

# POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES

## THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

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*The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was initiated in 1987 to establish "high and rigorous" standards for the teaching profession, create a voluntary system to certify accomplished teaching, create professional development opportunities, and increase the status of the teaching profession in America. Various educators have proposed numerous challenges to the NBPTS system, particularly the assessment process, whereas other educators have suggested that the NBPTS process will create new possibilities for staff development and increase the quality of classroom teaching. This article outlines a variety of possibilities and challenges for classroom teachers considering NBPTS certification and other concerned educators synthesized from the available research and educational publications.*

In response to recommendations made by the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was created in 1987 to serve two distinct purposes, one being the creation of an assessment and certification system to offer teachers an advanced certification designed to recognize "accomplished teaching" and the second being to establish a standards-setting board to develop standards in as many as 36 separate teaching certification areas. The NBPTS was initiated to "increase the professional development of teachers, the status of the teaching profession and the quality of education in America" (NBPTS, 1987).

As stated in its original policy statement titled *Toward High and Rigorous Standards for the Teaching Profession* (NBPTS, 1989), the board's mission is to "establish high and rigorous standards for what teachers should know and be able to do, to certify teachers who meet the standards, and to advance other education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning

in America's schools" (p. 1). The initial policy statement described three distinct areas of work to be conducted by the NBPTS, namely, the development of the board's vision of accomplished teaching, the design of the certification system, and the development of guidelines for the creation of the assessment system to recognize accomplished teaching (p. 2). The NBPTS's research and development plan for the assessments consisted of two strategies: (a) the creation of assessment-development laboratories and (b) the funding of research studies to address issues concerning all certificate areas. The assessment system was to consist of a variety of methods, including portfolios, on-site performance evaluations, and assessment center exercises; include classroom teachers during the various stages of development; be affordable and accessible for all classroom teachers; and align to three criteria: (a) validity—the extent to which the assessment procedures measure the standards—(b) efficiency—relationship between the costs and time allocated and the information generated—and (c) impact—

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the effect of the assessment procedure on strengthening teaching practices (Baratz-Snowden, 1990).

The NBPTS was created to respond to the claims that “the teaching profession, unlike medicine, architecture or accounting, has not codified the knowledge, skills and dispositions that account for accomplished practice” and that “certain misconceptions about what constitutes good teaching continue to exist” (Baratz-Snowden, Shapiro, & Streeter, 1993). The NBPTS was to address these claims by creating a system of teacher certification, designed to go beyond the minimum requirements of state licensure, to acknowledge and certify advanced or accomplished practice. These certifications were to align to a specific set of teaching standards developed by teachers for teachers and to develop a unified vision of teaching across the United States.

The NBPTS is governed by a 63-member board, a majority of whom are practicing classroom teachers. The NBPTS is described as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization whose mission is to establish high and rigorous standards for what teachers should know and be able to do and to develop and operate a national, voluntary system to assess and certify those teachers who meet these high standards (NBPTS, 1987).

The NBPTS can be historically situated as part of the standards movement in education during the latter part of the 20th century. As other professional organizations have researched and developed standards in their content areas (e.g., National Council of Teachers of English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics), the NBPTS claims to “reflect the first thoroughly researched standards for what excellent teaching ought to be” (Lewis, 1994, p. 4). The stated purpose for the creation of these teaching standards suggests that “as the demands on students become more rigorous, guarantees that the education system is staffed with professionals capable of teaching to achieve these standards becomes more essential. Standards for students must be matched by standards for teachers” (Ambach, 1996, p. 207).

The NBPTS certification system comprises three components: (a) the standards and core propositions, (b) the assessment/certification process, and (c) the professional development component. The standards for each certification area are aligned to the five core principles set forth in the board policy statement *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do* (NBPTS, 1987). The primary goal of developing these standards documents is to address the unique teaching characteristics of each certification field while still adhering to the five core principles that reflect the board’s vision of accomplished teaching. These five core principles are the following:

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.

In the initial policy statements regarding the assessment system, the guidelines adopted by the board envision an assessment process that “communicates to the teaching profession and the public a vision of teaching as a collegial enterprise involving complex decision making” (Baratz-Snowden, 1993, p. 83). From these original policy statements, the NBPTS lists four criteria that are to be used to select assessment methodologies: validity, fairness, efficiency, and impact (NBPTS, 1989). The NBPTS took the position that

a valid assessment of accomplished practice must allow for a variety of forms sound practice takes, must sample from the range of ways of knowing required for teaching, and must place assessments of teaching knowledge and skill in appropriate contexts. (NBPTS, 1989, p. 4)

## ISSUES

The NBPTS certification process and its accompanying assessment system have been touted as a model for professional development (French, 1997), a unique process for certifying accomplished teachers and attracting qualified

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individuals into the teaching profession (Shapiro, 1993), a set of high and rigorous standards that teachers must demonstrate to achieve NBPTS certification (NBPTS, 1989), a vision of excellence in teaching that combines the wisdom of practice of outstanding teachers with consensus among the broader education community (Barringer, 1993), and a process that requires teachers to think and talk about their practice in ways they have never done before, ways that even experienced teachers find daunting (Mitchell, 1998).

Proponents of the NBPTS system suggest the certification process and the development of rigorous teaching standards will increase the professional standing of the teaching profession; create a sense of collegiality among teachers; develop teachers who are more reflective and cognizant of their practice; create a consistent, unified vision of accomplished teaching; and instill in the general public a positive image of public education (Buday & Kelly, 1996; NBPTS, 1989). These possibilities also include the enhanced status accorded public school teachers, the recognition of accomplished practice as represented by the NBPTS certification process, the attraction of qualified teachers to the profession, the promotion of reflective practice, the support of collegial relationships among teachers, the use of new assessment procedures to capture the complexities inherent in accomplished teaching, and the positive effects that the development of the "high and rigorous" NBPTS standards will have on the teaching profession.

Along with these positive endorsements, many educators have levied challenges to the NBPTS standards, assessments, and certification processes. Researchers and concerned educators have challenged the NBPTS process on the grounds that it will create a competitive atmosphere rather than the collegiality it purports to establish (Marshall, 1996); that it will create unnecessary distinctions between teachers, leading to an "informal" hierarchy in the teaching profession rather than the unifying vision the board proposes (King, 1994); that the NBPTS standards and criteria are not consistent with what many scholars have described as

"culturally sensitive teaching pedagogies" (Irvine & Fraser, 1998); that minority teachers, especially African American teachers, are achieving NBPTS certification in disproportionate numbers (Bond, 1998); and that the standards themselves are a normative force, although the teaching profession should be celebrating its diversity and creative differences rather than a solitary vision of accomplished teaching (Labaree, 1992).

It is possible that the rigorous standards outlining the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice, and the reflective or systematic thinking that teachers engage in during the certification process, do more to improve the quality of teaching, whereas the assessment procedures utilized by the NBPTS are merely a traditional, numerical scoring device designed to certify and normalize accomplished teaching as well as exclude certain teaching styles based on their test results. Delandshere and Petrosky (1998) stated, "there appears to be a certain dissonance between the constructivist views of knowledge implied by the [NBPTS] standards and the more essentialist [positivist] notions that dominate current educational measurement discourse" (p. 19).

Is the benefit various teachers have associated with the certification process attributable to their alignment to the vision of accomplished practice set forth in the NBPTS standards documents or to the requirements of the assessment system? 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, remains uncertain. However, what is certain is that the NBPTS assessment process represents an innovative system for gathering artifacts of teachers' practice and for analyzing the characteristics of accomplished practice across a range of teaching areas of specialization and student age levels.

Although there is emerging evidence that NBPTS-certified teachers are more effective classroom teachers, based on a predetermined set of 15 dimensions of teaching excellence (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000), there remain concerns about the effects of the NBPTS

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process and certification on the teaching profession. A review of the literature reveals a sense of skeptical optimism about the future of the NBPTS standards and assessment process. Although the NBPTS teaching standards reflect a vision of accomplished teaching that it is hoped more teachers will be able to demonstrate in the years ahead, concerns are still being written about the standards-based reform movement in general (Labaree, 1992), the hierarchy of teachers that may arise due to the NBPTS certification (King, 1994), the assessment system's ability to distinguish and certify accomplished teaching (Delandshere & Petrosky, 1998), and the means of representing quality teaching given the vehicles provided by the NBPTS certification system (Burroughs, Roe, & Hendricks-Lee, 2000; Serafini, 2001).

This article addresses some of the possibilities and challenges that have emerged since the inception of the NBPTS certification process and the initial design of its assessment system. Critics (Irvine & Fraser, 1998; King, 1994; Petrosky, 1994) are reluctant to put aside their differences regarding the assessment procedures and the certification process itself, and proponents are trying to build support for what they see as one of the best chances for reforming the teaching profession and eventually public school education. Although there has been limited research available up to this point concerning how the certification process affects the individual classroom teacher, numerous anecdotal reports and teacher testimonials offer convincing evidence for the positive effects of the process on reforming the instructional practices of classroom teachers.

## POSSIBILITIES

In the literature distributed by the NBPTS, teachers are described as active participants in every phase of the certification process, serving on committees that draft and adopt the standards documents, scoring portfolios and assessment center exercises, piloting test portfolio exercises, and participating in a speakers bureau developed by the NBPTS in 1999. Teachers are seen as a valuable resource, able to lead one another, learn from one another, and

assess one another (Cascio, 1995). It is this sense of collegiality, and the inclusion of teachers' voices in the NBPTS decision-making process, that the NBPTS sees as a major benefit of the certification process for classroom teachers.

Along with the extensive role that teachers play in the NBPTS, the NBPTS certification process and the accompanying assessments are being described as a means to increase the professional status of the teaching profession. Words such as *recognition* and *respect* are frequently used to represent the results of achieving certification. In one article, the author suggested that possible benefits of NBPTS certification include higher salaries, new roles and responsibilities for teachers, a sense of pride, reasons to remain in the teaching profession, recognition of exemplary practice, and increased mobility due to the possibility of portability of teaching credentials from state to state (Shaprio, 1993). Other articles refer to the certification process as having the potential for legitimating the hard work of teachers, recognizing the specialized knowledge of the profession, increased levels of public accountability, peer recognition of excellence, and the opportunity to document one's professional activities (Areglado, 1999; Bean, 1995; Smagorinsky, 1995). These are considered important benefits for both individual teachers and the teaching profession as a whole.

Another important aspect of the NBPTS system is the actual certification teachers will receive after successful completion of the certification process. This certification is referred to as a "symbol of professional teaching excellence" and "the North Star for teacher development" (Buday & Kelly, 1996), a "catalyst for your own professional growth" (NBPTS, 1989), and "an opportunity to be recognized as an outstanding veteran educator, sharpen your skills, challenge yourself, and make your best a little bit better" (Rose, 1999). In a press release published on the NBPTS Web site ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)) in 1999, the certification was described as "the highest honor the teaching profession has to bestow." The statements proffered throughout these writings suggest the certification process and the actual certification itself are capable of hav-



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ing a substantial and immediate impact on the status of the teaching profession and the public recognition of teaching excellence.

The NBPTS certification process has also been suggested as a means of attracting and keeping highly qualified teachers. Buday and Kelly (1996) stated that NBPTS certification "encourages bright college graduates to consider a career in teaching and motivates accomplished teachers to continue working directly with students" (p. 216). To do this, NBPTS-certified teachers are being offered financial incentives, new leadership roles and responsibilities, positions on district committees, and other advanced opportunities in various educational institutions.

The NBPTS' fourth core proposition states, "Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience." In the paragraphs that accompany this proposition, a vision of the teacher as "reflective participant," a teacher who thinks about the daily events in the classroom, using this information to create and adjust upcoming learning and curricular experiences, is described:

Teaching requires an open-minded capacity that is not acquired once and for all. . . . [Therefore] teachers have a professional obligation to be lifelong students of their craft, seeking to expand their repertoire, deepen their knowledge and skill, and become wiser in rendering judgments. (NBPTS, 1989, p. 14)

The majority of the testimonials written by teachers who have achieved certification refer to this concept of reflectivity as one of the most important results of going through the certification process. Teachers have written, "Never before have I thought so deeply about what I do with children, and why I do it" (Haynes, 1995, p. 60); "It has been the most maturing and fulfilling professional development experience I have ever had" (Sumner, 1997, p. 65); and "You can be challenged to grow in new ways even after 16 years of teaching" (Letofsky, 1999, p. 4).

In one of the first studies of the NBPTS process, the authors presented results of a survey of teachers' perspectives on the certification process (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998). In this article, the authors cited numerous teacher comments about the positive effects of the

NBPTS process, stating, for example, that it was "one of the best professional development experiences, most dramatic and transforming experience, and the most meaningful self-evaluation" (p. 463). This change in perspective, from teacher as program deliverer to reflective participant, has been put forth as another of the major benefits of the certification process.

Proponents of the NBPTS process cite the assessments and the standards developed in each teaching and certification area as having the most potential for affecting the teaching profession. Proponents write that the assessments are "cutting edge" methods that are sensitive to the complexities of exemplary practice (Shapiro, 1995). Proponents often refer to the school site portfolio as an innovative means for collecting evidence of a teacher's capabilities that goes beyond considerations of "technical rationality" to understand a teacher's thinking and reflective processes (Buday & Kelly, 1996). Along with being described as an innovative process, the assessments are continually referred to as a rigorous series of exercises that captures the richness and complexity of the work of teaching (Barringer, 1993). Baratz-Snowden (1990) wrote,

The most valid assessment process is one that engages candidates in the activities of teaching—activities that require the display and use of teaching knowledge and skill and that allow teachers the opportunity to explain and justify their actions. (p. 21)

The standards developed by the NBPTS are described as "something to measure your practice against," "high and rigorous," and "beyond minimum requirements"; it has been noted that they were "developed by teachers for teachers" and "compare favorably to standards developed in other professions" (NBPTS, 1989). The extensive nature of the standards development process is seen as an innovative model for developing the codified knowledge of teaching excellence, designed to remove misconceptions of what constitutes good teaching.

A research study recently released (Bond et al., 2000) was designed to study the differences between teachers whose NBPTS certification score was well above the required certification score and those whose score was well below the certification score. The choices made

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about participants in the study were defined to ensure that dependable differences between NBPTS-certified and noncertified teachers could be detected. Evidence was gathered from a variety of sources, including interviews with candidates, classroom observations, and teachers' lesson plans. The results of this study, based on a comparison of 15 "dimensions of teaching excellence," suggest that "the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards . . . is identifying and certifying teachers who are producing students who differ in profound and important ways from those taught by less proficient teachers" (p. 5). This is one of the first studies designed to measure the differences between NBPTS-certified and noncertified teachers and their impact on student learning and growth. Compelling evidence is offered in this study that the NBPTS certification process is having an impact on the level of accomplished teaching that is evidenced in NBPTS-certified teachers' classrooms.

In a recent article, Johnson (2001) stated that NBPTS certification may have the ability to create a "staged career," a structure designed to provide expert teachers a set of advanced career steps and increasing status in the teaching profession (p. 394). Johnson believes that a staged career in teaching is important "to attract and retain excellent teachers, revitalize pedagogy, strengthen instructional programs, and create more responsive schools" (p. 394). By allowing NBPTS-certified teachers to assume new roles and responsibilities, a staged career would offer teachers the recognition, and increased professional standing and responsibilities, to keep them in the teaching profession.

The possibilities inherent in the NBPTS process hinge on the impact the assessments and certification requirements make on teachers themselves and the recognition given to public school teachers by the general public. Whether the public will see this process as a guarantee of quality in classroom teaching practices, whether the certification process can change the public's understandings and perceptions of the teaching profession and the quality of public education in general, and whether teachers

themselves will recognize the status of NBPTS-certified teachers remains to be seen.

## CHALLENGES

The various challenges to the NBPTS assessment and certification process may be grouped into several categories for purposes of discussion. First, there are those researchers and educators who are concerned about the assessment process itself and whether it can adequately measure a complex phenomenon such as accomplished teaching practice. Challenges to the assessment procedures include the problems associated with reducing the complex nature of accomplished teaching to a numerical score, the qualifications and training of the assessors scoring the teacher portfolios, and the nature of the feedback provided to the participants after submitting portfolios and assessment center documents.

Second, researchers and educators are concerned with the legitimization of particular forms of teaching over other forms, for example, constructivist approaches over direct instruction, and the normative effects of any process of standardizing accomplished teaching. The NBPTS standards documents and assessment procedures have created a vision of accomplished practice, and this vision is apt to leave out some forms of effective teaching while promoting other forms. Which voices are heard and which ones are left out is certainly a challenge to the creation of any standards documents and assessment procedures, especially to the efforts of the NBPTS.

The certification process requires teacher candidates to adopt the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice, align their practice to this vision of teaching, and represent this alignment through the assessment vehicles provided by the NBPTS assessment system (Serafini, 2001). Burroughs et al. (2000) suggested, "In creating standards and requiring teachers to argue in writing that they have realized the standards in their teaching, NBPTS may offer a national discourse about teaching, and as such may form a discourse community" (p. 344). Their research suggests that aligning to this national discourse

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causes problems for teachers who find difficulties writing in such a way that they can enter this discourse. Those candidates who were able to assume the discourse values were those who were more likely to be certified. However, this alignment with a national discourse may be at odds with teachers' working knowledge, which is considered local, contextualized, and personal (Burroughs et al., 2000).

A third category of challenges includes the concerns about the commodification of NBPTS certification itself. Challenges have been raised about what this certification will be worth in terms of prestige, opportunities for advancement, and salary increases and recognition among peers. To date, there has not been a nationally recognized formal hierarchy associated with the teaching profession, and this certification may develop a sense of haves and have-nots among teachers. It will be important to consider the effects that being certified, and the possession of an NBPTS certification, will have on relationships among teachers. Another part of this challenge is the expense of the certification itself, which is about \$2,000 at the time this article is being written, and the resources and support provided for teachers to achieve certification. If the cost of the certification is a limiting factor concerning who can go through the process, is it as universally available as the NBPTS suggests?

Finally, the NBPTS process is part of the general push toward creating standards in the various disciplines in education. Challenges have been raised to the purposes and needs for standards in language arts, reading, mathematics and science instruction. The NBPTS standards documents are being challenged on the same grounds as these other standards. Whether creating a one-size-fits-all vision of accomplished teaching will increase the quality of classroom teaching remains uncertain.

### ***Challenges to the Assessment Process***

A lion's share of the critiques levied against the assessment process have come from the writings of Anthony Petrosky and his colleagues (Delandshere & Petrosky, 1994, 1998;

Petrosky, 1994). Petrosky was director of one of the original assessment-development laboratories, located at the University of Pittsburgh, that was granted a contract to develop the first assessments for the NBPTS. Petrosky and his colleagues envisioned the assessment system as a two-part process, one containing the school site portfolio and one that involved the assessment center exercises, that was primarily designed to measure content knowledge (Petrosky, 1994). They believed that these assessments were unique attempts to capture the complexities of teaching excellence and provide the necessary feedback for teachers in the certification process. The original proposal also included a scoring system that relied on extensive training of scorers to support the reliability of their results and in-depth "interpretive summaries" to be written by judges scoring individual candidates (Petrosky, 1994). These procedures were seen as unique efforts to improve the assessment of the complex performances associated with accomplished teaching (Delandshere & Petrosky, 1994).

The NBPTS, after issuing a new contract to Educational Testing Service, revised the scoring system to include "canned" feedback (Petrosky, 1994) rather than the interpretive summaries originally designed by Petrosky and his staff to "document the salient characteristics of the [candidate's] performance and the judges' interpretations of those as evidence in their evaluations" (Delandshere & Petrosky, 1998, pp. 14-15). Petrosky (1994) stated,

The NBPTS staff decided our system would be too complicated, expensive and time consuming. They wanted instead, on the advice of the psychometricians in their Technical Analysis Group, a scoring system that judges could be trained to in three to four days, that would place its primary emphasis on the judges assigning scores to exercises, and that would provide candidates with "canned" feedback for each exercise score. (p. 36)

The Educational Testing Service also provided time for the scorers to be trained; however, the time allotted fell far short of the extensive training that Petrosky initially proposed. Utilizing rubrics and trained scorers scoring small segments of individual portfolios, the new scoring system developed by Educational Testing Ser-

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vice was radically different from the original system proposed by Petrosky and his colleagues. Petrosky (1994) emphasized his concerns about the reduction of teacher performances to numerical ratings, the lack of preparation for scorers, and the limited feedback candidates would receive.

A review of Petrosky's writing shows an obvious tension between the literature of the NBPTS; its standards; its stated purpose of creating reflective, collaborative practitioners; and the nature and content of the assessments used to support the certification process. In recent decades, there has been less emphasis placed on assessment frameworks that support teaching and learning than on assessment designed for sorting and ranking of individuals (Delandshere & Petrosky, 1998).

Critics of the NBPTS certification process believe that the sorting and ranking of teachers seems to have taken precedence over the collaborative, instructional intentions of the certification process and its standards (King, 1994; Marshall, 1996). The certification process itself may support teachers, but it seems that the assessments have become gate-keeping mechanisms that include (certify) as well as exclude (deny certification). Numerical ratings may be legally defensible and economically justifiable, but the question remains whether they support the improvement of teaching performance and the recognition of accomplished practice, both important goals of the NBPTS.

The interpretive summaries originally proposed by Petrosky may provide more substantial and pertinent information for teachers, yet these were excluded from the current assessments because they were not legally defensible, economically affordable, or publicly acceptable (Delandshere & Petrosky, 1998). This issue of assessing complex performances has pitted the psychometricians against the interpretivists, where the battleground encompasses not only the assessments themselves but the inherent purposes, audiences, and consequences of the certification process.

Although the psychometricians were trying to design assessments with strong interrater reliability and traditionally defined notions of

validity and reliability, the interpretivists were complaining about the reduction of complex performances to a set of numerical scores that fall short of providing useful analysis of teaching performance. If collegiality and systematic thinking about one's performance, as stated in Core Propositions 4 and 5, are prioritized over economic and psychometric concerns, then only by providing substantive statements about teaching and teachers' performance will these propositions be realized. Petrosky (1994) believed that not only must the numerical ratings be made available for inspection and critique, but so must the interpretive process of the judges, the warrants for their conclusions and decisions, which tend to "remain invisible" in this rubric-driven evaluation process (p. 37). The interpretive summaries, or narrative records of the scoring process, must remain available to the teacher candidates so they can learn from their performances and the evaluations of the judges.

In addition to these concerns, NBPTS teacher-assessors have stated that they were worried about the lack of teachers' voice in the assessment process. McDonald-O'Brien (1995) was concerned about a teacher candidate's lack of feedback during the assessment process and stated, "To have reviewed a colleague's work with no opportunity for discussion or discourse rang hollow for me" (p. 42). Close (1995) was "shocked and concerned about how compartmentalized and isolated the scoring process became" (p. 40). These views were expressed by teachers who were part of the initial scoring groups brought together by the NBPTS. As the number of NBPTS teacher candidates increase each year, the various concerns raised by NBPTS scorers and the qualifications and training of these assessors will have to be addressed.

Research conducted during my doctoral dissertation focusing on the experiences of a single candidate going through the NBPTS certification process has shown that the NBPTS certification process focuses on a candidate's ability to align to, and adopt, the vision of accomplished practice that is set forth in the NBPTS standards documents (Serafini, 2001). Given the limitations of the assessment vehicles provided dur-



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ing the certification process, one of the primary challenges for the candidate in this study was to represent her teaching practices, classroom context and community, and alignment to the NBPTS vision of accomplished practice through the written interpretive commentaries and videotape segments. The NBPTS vision of accomplished teaching is delivered to the candidate in written standards and must therefore be interpreted into classroom practice. The candidate must represent his or her own teaching through written interpretive commentaries, student artifacts, and videotape segments. In a sense, the alignment that is assessed by the NBPTS scorers is between two written representations of accomplished practice. Representing the complexities of accomplished practice through the written commentaries and videotape segments presented the NBPTS candidate in my study with a considerable challenge if she was to become NBPTS certified. Whether the certification process represents a demonstration of accomplished practice or a perceived alignment between two written representations of accomplished practice was a concern raised during my study and remains a challenge the NBPTS may want to address.

### ***Challenges to the Certification Itself***

Along with problems associated with the assessment procedures, various educators have challenged the actual certification itself, insisting that the NBPTS certification will create a hierarchy within the teaching profession that will establish one legitimate style of teaching over other styles. King (1994) was concerned that the NBPTS certification process, and its accompanying standards, would establish itself as *the* legitimate and official view of teaching excellence (p. 104). The creation of a "universal dogma" will exercise power over other teachers and "ultimately deny the impact of specific local control" (p. 104). Although educators writing in other articles have referred to the "codification of knowledge" associated with the board's standards and the demystification of what makes a good teacher as a positive conse-

quence, King remained skeptical of these claims.

Expressing another concern about the nature of the certification itself, King (1994) wrote, "[NBPTS] certificates will represent a new commodity, a symbolic good, with a particular set of consumers" (p. 102). He believed that one of the characteristics of "cultural commodities," such as the NBPTS certificate, is that they are markers of social distinctions, and he feared that this would create levels and distinctions that would have a negative impact on the teaching profession.

In conjunction with the charges levied against the NBPTS by King (1994) and others, educators are concerned with the lack of inclusion in the vision of accomplished teaching created by the NBPTS of "culturally sensitive teaching pedagogies," especially those of African American and Hispanic heritage (Hamsa, 1998; Irvine & Fraser, 1998). The percentage of African American teachers achieving certification is approximately 11%, compared to 45% for the total number of teacher applicants. Irvine and Fraser (1998) saw this as a serious problem, one associated with a narrow, standardized view of teaching rather than connected to the abilities of minority teachers.

Irvine and Fraser (1998) wrote, "Newly implemented standards aimed at increasing teacher quality and accountability have ignored the cultural and pedagogical style and beliefs that African American teachers bring to their classrooms" (p. 42). They stated that "if the national board becomes the arbiter of the definition of good teaching . . . and if its dismal failure to certify African-American teachers continues, then the current crisis level shortage of African-American teachers is sure to get worse" (p. 42). Irvine and Fraser urged more attention to the "adverse impact" of the relatively low percentage of certified African American teachers and suggested that

good teachers should be rewarded and acknowledged for their hard work and their success with their students, not excluded because of a culturally insensitive assessment process which biases the definition of good teaching in a way that privileges white, middle class, and suburban teachers. (p. 42)

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Hamsa (1998) also expressed her concerns when she wrote, "The attitudes, biases and cultural identities of prospective candidates for board certification should be examined for their teaching behaviors towards students of various cultures" (p. 454). She further suggested, "The growing minority enrollment in the student population does not reflect a proportionate diversity of the teaching force" (p. 454). This problem is still apparent in the relatively low numbers of minority teachers achieving NBPTS certification.

### ***Challenges to the NBPTS Standards and the Standards Movement***

Finally, the NBPTS standards are part of a wider standards movement that has its own critics. Some educators see the standardization of teaching as a movement that places certainty and consistency at a premium over flexibility and teacher response to individual student needs (Petrie, 1989). One of the primary tensions is the problem associated with identifying practices that are exemplary and then prescribing other teachers to implement these practices. In a sense, this prescription of accomplished teaching practices can be viewed as a different form of technical rationality, where teachers are expected to diagnose students' problems and apply the appropriate, externally devised prescriptions to said problems. Schon (1983) believed that reflective practice entails not only deciding on the means for attaining a goal but also the goal itself. King (1994) wrote, "Standards deny uncertainty. The prevailing vision of teaching as a problem of technology, efficiency, and scientifically proven methods masks the fact that it is a highly unpredictable practice, interwoven with the responses of students" (p. 106).

King (1994) was also concerned with the "vagueness" of the standards documents and described his belief that they amount to no more than a "slogan system," referring to Michael Apple's (1986) writings. King described these slogan systems as concepts that offer little but are hard to dispute, offer something concrete to

participants but lack any assurances of this being achieved, and must be alluring in order to capture public interest (p. 100). King believed the NBPTS standards are slogans that are hard to disagree with but offer little direction or "concreteness" for effecting change in teaching in America. Marshall (1996), in writing about the problems associated with the NBPTS standards, stated,

You may share my sense that these are positive and affirming statements [NBPTS standards], but it should be clear that they support a particular ideological position, that they speak about what teachers are and do as predetermined, and that they imagine an ideal, even utopian, world rather than the one in which many teachers must work. (p. 51)

### **DISCUSSION**

Although challenges have been raised about the NBPTS and its certification system, especially the assessment process, there also exists the possibility for improving the status and quality of the teaching profession that has not existed in previous reform initiatives. As individual teachers work through the certification process and begin to reflect on and critique their practice from different perspectives, they become more capable of making appropriate decisions for the students in their classrooms. In this way, the NBPTS has the potential to affect teaching, staff development, and teacher education programs in positive ways.

The tension between the normalizing effects of teaching standards and national certification and between individual teacher creativity and autonomy needs to be addressed as the work of the NBPTS progresses. Certainly, raising the capabilities of all teachers is a justifiable goal; whether the NBPTS process can do this without imposing standards on classroom teaching that limit teacher control and professional autonomy remains a primary concern. If the certification process focuses on recognizing accomplished practice rather than supporting teachers in improving their classroom instruction and the quality of the experiences provided students, the goal of professional growth may be overshadowed by the rush to legitimize, rec-

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ognize, and certify a few master NBPTS teachers. Is the goal of the NBPTS to recognize a few accomplished teachers or to increase the quality of the teaching profession as a whole? The answer to this question will have an important impact on which direction it proceeds in.

The NBPTS standards represent a vision of accomplished practice put forth by the individual committees that have designed the teaching standards. The goal of a teacher moving through the NBPTS certification process is to achieve certification, and to do this, the candidate must align her or his practice with the NBPTS standards. Does this represent a challenge to teachers' creativity and autonomy? Can creative, cutting-edge teachers find space within the standards to be recognized as accomplished practitioners, or will they be forced to align with the vision set down in the standards documents? Are there teaching practices, demonstrated as being effective, left out of the certification process and the NBPTS standards? Standards are instruments of conformity. The question is whether this conformity will increase the quality of the teaching profession or stagnate it. A question left unanswered is whether we are replacing one version of technical rationality with another, albeit more substantial, set of standards and vision of accomplished practice with which teachers must align.

Although one could read a bit of tension, and possibly sour grapes into the writings of Petrosky and his colleagues after losing the contract for the NBPTS assessment system, one could also make the case for their standing firm in their beliefs that the assessment system, as currently formulated, has lost much of its original intent. Abandoning the interpretive summaries and replacing them with canned feedback for candidates, shortening the length of time and the intensity of scorer training, and removing the teacher candidate from the evaluative process have changed the nature and intent of the assessment process from one of professional conversation to the numerical scoring and eventual issuing of a certification. What seemed like a professional growth opportunity

may have been replaced by a standardized scoring system.

Although there are certainly a number of challenges to be addressed, there are also a number of possibilities associated with the NBPTS certification process. How the NBPTS system will affect the teaching profession and the general population's perspective concerning public schooling remains uncertain. There are currently very few studies reported on the actual certification process and very few reports that are not written by either certified teachers or NBPTS staff members. The reports that are available cite teacher testimonials as the primary evidence of success. Studies that go beyond teacher-reported beliefs collected in national surveys need to be conducted to understand the effects of this process on classroom teachers and how this process is interpreted by candidates as they move toward certification. However, these testimonials should not be dismissed outright. The vast number of reports by teachers of profound changes and improvements in their teaching practices and abilities suggest that the NBPTS certification process and standards are forcing teachers to reflect on their teaching and attend to aspects of their practice that they may not have addressed previously. Teachers have attested to the changes in their teaching and its effect on their professional lives. In and of itself, these testimonials represent compelling evidence that the NBPTS is having a positive effect on the quality of teaching in America's schools.

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