due to the fact that logistic or process problems added to the stress felt by all of the
candidates.

The most difficult logistic problem, and all six of the candidates agreed, was the
videotaping requirement for two of the four sections of each candidate's portfolio. None
of these teachers had had any prior experience with video equipment and Kathy, Amy,
and Carolina particularly mentioned that they experienced a series of difficulties in
learning how to use the equipment as well as getting quality videotapes with sound at a
level they felt was required.

Candidates informing this project also encountered problems when it came to
finding people to do the actual taping. Even after the teachers became familiar with the
equipment themselves, they still had to find someone willing and able to run the camera.
The teachers not only had to explain how to run the equipment; they also had to explain
to the prospective operator what was required on the video. For example, videos
submitted in the portfolio cannot be edited in any way, and starting and stopping the
video counts as editing. Therefore, a video that captures a lesson well, with good sound,
will not be accepted if the camera stops and restarts during the taping.

Amy found that she had fewer problems after she and her "buddy" learned how to
use the camera, something they "spent hours and hours learning." Because they
videotaped each other, and they were both working on the same certification area, the
person doing the taping was fully aware of all the precise requirements. Kathy also was able to work with just one person (her full-time classroom aide) to do all the videotaping, but Carolina, Stephanie and Peggy all had to use a variety of videographers. Carolina reported that she had to ask many people to videotape, “but they didn’t know what to look for.” She also felt constrained from asking people from her school site because of her principal’s position that “this is a personal endeavor.”

Aside from the physical act of taping, Peggy, Kathy and Carolina had a great deal of difficulty with the actual lessons they were trying to tape. Peggy said that at first she thought the videotape was intended to represent “a slice of life in my classroom. I tried that but I realized the requirements were so specific in what they wanted to see that I kind of had to stage the type of lesson they wanted.”

Kathy felt somewhat the same way. She says that she didn’t even have the lesson designed until a few days before the whole portfolio was due to be turned in. Her opinion is,

It’s manufactured this way. It’s not natural. I had to create a lesson about classroom community, but part of my classroom community was established five years ago, when I started (at that school). When you have the same kids for five years, that’s just the way it is. But the lesson I had to set up was just an unnatural situation.
Carolina, on the other hand, felt that the problem had to do, at least in part, with her choice of the English as a New Language path. She felt that there was a conflict between the standards the NBPTS espouses and the videotape she was expected to submit. She said, "The (NBPTS) standards say how important primary language is for learning a second language, but the video had to show an English lesson, a lesson in English." For Carolina this was especially difficult because she teaches kindergarten in a school district whose policy is that 80% of instructional time at that level is taught in the students' primary language, in this case Spanish. That meant that Carolina’s English lesson is only about 20 to 30 minutes out of the whole day. She says, "And so the video showed a very small part of my program."

Another major difficulty all these respondents said they faced was the amount of time they had to dedicate to the whole NBPTS certification process. Stephanie estimated that she spent more that 400 hours over a period of about six months. The other candidates also spent many, many hours on their portfolios, to the point where Kathy and Carolina both talked about not having any time to cook or clean their houses for several months. Carolina said, "You have to not have a life. You have to put your whole life on hold for this."

Carolina and Kathy also mentioned that they felt the time they had to devote to the assessment process also took away from their teaching. Kathy put it this way:
My real gut feeling is that it (the NBPTS Certification) is so hard that, in order to prove that you are a good teacher, it takes away from your teaching. You do the lessons and you skate with the kids so you can work on (the portfolio), and that’s not right. That’s a whole four or five months of not being your best, which is what they are trying to find.

Another area of difficulty about which all respondents expressed strong feelings was the writing required for the portfolio. They all mentioned writing and re-writing as time consuming and a huge undertaking, and all concluded that, in Kathy’s words, “If you’re not a good writer, it’s not a good test.” Although Carolina mentioned that she has had her writing published, and both Stephanie and Kathy felt that writing was a strength for them, the prescribed reflective and descriptive writing required by the NBPTS assessment process was arduous for them. Kathy stated:

I was really disturbed by the writing. I was thinking, “I’m glad I’m a good writer.” I had never done reflective writing before. I think it’s okay to weed people out with how it’s typed and the font and margins, because you want top quality. But I’m not sure if this is demonstrating top teachers. If you don’t have the skills of being a good writer, that doesn’t really mean that you are a poor teacher. Unless you can explain it in writing, it just doesn’t show.

While all of the aforementioned difficulties also carried a certain level of stress for the candidates interviewed here, the highest level of stress reported by all of them
came at the end of the portfolio part of the assessment. This is when the entire portfolio has to be packed in an exact manner in the box in which the instructions were delivered, and the whole thing has to be shipped to Texas. It must safely arrive no later than the candidate’s specific due date, at the risk of losing credit for some or all of the entries. Each candidate in this study reported this culminating process was the most stressful period.

One specific stress at this point that was mentioned by Stephanie, Carolina, Amy, and Kathy was the need to follow every instruction so precisely, what Carolina called “the stress of putting it all together the exact way they wanted it. I started resenting the dos and don’ts. They were so petty to me.” Amy, whose portfolio was due at the beginning of April, says that, “By March we were pretty much freaking out, trying to complete and pack the portfolios before the deadline.” The stress was so great at this point for Kathy that she says that she was “so high strung, so strung-out, I was just frantic.”

Amy, Kathy and Stephanie all had a hard time actually parting with the box at the post office. They all mentioned the feeling that there was such a huge part of their lives packed in the boxes it was hard to trust them to someone else. Stephanie, who says she had panic attacks over whether she had packed it correctly, even considered buying a plane ticket, flying to Texas, and hand-delivering the box to the address. She said, “I
realized that was nuts, but I had so much in that box. That's my life in there. How can I put a price on that?"

On the other hand, Carolina was so stressed by the end of her assessment process that she says she actually felt "abused". She said, when I took it (the box) to the post office to send it off, I was like, I don't want to see it any more, I was glad to get rid of it. I felt resentful of all the hoops that I had to go through, that I had to jump.

In fact, Carolina said that she used to share that she was going through the NBPTS certification process because she was proud of herself for it. However, at the time she was interviewed for this project (approximately one month after completing the whole certification process) Carolina was still so disheartened by the stress of the process that she no longer cared to tell anyone that she had been involved in an attempt at certification.

After the portfolio is submitted, there is a second phase to the NBPTS assessment process, which takes place at an assessment center, which may be one of many centers set up all around the United States. This part of the assessment process is generally referred to as just "the assessment center." This element of NBPTS assessment involves responding in essay form to six scenarios in a strictly controlled situation. Candidates are allowed precisely thirty minutes to read and respond to each scenario. Everyone who had been to the assessment center thought that it was a very difficult part of the whole
process, except for Kathy. Kathy felt that it was "a little too easy. One of my questions was a silly little piece of fluff. I finished early. Compared to the writing that we were doing (for the portfolio), the assessment center was too easy."

Stephanie had gone through the assessment before the others, and the procedures had changed quite a bit from her experience, in ways that she thought were improvements. At the time of her assessment center exercises, Stephanie felt that the process was "really messed up. You could only read the questions one time and had to spend a lot of the allotted time taking notes." Stephanie felt that there was better flexibility in what is known as "Next Generation" testing (beginning with the candidacy year 2001 – 2002, during which all of the other respondents except Oo were candidates). However, Peggy and Carolina still felt that this was the hardest part of the whole assessment process, and Amy also felt that she was unable to give quality answers due to the timed nature of this part of the assessment.

For Carolina, a bigger issue was the fact that English is not her primary language. She says she knows that timed writing in English is one of the hardest things for her to do, because she doesn't have time to revise. She explained,

Anybody who is struggling with (English as) a second language is going to have a hard time on this part of it. We have to write and rewrite and think it out and think about the vocabulary. The vocabulary doesn't come as easily. Writing is the last part of a second language (to be acquired), and I think it always stays that way. I
wonder how many teachers who were second language learners (of English) at one time, are passing this? Because even though I feel myself a good writer, and this has been validated for me, I still think that the writing part of the assessment center is not fair. I left there knowing I didn’t pass it.

Once the candidates have completed their assessments, they all face one more period of stress. Since portfolios are all due by June, and assessment center entries are completed by July, these candidates will wait up to five months or more to receive word of their scores. For Amy, the time she has to spend waiting to hear whether she “passed” and will be certified by the NBPTS is the hardest part of the whole assessment process. For the others, they are mostly interested to know if there are parts that they will need to retake, parts that had scores that didn’t allow them to pass. Until then, several of them feel as if that part of their lives is on hold.

In summary, all of the candidates reported encountering some difficulties during the NBPTS assessment process. Logistic problems included obtaining and using videotaping equipment, as well as being unsure of exactly what was to appear on the videotaped segments. The writing entries for the portfolios, because they were so specific, reflective and descriptive, were great challenges for most participants in this research. Packing of the portfolio for shipping was very stressful for all of the candidates, and most of them were troubled by the assessment center exercises, particularly for the candidate whose primary language was not English. Lastly, some of
the candidates felt the waiting time from the completion of the assessment until they found out their scores was particularly stressful.

Benefits and Value for the Candidates

In spite of all the stress and difficulties they encountered, all of the respondents who had completed the assessment process felt that they have derived value and benefits from their efforts. For example, both Carolina and Peggy felt that it was quite beneficial to them to watch themselves and their teaching on videotape. They felt they learned from seeing the interactions between themselves and their students.

Stephanie, who knew at the time that she was interviewed that she was successful in gaining NBPTS certification, said she found a lot of value in thinking about the how and why of her teaching, which was beneficial to her when she changed the grade level that she was teaching. She said, “It was really worth doing. It made me a better teacher.”

Amy agreed that it improved her teaching, as well. She said the analysis of the interactions between her and the students was a great gain for her, and that she had also changed some facets of her teaching style as a result. She also felt that the study of the standards that was required has helped her interpret what she does and how she does it.

Peggy said she actually enjoyed doing the portfolio entries. She felt she learned a lot through all the analysis of her teaching. She said, “It was really good for me to
articulate why I do what I do. It made it clearer for me and I think it will make me a better teacher."

Other benefits, these teachers felt, come with completing the assessment and with gaining the title of National Board Certified Teacher. Amy said that for her,

I call it more like an honor. I'll be like a mentor teacher for the district. I'll get to help people all across the district, not just at my school site. The district values this, they recognize us.

Carolina says that she felt that the whole process was important and that she felt "special" while she was going through it. Kathy, also, felt that it was a process that would validate her as a professional, and would be a strong recommendation for her if she were ever looking for a change of teaching assignment. Kathy thought that the difficulty of the process was important to its value. She said, "It's supposed to be hard so now, if I pass, it was worth it."

To summarize, all of these candidates felt that the overall NBPTS assessment process was beneficial to them, especially in the area of professional growth. They all felt that they had learned about themselves and their teaching, and that this was a worthwhile process. Several of them mentioned that passing this assessment would allow them to assume a position of honor in their districts and that they would be able to offer more to other teachers in the form of support.
Suggestions for Change

The teachers informing this project all had some suggestions for improving the NBPTS assessment process. Their ideas can be divided into those regarding the assessment itself, and suggestions for providing support for the teachers during their candidacy.

Most of the suggestions for improvement of the assessment itself concerned the assessment center exercises. All of these teachers (except Oo, who had not yet completed the assessment process) opted to respond to the exercises via computer, although candidates may also write out their responses in longhand, on paper. All of them reported that they felt comfortable with that choice, although several mentioned that the first section was more difficult as they had to take time to discover exactly how to navigate through the program. They felt that the tutorial provided was not sufficient to familiarize them with the actual processes of the computer program in use.

The “Next Generation” of assessments (beginning in the 2001-2002 school year) has incorporated substantial changes in the assessment center part of the assessment. However all of the candidates except Kathy felt that the time allotted for each of the six sections (precisely 30 minutes, as timed on the computer from the moment each section is “opened”, or accessed to begin) was too little. Although Kathy finished early, all of the rest felt that they were unable to fully answer each section in the given time.
Kathy had some specific suggestions that were related to her unique situation. She felt that there needed to be some sort of accommodations for the type of classroom and school in which she teaches, because she had to really manipulate her program to fit what she felt was required. She said,

There are no accommodations for this situation. I have to deal with “I have to go potty” (from kindergartners) and algebra (for eighth grade) at the same time. So what I really had to work on was explaining the situation, and I just hope that they’re so astonished about it that I will pass.

One answer, for Kathy, would be to have “a variety of ways to show your teaching rather than just your writing.” She suggests that perhaps other teachers could come into the classroom and make observations, not to take away from the current assessment procedures, but to add “another dimension, because you don’t get the whole feeling of what the class is like” under current procedures.

Carolina and Peggy agreed that the current portfolio does not provide a complete picture of their classrooms. They particularly referred to the requirements for the videotaped submissions. Both Peggy and Carolina felt that there should be a reworking or clearer statement of what is to be shown in the video sections.

The cost of the assessment, since it was subsidized for the most part, was not a particular concern to any of the candidates except for Kathy. She had to pay one half the fees ($1150.00) herself, in addition to buying a video camera and paying for motel stays.
when she wanted to attend the support group meetings. For Kathy, the cost was significant, and she didn’t know if she would even retake parts of the test, in the event she didn’t pass some. It was uncertain whether she would even have sufficient students in the primary grades to allow her to retake classroom-based entries, so Kathy would only be able to re-do entries such as the assessment center or professional/community development. However, the cost for retakes is $300.00 for each section, and Kathy says, “I’m not sure I would (retake), because I know I’m a good teacher without it, and it’s very expensive.”

For Carolina and Peggy, the question of retaking any parts they didn’t pass presents different problems, because they have both left classroom teaching (one for a district position, the other for a research position) and do not have classrooms in which to build portfolio entries. They, also, will only be able to retake sections that relate to the assessment center (which both of them found to be the most difficult part) or the professional/community development section. Therefore, unless they are able to “bank” (or save) their passing scores until such time as they re-enter the classroom, their options for completing the assessment would depend on receiving passing scores in specific areas of the assessment. Currently scores may be “banked” for only two years from the date that scores are received.

Kathy also suggested that the requirement of at least three years of successful, full-time teaching before undertaking the NBPTS assessment is perhaps too short a time
to amass the experiences. She felt that it would generally require more teaching experience before a teacher could be successful. Kathy also felt that "the teacher who has only taught kinder, that sort of thing, is only one-dimensional and I saw some teachers having a hard time with that." Amy, who took the assessment immediately after completing the minimum of three years, agreed that it was necessary for her that she had taught at different grade levels. She felt that it would have been much more difficult if she had not had the variety of experiences at different grade levels.

Carolina also found that she had more difficulty because, although she had been teaching for 21 years, her experience was strictly with kindergarten and first grade. This became a problem for her at the assessment center because she was asked to respond to a scenario which pertained to third grade, and felt she was unable to do that well.

As previously mentioned, most of the teachers interviewed felt that information regarding the assessment process itself was difficult to obtain, that the NBPTS was not good at responding to questions or at clarifying instructions, and that dissemination of information was very slow, especially information that came from the NBPTS. They all mentioned that the time between the submission of all parts of the assessment and the notification of their scores was extremely long, and felt that there should be some method of speeding that part of the process. Amy, for example, mentioned that a friend was taking the Bar Exam (the licensing exam for lawyers) which requires four and a half years of preparation and takes three days to complete. The results of that exam will be
ready within a few weeks of submission, whereas Amy had to wait more than five
months for her scores.

Aside from the anxiety of waiting for the results, several of the participants had
another specific reason for wanting to know the results of the assessment as soon as
possible. For those who were planning to retake any sections they did not pass, there was
the element of needing to plan for those retakes. Depending upon which scores were to
be improved, teachers would have to again arrange for video equipment and
videographers, plan lessons, or sign up and study for assessment center exercises. They
felt that the first four months of the school year were going to be “lost time.” While they
would have to wait until the end of November or the beginning of December for their
score reports, they could be preparing and/or working on their retakes while the whole
process was fresher in their minds.

Amy also mentioned that time was a factor in getting the information out from the
County Offices of Education regarding the informational meetings, which were the main
source of information for all of the teachers involved in this study. Amy said that she
would have liked to get the information much sooner, perhaps even in the summer, so she
could begin to plan and act on the assessment at the beginning of the school year. As it
was, she didn’t get started until January, and her portfolio was due in April, leaving her
only four months to complete it.
Regarding support for teachers who are going through the NBPTS assessment process, all of these teachers had suggestions for improving the support groups offered by the Count Offices of Education. Aside from beginning the meetings and recruiting of teachers earlier in the school year, Kathy, Peggy, Carolina and Amy all felt that once-a-month meetings were not enough. Kathy, although she had to drive over 75 miles each way and stay in a motel each time in order to attend those support group meetings, felt that they should be held at least every three weeks, in order to help teachers stay on track. Kathy also suggested that they be held even more frequently towards the end of the school year, in March, April, and May. She reasoned that this was when portfolios were coming due and so many teachers had writing that they wanted help with that there were “never enough readers to go around.”

Peggy and Amy were both very vocal about what they felt were problems with the structure of the meetings. They both felt they were disjointed and would have preferred that the meetings be organized along a more linear format. While Peggy simply referred to them as needing more structure, Amy felt that it would be best to actually address portfolio entries in the order in which they were numbered in the directions. To accomplish this, she felt that it would be most helpful to break the groups down by certification area. In this way, people would be working on precisely the same portfolio entries, in a specific order. Stephanie also felt that the best support was having teachers who were working on the same certification area work together.
Peggy and Carolina agreed that there needed to be more support within the group concerning the videotaped sections. Peggy reported that, "I had to beg people to watch my videotapes" to provide feedback. Since this was a difficult part of the assessment for many of the candidates, Peggy and Carolina felt that it would have been very helpful to view and discuss "successful" videotapes of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). Peggy reported that she saw only one such video, and that it was presented at one of the early meetings as information on the parts of the portfolio, without analysis of what was "good" about it.

In fact, both Kathy and Peggy mentioned that they would have liked to see a completed portfolio of an NBCT. The process is, in Kathy's words, "So overwhelming I didn't know where to start." They felt that the visual aid of seeing just how the portfolio was assembled would have been a strong form of support. Even though the assessment process was new in many ways for their candidate year (the Next Generation assessment was newly in place), they strongly felt that it would have been very helpful to have seen even a portfolio from the "old" generation, just to know what a "passing" teacher's portfolio looked like.

Further, Stephanie and Amy both made plans to support teachers in future years. Stephanie made an offer to the Superintendent of her school district to speak to teacher groups or to prepare informational flyers. Amy hopes to become a support provider or
facilitator at future support groups. They both see this as a role that a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) should play in their districts.

Some suggestions for change that came from these informants, then, had to do with the testing procedures and processes. They suggested a longer time for responses to the timed writings in the assessment center as well as adding some variety to the ways in which the teachers can be assessed in their classrooms. In addition, they suggested improving the availability and dissemination of information from both the NBPTS and the organizers of the support groups. Suggestions were also made regarding how to conduct the support groups, which some of these teachers see as roles for themselves, should they become National Board Certified Teachers.

These six teachers were articulate informants for all aspects of this project. They provided their insights into the NBPTS certification process, sharing their ideas about how they obtained the information that led them to and through the process. They also expressed their personal motivations for undertaking such a grueling inquiry into their teaching practice, along with the difficulties and stresses they encountered along the way. They gave voice to the benefits of such intense reflection, and provided suggestions for ways to change and improve the process. Their words led me to the discussion, implications, and conclusions that follow in Chapter Five, and I am grateful to have been able to air their voices here.
Chapter 5

Looking Further Down the Path

In my search for information regarding the certification process for teachers set up by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), I found that this process was begun in 1984 in order to improve the teaching profession by setting high standards. The certification process, though grueling and time-consuming, is considered to be excellent for professional development. The process of compiling the portfolio entries and taking the assessment center exercises and the certification itself of those who pass the NBPTS criteria carry with them a number of benefits as well as disincentives in professional careers. As a bilingual teacher seeking NBPTS certification in an area with a richly diverse population, I wondered why there were very few people of color represented among teachers who had already been certified, or who were pursuing the goal of certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Dissemination of information regarding the process of NBPTS certification and support for teachers attempting the certification process varies considerably from school to school, and from district to district. The availability of support and information depends to a great extent upon the demographics of the districts, in that schools serving poorer segments of the population have fewer resources to apply to supporting and publicizing this type of program. The NBPTS has stated as one of its goals to have at least one National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) for each school in America.
However, the likelihood is that those teachers will not be evenly distributed across all schools and districts. There are only about 1,000 teachers of color among the 16,000 teachers currently certified by the NBPTS, so it is unlikely that the goal of one NBPTS certified teacher in each school, if achieved, will be representative of the students of color being served in our nation’s schools.

My research indicates that there are some concerns regarding the equity of the NBPTS assessment process, especially in regards to candidates of color whose native language is other than Standard English. There are questions regarding whether this type of assessment, which relies heavily on candidates’ written explanations and reflections, is actually a valid assessment of their teaching skills. Because the assessment is designed and scored by predominately white females, as determined by the teaching pool, there are questions concerning whether cultural aspects of candidates and/or assessors may affect scoring.

Discussion

In looking back on the questions that initially drove this project, I find some answers as well as some points that call for further study. These answers and points for inquiry led me to the following discussion points.

My own experience led me to believe that the standards set by the NBPTS are of the highest order, and that the rigorous assessment process, although time-consuming and
somewhat daunting, was a very effective professional development experience. I found support for this opinion within the literature as well as among the six teachers who I interviewed. I also found that there is considerable interest among teacher educators in incorporating the NBPTS standards into teacher training, because of their value, and in order to prepare future teachers to meet these high standards.

Because the majority of teachers throughout the nation are white females, it follows that the majority of applicants for NBPTS certification would also be white females. Those who are passing the NBPTS certification process, however, are disproportionately white. In fact, the literature points out that the passing rate for minority candidates could be viewed as having an adverse impact, if NBPTS certification were to be used as an employment criteria. One of the teachers informing this project felt that the time might come when NBPTS certification will be required for teachers. If that happens, the test as it now exists would be subject to legal challenge by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC), based on the dismal passing rate for minority candidates.

The reasons for the lower passing rate among minority candidates are varied, according to the literature and the informants of this project. However, several reasons stand out as having considerable weight. One of these key elements relates to the high cost of applying for NBPTS certification and socio-economic factors.
All of the literature and all of the candidates interviewed for this project mentioned that financial considerations played a part in their decision to undertake NBPTS certification. First of these considerations is the fee for the process ($2300.00 per candidate in 2001, and $300.00 per section for retaking parts of the assessment for the purpose of improving scores in the event that a candidate does not pass). From my own experience, this would have been a prohibitive sum. However, my fees for attempting NBPTS certification were wholly subsidized by the school district (through state funds) and by a grant available to teachers who teach in “under-performing” districts.

Although there are a number of ways for the initial fee to be subsidized, they may not be available to all candidates, may not cover the full fees, or may not cover the retake fees. Thus, the cost of the NBPTS assessment cannot be discounted as a factor that may determine whether a teacher becomes a candidate, or completes the assessment successfully. I met a teacher at an NBPTS candidate support group session who had failed all but two of the ten sections of the process on her first attempt at NBPTS certification. Since there was nothing available to her in the way of funds for covering the costs of retaking those failed sections, she will have to cover the retaking fees of $2400.00 (eight sections at $300.00 each) herself. Teachers with many other financial obligations may not be able to afford such an expense.

Another socio-economic factor relates to the amount of time required for fulfilling the requirements of the NBPTS assessment. The literature mentions time commitments
of more than 200 hours to complete the certification process. My own experience was
that I spent more than 300 hours on the process, and my teacher informants spent up to
400 hours and more. Teacher candidates who have small children, who are single
parents, or who have second jobs or many adjunct duties may find such a time
commitment beyond their reach. In fact, all my respondents agreed that a candidate must
virtually be able to devote him or herself to this process for many months. Family or
financial demands would prohibit such an effort by many teachers, and statistics tell us
that minority households are more likely to be headed by single parents and to be
struggling financially.

In an effort to recruit excellent teachers to poorer and "under-performing"
schools, some states tie financial incentives to National Board Certified Teachers
(NBTCs) teaching in those schools. For example, California pays a stipend of $5000.00
per year for four years after NBPTS certification for teachers teaching in schools
designated as underperforming. As a financial incentive, many teachers would consider
this to a desirable benefit. However, the designated schools are often those which
serve a population that is very challenging to teach and may be located in unsafe
neighborhoods. Quite often students in these schools speak languages other than English
and have many socio-economic problems to deal with. Such factors make these schools
less attractive to many teachers. Frequently, too, these are schools that actively recruit
minority teachers because of the need for bilingual services. As previously mentioned,
minority teachers are the least likely to pass the NBPTS certification process, effectively denying them the benefit of this financial incentive.

Another factor that weighs heavily in the lower NBPTS certification rates for minority teachers is the design of the assessment itself. As mentioned, the assessment relies heavily on the written reflection and analysis of the teacher candidate. It is mentioned in the literature and by the teachers responding to this project that writing may not be the best way to demonstrate excellence in teaching practice. This would be particularly true for candidates for whom Standard English is not their native language, or for those who do not express themselves well in written form.

The choice by the NBPTS to have candidates develop portfolios as a major part of their assessment is based on educational theory that such assessment is more authentic than question and response. Although portfolio assessment is considered more reliable for assessing minority candidates, there are three areas of concern that appeared in the literature and were reinforced by informants to this study that relate to the NBPTS portfolio assessment.

The first of these three areas springs from the writing requirements themselves. None of the respondents to this study have ever had to do the type of analytical and reflective writing required for this assessment prior to their candidacy. There are also strict formatting restrictions and limits to numbers of pages allowed for each entry. All
of the informants to this study expressed the opinion that the writing was extremely
difficult and frustrating, even if they felt themselves to be good writers in general.

Second, the added burden of writing in a non-native language could partially
account for low minority passing rates. The literature makes the point that culture and
language are enormous in their impact on expression, particularly in writing. The NBPTS
allows for teachers in bilingual settings whose students work in Spanish to submit some
student work samples in Spanish. However, student work in other minority languages is
not accepted, and all teacher writing for the NBPTS assessment must be submitted only
in English. For teachers who do not express themselves fluidly and clearly in Standard
English, which may not be their native language, such a language limitation is clearly a
disadvantage. Further, the writing for the assessment center exercises must be done not
only in English, but also under timed conditions. While many teachers responding to this
project found those exercises to be difficult, for the non-native English speaker it was
something she felt she could not pass under timed conditions.

The third concern regarding the question of minorities and their lower passing rate
for the NBPTS assessment can also be viewed in regard to the nature of the assessment.
Portfolio assessment is fundamentally a qualitative approach. As such, it is much more
difficult to establish validity and reliability. Evaluation of such assessments requires
multiple judges and careful planning. Raters must be properly trained, and there needs to
be triangulation of scores. All of these functions have been adopted by the NBPTS in the
scoring processes for their assessments, and assessors must complete assessor training provided by NBPTS. Assessors are teachers who teach in the certificate area being scored, and may be NBPTS certified. By definition, however, these are mainly white women who are native English speakers (based on the demographics of the teaching profession in the United States). According to the literature, there is no way to assure that there will be bias-free rating of candidates who are teachers of color when they are being rated by teachers who do not share their culture and language.

Another concern that may account for the lower passing rate of minority teachers has to with the highly structured nature of the portfolio requirements. Both in studies reported in the literature reviewed and in responses from the informants of this study there are questions as to whether the portfolio entries are actually demonstrating what they seek to demonstrate. That is, do they really serve to demonstrate a high level of teaching, as measured by the standards?

According to the literature and my informants, they frequently do not. Several of the informants to this study confirmed my own experience that the assessment process is so difficult and time-consuming that it actually takes away from a candidate’s time and ability to work with the students. Although such a certification should not be superficial, it certainly should not be something that actually detracts from the very thing it purports to assess – the teachers’ ability to teach.
Further, teachers informing this study and those represented in the literature also mentioned that they actually felt that they had to "stage" the lessons that they videotaped for the NBPTS portfolio entries, and that the required lessons were not really reflective of their whole class or their program. They did this because they felt that there was a "right" answer to what the NBPTS was looking for. As reflected as well in the literature, the teachers informing this project felt they had to set up their lessons so that this "right" way would show. For teachers of color, this perceived "right way" may be foreign to them and not suited to their styles, their classrooms or their students.

Of course, a key element in the NBPTS certification is the recruitment of candidates. I found that the literature and the informants of this project all mentioned that information regarding NBPTS certification was difficult to come by, unevenly disseminated, and sometimes erroneous. I, for example, had never heard of NBPTS certification until the assistant principal at my school mentioned it to me last May (2001). His wife had just completed her certification (and passed). Some time later I saw a very short article in the newspaper, listing the names of teachers who had received certification. That was the total extent of information that had reached me before I entered into the process itself.

Likewise, most of my informants relied on word of mouth, from teachers who had been through the assessment process in the past or who were current candidates. Many reported receiving incorrect or incomplete information, even from the NBPTS itself.
Even teachers who have been through the process and have achieved NBPTS certification sometimes cannot provide accurate information because the testing process is still under development. Testing procedures and requirements change from one assessment cycle to the next, and new certification areas are being developed. As the literature points out, what information is available depends upon where prospective candidates work and who they have available to ask for information.

As mentioned before, the comparative “wealth” of a school district often determines whether teachers are informed of or encouraged to participate in the NBPTS certification process. Districts that are struggling with many non-English-speaking students, low socio-economic conditions, severe social problems such as gang activity, and aged physical plants seldom place priority on something such as NBPTS certification that could be perceived as a frill, or possibly a distraction from more immediate needs. Administrators in such schools are harried by concerns that place low priority on the level of professional development required by and supportive of NBPTS certification. The staffing in many such schools consists of teachers with less than the three years’ experience required for candidacy, and many of them would be unable to find funds to subsidize the teachers’ fees for undertaking NBPTS certification.

For example, all but one of the teachers who informed my project worked in schools that are considered economically disadvantaged. That one, who taught in a school district that serves mostly middle class, native-English-speaking students, was the
only one who received paid time off for work on her NBPTS assessment. She was also
the only one who was supplied by her school with high quality video equipment and
microphone, to use for the videotaped entries of the portfolio.

Multiple efforts are under way across the United States to increase the pool of
candidates in various ways. The NBPTS recognizes that dissemination of information
about the process and how to go about it are critical to increasing the numbers of NBCTs.
In order to disseminate information concerning the NBPTS certification process, the
NBPTS has commissioned a number of television “spots.” The 30-second
advertisements were shown in August 2002, in Louisville, Kentucky, Springfield,
Illinois, Sacramento, California, and Albany, New York. They featured students and
NBCTs, and are similar to advertisements that have been run in the past in Charlotte,
North Carolina, where they generated considerable interest. At the same time, in the
aforementioned cities, posters, flyers, and informational packets were to be provided for
school districts, in an effort to bring the information to the administrators and teachers.

The next major consideration for NBPTS candidates regards the issue of support.
Without teachers who are willing to undertake this grueling process, there is no need for
support. That is why there is a major advantage to the television spots, in that they will
reach a wide range of prospective candidates. The question remains whether these
candidates will then have the assistance they need to pass the assessment process. Aside
from financial aid, I found that NBPTS certification candidates need other forms of support, specifically mentoring support.

The NBPTS recommends that teachers attempting certification by the NBPTS work together, in groups whose focus is the assessment process. The NBPTS has set up centers for just this purpose, and has training programs for facilitators (people who lead and organize the activities of the group). The NBPTS recommends a multi-year format for the support group. First there is a Pre-candidacy year. This involves summer or monthly sessions, which focus on the propositions, standards, and stages of the NBPTS certification process. The following year is the Candidacy year, during which the portfolio is assembled and the assessment center exercises are completed. During this year, further meetings and mentor support are offered. The third year is the Candidacy Support year, or the Banking year. During this year, candidates prepare for retaking any parts they need to attain certification, and certified teachers move into the role of mentor, supporting the new teachers in the pre-candidacy phase.

Again, however, access to these support groups and the facilitator training is seriously limited due to availability and cost. In most cases reported in the literature and by the respondents to this study, support is somewhat haphazard and difficult to come by.

In some counties, such as in the county in which I reside, there is no support available at all. Although this situation may change with the availability of information regarding the process, for now teachers in my home county must travel some distance to
find a group that can help them get through the NBPTS assessment process. In some instances, the teacher/candidate will find a group organized by a person who works for the County Office of Education, who may not be certified or trained by the NBPTS, which limits the type and level of support the candidates would receive.

Some support groups are run by union representatives, and unions are beginning to take more interest in supporting NBPTS candidates. However, most groups are run along the lines of the ones in two of the three counties where I conducted my case study. It comes down to teachers training teachers, without the expertise sometimes necessary to answer some of the questions candidates pose during their lengthy assessment process. The support groups available in the three counties I studied consisted of facilitators who brought in speakers. These speakers were from universities and other places that were offering courses that could support the process, or former NBPTS candidates, some of whom had already passed and been certified.

The facilitators may also bring in people who can help read and edit the writing for the portfolio entries, although many of them are unaware of the very specific requirements for NBPTS certification. Even teachers who have passed certification may have been part of a previous form of the testing process, and may not know what is now required. Therefore, while they may offer some insight, the assessments they are using as a base of reference may not be in the same format as the ones current candidates will be taking. I experienced this myself, because my assessment year was the first in what the
NBPTS calls the "Next Generation" of assessment. Those teachers who had already been certified and came to support that year's candidates were only able to offer fairly superficial advice.

Four of the six teachers who informed this research were very sure that they would not have had a chance of passing the NBPTS assessment without the support of the group, especially in reading and editing the writing. However, they all felt there were limitations in the groups' effectiveness in meeting their needs, particularly in that the meetings were very loosely organized. My respondents also reported needing more frequent support meetings, and needing support for the assessment center timed-writing exercises.

Another source of support for the NBPTS assessment mentioned by almost all of the respondents to my case study was the Internet. Information gained on line was reported to be a very accurate and reliable. The Internet provided these teachers with a source of information and a method by which candidates could find a good deal of help in their attempt at certification. Although some candidates used this resource more that others, all of those involved in this project did mention positive results, which points to the internet as a tool worth major consideration as a support option.

There are very few materials available to help candidates with the NBPTS certification, unlike most other major assessments (such as the bar exam for lawyers, and nursing and college exams). Realizing the lack of available resource materials, the
NBPTS has made some materials available, such as sample portfolio entries. These, of course, cost over and above the $2300.00 fee for taking the assessment, and they are from the older models of the tests, which limits their availability and usefulness.

*Implications and Recommendations*

I suggest that the question of minority representation among National Board Certified Teachers is one area that deserves further study. Since it is well documented that all students benefit from exposure to professional role models of varied cultures and ethnicities, it behooves an organization such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to do their utmost to provide those role models to all our schools. Equity must certainly begin in the schools if there is to be equity anywhere else in the nation.

The NBPTS should also continue to explore alternatives to their current assessment requirements, not by lowering their criteria, but rather by offering more methods by which teachers can prove the quality of their practice. Some options suggested by my informants were to have assessors do classroom visits, especially in extraordinary settings (such as a one-room school serving students in kindergarten through eighth grades), and allowing more flexibility when it comes to choosing the activities for the videotaped segments. In particular, too, is the question of relevancy of the timed-writing aspect of the assessment center exercises. Although the scenarios do
relate to the types of problems teachers encounter from day to day, it is doubtful that teachers realistically plan for methods of dealing with such scenarios under timed-writing conditions.

The NBPTS is currently actively soliciting and offering support for research pertaining to its assessment process. This is a positive step, and there should be some way to publicize this opportunity. Since the foundation of the NBPTS assessment for teachers is reflection on practice, the NBPTS should follow its own lead. Further reflection is necessary in order to determine why the passing rates for minority candidates are abysmally low, and should be of utmost concern to the NBPTS.

Some attention should be paid to outstanding research in the field of education and minority students and teachers. An assessment which would not stand up to fairness measures of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission should be looked at long and hard, especially when it purports to identify the best teachers in the nation.

The timing, amount, quality, and reliability of information disseminated to teachers all over the country are crucial to the expansion of the network of NBCTs, especially in areas where there is the most need for superlative teaching. In order to attract teachers of color, recruitment must actively take place in the schools and districts where there are higher numbers of minority teachers, regardless of whether it is in an economically disadvantaged area.
On a local basis, I propose to work in concert with the support group offered by the County Office of Education to expand and improve upon the support currently provided to NBPTS candidates. Foremost, there has to be more active recruitment, especially of the fine minority teachers in our district. In spite of the fact that two of the six informants in my study received their first information about the NBPTS certification from flyers distributed by the County Offices of Education, merely relying on flyers to send out the word about informational meetings is insufficient for two reasons. First, there is no guarantee that the flyers will reach the teachers who would likely be candidates. Second, there is often no guarantee that the flyers, once delivered to the teachers, will be read. Teachers are inundated with flyers, brochures, catalogs, and memos to the point that it is a standing joke in most school mailrooms that most mail received goes directly into the recycling bin, unread.

All of the candidates I spoke to during my case study expressed a willingness to share information about the process with other teachers, and two had made plans to do so. Districts and counties should take advantage of such resources. I suggest that teachers who have actually been through the assessment process speak in person at school staff meetings. The presence of a real person who can answer questions on the spot, or have some certainty of getting back to the questioner with an answer in a timely manner, is much more effective than a flyer. Armed with a list of teachers from my district who have undergone the NBPTS certification process, I plan to set up a schedule for attending
regular school staff meetings, where teachers can get firsthand information directly from someone from their own district.

I also suggest that these informational visits to staff meetings should take place in the second half of the school year. The reason for this is to allow prospective candidates time to research the process and decide how it would fit into their lives. This is such an arduous and time-consuming process that the decision to participate must not and cannot be made lightly and quickly. Information disseminated in August or September does not allow time for informed decision making. In addition, since portfolio entries are due in the spring months, teachers who send in applications and receive their boxes of materials in late fall or early winter lose preparation time.

Instead of quickly rushing teachers through the application and certification process, I prefer the multi-year support plan endorsed by the NBPTS. Informing teachers well in advance would be part of that process, because it would allow for some preparation in the year before a teacher actually undertakes the assessment process. I propose to offer some preparation and study of the NBPTS standards in advance of application to the assessment. Such preparation is currently offered at a local university, and prospective candidates can receive credit towards a Masters Degree in Education. It may be possible to bring such a course closer to the schools, or to offer similar studies without the university credit to those who can’t manage traveling to the university for the classes.
At any rate, what the NBPTS calls the pre-candidacy year would be invaluable to teachers in giving them time to prepare and familiarize themselves with the process before they actually commit themselves to the grueling undertaking of the NBPTS certification process. It would, in fact, make the whole undertaking less grueling, because teachers would be more familiar with the standards and requirements.

The support offered to teachers who are actually in their candidacy year needs to be more structured, according to my informants. It was clear to them that the most effective support came from those who were going after the same certification area. They all suggested forming the support groups around certification area, something I tried to do during my own candidacy. This makes sense because all certification areas have their own, very unique requirements. With more than 24 certification areas, it is almost impossible to provide a generic form of support for all.

With that in mind, I will encourage the support groups in my area to organize in this manner. Although there may be times when there is a topic of general interest, most of the support should come from people who are truly peers within their areas of expertise and certification area. From educational research we know that by forming close, supportive relationships, there will be a more satisfactory sense of community and common bond. It will also make the sharing of questions and clarification more effective, if all the teachers involved are working on the same certification.
Something that was not offered in any of the support groups that I attended was practice with the timed writing section in the assessment center. There were many offers from various support providers to read and comment on the writing required for the portfolio entries, and many teachers felt that this was invaluable help. However, for those who are not as confident in their writing, and especially for those whose native language is not Standard English, the timed writing was and is a huge difficulty. Although the writing for those six prompts is not required to be as reflective or in-depth as that for the portfolio, the strict time limit of thirty minutes per prompt does not allow for the extensive re-writing and editing that someone may require if English does not come as readily.

For support in this area of the NBPTS assessment, I suggest practice with timed writing. Prompts may be presented in a format similar to that of the assessment center exercises, within the support groups. Candidates can have a limited time to respond, and then they can share their responses and suggestions for improvement, relaxation techniques, or study materials that may help. Since writing is the last of the four domains of language in which language learners become proficient, candidates must be supported for the timed writing exercises. This seems very simple, but may be critical to some teachers, especially minority candidates struggling with writing in a language (English) in which they are non-native speakers and writers.
I further propose to encourage teachers’ unions to become active participants in supporting NBPTS assessment. It is in the interest of the unions to have highly qualified practitioners recognized and supported, just as it is in the interest of the unions to negotiate support for the teachers. In some areas, as previously mentioned, it is actually the unions that organize the support groups for NBPTS candidates. In my area, I would ask that the unions be involved in negotiating the financial support for the candidates, much like one of the teachers responding to my project did for herself.

For the moment, my district and many of those nearby are subsidizing part of the cost of the assessment, which is $2300.00 in 2002. However, funding for this type of endeavor, which many may consider a luxury, is not guaranteed. The union needs to step in at the negotiating table and get some language into teachers’ contracts in support of those who care to pursue NBPTS certification, so that the assessment fees do not become a prohibitive factor. This is especially for teachers who may already be facing economic hardships because they choose to work in one of the “poorer”, under-performing districts in our area. Since those teachers are more likely to be teachers of color, they should not be burdened with another hindrance to becoming certified by the NBPTS.

Likewise the union should become involved in negotiating the stipends for teachers who are successful in becoming certified by the NBPTS. At the moment, many states and school districts offer financial rewards for NBCTs, but they are in danger of being cut every time a budget is discussed. The union can and should work for
consistence in the compensation agreed to by the district for NBCTs, especially in
districts such as the one in which I teach that serve such a high proportion of minority
students. We do want to provide them with the very best teachers, and negotiating
provisions for financial incentives for NBCTs is one way to do that.

The NBPTS certification is a difficult process. Only about 45% of all applicants
can expect to pass, and only about 11% of applicants who are teachers of color will
manage to gain NBPTS certification. There are proven ways to increase those passing
rates. Some are mentioned in the literature and others mentioned by the teachers
informing this study, who have been through this strenuous process. By using those
suggestions we can encourage and support teachers in the local counties, especially those
who are teachers of color and have a vested interest in serving diverse student
populations. Diverse populations would benefit from increased participation in and
certification by the NBPTS certification process, especially if there is a significant
increase in the participation of teachers of color. We could thereby help insure that
teachers who are quality practitioners of their profession are recognized as such.
References


http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/district/CBEDS/MONTEREY.htm


APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for

Minority Representation Among National Board Certified Teachers

Ronna Lynn Gilani

Assigned # or Pseudonym______________________ Ethnic Identification______________________
(For demographic purposes)

The scope of the interview will encompass the following general questions:

1. Have you ever heard of National Board Certification? What do you know about it?
2. Have you ever considered going through the process of National Board Certification?
   Why or why not?
3. Have you ever actually attempted to participate in the National Board Certification process? If so, what were your main motivating factors?
4. If you participated in the National Board Certification process, how much did you complete? If you did not complete the entire process, why did you stop?
5. If you attempted the certification process, what support did you receive from your school district? From your Principal? From your colleagues? From the County Office? From your family and others?
6. What kinds of support would have been helpful to you, but were not available to you?
7. If you attempted certification, what are your thoughts about the process? Which parts were/are hardest for you? Which parts were/are easiest for you?
8. Do you know if you passed? If so, how many sections?
9. If you did not pass all sections, will you "bank" your scores and try again on those you didn't pass? Why or why not?
10. What do you think could or should be changed about the assessment process for the National Board Certification? Would you recommend this process to other teachers?
Author’s Note

As this thesis was being submitted, the results for the NBPTS Assessment for the year 2001-2002 became available to the candidates that participated in this study and the author. The results for the informants of this case study are included here.

Stephanie was already certified when she participated in this study, in the area of Early Childhood/Generalist.

Amy, who took the assessment during her fourth year of teaching, was the only teacher who was given time off from the classroom to work on her assessment. She missed becoming certified by only two points. She felt that she had one weak entry, and was determined to bank her scores and retake that entry.

Kathy, who taught in the rural, one-room school, missed being certified by 10 points. She felt that one of her scores was out of line with the others, and was going to officially question that score, at a cost of about $200.00. She will be unable to retake any sections of the portfolio, due to the change in numbers of students in her tiny school.

Carolina is the only teacher of color from this study who attempted certification during the 2001-2002 school year. Carolina did not pass certification, and declined to state her score. She is unable to attempt retaking any of the assessment because of the fact that she is no longer working in the classroom. She has taken a Reading Recovery Specialist position with the county and works only with one child at a time.

Peggy, who worked closely with Carolina throughout the assessment process, was teaching in a dual-language immersion program in a very low-income school district. She is the only one of these four who passed, receiving 324 points (275 is a passing score). Peggy was primarily interested in the financial incentives offered to California teachers. She will receive the $10,000.00 award for passing the certification. However, Peggy has also left classroom teaching and will therefore not be eligible for further financial incentives offered to NBCTs who teach in underperforming schools.

Oo, the other teacher of color participating in this study, is undertaking the certification process in the current school year (2002 – 2003). She will not have her scores until November of 2003.

The Author is a Caucasian bilingual teacher in a very low income, underperforming school. She missed being certified by 13 points. In order to pursue the goal of certification by the NBPTS, one section of the portfolio, including videotape of a class lesson, will need to be resubmitted and receive a significantly higher score. This section will be due in April of the coming year, but results will not be available for another full year.

Out of the five teachers who were assessed by the NBPTS during the 2001 – 2002 school year, the passing rate is only 20%. The passing rate for teachers of color in this group is 0%.