Experiences of Michigan Elementary National Board Certification Candidates

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EXPERIENCES OF MICHIGAN ELEMENTARY NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION CANDIDATES

by

Kristen L. Dewitt

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Dr. Sue Poppink, Advisor

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 2007
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. -- Albert Schweitzer

It goes without saying that this project would not have happened without the assistance and guidance of a great many people, including my participants, committee members, colleagues, and family. I give great thanks and appreciation to each of you.

First, to my participants, I cannot express my gratitude for allowing me into your lives. Because of your patience and kindness I enjoyed this project more than I could have imagined. You are all truly accomplished teachers and amazing people.

Second, I thank my committee: Dr. Sue Poppink, my advisor and committee chair, who guided me through this program with experience, kindness and an amazing understanding of APA; Dr. Larry Blackmer who convinced me to pursue this degree and was the first to see me as a "teacher of teachers"; and Dr. Patricia Reeves whose kind words, valuable feedback and suggestions made all the difference.

Next, I thank my fabulous study group partners, Patty and Sarah, with whom I shared fabulous meals and even better conversation; my teaching partners, Barb and Rick, and my coworkers at Cooper Elementary, who provide the best support, ideas, editing assistance, laughs, and friendship anyone could ask for; my friends who
Acknowledgements - Continued

showed their support with shopping breaks and well wishes; and finally, my
transcriber, Karen, who generously gave her time and energy for this project.

Finally, I thank my family. Without the endless encouragement of my parents
and stepparents, my sister, my amazingly supportive husband, Dan, I would have
never dreamt I could take this on. I love each of you very much.

Kristen L. Dewitt
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

The educational system in our country is changing. In Classroom Instruction That Works (Marzano, R., Pickering, D. & J. Pollock, 2001), the authors state that since the early 1990s studies indicate that an individual teacher can have a powerful effect on his or her students. "The myth that teachers do not make a difference in student learning has been refuted" (Marzano et al, 2001, p.3). The authors explain the importance of identifying not only what highly effective teachers know but also what they do. As higher demands and expectations are being placed on students, a movement is taking place to help make teachers more effective.

Many believe that teachers should meet the "highly qualified" provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) to ensure student success. Unfortunately, federal policy has focused "predominantly on content knowledge, ignoring critical knowledge and skills that teachers must possess to improve student learning" (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004, NP). In other words, "highly qualified" teachers do not necessarily ensure high quality teachings. Some believe that teaching skills and pedagogy are identifiers of effective teachers. "Recent studies have consistently found that teacher expertise is the single most important determinant of student achievement" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 3). The research indicates that accomplished teachers "have both content knowledge and teaching skills, such as knowing how to address different students' learning needs" (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, NP).
Highly Qualified and High Quality Teachers

The need for quality teachers in our country has become a focus for recent educational reform and federal legislation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 sets new demands on schools and requires that all teachers in core academic subjects become "highly qualified" by meeting federal requirements. NCLB was designed to improve teacher qualifications in the hope that it would address the inequities between advantaged and disadvantaged schools. The high qualifications include an assessment of teacher content knowledge. "No longer are states able to decide independently what constitutes a qualified teacher; they must also consider a federally imposed standard that addresses the teacher's knowledge of subject matter" (Walsh & Snyder, 2004, p. 1). This focus on highly qualified teachers will affect more than educational reform at the federal level. As a result of NCLB, state and local agencies, as well as universities, have been forced to look more closely at teacher preparation programs and requirements, as well as professional development programs and new recruitment and retention strategies (The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004).

The Role of Professional Development

There is a strong connection between quality teaching, professional development and meeting student needs. Bullough (1998) makes the argument that professional development, in particular is a great importance today.

Nearly 40 percent of today's public school teachers have at least twenty years teaching experience, compared with only 14 percent in 1976. Accordingly,

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the professional development of experienced teachers is of greater importance to school improvement than ever before (Bullough, et al, 1998, p. 1).

The need for quality professional development is evident. Teachers want to improve their teaching. "Teachers seek to become more effective at addressing the full range of needs they encounter in their teaching" (English Update, 2002, NP). At issue, however, is the question of whether accomplished teaching can be best identified by a teacher's content knowledge or through their teaching experience. Quality professional development is a critical piece to the puzzle.

Successful professional development helps teachers attain their instructional goals, sustain them, and inform their professional judgments, resulting in improved teaching and improved student achievement. "It is clear that what teachers value meshes with what the research also shows to be effective: (a) new ways to think about their practice, (b) engagement in rich subject matter experiences, (c) interaction with their peers and other professionals, and (d) time" (English Update, NP). In other words, teachers in all areas seek time to reflect and engage in worthwhile experiences with others.

Developmental Stages of Teaching

As new teachers receive training and gain experience, they learn and develop, moving slowly from the novice stage towards the expert stage (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Becoming an expert is increasingly difficult, with more and more expectations, "today's educators are finding it harder to become more proficient: there's more to study, more to learn, more to practice" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.
1). Although every teacher moves through these stages in significantly different ways, some patterns and comparisons can be identified. The Life-Cycle of the Career Teacher Model (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000; Steffy & Wolfe, 1997) examines the stages and transitions teachers face. It consists of six developmental phases: novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished, and emeritus. The six developmental phases and significant points of the model are explained further in Chapter 2.

Teacher Certification

With an understanding that teaching has an influence on student learning and teachers have the abilities to improve their practice; opportunities for advanced teaching certification began to emerge in the early 1980s. Two national certification programs that emerged are the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Both programs require a lengthy credentialing process and result in the teachers receiving an advanced certification credential. Through assessment and reflection, both offer ways for teachers to improve their teaching practices. They differ, however, in their focus on content knowledge and teaching experiences.

American Board Certification (ABC), the smaller and lesser known of the two programs, offers two alternatives to advanced certification: Passport to Teaching Certification and Master Teacher Certification. The Passport Certification identifies professionals who possess the necessary skills to enter the teaching profession through alternative routes. Master Certification identifies veteran teachers who are
able to demonstrate outstanding teaching ability and serve as mentors and models for other teachers. Both certification options are voluntary, focus on content knowledge, and recognize certified teachers as highly qualified under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

National Board Certification is another national certification option for teachers. Developed by the NBPTS (2001), National Board Certification (NBC) is the most common and most effective avenue to advanced certification. There is emerging evidence of the effectiveness of NBC as a method to improve teacher quality (Lustick and Sykes, 2006). It is another way that a growing number of districts and states are using to identify accomplished teachers through both content knowledge and teaching experience. NBC was created to set professional standards for teachers, much like those in the medical and legal professions.

National Board Certification developed by teachers, with teachers, and for teachers, is a symbol of professional teaching excellence. Offered on a voluntary basis, it complements, not replaces, state licensing. While state-licensing systems set entry-level standards for beginning teachers, National Board Certification has established advanced standards for experienced teachers. (NBPTS, 2001, NP)

NBC is a voluntary, advanced teaching credential and a challenging professional development experience for many teachers. Offered by the NBPTS (2001), it is a voluntary certification system based on high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, including the art of
reflection. "What teachers learn from the process is to evaluate their own practice in
the light of objective, external standards" (Lustick & Sykes, 2006, p. 29). As with
ABC, teachers who receive NBC are recognized as highly qualified under the No

As stated above, National Board Certification is an evaluation of both content
knowledge and teaching ability. The certification credential consists of a two-part
assessment process: a portfolio of materials to demonstrate how candidates' teaching
meets National Board standards and an assessment whereby candidates respond to
computer prompts about subject matter and classroom situations, based on national
standards developed for their field. "The goal of the NBPTS is to identify highly
effective teachers in classrooms across the country and correlate the effectiveness of
these teachers with increased student achievement" (NBPTS, 2001, NP). Candidates
complete a total of 10 entries (4 portfolio entries and 6 assessment center entries) that
are scored separately based on a 4-point rubric. Each entry must receive a passing
score in order for a candidate to become certified. If all entries do not receive passing
scores, the candidate has the option to retake, or attempt certification again by
"banking" the passing scores and redoing the entries that did not pass. A candidate
may attempt certification three times.

National Board standards are based on five Core Propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to
   students.
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.

"We identified Five Core Propositions that describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that characterize accomplished teaching and created, where none existed before, professional standards for the nation's K-12 teachers" (NBPTS, 2001, NP).

As teachers complete the certification process, these Core Propositions and the NBPTS standards, which are based on a particular field of study and grade level of students, guide teachers.

At this time, there are NBPTS 27 certificates available in 14 subject areas distributed across seven developmental levels (see Summary Table included as Appendix A). The certificates available cover almost 90% of the eligible teaching population (Linquanti, 2001). While more than 55,000 U.S. teachers have successfully certified, just over 200 Michigan teachers have achieved this advanced certification, and hundreds more in Michigan have attempted it (NBPTS, 2001). Whether or not Michigan teachers certify, teachers who attempt certification experience the process in very different ways, for different reasons, with varying degrees of support, and with different motivations.

So why are teachers pursuing National Board Certification? It is important at this point to consider why teachers decide to change their teaching practices and what motivates them to change. Research shows that teacher change is associated with
internal motivation such as support, personal experiences, and attitude (Hunzicker, 2004), as well as external motivation such as pressure from outside sources. "Many teachers prefer to remain within their comfort zones... which poses a huge problem for principals, curriculum directors, and other instructional leaders interested in changing teachers' behaviors" (Hunzicker, 2004, p. 44). We know that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators play a part in change. (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hunzicker, 2004). Support is a piece of motivation. When teachers feel supported by their district, their administrators, their peers, and their families, they are more motivated to improve their teaching. But when there is little outside support and few extrinsic motivators, such as time or financial incentives, teachers must look inside themselves and decide if the change they desire is worth the challenges they will face (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

While research explains what motivates teachers to change, additional research is needed on what motivates teachers to pursue National Board Certification, how support and pressure influences their decision, how the NBC certification process influences their teaching.

Rationale for Study

Since it was established in 1987, the NBPTS has been the focus of educational studies looking at the effectiveness of National Board Certification in identifying highly effective teachers, how the NBC improves teaching quality and how the process influences teaching, and, although it was not designed as a measure of student
achievement, in the increase of student achievement. Lustick and Sykes (2006) state that the NBC process is an effective professional development opportunity.

If teacher learning is considered an important component to improving teacher quality and ultimately student achievement, then these results point to the possibility that the process of Board certification may positively impact the quality of instruction and students' learning experiences. (Lustick & Sykes, 2006, p. 30).

According to Lustick (2000), National Board Certification “acts as a mirror for candidates to gaze into their practice and gain a much desired affirmation of their way of teaching” (p. 17). This study acts not as a mirror, but as a window, through which we gaze into the experiences of both National Board Certified Teachers and National Board Candidates, in terms of the role motivation played in their decision to seek and complete National Board Certification, the role support and pressure played in their decision to seek and complete the certification process, and the influence the process had on their teaching. Therefore, the purpose of conducting this phenomenological study was to understand the journeys of teachers as they seek National Board Certification.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

We know that there is a need for qualified teachers in the U.S. and that federal mandates and professional development programs have been implemented in an attempt to meet that need. For many reasons, teachers across the country are beginning to pursue other options and look at new ways of improving their craft,
including advanced teaching certification programs such as National Board Certification, developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). We also know that external motivation and pressure, as well as internal motivation and support, play a part in the decision to pursue National Board Certification. This study explored the experiences of Michigan elementary National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and National Board Candidates (NBCs) with the intent of better understanding of the role motivation played in their decision to seek and complete National Board Certification, the role support and pressure played in their decision to seek and complete the certification process, and the influence the process had on their teaching.

For the purpose of this study, the following questions, one overarching question and three sub questions, were considered:

What were the experiences of Michigan elementary NBCTs and NBC candidates as they pursued National Board Certification?

A. What role does motivation play in a teacher's decision to seek National Board Certification and in the certification process?

B. What role do support and pressure play in a teacher's decision to seek National Board Certification and in the certification process?

C. How does participating in the National Board Certification process influence a teacher's teaching?

This study was limited to 10 Michigan elementary National Board Teachers and National Board Candidates in Michigan. The rationale for choosing to work with
teachers within the state was that National Board Certification is still relatively unknown to many in Michigan. I choose to limit the study to elementary teachers in hopes that similar teaching experiences would result in comparable results. In addition, the limited number of participants allowed for each interview to be as in-depth and thorough as possible.

Limitations and Delimitations

Through this research I am aware that everyone has research bias and brings their own perceptions into their studies. In my case, my perceptions surface as both an educator and a National Board Certified Teacher, therefore, all efforts were made to address these perspectives and recognize any prejudices and assumptions throughout the duration of the study. Before the research began, I deeply considered my experience as a candidate and thought through my motivation, support network, and the influence it had on my teaching. I also carefully bracketed my personal reactions, questions, and thoughts as I collected and analyzed the data in order to truly understand what the participants were sharing and keep my perspective separate from theirs.

A total of ten teachers were included in this study and a cross-section of Michigan elementary NBCTs and National Board Candidates were represented:

1. One participant was a NBC candidate. National Board Certification candidates are teachers who are currently completing the certification process.
2. One participant was a non-certified NBC candidate. Non-certified candidates are teachers who did not certify in previous attempts at certification and decided not to reattempt certification.

3. Eight participants were NBCTs. National Board Certified Teachers are teachers who successfully completed the certification process.

It was my hope that this study would also include National Board Certification banking candidates, or bankers, are teachers who completed the certification process but did not receive passing scores on all ten entries on their first and/or second attempts. They have saved, or "banked" scores from passing entries. Unfortunately, no bankers were available to participate.

It was also my hope to include males as part of this study, but due to various reasons, the two males who responded to my initial participation request declined. However, since 90% of Michigan's NBCTs are female, I was not overly concerned that my study only included females.

Significance of Study

This study of National Board Certified Teachers and candidates is significant in that it provides significant insights and valuable information for teachers and NBC candidates throughout the country interested in learning more about the NBC process, especially in the areas of motivation and support. The findings regarding professional development and support are beneficial to both school district administrators and state policy makers currently involved with, or who are interested in learning more about
NBC. Finally, it is a valuable resource for researchers as they continue to study this advanced teacher certification program and add to the growing body of literature.

Chapter two provides a thorough review of the literature that was conducted to better understand the issues related to professional development and teacher certification. The methods used to conduct this study are fully explained in the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, results of the study are explained in detail. Finally, the fifth chapter will contain a summary of the themes, a review of the findings, recommendations for further research and the author's self-reflection.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to better understand the experiences of National Board Certified teachers, in terms of motivation, support, pressure, and influence on teaching practice, this chapter reviews the current literature in a number of areas. It reviews what is currently known and not known about effective teaching and the role of motivation, support, and pressure on effective teaching.

The review is structured around a conceptual framework of Michigan teachers that chose to pursue National Board Certification, who are at different points in the process, and who have a variety of experiences as they complete the process. (See Conceptual Framework in Appendix B) It begins with an explanation of the need for quality teachers in the United States, which leads to an overview of No Child Left Behind, federal education legislation that defines highly qualified teachers. Current research on effective professional development is then summarized, followed by a summary of experiences of quality teachers as they progress from novice to expert educators. The chapter then shares what research suggests motivates teachers to change, the role that support plays in change, and what changes National Board Certified Teachers experience as they become more effective. It concludes with a detailed explanation of two national teacher certification programs, focusing on National Board Certification, that, through a rigorous standards-based process, identifies accomplished teachers.
A Need for Quality Teachers in the U.S.

Among the many challenges and issues facing the field of education today is a need for change. Many believe there is a need to improve teacher quality in our country and change is inherent in improvement, and this change is crucial to the success of our society.

All of our nation's children need to be well educated -- not only for moral reasons but also because our country depends on it. Failure to provide all children with a sound education is unacceptable in this information age in which education is essential to both a sound economy and a viable democracy.

(National Conference on Teacher Quality, 2000, NP)

Educational reform has come in waves over the years, focusing on student academic requirements and restructuring schools, and while those focuses still exist, one of the current waves of educational reform focuses on comprehensive changes in the quality of teaching through better teacher preparation and higher quality, more relevant professional development (Hirsch, 1998).

Rothman (2004) suggests that the quality of teaching is the largest school-related factor associated with student achievement. Teachers' content knowledge and teaching expertise are important influences on how well students learn. For children to succeed academically they must have teachers who not only know their subjects well but also know how to adapt lessons so that students with different skills and abilities master the coursework and meet high expectations. "The notion that teachers should have strong knowledge in the subjects they teach is intuitively logical and
prompts little argument" (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2004, p. 5). In other words, teacher quality is not just a result of content knowledge, but also experience, strategies, and classroom performance.

In order for students to be successful, teachers must be recruited and retained; however, assessing teaching quality is difficult. One of the most common means of assessing teacher quality is through written examinations, which focus on basic skill competencies or specific subject matter knowledge rather than teaching ability (Hirsch, 1998). While these examinations provide information regarding teacher knowledge and skills, they do not indicate teaching success or quality. In addition, they do not necessarily indicate the level of subject-matter knowledge being taught.

Until recently, states have not been strongly involved with teacher preparation programs and have permitted teachers to teach in areas other than their academic majors (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2004). This resulted in a high percentage of teachers teaching subjects different than what they were trained to teach. "By 2000 only 47 percent of secondary teachers in the U.S. held an academic major in the subjects they taught" (National Council on Teacher Quality, p. 8). The federal government believes that there should be some consistency between teacher subject-matter knowledge and what they teach, and in 2001 created legislation, signed in 2002, that determined the credentials teachers need to have to be considered a highly qualified teacher, the No Child Left Behind Act.

Federal Policy

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind
Act, which set new federally mandated guidelines for teacher quality, school accountability, and low-performing schools.

The quality of our public schools directly affects us all as parents, as students, and as citizens. Yet too many children in America are segregated by low expectations, illiteracy, and self-doubt. In a constantly changing world that is demanding increasingly complex skills from its workforce, children are literally being left behind. (President George W. Bush, 2001, NP)

The $22.5 billion No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the federal government's education policy. Since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted in Congress, the federal government has spent more than $267.4 billion to assist states in educating disadvantaged children. Yet, according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2002, only 31 percent of fourth-graders can read at a proficient (passing) or advanced level. "Achievement among the highest-performing students remained stable, and America’s lowest performers have improved only slightly. A wide achievement gap remains between poor and more economically advantaged students, as well as between white and minority students" (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2004, NP). NCLB was created to address this academic gap and has greatly affected education at all levels.

President George H.W. Bush first addressed these issues by convening the nation's governors at the 1989 National Education Summit where they developed broad objectives to be reached by the year 2000, known then as Goals 2000 (National
Conference of State Legislatures, 2005). In 1994, the ESEA was reauthorized under President Bill Clinton, as the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. The latest reauthorization took years of adjustments and months of deliberation in the House and Senate before President George W. Bush signed the NCLB Act into law in January 2002. It represents a 27% increase over the federal government's spending level on education in 2001 and a 49% increase over 2000 levels (Delisio, 2002).

"Recognizing that good teachers are essential to ensuring student academic success, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) sets stringent new teacher-quality requirements" (National PTA, 2006).

Like the current trend in educational reform, with the passage of the NCLB there has been an important shift in focus from high academic standards for students to higher teacher qualifications. "NCLB's focus on highly qualified teachers holds the promise of closing the teaching gap in schools where poor and minority children are the most likely to have the least prepared teachers" (The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004, p. 1). The passage of NCLB emphasizes growing concern in our nation that a need exists for highly qualified teachers if children are to have a chance at succeeding in the 21st century (Bennett, 2004, p. 69). Under the new law, virtually all public school teachers are required to be "highly qualified", which includes being fully licensed or certified under state law. According to NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), "highly qualified" means:

1. The teacher holds at least a bachelor's degree and full state certification, and has a major in the content/subject assigned to teach or if teaching in a
minor has passed a rigorous state test in the content/subject.

2. Holds a master's or higher degree in the content / subject, or has completed the equivalent of a major in the content/subject.

3. Holds National Board Certification in appropriate content and at the appropriate developmental level.

4. Meets a high objective uniform state-standard of evaluation [HOUSE].

"One of the most prominent aspects of NCLB is the emphasis it places on teacher quality" (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2005, NP). As part of NCLB, school systems around the country are required to ensure they have highly qualified teachers. National teaching qualifications are outlined in the policy, while states are given some flexibility in determining specific requirements. Key components of the highly qualified teacher policy in Michigan (State of Michigan State Board of Education, 2005) are the following:

1. Highly Qualified Teachers: To be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have: 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach.

2. State Requirements: NCLB requires states to 1) measure the extent to which all students have highly qualified teachers, particularly minority and disadvantaged students, 2) adopt goals and plans to ensure all teachers are highly qualified and, 3) publicly report plans and progress in meeting teacher quality goals.

3. Demonstration of Competency: Teachers (in middle and high school) must
prove that they know the subject they teach with: 1) a major in the subject they teach, 2) credits equivalent to a major in the subject, 3) passage of a state-developed test, 4) HOUSSE, 5) an advanced certification from the state, or 6) a graduate degree.

4. High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation [HOUSSE]: NCLB allows states to develop an additional way for current teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency and meet highly qualified teacher requirements. Proof may consist of a combination of teaching experience, professional development, and knowledge in the subject garnered over time in the profession.

NCLB and educational policy is clearly one small piece of the effective teacher movement. Under NCLB, "teachers are considered highly qualified if they meet specific requirements" (The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004, NP). According to the new set of requirements, both new teachers and experienced teachers alike must achieve highly qualified status, prompting universities and school districts to create more effective professional development programs, local administrators to implement new recruitment and retention strategies, and teachers to think and act differently with regard to their own profession (The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality).

Professional Development

In Results Now, Mike Schmoker (2006) argues that, of all the factors within our control as educators, instruction has the largest influence on achievement. In
order to improve instruction effective teachers must better understand themselves as
learners, which involves setting goals, deciding what to learn and how to best learn,
deciding when the learning has occurred and reflecting on the experience. "Our
ability to learn continuously and purposefully throughout our lives will determine our
ability to grow and prosper" (Smith, 2004, p. 59). In order to assess the student
learning that has occurred, teachers must reflect on their own learning, understanding
and teaching in order to better meet the needs of their students. "By knowing how we
learn, by learning the importance of reflection, we can make conscious learning a
lifelong process" (Smith, p. 66).

Over one hundred years ago, John Dewey suggested that teachers should be
involved in reflective inquiry to develop an understanding of what takes place when
learning occurs (Dewey, 1974). This idea of reflective practice has become essential
to quality professional development as did his idea that inquiry should involve
observation of others as well as analysis of one's own behaviors. Dewey also
believed that observing others provided the best kind of professional development.
His ideas were particularly helpful for those new to the teaching profession such as
student teachers. Reflection, combined with quality professional development, is a
powerful tool (Smith, 2004).

Schools must realize the need to "focus more on helping teachers learn how to
learn and how to recognize when it is time to learn something new in their job"
(Sousa, 2003, p. 18). In order to prepare students for the new millennium, changes
must be made to traditional professional development. "Professional development
often is bad beyond hope" (Schmoker, 2006, p.109). Today's professional development should be based on the way today's students learn best. "Teachers who design and use instructional strategies based on their deep understanding of how the brain of today's learners work are going to have the greatest impact on student achievement" (Sousa, p. 101).

"The research literature on teacher quality - taken as a whole - sends a strong message to policy makers and practitioners that teachers need to know their subject matter and how to teach it" (Berry, 2004, p. 686). As a result of educational reform, there are new, higher expectations for teacher quality, and thus for professional development of both novice and experienced teachers and a refined definition of highly qualified professional development. Federal policy requires that all teachers must "stay current with developments in the field and continue to increase their knowledge and skills to remain effective in the classroom" (Donlevy, 2005, p. 205).

At the federal level, NCLB has provided some guidance about effective professional development in its list of characteristics of high-quality professional development. Characteristics include attention to building content knowledge and a focus on student learning, linked with achieving standards. They specifically exclude activities that are one-day or short-term workshops or conferences. NCLB also recommends the inclusion of professional development on using data and assessments to inform and instruct classroom practice (NCLB, 2001, sec. 910, p. 1963).

Policy emphasizes the importance of regularly evaluating professional
development programs as to their impact on teacher effectiveness, defined in terms of student achievement (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). States and districts have responded to these requirements by creating specific requirements to ensure that all teachers keep up-to-date and involved in relevant professional development opportunities.

The least understood aspect of professional development, however, is the "What are teachers learning?" question (Lustick, 2002). According to Wilson and Berne (1999), research in this area has yet to identify, conceptualize, and assess what teachers are learning. An assumption is made that quality professional development will result in an increased number of quality teachers.

Currently, there are concerns about professional development opportunities regarding coherence, content, and time span (Garet, et al., 1999). Recent data from a national probability sample of mathematics and science teachers (Garet et al.) indicated the following:

1. The average time span of a professional development activity was less than a week.
2. The average number of contact hours per activity was 25 and the median was 15.
3. Most activities did not have collective participation.
4. Most activities did not have a major emphasis on content.
5. Most activities had limited coherence and a small number of active learning opportunities.

According to Garet et al. (1999), these types of professional development...
opportunities often result in negative teacher attitudes and little effectiveness in the classroom.

It is clear that, in general, teachers are not receiving the types of learning opportunities that are likely to improve their instruction and improve student achievement. This is based on evidence that good teachers must have a host of knowledge on various subject matters and technical knowledge, including the knowledge and skills needed to help every member of an increasingly diverse student population reach much higher academic standards (Berry, 2004). In other words, quality professional development should meet the needs of our teachers. According to Snow-Renner & Lauer (2005), when it comes to effectiveness, and for classroom practice to change, professional learning opportunities should be:

1. Grounded in the curriculum that students study.
2. Embedded within an aligned system and connected to several elements of instruction (e.g., assessments, curriculum).
3. Extended in time, with time built in for practice, coaching, and follow-ups.

Research has also shown that the more time spent on professional development, the more coherent teacher instruction. "Overall, the data suggest that deep changes in teacher instruction, like those required by reformers, take considerable time" (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2006, p. 6). In other words, it appears that teacher quality improves, over time, due to quality professional development (Snow-Renner & Lauer).
"Great teaching is greatly needed" (Smith, 2004, p.54). Successful schools emphasize a process of continuous improvement through professional development. These schools work together to identify needs as well learn about different methods of instruction and school organization. Teachers within such schools work not only on professional development, but also on school-wide improvements (Smith).

Whether they rely on professional development provided by their districts or seek it out themselves, researchers believe teachers have discovered what is important and what works. According to Betty E. Steffy (2001), teachers believe professional development should focus on individual and organizational development related to improving student achievement, be relevant and research-based, help staff meet the needs of a diverse population, and develop expertise in both content and process.

Research on professional development shows that teachers want professional development that provides new ways of looking at what they are already doing (English Update, 2002). Teachers need support and resources that will help them become experts in their fields. By thinking about their own practice and improving upon what they know, teachers are more effective and student achievement improves (English Update). Professional development opportunities vary tremendously from teacher to teacher—it is a highly individualized experience (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). It is suggested that teachers have a fair amount of freedom in choosing the best opportunities for them (Russo, 2002).

When successful professional development opportunities are offered, "at all levels, teacher change is connected with firsthand, intensive, and extensive
experiences" (Bullough et al., 1998, p. 2). As stated earlier, when teachers are presented with worthwhile, engaging activities, teacher learning and student achievement improve. Successful professional development helps teachers develop new ways of thinking about learning, learners, and subject matter (Borko & Putnam, 1995).

Teacher Experience

John Dewey alerted the teaching profession to the need for interventions in the teaching processes that foster the development of teachers' knowledge and suggested that teachers be involved in reflective inquiry to develop an understanding of what takes place when learning occurs (Ethell, 2000). As teachers progress throughout their careers, they must be willing to grow and reflect to remain effective. Research on the change from teacher novice to teacher expert shows the importance of teachers continuing to grow and become more competent.

The literature on teaching careers distinguishes novices and experts with respect to their cognition and knowledge. Experts are more knowledgeable than novices and are typically identified by their performances in comparisons with other practitioners. "In comparison to novices, expert teachers have a larger knowledge base from which to draw; they organize knowledge more efficiently in complex interconnected schemas and utilize it more effectively" (Ethell, 2000, p. 2).

A model that examines the stages and transitions that teachers progress through was developed on the premise that "given the appropriate learning environment, teachers will continue to grow and develop throughout their
"professional lifetime" (Steffy, 2001). The Life Cycle of the Career Model identifies six phases of development: Novice, Apprentice, Professional, Expert, Distinguished, and Emeritus.

1. The novice phase begins when pre-service students begin practicum experiences in teacher education programs and continues through student teaching and internships.

2. The apprentice phase begins when they begin planning and delivering instruction on their own and continues until knowledge of content and pedagogy emerges and confidence is evident, usually into the second or third year of teaching.

3. The professional phase begins as teachers grow in self-confidence and includes critical student feedback with regard to respect for the teacher.

4. The expert phase symbolizes achievement of high standards, such as national certification.

5. The distinguished phase includes teachers who exceed current expectations for what teachers are expected to know and do. They impact education-related decisions at city, state, and national levels.

6. The emeritus phase marks a lifetime of achievement in education and includes teachers who retire after a lifetime of teaching and continue to serve the profession as tutors, substitute teachers, and mentors.

According to Steffy (2001), the critical factor that enables teachers to move through the phases is the Reflection-Renewal-Growth Cycle (Fig. 1).
Each stage of the cycle represents an essential piece of the growth process. First, teachers reflect on their teachings, matching means and teaching methods with student results. The goal is to enable the learner to see the relations between means and methods employed and results achieved (Schon, 1987, p.17). Next, they identify areas of weakness or those that need improvement, and challenge themselves to improve, providing a sense of renewal. Finally, this renewed attitude and energy results in professional growth. If this cycle is missing or incomplete, teachers are likely to begin to withdraw and disengage, possibly becoming a detriment to students, schools, and the profession (Schon).

When teachers begin their careers they often believe that they will quickly become outstanding teachers, transitioning easily from the novice to expert phase. As this becomes reality, feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and withdrawal often occur.
(Darling-Hammond, 1995). Only after they develop self-confidence and an essential understanding of content knowledge and pedagogy will teachers begin transitioning through the career cycle.

Teacher Change: Motivation and Support

As teachers progress through their careers, ideally, skills and talents develop and confidence in the classroom grows. However, while expectations for teachers increase and professional development opportunities are provided for teachers to improve upon these skills, many of them "remain within their comfort zones, admitting that their instructional practices do not change much as a result of professional development activities" (Hunzicker, 2004, p. 45).

With regard to change, many teachers resist, due to lack of motivation, low levels of knowledge, experience and comfort (Hunzicker, 2004). Since this study focuses on teachers who have voluntarily taken on National Board Certification as a professional development opportunity, it is important to understand what the literature says about what motivates teachers to challenge them and improve their teaching.

The literature shows that resistance to change can be overcome with quality professional development, as defined above, strong support from colleagues and administrators, and the desire to improve (Bullough et al., 1998; Borko & Putnam, 1995).

Along with meaningful professional development, support is essential for teacher change. "Very few major changes occur in an institutional setting in which
there is no strong vision for that change, advocacy for the program and the process, and consistent resources during the change" (Goodlad, 1990, p. 415). Colleagues play a large part in motivating teachers to change or take on new challenges by providing assistance and support in various ways such as mentoring. In addition, when administrators recognize the value of change and make a commitment to support it, teachers are far more successful (Bullough et al., 1998).

Finally, and most importantly, it is the drive and intrinsic motivation to improve that moves teachers toward change (McCarty, 1993). These teachers share a vision for their futures and have a desire to improve. Successful teachers are more likely to change or take on a challenge when they feel supported, confident, and committed to the goal (McCarty).

National Teacher Certification Programs

One way teachers can now demonstrate their expertise, and states can better identify quality teachers, is through two national teacher certification programs. The idea of advanced national certification programs began in the early 1980s and was designed to signify the achievement of a certain level of accomplishment in content area knowledge and teaching ability. Unlike state licensing or certification, these programs are voluntary.

A study of the literature identifies several benefits to seeking National Certification to both the individual and the profession. Benefits to the individual teacher include "increased mobility and professional development opportunities, assuming states eventually adopt board standards and exempt nationally certified out-
of-state teachers from routine testing requirements" (Baron, 1988). Benefits to the profession include an increase in leadership skills and collegiality (Kaye et al., 2003). But while many praise these programs, there are concerns about cost, time, and these teachers receiving special treatment. "The introduction of a special status into the profession may create an elite group of teachers who receive choice classroom assignments, staff development opportunities, preference for advancement, and access to outside resources" (Baron, NP).

The two largest programs, The American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence and The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, are examined here.

American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence

The American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) offers two highly qualified teacher certification options. The first, Passport Certification, is designed for licensing prospective teachers whether right out of college or after having spent years at another career recognizes that the holder has an understanding of effective instructional and assessment strategies, including basic classroom management. The second, Master Teacher Certification, is designed for the veteran teacher and carries the distinction of recognizing teacher effectiveness as measured by documented success in student achievement. Both the Passport and Master Teacher Certifications are nationally recognized, allowing teachers to have their certification recognized in other states (Suh, 2002).
The first, Passport to Teaching, is an alternative route to certification for prospective teachers. With certification requirements differing from one state to another, teachers are limited when relocating. Passport to Teaching candidate benefits include:

1. A teaching credential that is nationally recognized and portable from state to state.
2. Reduced barriers to entry, encouraging young professionals and career changers to become teachers.
3. A cost-effective route to earning a teaching credential based on subject area mastery and professional teaching knowledge as demonstrated by meeting rigorous testing standards.

State education agencies benefit as well as teachers in that they gain:

1. An increased number of highly qualified teacher candidates for school districts.
2. A reduction in the number of out-of-field teachers by providing schools with educators for hire in their specific area of need.
3. A new tool for states to meet the requirements of placing a highly qualified teacher in every classroom.

The second certification option, which is still in the development stage, is the Master Teacher option, which recognizes "exemplary teachers with a proven track record of success" (ABCTE, 2001, NP). Master Teacher certification offers:

1. A quality credential indicating their high levels of professional teaching and
subject matter knowledge.

2. A professional honor based on documented results of outstanding student achievement.

State education agencies gain:

1. Access to current research on the correlation between a Master Teacher's impact on student achievement and teacher retention rates
2. A reciprocal teaching standard for quality teachers relocating to the state
3. A method to ensure that state bonus programs are directed to experienced teachers with a focus on achievement where it matters most in the classroom

History and Purpose

ABCTE was founded in 2001 and is the considerably smaller, lesser known, program of the two discussed here. "The American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence is committed to recruiting, certifying and supporting excellent teachers essential for achieving student success" (ABCTE, 2001, NP). Their goal is to open new pathways into the classroom, helping states, districts, and communities meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Currently, the Passport to Teaching certification option is available to teachers in eight areas including Elementary Education, Biology, Chemistry, English Language Arts, General Science, Mathematics, Physics, and Special Education. Certificates are being developed in other areas including Reading, Chemistry, and History.
The Master Teacher certification program, which will officially be launched Winter 2006, will require that candidates perform at a successful level on a subject area knowledge exam. Certificates that will be available at that time include Elementary Education, Middle Level Mathematics, and Middle Level English Language Arts. Certificates available Fall 2007 include Upper Level Mathematics, Upper Level English Language Arts, Middle Level General Science, Upper Level General Science, and Biology.

Requirements

All candidates for both the Passport to Teaching and Master Teacher certifications must hold a bachelor’s degree and demonstrate mastery on rigorous examinations of subject area and professional teaching knowledge. Prior to earning certification, candidates must also pass a federal background check.

Certification Process

Passport to Teaching is a five step process. The first step is to enroll. Secondly, candidates must meet with an ABCTE Learning Plan Advisor to discuss the process and complete an online Self-Assessment. The third step is to prepare by creating an Individualized Learning Plan. Fourth, candidates complete online certification exams. The final step is to begin teaching.

Master Teacher candidates will be required to demonstrate classroom effectiveness over time, as determined by a longitudinal study of student academic achievement. "This link between classroom experience and student achievement distinguishes American Board certification – the students, not the process, are the
central focus" (ABCTE, 2001, NP). Candidates must successfully complete two phases of the process:

1. Phase I: demonstrating subject area mastery by receiving a successful score on subject area examinations
2. Phase II: showing significant student gains by measuring student achievement gains on assessments and comparing them to district, state, and national averages

The recommended time to complete the process is 18 to 24 months. The total cost for the Master Teacher certification process is $1100.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

The National Board Certification program began in 1987 and, by 2006, has identified over 47,000 highly qualified teachers nationwide. It has helped teachers and researchers identify successful teaching strategies and techniques, and it is the first of its kind to combine teacher qualifications and knowledge of content with actual classroom practice. "The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is rooted in the belief that the single most important action this country can take to improve schools and student learning is to strengthen teaching" (NBPTS, 2001, NP). As stated in the NCLB highly qualified teacher policy, achieving this certification automatically identifies teachers as highly qualified. National Board standards include:

I. Understanding Young Children

II. Equity, Fairness, and Diversity
Since National Board Certification is the central focus of this study, the following is a detailed review of the Board's origins, purpose, requirements, and application process.

**History and Purpose**

In 1987, National Board Certification was introduced. "The goal of NBPTS is to identify highly effective teachers in classrooms across the country and correlate the effectiveness of these teachers with increased student achievement," (NBPTS, 2001). NBPTS is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization created in response to the 1983 President's Commission of Excellence in Education report, *A Nation at Risk*.

A President and a Board of Directors, the majority of who are classroom teachers, govern the National Board. Classroom teachers are a vital part of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. They compose more than half of the board and form the majority of the Standards committees (NBPTS, 2001).

The Board's mission 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 student learning (Linquanti, 2001).

As stated earlier, the National Board Standards are based on five Core Propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
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.

Requirements

In order to be eligible for National Board Certification, teachers must submit proof that they meet the following education, employment and licensure requirements:

1. Possess a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution.
2. Have completed three years of teaching (in one or more early childhood, elementary, middle or secondary school(s).
3. Hold a valid state teaching license for each of the three years of employment you verify.
Once requirements have been verified, applicants must decide on the best time to apply and submit payment of the $2500 assessment fee. NBPTS offers financial scholarships to support candidates. In addition, states and local school districts may offer salary increases, bonuses, or other incentives to educators who apply to become National Board Certified Teachers.

Certification Process

While the credential stands as a symbol of professional teaching excellence (NBPTS, 2001), the certification process itself is becoming known throughout the educational community as a forceful professional development experience (Bottiger, 2001; Gordon, 2005; NBPTS; Goldhaber, Perry, & Anthony, 2003). Teachers apply for board certification by submitting ten items (or entries) documenting some aspect of their teaching performance. Four of these entries are contained in a portfolio. These include:

1. Two entries each with videos of classroom activities and the teacher's written commentary.
2. One entry containing student work samples and written commentary.
3. One entry of "documented accomplishments" describing candidate's work with student's families and community, and with professional colleagues and organizations.

In addition to the portfolio, six entries are completed at an independent assessment center. These exercises are comprised of six essay tests of teacher's knowledge of content. Candidates have four to five months to complete the portfolio.
portion of the assessment and are given a window of two to three weeks in which to take the assessment exercises at assessment centers located around the country.

After candidates submit the portfolio and complete the assessment, teachers around the country who have completed extensive training score the ten entries. Each entry is scored in a different location and is scored by at least two scorers. Candidates must achieve passing scores for all ten entries to become certified. Not all candidates certify their first attempt. Of those who do not certify the first time, many choose to retake. Candidates who do not certify may "bank" the scores for the entries that received passing scores and may choose to retake, or redo, the entries that did not, at a cost of $350 each.

NBPTS Research

Since its inception, NBPTS has been the focus of numerous studies. Many studies on reflect the positive benefits of NBC such as "a renewed effort in my classroom... and a refreshed commitment to my students" (Wiebke, 2000). NBCTs cite benefits to the teaching profession as well. These include "a revitalization of my work with colleagues" (Areglado, 1999) and "leadership development of candidates" (Kaye et al., 2003).

Recent studies indicate both positive and negative results. That is, positive results with regard to teacher impact and student achievement, and negative results with regard to cost and validity. The positive research says that NBC teachers will become the leaders in changing the culture of American education and will have significant beneficial impacts on students, while opponents question whether students
learn more in classes taught by NBCs (Gordon, 2005). In addition, NBPTS has maintained that the process of recognizing accomplished teachers should provide opportunities for candidates to develop professionally (ETS, 1999). Although NBC was not designed as a measure of student achievement, Darling-Hammond (2001) claims that NBCTs have a positive impact on student achievement.

On the negative side, several studies raise concerns regarding cost and validity (Ballou, 2003; Bennett, 2004; Bond, et al., 2000; Gordon, 2005). Some feel the application fee is not a cost-effective way to identify quality teachers. "The fundamental question remains unanswered: Is the National Board's certification process a valid and cost-effective way of identifying the nation's best teachers?" (Bond et al., 2000, p. 79). In addition, there is a concern with validity. Some believe candidates stage video performances to show the best lessons or include untrue facts and information about their work. "The long-distance judging of applications makes cheating more likely" (Gordon, 2005).

Factors of Success

As with most issues in education, research shows a disparity in the success rate of teachers who pursue National Board Certification based on many factors including race, gender, support, and district. In 2003, teachers in North Carolina were studied as they went through the National Board Certification process. Results showed significant differences between successful and unsuccessful candidates. First there were disparities between certified applicants and non-certified applicants by race and gender. "African-American teachers constitute approximately 13 percent of
the applicant pool, but only 4 percent of those applicants who successfully obtained certification" (Goldhaber, 2003, p. 11). On average, it should have been between 6% and 7%. In addition, male teachers are significantly less likely to apply for certification than female teachers, and less likely to certify the first time (NBPTS, 2001).

Second, a significant difference was identified with regard to financial support and applicants whose school district offered financial incentives for being Board certified and those whose districts did not. "The differences in application and success rates for these different districts at least suggest that a relationship exists between the presence of a NBPTS financial reward for teachers and NBPTS success rates" (Goldhaber, 2003, p. 11). NBPTS certified applicants taught in districts and communities with fewer children in poverty, fewer minority children, more college-educated residents, and higher median housing values.

Finally, there is a connection between higher education and National Board Certification. Researchers have discovered that teachers with Master's degrees and stronger academic skills (based on state teacher certification exams, SAT scores, etc...) were more likely to apply and become certified than those without (Goldhaber, 2003). We can infer, therefore, that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is one way to increase the success of all teachers.

NBC as Professional Development

According to researchers, NBC satisfies many of the parameters and requirements for a standards-based professional development opportunity (Ball &
Cohen, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hargreaves, 1995; Huberman, 1993; Ingvarson, 1998; Little, 1993 & 1997; Stein and Brown, 1997; Sykes, 1999) and has received numerous endorsements as productive professional development by a wide range of organizations (Lustick and Sykes, 2006). In addition, the certification process has been identified as "a form of professional development that actually enhances teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions in candidates regardless of whether or not they achieve certification" (Lustick and Sykes, 2006, p.2).

This research came as a pleasant surprise for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards who initially saw this certification as a way to set professional standards for teachers, much like those set for the medical or legal profession (NBPTS, 2001). The idea of using NBC for professional development was created by teachers who had gone through the process. "Therefore, it is not surprising that the literature provides abundant evidence of specific instances of teachers benefiting from the assessment procedures" (Lustick, 2002, p. 3). Over 90% of teachers who have participated in National Board Certification, whether they have been successful or not, have overwhelmingly stated it is the most powerful professional development experience of their careers. (Lustick) "Teachers routinely rate the process as more powerful than that of advanced university coursework or short-term trainings, citing the sustained analysis and reflection of their teaching practice required to meet portfolio entry requirements" (Linquanti, 2001, p. 4). The certification experience changes them as professionals and through the process they
deepen their content knowledge and develop, master, and reflect on new approaches to working with their students.

In order to assess the impact of the certification process on teachers, NBPTS commissioned two comprehensive research surveys in early 2001. One survey examined the impact of the assessment process on Board Certified teachers, while the second survey examined the effect of the scoring process on the teachers who served as assessors. Assessors are teachers who score portfolio entries and assessment center exercises as part of the certification process (NBPTS, 2001). Among the findings that emerged from the two surveys are three key findings:

1. The National Board Certification process is an excellent professional development experience.

2. National Board Certified Teachers say that the certification experience has had a strong effect on their teaching skills.

3. The certification process has a positive affect on students, and has led to positive interactions with teachers, administrators and communities (NBPTS).

As stated previously, Smith (2004) refers to the importance of reflection in learning. Research identifies reflection as an important element in the National Board Certification process. "Teachers learn to be more reflective practitioners as a result of the process" (Lustick and Sykes, 2006, p.3) Candidates are required to analyze their teaching by comparing lessons and learning goals with student results. They reflect on their teaching practices and begin to understand their strengths and weaknesses as
educators. Teachers believe reflections are very valuable in planning future lessons and in determining what changes and clarifications need to be made (Smith).

"Teacher isolation is a well-established problem in the academic literature" (Lustick, 2002, p. 15). Effective professional development is believed to be reliant upon disrupting this isolation and increasing professional collaboration and community (Bondy & Brownell, 1997; Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Connolly, 2000; Mycue, 2001; Rogers, 1999; Weld, 1998). As with other professional development, NBC candidates are required to demonstrate membership in professional communities.

Research shows that National Board Certification is resulting in positive changes in teachers' classrooms, in their school districts, and in the larger education community (NBPTS, 2001). The recognition, visibility, and new roles of National Board Certified Teachers are affecting not only classrooms around the country, but also the culture of our nation's education system. As teachers complete the process of National Board Certification, research shows that they become leaders in their school communities. "NBPTS certification provides teachers in many districts with a venue to advance professionally without leaving the classroom" (Goldhaber, 2003, p. 4). They become experts on learning and work with other leaders to implement change.

Candidate Motivation and Support

There is little research to indicate the role motivation and support play in the success of NBC candidates. While pursuing National Board Certification, candidates
may receive both emotional and financial support, which may increase motivation. Support from state and professional organizations, unions, family members, coworkers, administrators, and other NBCTs, and varies greatly from candidate to candidate, district to district, and state to state. (Lustick, 2002; Sykes, 1999).

However, when compared to other avenues of achieving highly qualified status, NBC support is strong. "Support for the teacher pursuing National Board certification is unprecedented when compared to other routes to become highly qualified" (Bennett, 2004, p. 76). In many cases, candidate support can mean the difference between achieving certification and not achieving certification (Bennett).

What is Missing From the Research?

While the literature on National Board certification provides some insight the process being used as professional development, there is still much to be learned. "If professional development is accepted as a primary means of improving learning, then it becomes important to understand what teachers may or may not be learning from a specific professional development intervention" (Lustick and Sykes, 2006, p.5).

Claims both for and against the NBPTS and National Board Certification are being made, yet, "what we know about the teachers, their experiences, and their effectiveness at bringing about learning in their students remains relatively unknown" (Lustick, 2002, p. 18).

"Evidence suggests that candidates whether they pass or not, find the experience valuable to their professional growth" (Lustick and Sykes, 2006, p.3).

While we know that quality teachers are choosing to pursue National Certification,
after two decades of implementation, the full impact of National Board certification on teaching is still unclear. "Teachers who volunteer to undertake Board certification are superior teachers to begin with" (Lustick and Sykes, p.3). It is suggested by researchers that we continue to study the impact the NBC process has on teachers (Harman, 2001; Lustick and Sykes, 2006; Rotberg, 2000). Specific studies are needed to better understand what motivates teachers to pursue NBC, how support plays a part motivation, student achievement and teaching.

"Board certification promotes useful learning among candidates and so is a worthwhile policy" (Lustick and Sykes, 2006, p.3). The literature clearly demonstrates that teachers benefit from the NBC process, depending on gender, race, support, and district, however it is unclear how they are benefitting. In other words, in what ways do teachers benefit from NBC? How does their teaching benefit? "Much of our understanding of what researchers are learning is based upon self-reported data in the form of anecdotal testimonies, surveys, and qualitative studies" (Lustick, 2002, p. 3). For example, many teachers have attributed improvements in their teaching practice to NBC (Bailey & Helms, 2000; Benz, 1997; Gardiner, 2000; Haynes, 1995; Jenkins, 2000; Marriot, 2001; Roden, 1999; Wiebke, 2000). These teachers describe their experiences but provide few details about what candidates learn or how terms such as "enlightening" or "revitalizing" translate into practice (Lustick).

Finally, "The National Board places a high value on participating in a professional community as part of the responsibilities of an accomplished teacher" (Lustick, 2002, p. 16). Research identifies strengths in teachers who work together as
well as the value of mentoring where all participants contribute to the practice of other team members (Keiffer-Barone, 1993), however, there are very few studies that address the support that NBC candidates feel as they complete the process (Rotberg, 2000). It is necessary, therefore, to study candidate support as a piece of motivation.

Through this study I hope to learn what motivates Michigan teachers to pursue National Board Certification, how candidate support plays a part in their experiences, and what influence the NBC process had on the teaching practices of Michigan teachers. In Chapter 3 the research methods, instrumentation, data collection and analysis are explained in detail.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research study examines the experiences of Michigan elementary National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and NBC candidates. I was specifically interested in developing an understanding of the teachers' experiences with regard to (a) what motivated them to seek and participate in National Board Certification, (b) the role support and pressure played in their decision to seek and participate in certification, and (c) the impact the certification process had on their teaching. Because participants were asked open-ended questions that required in-depth responses, and I wanted to experience their personal stories, the study was ideally suited for qualitative research.

The aim of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2001). Marie C. Hoepfl (1997) explains that if quantitative research seeks causal relationships between variables, qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena and understand the experiences between people. According to Bush (2003), qualitative research focuses on the perceptions of individuals, is concerned with interpretations of events, and results in research based on interpretations using grounded theory. Qualitative research tells a story (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). As demonstrated in the review of literature, there has been little in the way of qualitative research used to examine the experiences of National Board Certified teachers and candidates and the National Board certification process. Even less is known about the role motivation plays in their decision to become Nationally
Certified as well as the support these teachers receive and pressure they feel as they complete the process. Through this study, common themes emerged that addressed the research questions and significant findings were made about these critical issues.

Qualitative research consists of several paradigms, including positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical/feminist, and poststructuralist (Hatch, 2002). According to Hatch, a researcher needs to explore his own beliefs and identify a research paradigm that best suits those beliefs. Hoepfl (1997) considers it adopting a stance. As I think about my behaviors as a researcher and understandings of the world, I consider myself a constructivist, which Hatch defines as someone who believes that realities and knowledge are constructed and ongoing. Within the constructivist paradigm there is a belief that the researcher and participant co-construct understandings. Since the desired outcome of this study was to work in-depth with each participant to create realities around National Board Certification, it was designed around the constructivist paradigm.

A natural research approach to the constructivist paradigm is phenomenology, a kind of research that "assumes that multiple, socially constructed realities exist and that the meanings individuals give to their experiences ought to be the objects of study" (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). As a phenomenological researcher I examined the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of NBCTs and candidates (Patton, 2002). I listened to their perceptions, interpreted their meanings, and explained their experiences as understood them.
According to Creswell (1998), participants in a phenomenological study must be "individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being explored" (p. 111). This study will be limited to ten National Board Teachers and Candidates in Michigan. The rationale for choosing to work with teachers within the state was that National Board Certification is still relatively unknown to many in Michigan. It was my hope that studying the experiences of these teachers would assist teachers, administrators, and others in the state to better understand the NBC process and its benefits, as well as the role motivation, support and pressure play in achieving Board certification. In addition, the limited number of participants allowed for each interview to be as in-depth and thorough as possible.

A population of ten teachers represented three levels of completion in the National Board Certification process as well as different school districts and counties of the state. These various levels of completion include National Board Certification candidates, non-certified candidates, and National Board Certified Teachers. The purpose of interviewing representatives of these groups was to create a diverse population and to get a balance of participants with varying experiences. These levels of certification are defined as:

1. National Board Certification candidates are teachers who are currently completing the certification process.

2. Non-certified NBC candidates are teachers who did not certify in previous attempts at certification and decided not to reattempt certification.
3. National Board Certified Teachers are teachers who successfully completed the certification process.

For a phenomenological study, purposeful sampling was suggested (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). This year, there were just over 180 NBCTs and 145 registered candidates in Michigan. In order to purposefully select ten participants for this study a snowball sampling technique was utilized.

I began by sending an "Initial Email for Identifying Potential Participants" (See Appendix C) to NBC candidates and NBCTs that I knew personally and professionally, who, in turn, contacted potential participants they knew, and so on. In addition, I posted this email request on the NBPTS list serve (mi_nbc@list.nea.org). This email gave a short explanation of the study and invited interested candidates and/or NBCTs email me at kdewitt@plainwellschools.org to learn more. It also invited them to forward the email to NBC candidates or NBCTs they knew. This process continued until 25 interested respondents emailed me saying that they wanted to learn more.

Within one week of receiving emails from interested potential participants, I emailed them the "Questionnaire Consent Form" (See Appendix D), which asked them to give signed consent to complete the Participant Questionnaire. Before signing, they had the option to contact me, via telephone or email, with questions and/or concerns regarding the study and questionnaire. Those who were interested, printed two copies of the consent form, signed and dated each copy, keeping one copy for their records, and returning one copy to me, via US mail.
Upon receipt of each signed consent form, I emailed a "Potential Participant Questionnaire" (See Appendix E), which asked participants where they teach, in which county they live, their level of NBC completion, the number of years they have been teaching, their highest degree earned, and current teaching position. Participants had the option to contact me with questions and/or concerns regarding the questionnaire at any time. Those who were interested in completing the questionnaire completed it and returned it to me via email.

After 25 respondents returned the questionnaires, the most diverse group of 10 potential participants, in terms of region and NBC level of completion, received an "Email Notification for Potential Participants" (See Appendix F). The participant NBC levels were as follows:

1. Eight participants were NBCTs
2. One participant was an NBC candidate
3. One participant was a non-certified NBC candidate

The participant regions were as follows:

1. Four participants were from the southeast region of Michigan
2. Three participants were from the southwest region of Michigan
3. Two participants were from the western region of Michigan
4. One participant was from the central region of Michigan

After being selected, "Consent to Participate in Study" forms (See Appendix G) were attached to this email. Participants had the option to contact me with questions and/or concerns regarding the interviews at any time. Those who were
interested in participating in interviews printed two copies of the consent form, signed and dated each copy, keeping one copy for their records, and returning one copy to me via US mail.

I made telephone calls to the selected ten potential participants within a week of receiving the "Consent to Participate in Study" forms to confirm receipt of the email and discuss participation in the interviews. First round interviews were scheduled with each participant. Second round interviews were scheduled with each participant within one week of the first interview and took place approximately two weeks after the first interviews.

Instrumentation

Phenomenology is a type of research that involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive contact to develop patterns and relationships (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (1998) suggests the use of in-depth interviews as the primary method of collecting information in phenomenological studies. While researchers spend extended periods of time interviewing participants, the participant controls the interview (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). It was my goal to experience the participants' point of views by conducting two rounds of 60-90 minute, semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were scaffolded, beginning with general demographic questions, moving on to open-ended, essential guiding questions that, with the help of the participants, develop and change as needed, leading to insights that may not have been considered earlier. (See Interview Protocol as Appendix H of this proposal.)
In addition to two in-depth interviews, follow-up phone conversations, transcripts were shared, and written correspondence to each participant was employed if additional information or clarification was required, and with the participant's permission. These contacts were only be made if there was a need to clarify information that had been collected or if responses to specific questions were not addressed sufficiently in the interviews. Participants were made aware of the potential need for additional contacts prior to agreeing to participate in the study.

Data Collection

"The central strength of interviewing is that it provides a means for doing what is very difficult or impossible to do any other way" (Hatch, 2002, p. 92). Scheduling of the interviews was based on the availability of each participant. In addition, every effort was made to schedule multiple interviews each day with participants in neighboring counties. Therefore, interviews will began in January 2006 and continued through February 2007. With regard to the first round of interviews, participants were interviewed in person at the most convenient and comfortable locations possible for them, such as a library or restaurant in their town or city. In order to minimize distractions and interruptions, a quiet, private space at each location was secured prior to each interview.

For the second round of interviews, telephone interviews were conducted. Hatch (2002) states that "researchers and the participants in their studies are joined together in the process of co-construction..." making it "impossible and undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective" (p. 15). Being very appreciative of the
participants' willingness to allow me into their lives and to participate in interviews
during their busy schedules, I interviewed each participant at a location that was most
convenient and comfortable for them. It was also my intent to give back to the
participants and show my gratitude by sending a thank you note and gift card
following the second interview.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis as a constructivist is to co-construct meaning and
realities of the participants. According to Hatch (2002), "interpretation is a defining
element of all qualitative research" (p. 180). For the purpose of this study I used the
interpretive analysis approach, which includes reading the data several times over,
reflecting, recording impressions, coding, identifying themes, and reviewing
interpretations with participants. All interviews were digitally recorded, backed up,
and transcribed as soon as possible, at which time, the recordings were destroyed.

As I analyzed the transcripts from each interview, I offered participants
opportunities to give feedback and make clarifications. "While it is presumed that
constructivist researchers will have provided many opportunities for collaboration
throughout the process, inviting participants to give feedback on interpretations is a
vital step in co-construction" (Hatch, 2002, p. 188). Each participant took advantage
of this and was very helpful in giving suggestions and making clarifications. These
member checks assisted with my interpretation of the data and improved the overall
accuracy of the study.
When possible, to ensure accuracy, member checks took place, via email or telephone call, within two weeks following each interview as the researcher and participant reviewed and revised each transcript. Participants who agreed to participate were asked for feedback and suggestions, and had the option of declining at any time. As transcripts were coded and categorized for analysis, several significant themes emerged and led the analysis further.

All data collection and analysis were in compliance with the requirements of the HSIRB standards and written consent was obtained for each of the participants. The confidentiality of all participants was maintained throughout the study and pseudonyms were used in all notes and transcripts. In addition, all notes, recordings and transcripts were kept in a secure lock box in the researcher's office. The results of this study were disseminated as a doctoral dissertation. Publications in peer-reviewed journals followed.

Role of the Researcher

I believe that as a National Board Certified Teacher, I had an advantage in this study that other researchers might not have had. First, I was better able to understand what these teachers had experienced because I had gone through the NBC process myself. I understood the requirements, commitment, and challenges required. I was, therefore, able to place myself in the shoes of the participants and was better able to interpret their descriptions and experiences. Finally, I was curious to learn how the participants' experiences compared with mine in hopes of better preparing others interested in seeking National Board Certification.
"The researcher should think carefully about what type of researcher-participant relationship is desirable given the paradigm in which the study is framed, the kind of study to be done, and the research questions to be asked" (Hatch, 2002, p. 50). As the researcher, my role in this study was to establish credibility in my attempt to experience the participants' realities first hand, and, as stated earlier, free from judgments and assumptions. The known potential risks of this study were limited and every effort was made to establish a trusting relationship with the participants. In terms of potential for risk, I thought carefully about what type of researcher-participant relationship was desirable given the paradigm in which the study is framed, the kind of study to be done, and the research questions to be asked. I realized that I would be working closely with my participants and believed that I had the interpersonal skills necessary to do so.

I understood that through open-ended interviews, personal and sensitive material may be discussed and that it was my responsibility to consider the emotional responses of the participants. I also understood that interviews are time consuming and every effort was made to keep each interview limited to 90 minutes or less. I was aware that participants may also feel embarrassed about not achieving certification, so I engaged in casual conversation as each interview began and attempted to make each subject feel as comfortable as possible. I explained to the participants that the interviews may be terminated at any time, for any reason, without prejudice or penalty, and finally, that it was my intent to develop and maintain trust with each of them throughout the process.
Benefits of Research

This study of National Board Certified Teachers and National Board Candidates are beneficial because they provide insights and information for teachers throughout the country interested in learning more about the NBC process. In addition, the findings are beneficial to both school district administrators and state policy makers currently involved with, or who are interested in learning more about NBC. Finally, this study is a valuable resource to researchers as they continue to study the experiences of teachers who pursue this advanced teacher certification program.

Confidentiality of Data

As stated earlier, all data collection and analysis is in compliance with the requirements of the HSIRB standards and written consent of all participants was obtained. In an effort to protect the identity and confidentiality of all participants, pseudonyms were used in all notes and transcripts and any identifying information that emerges during the interviews is disguised in the final report. In addition, interviews were held in discrete locations.

All notes and transcripts were kept in a secure location and will be stored for at least three years in the primary researcher's office at WMU. All electronic recordings are password protected and were destroyed by the researcher once the interviews were transcribed. Included in Chapter 4 is an overview of research findings, including a review of National Board Certification and the methodology, as
well as a description of participant demographics and presentation of findings by theme.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter contains the description of the research participants, an analysis of the interviews, and the research findings gathered from ten interviews with National Board Certification teachers and candidates. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Michigan elementary National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and National Board Candidates (NBCs) with the intent of better understanding of the role motivation played in their decision to seek and complete National Board Certification, the role support and pressure played in their decision to seek and complete the certification process, and the influence the process had on their teaching.

This study was limited to ten Michigan elementary National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and NBC candidates. The rationale for choosing to work with teachers within the state was that National Board Certification is still relatively unknown to many educators in Michigan. I choose to limit the study to elementary teachers in hopes that similar teaching experiences would result in comparable results. In addition, the limited number of participants will allow for each interview to be as in-depth and thorough as possible. Trustworthiness of the data was accomplished through thick, rich descriptions, member checks and peer review (Creswell, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). It was my hope that studying the experiences of these teachers would assist teachers, administrators, and others in the
state to better understand the NBC process and its benefits, as well as the role
motivation, support and pressure play in achieving Board certification.

For the purpose of this study, the following questions, one overarching
question and three sub questions, were considered:

What are the experiences of Michigan elementary NBCT's and NBC
candidates as they pursue National Board Certification?

A. What role does motivation play in a teacher's decision to seek National
   Board Certification and in the certification process?

B. What roles do support and pressure play in a teacher's decision to seek
   National Board Certification and in the certification process?

C. How does participating in the National Board Certification process
   influence a teacher's teaching?

National Board Certification

Established in 1987, National Board Certification (NBC) is a second national
certification option for teachers. According to NBPTS (2001), National Board
Certification (NBC) is the most common and most effective avenue to advanced
certification. There is emerging evidence of the effectiveness of National Board
Certification as a method to improve teacher quality (Lustick and Sykes, 2006). It is
another way that a growing number of districts and states are using to identify
accomplished teachers through both content knowledge and teaching experience.
NBC was created to set professional standards for teachers, much like those in the
medical and legal professions.
National Board Certification developed by teachers, with teachers, and for teachers, is a symbol of professional teaching excellence. Offered on a voluntary basis, it complements, not replaces, state licensing. While state-licensing systems set entry-level standards for beginning teachers, National Board Certification has established advanced standards for experienced teachers. (NBPTS, 2001, NP)

National Board Certification is a voluntary, advanced teaching credential and a challenging professional development experience for many teachers. Established by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2001), it is a voluntary certification system based on high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, including the art of reflection. "What teachers learn from the process is to evaluate their own practice in the light of objective, external standards" (Lustick & Sykes, 2006, p. 29). As with ABC, teachers who receive National Board Certification are recognized as highly qualified under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

As stated above, National Board Certification is unique credential in that it is an evaluation of both content knowledge and teaching ability. The certification credential consists of a two-part assessment process: a portfolio of materials to demonstrate how candidates' teaching meets National Board standards and an assessment whereby candidates respond to computer prompts about subject matter and classroom situations, based on national standards developed for their field. "The goal of the NBPTS is to identify highly effective teachers in classrooms across the
country and correlate the effectiveness of these teachers with increased student achievement" (NBPTS, 2001, NP). Candidates complete a total of 10 entries (4 portfolio entries and 6 assessment center entries) that are scored separately based on a 4-point rubric. Each entry must receive a passing score in order for a candidate to become certified. If all entries do not receive passing scores, the candidate has the option to retake, or attempt certification again by "banking" the passing scores and redoing the entries that did not pass. A candidate may attempt certification three times.

National Board standards are based on five Core Propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
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.

"We identified Five Core Propositions that describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that characterize accomplished teaching and created, where none existed before, professional standards for the nation's K-12 teachers" (NBPTS, 2001, NP). As teachers complete the certification process, these Core Propositions and the National Board standards, which are based on a particular field of study and grade level of students, guide teachers.
At this time, there are NBPTS 27 certificates available in 14 subject areas distributed across seven developmental levels (see Summary Table included as Appendix A). The certificates available cover almost 90% of the eligible teaching population (Linquanti, 2001). While more than 55,000 U.S. teachers have successfully certified, just over 2000 Michigan teachers have achieved this advanced certification, and hundreds more in Michigan have attempted it (NBPTS, 2001). Whether or not Michigan teachers certify, teachers who attempt certification experience the process in very different ways, for different reasons, with varying degrees of support, and with different motivations.

So why are teachers pursuing National Board Certification? It is important to consider who these teachers are, why they decide to improve their teaching practices and what motivates them to change. Research shows that teacher change is associated with internal motivation such as support, personal experiences, and attitude (Hunzicker, 2004), as well as external motivation, such as pressure from outside sources. "Many teachers prefer to remain within their comfort zones... which poses a huge problem for principals, curriculum directors, and other instructional leaders interested in changing teachers' behaviors" (Hunzicker, 2004, p. 44). We know that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators play a part in change. (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hunzicker, 2004). Support is a piece of motivation. When teachers feel supported by their district, their administrators, their peers, and their families, they are more motivated to improve their teaching. But when there is little outside support and few extrinsic motivators, such as time or financial incentives, teachers must look
inside themselves and decide if the change they desire is worth the challenges they will face (Darling-Hammond).

While research explains what motivates teachers to change, additional research is needed on what motivates teachers to pursue National Board Certification, how support and pressure influences their decision, how the NBC certification process influences their teaching.

Overview of Methodology

A population of ten Michigan elementary teachers was carefully chosen to represent three levels of completion in the National Board Certification process as well as different school districts and counties of the state. The number of participants per level of completion was: One National Board Certification candidates, one non-certified candidate, and eight National Board Certified Teachers. The purpose of including participants from each of these groups was to create a diverse population and to get a balance of participants with varying experiences. The three levels of certification completion are defined as:

1. National Board Certification candidates are teachers who were completing the certification process at the time of their interviews.

2. Non-certified candidates are teachers who did not certify in previous attempts at certification and decided not to reatempt certification.

3. National Board Certified Teachers are teachers who successfully completed the certification process.
For this phenomenological study, I used purposeful sampling to identify potential participants. Since personal contact information regarding NBCTs and NBC candidates is limited, the ten participants for this study were identified using a snowball sampling technique, which involves the researcher identifying potential participants, who, in turn, contact others, and so on.

After gaining HSIRB approval (See Appendix I), I began the participant identification process by listing the NBCTs and NBC candidates I knew. I then went online to the NBPTS directory, which lists NBCs by state, certification area, and district. After learning the names of 45 Michigan elementary NBCTs, I searched online for email addresses by visiting school web sites. To each potential participant, I emailed an "Initial Email for Identifying Potential Participants" (See Appendix C). This email gave a short explanation of the study and invited interested candidates and/or NBCTs email me to learn more. It also invited them to forward the email to NBC candidates or NBCTs they knew. In addition, I posted the "Initial Email" request on the NBPTS listserve that is used by teachers interested in learning more about NBC. In all, I contacted 65 teachers directly and over 200 via the listserve. Within one month, 31 respondents had responded to me via email agreeing to participate and four sent emails with questions about the study. In all, 31 responded favorably, 22 did not respond, nine declined and 23 emails were returned due to incorrect email addresses.

Within one week of receiving each email from the interested 31 potential participants, I emailed them a "Questionnaire Consent Form" (See Appendix D),
which asked them to give signed consent to complete the "Potential Participant Questionnaire". Before signing the consent form, two respondents contacted me via email with questions regarding the study. I responded to each of them the same day I received their emails. Within a few weeks, 29 of the 31 interested respondents had completed and returned a signed copy of the "Questionnaire Consent Form" to me via US Mail. The other two respondents decided to decline for personal reasons.

Upon receipt of the 29 signed consent forms, I emailed each respondent a "Potential Participant Questionnaire" (See Appendix E), which asked participants questions regarding where they teach, in which county they live, their level of NBC completion, the number of years they have been teaching, their highest degree earned, and current teaching position. Each of the 29 respondents completed the questionnaire and returned it promptly to me via email or US mail.

After receiving the 29 "Potential Participant Questionnaires", I selected a diverse group of ten potential participants based on NBC level of completion, certification area, years of teaching, and region of the state (See Table 1 below). Each of the ten received an "Email Notification for Potential Participants" email (See Appendix F). A "Consent to Participate in Study" form (See Appendix G) was attached to this email. Each of these ten participants signed and dated each copy, kept one copy for their records, and either returned one copy to me via US mail or gave it to me in person at the first interview.
Table 1: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Candidate Level</th>
<th>NBC Certification Area *</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Region of State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Exceptional Needs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Early Childhood Generalist</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Early Childhood Generalist</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Middle Childhood Generalist</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>NBC Candidate</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Non-certified candidate</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Middle Childhood Generalist</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendra</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Early Childhood Generalist</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Early Childhood Generalist</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>Library Media</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See Appendix A for further explanation of Certification Areas

Demographically speaking, although each participant was female, these participants were very diverse. As shown above, 8 of the 10 were NBCTs, one was a candidate at the time, and one was non-certified. Of the ten candidates, 5 of them were first in their districts to certify while 2 participants were the first in the state to certify in their specific certification area. In addition, the participants had teaching...
experience ranging from 6 to 39 years. In terms of ethnicity, seven of the ten participants were Caucasian and three were black.

As the final step in the participant identification process, I contacted participants after receiving their "Consent to Participate in Study" forms. I sent brief emails to each participant to introduce myself, thank them for agreeing to participate, discuss participation in the interviews, and answer any questions they had. In addition, first round interviews were scheduled with each participant.

In order to experience the participants' points of view I conducted two rounds of 60-90 minute, semi-structured interviews. The first-round interviews took place face-to-face in public places, such as restaurants and coffee houses, near the participant's home or school, with the exception of one participant, who invited me to interview her at her home. The questions for these interviews were scaffolded, beginning with general demographic questions, moving on to open-ended, essential guiding questions that, with the help of the participants, developed and changed as needed, leading to insights that may not have been considered earlier. (See Appendix H).

Second round interviews were scheduled with each participant within one week of the first interviews and occurred within one month after the first interviews. Second interviews took place over the phone, with the exception of one participant, who invited me to interview her at school. The questions for these interviews were much more specific and addressed answers and comments made during first interviews. Transcripts for all interviews were coded and categorized for analysis.
In addition to the in-depth interviews, at least one member check was made with each participant for the purpose of clarifying statements made during interviews and to discuss emerging themes that were not addressed sufficiently in the interviews. Each participant was emailed a draft and was asked for feedback and suggestions. All participants responded with feedback, including ideas and suggestions.

All data collection and analysis was in compliance with the requirements of the HSIRB standards (See Appendix I). The confidentiality of all participants was maintained throughout the study and pseudonyms were used in all notes and transcripts. In addition, all notes, recordings and transcripts were kept in a secure lockbox in the researcher's office.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of Michigan elementary National Board Certified Candidates. The data for the study were gathered from individual interviews and telephone calls. These interviews provided valuable information that enabled the experiences of the participants of the study to be better understood. After the data were gathered, it was sorted, coded, and examined for the broad, overriding categories and themes.

Themes

It was through the examination and analysis of the data that several reoccurring themes emerged which characterized the extraordinary journeys of the participants. These themes were revealed as a result of reading and rereading transcripts, conducting member checks with participants, and identifying patterns and similarities between participants. The identification of these themes added critical
insights to my understanding of the experiences of these candidates. These themes are presented in alignment with the three research sub questions in Table 2 and are further defined below.

Table 2: Thematic Distribution of Research Sub Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Distribution of Research Sub Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What role does motivation play in a teacher's decision to seek National Board Certification?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1: Candidate Self-Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2: Motivation for Pursuing National Board Certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What roles do support and pressure play in a teacher's decision to seek National Board Certification?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3: Support Received Throughout Certification Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #4: Factors Affecting Certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does participating in the National Board Certification process influence a teacher's teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #5: Affects of Certification Process on Teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme #1 deals with candidate self-concept. Participants were asked to describe themselves as teachers in order to get a sense of their self-concepts and to describe the images that the participants have of themselves as educators, colleagues, and leaders. As a result, four significant sub themes emerged: pioneers, life-long learning, understanding student needs, and collegiality. Participants clearly saw themselves as life-long learners. They seemed confident and assured, but humble. They were good teachers determined to improve their practices. In addition, since
many of them were the first in their schools, districts, and the state to seek National Board Certification, they described themselves as pioneers.

Internal motivation is Theme #2 and a central theme in this study. The participants, like all NBC candidates, had many reasons for pursuing National Board Certification. As a result of their responses, two significant internal motivation sub themes emerged: learning and improving, validation of teaching, and support and encouragement. In addition, an external motivation sub theme emerged: pressure. The most significant finding in the study was that these teachers felt NBC would validate their teaching. They knew they were doing good things in their classrooms and wanted to prove it to themselves and to others. In addition, the participants made their decisions to pursue NBC based on internal factors, such as support from colleagues or the desire to improve teaching, rather than external factors such as financial incentives and pressure from administrators or state requirements.

Theme #3 deals with support received throughout the certification process. Candidate support is another central theme in this study and was described by participants in terms of the sources of support they received throughout the certification process. Such sources of support came either formally or informally and from participants' districts, colleagues, and support groups. Several significant informal support sub themes emerged including: informal support from colleagues, district administrative support, and building-level support. In addition, one formal support sub theme emerged including: formal support groups. While participants received varying degrees of support, all mentioned receiving informal support and
many believed strongly that both types of support was vital to their experiences. In addition, collegiality played a critical role in their experiences.

Theme #4 identifies factors affecting certification. When asked to identify positive and negative factors that affected their ability to complete the certification process, the participants mentioned many factors and several significant sub themes emerged in these two categories. For the purpose of this study, positive factors were defined as those factors that participants felt helped them through the process. Negative factors were defined as those factors that put pressure on them or added difficulty to the certification process. In terms of positive factors, the sub themes included: support, time and motivation. In terms of negative factors, the sub themes included: time, lack of support, and lack of preparedness. As stated earlier, participants believed informal support was critical to the process, and came in many forms including colleagues, family, and administrators. In addition, participants believe there is a lack of formal support in Michigan in the form of NBC support groups, workshops, and mentoring.

The final theme, Theme #5, was discussed over and over again in the interviews. It deals with the influence of the certification process on teaching. The significant sub themes that resulted included: reflection and professional growth and validation of teaching practice. Participants agreed that the NBC process affirmed their teaching practices and gave them a feeling of recognition and affirmation. When asked about the influence of the certification process, all participants stated that it going through the process had improved their teaching in positive ways. Many felt
it gave them increased confidence, better understanding of student needs, and all felt they had become more reflective and their classroom practices had changed.

The remainder of this chapter provides participant demographics and a detailed narrative of each of these themes as they relate to the participants and research sub questions.

Participant Demographics

As shown earlier in Table 1, these participants were purposefully selected based on NBC level of completion, years of teaching, and region of the state. At the time of this study,

1. Eight participants were NBCT's, one was a National Board candidate, and one attempted certification and did not certify.

2. Of the eight NBCT's, three certified on their first attempt, four certified on their second attempt, and one certified on her third attempt.

3. All participants were female public school elementary teachers, nine of which had earned a Master's Degree previous to pursuing National Board Certification. The tenth had earned a Bachelor's Degree.

4. Of the ten, four participants had been teaching for 5-10 years, one had been teaching from 10-20 years, two had been teaching for 20-21 years, and three had been teaching for 30-40 years.

5. Five participants taught in districts in Southeastern Michigan, four taught in districts in Southwest Michigan and one taught in a district in the central part of the state of Michigan.
6. Five participants taught in urban districts, four taught in rural districts and one taught in a suburban district.

7. Three participants taught in self-contained, single teacher, graded classrooms; two taught in multiage, team-teaching classrooms; one taught library and one taught art; one taught special education; and two worked outside the classroom providing professional development.

8. In terms of ethnicity, seven participants were Caucasian and three were black.

Specific demographics for each participant are as follows:

Lori is a library coordinator in an urban public school district in central Michigan. She has taught for six years and has a Master's Degree. In 2006, she was the first in her district to achieve National Board Certification. She did so on her second attempt and received it in the area of Library Media.

Leah is a 1st/2nd grade multiage teacher in a suburban public school district in Southeast Michigan. She has taught for nine years and has a Master's Degree. She achieved National Board Certification on her second attempt in 2003 as an Early Childhood Generalist.

Cindy is a Kindergarten teacher and Reading Support teacher in an urban public school district in Southeast Michigan. She has taught for 35 years and has a Master's Degree. She was one of the first in the state to achieve National Board Certification and did so on her first attempt in 1996 as an Early Childhood Generalist.
Fran is a Reading First Facilitator currently working with teachers in an urban public school district in Southeast Michigan. She has taught for 37 years and has a Master's Degree. She was one of the first in her district to achieve National Board Certification and did so on her second attempt in 2000 as an Early Childhood Generalist.

Jill is an elementary art teacher in a rural public school district in West Michigan. She has taught for nine years and has a Master's Degree. She is currently a candidate seeking National Board Certification in Art/Early and Middle Childhood.

Jamie is a 3rd grade teacher in a rural public school district in Southwest Michigan. She has taught for 29 years and has a Bachelor of Science Degree. She was one of the first to achieve National Board Certification in her district and did so on her third attempt in 2005 as a Middle Childhood Generalist.

Kelly is currently working as a Teacher On Loan for the Michigan Department of Education. She taught for 21 years in an urban public school district in Southeast Michigan and has a Master's Degree. She was the first in her district to achieve National Board Certification as a Middle Childhood Generalist and did so on her second attempt in 2003.

Betsy is a teacher of the severely mentally/multiply impaired in an urban public school district in Southeast Michigan. She has taught for 31 years and has a Master's Degree. She achieved National Board Certification on her first attempt in 2003 as an Exceptional Needs Specialist.
Karen is a 4th grade teacher in a rural public school district in Southwest Michigan. She has taught for ten years and was a National Board Certification candidate in 2001. She was the second teacher to pursue National Board Certification in her district and did not certify. She chose not to retake.

Kendra is a 1st grade teacher in a rural public school district in Southwest Michigan. She has taught for 11 years and has a Master's Degree. In 2006, she was the second in her district to achieve National Board Certification. She was the first in her district to receive it as an Early Childhood Generalist and did so on her first attempt.

Presentation of Findings By Theme

As stated earlier, themes and sub themes emerged as a result of data analysis. These themes and sub themes are identified in Table 3 as they relate to each research sub question and are explained in further detail in the remainder of the chapter.

Theme #1: Candidate Self-Concept

As first interviews began, participants were asked to describe themselves as teachers. The purpose of this question was to better understand their self-images and determine the type of teacher that chooses to pursue National Board Certification. The participants felt they were good teachers before they decided to pursue certification, wanted to improve as teachers, understood the needs of their students, and were pioneers as the first in their buildings, districts or state to seek National Board Certification. As a result, the following sub themes include:
1. Pioneers in education

2. Life-long learners

3. Understanding of student needs

4. Collegiality

*Pioneers in Education*

Betsy had heard of National Board Certification long before others in her district. Motivated to take on the challenge, she eagerly awaited the development of a certificate in her area of Exceptional Needs Specialist. "I like to read so I knew about National Board before most people did. It wasn't available to people in special education until 1996 or 1997. So in 1999, when special ed. came out, I just decided to do it. The reason why is I love learning and I love special ed."

Lori is another NBC pioneer. She heard about National Board Certification as an option to become "highly qualified" and, later learned that a few teachers in her district had attempted NBC, but had not certified. After not certifying on her first attempt, Lori persevered and, in 1996, became the first teacher in the state to certify in the area of Library Media.

Kelly certified in 2003 as the first teacher to certify in her district as a Middle Childhood Generalist. "When I did it, no one was certified in middle childhood in our district. It felt great!"

Another pioneer is Kendra, who certified in 2006. She had become familiar with National Board Certification several years earlier. Although there was an NBCT
Table 3: Alignment of Themes and Sub Questions with Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alignment of Themes with Sub Questions</th>
<th>Sub Question #1: Candidate Motivation</th>
<th>Sub Question #2: Support and Pressure</th>
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<th>Findings New to the Research on NBC</th>
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<td>Life-long learners</td>
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<td>Understanding of student needs</td>
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<td>Informal building-level administrative support</td>
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<td>Informal support from family members</td>
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<td>Reflection and professional growth</td>
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<td>Validation of teaching practice</td>
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in her building, she was the first in her district to become certified as an Early Childhood Generalist.

Cindy, on the other hand, did not seek out National Board Certification. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was promoting NBC within her district and approached Cindy. She and a colleague agreed with the philosophy behind it and decided to pursue it together. "NBPTS was looking for a new group of teachers to pilot the early childhood generalist. My colleague and I found out about it at an informational session. We looked at what they were saying it was all about and we said we believe in the principals of National Board and we believed in the early childhood piece, which was based on young child development, early childhood development." She certified in 1996.

In addition to blazing the trail for many others in their districts, the participants had similar teaching styles and mentioned similar teaching beliefs. All responses included references to at least one of the following elements: reflection, understanding student needs and collegiality.

Life-long Learning

The desire to improve and continue learning was something the participants felt very strongly about. They believed being life-long learners made them effective teachers. They use reflection to learn about themselves as well as their students. Many said they used reflection in their teaching before becoming candidates, and all agreed that their use of reflection increased during and after the certification process.
When describing her teaching style, Jill referred to her tendency to reflect on past lessons and make adjustments to meet the needs of her students. "I have stacks and stacks and stacks of lesson plans and I look through them and I never do the same thing. I always revise it and rework it." She demonstrated reflecting as a teacher as she explained her decision to pursue National Board based on a feeling that, after 10 years of teaching, she felt National Board would fill some gaps. "I thought this is probably what’s going to help me figure out what else I need.”

As Cindy described planning lessons for her multiage students it was clear that she considered more than academics. She considered how she could improve.

I think about developmentally appropriate learning and, when a kid isn’t doing too good in a classroom situation, I think about how I can make the classroom more comfortable place for them. I consider whether they need to be pushed or whether I need to adapt things, and what’s going to the best thing for helping them out. I try to understand where the kids are at and where I want to go. I like to see what they pick up and what they have an understanding of. I’m not giving them the knowledge; I am helping them construct the knowledge.

Fran, who worked as a Reading First Facilitator, also said she uses reflection in her teaching. "I try to consider the needs of my students and use those needs to plan my day." She believes reflection can be a powerful tool for teachers and believes the reflection she does of her own teaching makes her a better teacher.
Fourth grade teacher, Karen, was a reflective teacher before learning about National Board. She explained how she would carefully consider trying new things with her students to try to keep them focused. "I was able to look at what I was doing and say, 'Why am I doing it this way? I was doing kind of a personal reflective thing.' She'd ask herself what was working and what she could do differently.

Another Middle Childhood Generalist, Fran, learned about National Board through a colleague who knew how much Fran used reflection in her teaching. At that meeting she said, "You should do this. It is a great professional development opportunity and it uses that reflection that you always talk about." I knew that at that point in my career, I wasn't looking for a promotion or financial incentive, just a way to improve. "She said, "Its just documenting what you're doing." I immediately knew it was for me.

Understanding of Student Needs

These teachers believe that their understanding the needs of each of their students makes them effective teachers. The participants stressed the importance of getting to know their students and identified this as strengths of their teaching. The following three participants referred to understanding student needs several times throughout their interviews.

With an early childhood background, Leah believed addressing student needs and getting to know students is something every teacher should be concerned with. "I am very mindful of what they are doing and what they need. I spend a great deal of time on my knees talking with kids, eyeball to eyeball, about what's going on and
how I can help them and really trying to empower them." She works with students daily to make them feel important and cared about.

In clarifying her philosophy of teaching, Kendra addressed student learning styles. "I really try to educate the whole child, the entire child, as far as emotional, social, academic and behavioral because knowing the whole is important to understanding how they’re learning and why they’re learning and why they’re not." She felt it was important to understand a student's strengths and weaknesses in order to teach them effectively.

Kelly stated a belief that understanding the needs of her students was a process that has evolved throughout her career. "I’ve found myself becoming more student centered than I was when I started out; and my philosophy is that everyone can learn, you just set the standards out there and take them where they need to go." In explaining this statement, she said, "We need to focus on the needs of each individual child."

**Collegiality**

The final common element mentioned in participants' description of their teaching was collegiality. All participants clearly believed that working with others made them successful teachers and many attributed their decision to seek National Board Certification to the support they received from colleagues. While each felt they had ample opportunities to work with colleagues in their buildings and districts regularly, two participants, Leah and Cindy, work with teaching partners in multiage classrooms on a daily basis.
Leah, who worked with a teaching partner in a multiage classroom, felt fortunate to work in a place where people support one another and believed a positive school climate is essential. She felt that because the people in her building empower and support her, she felt confident in pursuing National Board Certification.

There are some people I work with and that I spend my day with who have this common language and we nudge each other and we challenge each other. We really have to challenge each other and then hold each other accountable for what we’re doing, and when and how and all of that.

Another multiage teacher, Cindy, taught at a magnet school designed with collaboration in mind. She learned about National Board Certification when she and her teaching partner attended a district NBC informational meeting. "I went with a colleague, and she and I were both team teaching in a K-1-2 multiage class and decided to go through it together." She felt that the collegiality she already shared with her partner and fellow teachers made certification possible.

Theme #2: Motivation for Pursuing National Board Certification

Participants were asked to describe what factors contributed to their decisions to seek National Board Certification. The reasons participants gave for seeking National Board Certification were internally motivated. While they gave numerous secondary reasons for their decisions, most participants' decisions were based on the desire to improve and grow as a teacher, a need for validation, and the amount of support and encouragement they felt they would have going through the process. Although support is often considered an external motivator, candidates clearly felt an
internal support knowing their colleagues would be there for them. As a result, the following sub themes include:

1. Internal motivation to improve
2. Validation of teaching
3. Support and encouragement
4. External motivation and pressure

Internal Motivation to Improve

Participants wanted to grow professionally. Several participants stated that they felt as though they were becoming stagnant and, instead of becoming complacent, they wanted to do something to renew their teaching. They also felt they were at a good place in their careers to put in the time and effort necessary to certify. The following six participants clearly demonstrate this internal motivation and drive.

Jill was an example of a teacher looking for a way to liven up her teaching. "As I was approaching my 10th year of teaching, I felt that there were some pieces that I was missing or I just wasn’t covering in the classroom. There was just something missing. And I thought, 'This is probably what’s going to help me figure out what else I need.' Well it was more like a personal best for me."

After achieving her Master's degree, Karen felt that she was ready to take the next step in her career. Wanting to continue her education but not pursue another degree, National Board seemed like the next logical step. Because a colleague in her district had certified a year before, she understood the amount of time and energy required, and felt it was something she was ready to do.
After attending two informational meetings about National Board, Kelly had made up her mind. She was also feeling like she was at a crossroads in her career and facing a difficult decision.

At the third informational meeting I decided I would do it because I felt it was something that I needed to do. It seemed like I should do National Board or go back for my doctorate. I chose National Board because I needed to do something more than just go to classes or workshops. I needed something more to improve my teaching.

When Fran learned about National Board from a colleague she was hoping it would improve her teaching. "I saw it as a professional development opportunity for me. I hoped it would be another way to reflect on my teaching, to give me an idea of what more I should be doing."

Motivated by the desire to grow as a teacher, Jamie was known to take on new challenges. She was teaching third grade, had attained over 30 credit hours beyond her Bachelor's degree, was training teachers throughout the state in teaching with technology, and working on a state technology committee. Having a sister who had achieved National Board Certification, she knew it would challenge her and help her improve her teaching.

I wanted a challenge. I used to always spend the summer reading books and trying to stay up with what's current, and always feeling like I was trying to do a better job or get better, get smarter or learn more about teaching. And then this just seemed like another way to develop myself professionally.
Leah made the decision to certify when she was completing her Master's program at a local university. She was given National Board Certification as an option for a final class project by the professor and became interested. After looking into it she decided it would be more valuable to her as a teacher than the alternative project.

I guess I didn’t even imagine that some kind of thesis I would write would influence someone else’s learning or thinking. I just thought it was a good choice for me and it would improve my teaching at the same time.

First grade teacher Kendra saw National Board Certification as a professional development opportunity that met her needs and goals as a professional.

What sparked my interest was that it was professional development directly related to what I was doing; it didn’t seem to be an extra. It meant looking at what I do already and making it better, rather than trying to pick a class that relates to what I do. It fit what I do.

She went on to explain the difficulty of making the decision and what it meant to her.

I teetered back and forth, but I knew that professional development is the only way to get ahead. I needed to better myself, I needed to evolve and to me that was the next step. Evolving as an educator through being an educator.

Finally, she compares it to the professional development (p.d.) offered by her district.

"I saw it as a better step for me, rather than taking a piece of p.d. and trying to fit it into what I do."

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Validation of Teaching

The surprising reason participants gave for seeking National Board Certification was validation of teaching. The participants stated over and over that they knew they were good teachers but were looking for a way to prove it, both to themselves and to others. The following two participants clearly explained this need for recognition.

Cindy and her teaching partner saw National Board Certification as a way to justify the way they were teaching and assessing their students. Working in a school where teachers are facilitators of information and help students develop based on their own learning needs, Cindy and her colleague were confident that they were successful teachers.

We knew that our kids in our program did well as they grew up and went into adulthood. And we were confident of that. We also knew that we were doing good things for kids. We just wanted to see if National Board could document that and acknowledge that.

Cindy went on to explain how she hoped the portfolio assessment used to assess National Board candidates would validate the same type of assessment they were using with their own students.

We wanted to see if this form of assessment was another way of getting at what the kids needed and if there was another way to look at what we did as educators. It was more an acknowledgment of our beliefs and to see if it was a valid assessment.
As a teacher in a large, urban district, Kelly first saw National Board Certification as a way of leveling the playing field.

There was a conception in a lot of places that people only taught in my district if they couldn't get a job anywhere else. So, and you know of course, that wasn't the case. So that's how I decided to become Nationally Board Certified. It was the motivation to prove that I was an effective teacher, as effective as my "superior" counterparts.

When Kelly learned more about the certification process, she was pleased to find a process that matched her beliefs in how teachers and students should be evaluated. She explained that working in a building where most teachers had a traditional teaching style made her feel "kind of out there" until she learned more about National Board.

I looked at National Board and they were constructivist in their philosophy, and they encouraged student involvement. It was just a natural fit for me. It was just like "Oh Yeah!" It confirmed and validated everything that I was doing.

Support and Encouragement

The third, and final, reason participants gave for seeking National Board Certification was the support and encouragement they felt they would have as candidates. Support was critical in the decision-making process and, although not all participants went through the process with a colleague, every participant felt they had
some type of support available to them. The following participants explain how support affected their decision to become candidates.

After making the decision to seek National Board Certification for her final class project, Leah explained that she would have never chosen to do it if she hadn't felt the support from others in her building. "I'd really been encouraged and enabled and supported to do it." Working with colleagues who push one another to take on new challenges, she knew she would have help. She later learned that a teacher from another building was also taking the Master's class and had also made the choice to pursue NBC. They decided to work together as candidates. "Once we realized we're both in the same class, and we actually lived maybe a block away from each other, we both decided we were going to do this."

Jamie's sister who had certified a few years earlier in Arizona convinced her to become a candidate. Her sister and a few NBCT colleagues were the basis for her decision.

She was saying, "You should do it, you should do it." She would say something about it every once in a while and encourage me. I knew I could count on her and a few other people I knew who had been through it to help.

Another factor in Jamie's decision to certify was her colleague who had also shown interest. They discussed the process a few times and realized they both saw it as a challenge. "She said she'd really like the challenge and so, what the heck, we should probably just give it a try." They also realized that knowing one another so well and working together as candidates would be extremely helpful.
NBC candidate Jill explained that she decided to certify because of a colleague in the art department. After learning about it and "mulling it over", she began to discuss it with the fellow teacher.

My colleague started talking about it. She was really into doing it and explained it to me. And then we decided to do it as a team. We thought it would be fun. Our grand goal was to have all of the elementary art teachers become National Board Certified.

Jill stated that without her colleague deciding to pursue as well, she would have not done it herself.

*External Motivation and Pressure*

It was obvious that all participants were internally motivated to seek National Board Certification, however, I was interested in learning the role pressure played in their decisions. In response to questions asking what external motivational factors may have played a part in their decision to seek certification, only three participants felt any sense of pressure, and they were clear that these were secondary to other internal motivational factors.

Lori, an elementary librarian, had been teaching for three years when she first heard about National Board Certification. "I was at a meeting about Highly Qualified Teacher requirements and heard that National Board was an option." She knew that under federal Highly Qualified Teacher mandates, she was required to become certified in the area of Library Science. Rather than take classes toward a degree, she learned that she could become Nationally Board Certified instead and given highly
As stated earlier, Kendra's primary reason for seeking certification was to improve as a teacher, but she also mentioned the need to attain state credits in order to renew her teaching certificate. "Credits were motivational, because I had to get them anyway." She made it clear several times that this was "not the main reason I wanted to become Nationally Certified, but it was a bonus."

Karen also felt that receiving credit was a motivator.

The one thing the state does that is nice is offer credits for National Certification, 10 if you make it, and 5 if you don't. It was rather expensive, but I thought, "You know, if you can get that done and get those credits... that's motivation!" For ten years, that's a pretty good investment.

**Theme #3: Support Received Throughout Certification Process**

Formal and informal candidate support is a central theme to this study and was clearly a motivational factor in each participant's decision to seek National Board Certification. For the purpose of this study, formal support refers to organized meetings, support groups or mentoring led by representatives from the NBPTS or by NBCTs. On the other hand, informal support refers to assistance, guidance, and help given to candidates by colleagues, family members, and others with little or no knowledge of NBC or the certification process. Several interview questions were centered on the idea of support in hopes that the types of support utilized by candidates would surface. Of the responses regarding candidate support, the most
common types of support candidates received fell in to one of six categories: informal support from colleagues, district administrative support, building-level administrative support, formal support groups, and support from family members. Without question, informal support was utilized far more than formal support. As a result, the following sub themes include:

1. Informal support from colleagues
2. District administrative support
3. Building-level administrative support
4. Formal support groups
5. Support from family members

**Informal Support From Colleagues**

Just as colleagues played an important part in a participant's decision to become a candidate, they also played a vital role in supporting them throughout the certification process. Although most colleagues had no knowledge of the NBC process and many had never heard of the certification, these people were clearly the most valuable support network for the candidates. The following participants explained the many roles that their colleagues played in supporting them throughout the process.

Working with a mentor who was the only National Board teacher in the district and the only NBCT in the state to certify in three different areas, Betsy explained her dependence on the strong support she was given. Her mentor read entries, pushed for further clarification in her writing, and encouraged her. "My
mentor wasn't just reading and questioning but just giving me support. She was the only one available."

Cindy, who worked with a teaching partner, made it clear that having a close relationship with her teaching partner already made working together on National Board and supporting one another through the process natural. "We were a support system as teaching partners already, so it made it easier."

Candidate Jill also worked with a teaching partner. She described the benefit of working together as partners and as candidates.

She was gung-ho to do it. And I also knew from talking to others that it was something that you should really not try to do alone. She was my partner, you know. I knew we could do this together.

Jill went on to discuss the value of working as partners to improve your teaching.

Another piece of it is being able to collaborate with her. I thought, "Oh this would be so awesome to sit down and belt ideas around and really get to the meat of why we do what we do."

Finally, Jill mentioned a colleague in her district that had offered her assistance. "An NBCT in another building offered support. I knew I could call her any time just to talk."

Having colleagues in her building as supportive as she did, Leah felt motivated to take on new challenges like National Board.
In my building, we’re sort of in this place where we really help each other and not just in a nice kind of way, but a rigorous way, a challenging way. I’ve been very lucky to have those people in my building and around me.

Leah felt supported by many throughout the certification process but referred specifically to one colleague who inspired her.

There was one colleague that, before she left to go to another position, brought me the poster she kept in her closet. It says, “It takes courage to stand alone.” I keep it behind my computer and it helps me remember why I did it.

The colleague offered to meet with Leah and her classmate, something Leah felt was very valuable. When Leah did not certify the first time, she was discouraged, but with the help of her colleagues and classmate, also a banking candidate, she decided to try again. "I think both of us just decided to do it and then both of us said, too, we were just so glad that it was both of us." She believed that her support system the second time around was even stronger than the first.

Another participant who felt supported by a teacher in her building was Kendra.

The colleague had convinced her to become a candidate. Kendra felt she could go to her for emotional and mental support.

I had support from a National Board teacher in my building. She was there everyday to push me and encourage me. Without seeing her everyday and knowing she was there when I needed her, I don't think I would have made it
District Administrative Support

While participants relied heavily on collegial support, some participants mentioned receiving support from district administrators. This support was both formal and informal, and came in the form of financial incentives, time off, and district support groups.

Fourth grade teacher, Karen, felt fortunate to be supported by her district financially. Knowing that most districts in the area offer no financial incentives for NBCT's, she stated that the financial incentive was a primary factor that convinced her to try it. "They offer $1000 a year for ten years, and I know that's not a lot, but its something. It makes you feel like they're offering you something for doing it."

Candidate Jill was pleased with the time she was given to work on portfolio entries. Feeling like very few people in her district, especially in administration, were supportive of her and expecting to be turned down, she approached her curriculum director asking for a full day off. She was pleasantly surprised when she was granted a half-day instead. "My curriculum director gave me a half-day to work. And she actually granted a half-day for an NBCT at another building to work with me." At the time of her second interview, Jill had not yet used the half-day, but was planning to use it to prepare for her assessment center exercises. In addition, her principal agreed to provide her with a full day to work on writing for her portfolio.

Kelly was fortunate to work in a large urban district that had developed a National Board Support Group for its candidates. "Our district has had a very strong support system for National Board since its inception. So, the support system was in
place and the time was right." She felt as though this support system made it easier for teachers to make the decision to become candidates.

Kelly admits, however, to not utilizing the support group as much as she should have the first time she attempted certification. Said she met with the group after deciding to retake and met with the group often. The support group helped her realize what was missing in her first attempt. "I used it. Yes, I did. I realized I didn’t have the evidence. It wasn’t there and I could have provided more."

Building-Level Administrative Support

Several participants mentioned receiving invaluable support at the building level. Building level support, in this case, was informal and came from building administrators. Each admitting to feeling very fortunate and believed that her principal went above and beyond to assist and support her throughout the process.

In addition to working with a very collaborative staff, Leah believed that her building principal was an important part of her support system, especially emotionally.

He was very inspiring, very supportive and I know I’m very lucky that he and I had that relationship. It was an amazing experience for the time that he was in my building and he was here for seven years being a role model and a mentor and giving me nudges.

In addition to emotional support, Leah’s principal assisted in reading her
portfolio entries. "He and his wife actually read things for me. He was so incredibly supportive." He also helped her and her teaching partner prepare her portfolio for mailing.

Besides doing all the proofreading for me, when it was time to send in our portfolios, we took the day off and spent it in his office with all our papers and our copies; we were all in there together and he helped us. He paid for our postage to send it in.

As a banking candidate, Leah again had a strong support system. While her partner, also a banking candidate, worked on a math entry, Leah focused on writing.

I scanned everybody's child development books from college, I talked to my principal and coworkers and we would go to these book clubs where we would get together and we read all kinds of kooky stuff. So I had some chances to really re-read some things; to re-do things and have some conversation about that. Everyone was really supportive.

As a candidate, Jill is pleased with the support her new principal has given in terms of granting time off and reading entries.

We have a new first time principal at my school and she is phenomenal. She has read my entries and given feedback. She is really supportive. She has also given me a couple of curriculum days, which is nice. It means all the world. She's very understanding and she advised me to take a sick day to do this or do that. My principal is a writer and I know that her husband is looking at it, too, and he is a writer, so I have some very good support there.
Since Kelly's district had developed a strong support system for its candidates, her building principal was supportive from the start.

When my principal found out I was in it, he was just ecstatic. I had all kinds of support from him and he paid for my application fee with professional development funds. He said 'Oh no, you've got to do this.'

When Kelly learned that she had not certified, she immediately decided to try again and continued to feel support from her principal. "He read for me and gave me advice. Once you see it from a different perspective and read it over again, things that you left out are just glaringly obvious."

When asked about building support, Karen explained that her principal was unfamiliar with National Board, but played a big role nonetheless.

George was real good about reading, although he didn’t know anything about the process. He read the entries and writing was one of his passions so he was great person to run things by.

In addition to receiving financial assistance from the state, Fran sought out the help of graduate students working in her building to videotape her lessons. "Since they knew so much about technology, I knew they would be perfect. They did a magnificent job and I owe them so much."

Formal Support Groups

Several participants mentioned receiving help from formal candidate support groups. These groups are formed by districts, unions, the state department of education, or online chat groups for the purpose of providing guidance to candidates.
They are typically led by NBCTs or representatives from the NBPTS. The following participants explain their value.

Cindy and her teaching partner felt as though their colleagues would look negatively on their decision to become Board certified so they were forced to seek support from groups outside their districts.

There were two support groups that we went through -- one from the ISD and one from the county. We went to them regularly; we met about every other week. We spent a lot of time dealing with concrete things like margins and type, and we talked about entries. She explained that the groups were made up of 30-40 candidates, making it difficult to share with individuals, but she felt she got some writing suggestions and meeting helped keep her on track.

Kendra also met with a candidate support group sponsored by the Michigan Education Association. She found it helpful to meet other candidates and talk with them.

The MEA had a one-day workshop in Lansing and I went there. It was really helpful because the NBCTs gave great suggestions and I met other candidates going through the same thing as I was.

She spent the day reading entries and sharing frustrations. A few months later she emailed a few NBCTs in the group her entries for feedback.

As the only library media candidate in the state, Lori felt as though lack of support made it difficult to certify her first time. "I felt like there was no one in Michigan who could help me." As a banking candidate, she decided to search for
support online, where she had been told there were organized support groups, and
found a library media group in Alabama.

Then I found a Library Media listserve through YahooGroups. Then I found a
sub-group from the listserve in Birmingham, Alabama that met monthly.
They were great. Since National Board is so big there, they really know what
they're doing. After talking online with the leader for a while, I decided to
drive down to meet with them in person. They helped me better understand
the process. I couldn't have done it without them.

Support From Family Members

Most participants mentioned family support and they made it clear that due to
the time and energy involved, completing the process without it would have been
very difficult. Although several participants made references to specific family
members who had been supportive, three made reference to a specific family member
several times throughout their interviews.

Although Cindy had a partner to work with, she turned to her husband for
assistance. "Actually the person that did most of my editing was my husband. He
read the entries and he had to figure out if it made sense." She knew that having
someone other than teachers read her work, meant it really had to be written clearly
and make sense to everyone.

Jill agreed that having non-educators read her work is important. "I have a
very supportive husband. I keep saying you’re going to read this before it goes. He’s
not an educator, he’s a farmer. I told him that I wanted his viewpoint too."
Jamie wouldn't have decided to become Nationally Certified if it weren't for her sister. "My sister in Arizona is an NBCT. She really supported and encouraged me." Julie appreciated the time and effort her sister gave in reading her entries and, although there were times when frustration was an issue, "I always felt like she was really helpful."

**Theme #4: Factors Affecting Certification**

The fourth theme to emerged from interview questions asking which factors the participants felt most affected their certification outcome, or will affect their outcome, in the case of candidates. Of course all participants mentioned several factors that they believe contributed, some positive and some negative. Therefore, this theme can be broken down into two types of factors: positive factors and negative factors. Each type can be divided into categories including support, motivation, time, and preparedness. As a result, the following sub themes include:

1. Positive factors
   a. Support
   b. Motivation
   c. Time

2. Negative factors
   a. Time
   b. Lack of support
   c. Lack of preparation
**Positive Factors**

The positive factors mentioned by participants were grouped into the following categories: support, motivation, and time.

**Support** As stated in previous themes, support has surfaced time and again as a critical element in the National Board Certification process. The following participants agreed that, while the amount and types of support may differ among candidates, support made their certification possible. While many of these examples have already been shared, the following explain further.

When asked what made the difference for Leah as she attempted certification she didn't hesitate. "The support I had from my friends and the people I worked with." She, again, referred to the help she received from a colleague.

We would meet at least once a month. It might have been every couple of weeks. We’d drive to her school and then hang out with her for a bit and just talk about things. She would say, "Here’s what the directions are. Do you think you’re really answering that?" She was really gentle and nice. It was an acknowledgment and sort of accountability and it really kept me moving. Jamie agrees that the support she received from her teaching partner helped keep her motivated and accountable.

We printed everything out in the summer, in binders, organized it, highlighted it and we had spent days going through and making notes about every question and going through the standards. What do they mean? What will
this look like? We were really familiarizing ourselves with it before we decided what kinds of lessons we were going to do.

Although she did not certify on her first two attempts, she continued to feel a sense of support that carried her through. "I think the emotional support came from a much broader audience; I think people felt sorry for me."

As she mentioned earlier, Kendra's support came from a colleague who was Board certified.

I had this fabulous friend and she was supportive mentally and emotionally as well as academically, in keeping me going and getting me through the insanity. When I was down and out, you know, she gave me the motivation to keep going. There were times when I thought, "I'm not going to need too much support." and there were times when I thought "Oh my god, I need 20 of her." Having support from somebody that's with me daily really did keep me going. I was forced to stay on it and I never let my guard down. And I think that that was a big factor.

Betsy relied on her experienced mentor for support. "There were just two NBCT's in Michigan at the time, including my mentor. She has certified with National Board three times in three different certificate areas and, to me, walks on water. She was a tremendous support."

With no candidates or NBCTs in Michigan in her certification area, Lori contributed her succeeding on her second attempt to the support group she found in Alabama.
They were the only help I had and I knew they were the reason I made it. It was great having someone to share, vent, read, and bounce ideas off of. I still keep in touch with the group leaders down there and I would love to start a similar kind of group here in Michigan.

**Motivation**  While all participants demonstrated some type of motivation to achieve certification, some were quick to share that determination was the number one reason that they were successful. Participants who certified on their second and third attempts all said that motivation played an important part in their decisions to attempt certification again.

Betsy believed that, through her own experiences, she understands the importance of motivation. In reference to working with other candidates, she explains, "It doesn’t matter if they have financial or other incentives. If they don’t have the internal motivation, they’re not going to survive. They’re not going to continue the process."

When asked what factors played a part in her certifying the first time, Kendra explained the motivation she felt as she worked her way through the certification process.

It’s just one more thing that I’ll have to feel good about, that I’ve accomplished. It’s setting and reaching a goal, you know, its my purpose. Personal drive. I don’t like to fail. I know nobody likes to fail, but my personality is such that I’ll do it and do it and do it until I succeed.

As Fran described the feeling of certifying on her second attempt, she
explained that she was even more motivated the second time around. "I saw National Certification as a challenge and, after not making it the first time, I knew that I'd be even more motivated to do it."

After not certifying on her second attempt, Jamie explained what thoughts went through her mind and what convinced her to try a third time.

You don't get anything out of it. I don't get any money, there's no crown, there's no tiara, there's no roses. Really what's the point? I've been through the process, and the process is very valuable, but in the end it really doesn't make any difference whether I get it or I don't. But personally I couldn't quit. She went on to explain how her students motivated her to be a better learner. She wanted to lead by example and not look bad do her students.

I felt it was important to share with them that you can't be lazy all the time and then just do what's easy, and then bail out as soon as it gets a little hard. This is why your teacher's crazy.

Kelly also wanted to lead by example. After not certifying on her first attempt, she felt she was setting an example for her students and her own children.

You know in my classroom, I don't allow my children to accept not succeeding on something. So how could I continue to not let them succeed and continue to push them the way I push them when I was not willing to do it to myself? And then for my kids at home, I couldn't very well say that I was quitting. You know, because you have to persevere. I had never not achieved anything that I set out to achieve.
One thing that motivated Cindy that she didn't expect was working with her teaching partner.

I think there was pressure between the two of us. There was pressure to not be competitive, but we also realized we were teaching together and making our academic decisions together. It's almost impossible not to motivate one another when you're working together everyday. I mean, working with this group of 50 kids, if one of us got it and one of us didn't, what would that say?

As first time candidate Jill approached her deadline, tired and drained, she explained what was keeping her going. "I have one of those funny personalities that just has to see something to the bitter end. I'm in this to the bitter end."

**Time** Two participants mentioned that although the certification process requires considerable time and effort, they found that planning ahead was very valuable.

After talking with an NBCT in her district about the best time to apply and begin the process, Kendra learned she could look over the requirements and do some planning in advance. She decided to take it slow. She learned that everything she needed was on the NBC website so there was no need to apply before she felt ready. "I began planning a year ahead of time. There was almost a year for me to think about it before I formally applied." She spent much of that school year, as well as the following summer, preparing lessons, practicing videotaping in her classroom, and thinking National Board. She believed that having this time was crucial to her certifying on her first attempt. "Summer was key. Summer was good because it wasn’t like I was doing two jobs at once."
Leah, on the other hand, felt rushed and unprepared her first try, so as a banking candidate she made sure to plan and block out steps of the process on a calendar before beginning. "I think the whole time thing was better. I knew what it took and was better prepared."

Kelly also realized the second time around that she'd need to schedule her time better. "I didn't pace myself well enough the first time. I didn't have the time to go back to do any fixing or correcting. Yeah, the scheduling I was really poor at."

**Negative Factors**

Not surprisingly, time and lack of support were also mentioned as negative factors that affected certification. The other commonly mentioned negative factors were combined into a third negative factor: lack of preparation.

**Time** As some participants felt like time was on their sides, others felt that, for many reasons, time was a hindrance.

For example, as Jill explains, candidates often felt it was difficult to juggle work, family, candidate support meetings, and life in general.

I haven't done many of the support group things and I wish that I could have, but I wish those had been earlier in the process for me. I could have used it earlier. I could not give up the time to go to many meetings, which is hard. You have to decide, which will that help me more? I felt needed to be at home and working on this. It takes a lot of time, it really does.

Jamie explained how being a candidate took away valuable time she would normally be spending with family.
It's stunning to me, how hard the work is and how time consuming it is for those 12 little pages of talk. Apologize to your family sincerely before you start because it's hellish, you're unavailable to people.

Leah remembers getting a late start after waiting for funding from the state to come through.

I do remember too, that I did not have the whole time because I had to apply to the state for that funding. I don't remember all of it, the pieces and parts of why I got it so late. I just remember waiting for the money and I don't know whether I was doing things late or someone else was late, I just remember thinking, "Come on, come on already!"

Karen recalled hearing about a support group offered by her union, but although she found it valuable, found it difficult to attend more than a few times.

They initiated a support group in Lansing and I did drive there twice and it was wonderful, but you know when you teach all day and you have to drive to the other side of the state to go to a support group, its difficult.

**Lack of Support** Although support has been mentioned numerous times throughout this analysis as a positive factor, most participants also agreed that there was a need for more candidate support. The following examples demonstrate participants' thoughts on how lack of support affects the certification process.

Betsy had strong feelings about the lack of administrative and state support. "My principal wrote me a recommendation for it. She didn't know anything about it. Principals need to know more about it." While explaining the financial incentives her
district recently put into place, she commented on the financial support that many states offer. "They should have something like that in Michigan because teachers don't have any incentive from the state."

When asked about the lack of support she received in her district, Cindy replied, "We knew that there wasn't going to be any acknowledging in our building and I mean the district took a really long time to acknowledge us. I think it was sometime in the dead of winter or early spring before the district brought us in front of the board."

Kendra also felt a lack of support in her district. "At first I felt there was going to be support and then I felt there wasn't as much as I wanted and needed because I heard of other places that had better support." Referring to the financial incentive they offer, she said, "It's merely pennies. It didn't make much difference." When asked if she felt her district felt her accomplishment was important, she replied,

Well, internally I think National Certification makes a difference, yes. The Superintendent gave me a plaque at a board meeting and I was recognized in the District newsletter and on the website, but after the one time congratulations, it seemed to be forgotten. I really feel like nobody really cares. My principal also said a one time congrats and then made a joke about how he now had higher expectations for me.

Karen, who did not certify on her first attempt and chose not to retake, agrees. She felt like "there was no support close to home." Although she had an NBCT in her
district, she felt that lack of support was the main reason she did not attempt certification a second time. "That was a big part, lack of support."

In referring to her administration, Jill showed frustration as she explained a conversation she'd had with her curriculum director.

I don't think they understand quite why we want to do this. As a matter of fact, the curriculum director has just flat out asked me, "Why do you want to do this? I mean it's just so much work, why would anybody want to do that?"

So I'm not sure that there's a good feeling there in supporting and why to do this.

Jamie shared a similar conversation she'd had recently with an administrator in her district.

My assistant superintendent said, "Wow, that's really impressive that you guys would do something so difficult." and our superintendent said, "You know, I went to a session at conference once and I thought 'Wow, who would ever want to do something that involved or difficult?'"

Kelly believed that districts want so seem supportive, but stop short of offering financial support. She offers a reply.

Districts say, "Oh, good for you! Oh, no, no, no, we don't have the money to give incentive pay to teachers for doing that." And I say, "It isn't incentive pay. You're not encouraging teachers to become Nationally Board Certified because they'll make more money. You need to encourage teachers to become Nationally Board Certified because it will improve their teaching and
it will increase student achievement and it will make them what you want
them to be."

Lack of Preparation The six participants who did not certify on their first attempts
each mentioned not feeling prepared or knowing what to expect as candidates. Some
felt they needed to be better prepared for the assessment exercises while others felt
they did not know enough about the portfolio process.

On her first attempt, Leah knew she had struggled the most with the
assessment center exercises. "I needed to review more." Referring to her second
attempt, "I think I knew so much more of the test. I knew I was a little smarter this
time."

Kelly, a teacher with an early childhood background, was attempting
certification in the area of Middle Childhood Generalist, which covers content
knowledge for grades 3-7. She felt the need to be better prepared for the assessment
center exercises, especially in the area of math.

I really needed to do some studying and to see where I was weak. It was just
like "Oh, what was I thinking? I should have done early childhood." My
background is really heavy early childhood; I could have done early childhood
with my eyes closed. You know I really needed my head examined. I felt that
this was making me much, much stronger in the classroom and then, when I
didn't certify, I knew I should have studied that math more for my assessment
test.
Fran felt that her content knowledge and writing skills were outstanding, but her lack of typing skills had caused her to receive low scores on the timed assessment center exercises. "I knew what I wanted to say, but since I couldn't type, I had a difficult time. The first thing I did when I decided to try again was to take a typing class!"

**Theme #5: Affects of Certification Process on Teaching**

As National Board candidates, the ultimate goal of these participants was to improve as teachers. The final theme that emerged from the research focuses on the questions asking how the certification process affected the teaching of the participants. Each participant found it very easy to answer these questions. Responses focused on reflection and professional growth and validation of teaching practice. As a result, the following sub themes include:

1. Reflection and personal growth
2. Validation of teaching practice

**Reflection and Professional Growth**

By far, learning how to reflect was the most powerful tool these teachers used to improve as teachers. Through the use of reflection, many felt they were using more ongoing assessment to meet the needs of their students and had a greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as teachers. Many shared that the reflective piece of the certification process was what they enjoyed most.

In summarizing what she gained from her two years as a candidate, Fran stated, "I went in for professional development and reflection, and that's exactly what
I got. It was a professional development opportunity for me and gave me a chance to really reflect on my teaching."

Leah explained the excitement she felt as she learned about herself through her portfolio entries.

A lot of what National Board was to me was the reflecting -- writing, thinking and re-thinking, and I think just couldn’t keep it in. I just wanted to keep sharing it with everybody.

She went on to explain the need she felt to let her colleagues know what she’d been learning and how the certification process was such a rewarding professional development experience. Leah also believed that reflecting on the work of her students was just as rewarding.

To really look at student work and have that drive of what is going on with my instruction. I don’t think there are too many other things that are more valuable to me.

When asked if she felt being National Board certified had affected those around her, Kelly explains the discussions taking place in her building.

In school it’s been different; there have been some changes. You know there seems to be more conversation of what students need. People take pauses and they think and don’t just say, “I’m just doing what I think is best for kids.” I really appreciate that; I really want more of those conversations.

She explains her reaction to the question she is always asked about being certified.
Did it make be a better classroom teacher? Yes it did. Did not certifying the first time make me a better classroom teacher? Yes it did. That’s the real purpose in becoming Nationally Board Certified -- to improve your teaching. It is also to improve student achievement. I definitely think it did that.

Jill also felt that her teaching had improved and that she was learning so much about herself as an art teacher. She believed the two portfolio entries that require the candidate to videotape herself were especially valuable.

It really is a process and I have learned so much about myself. The videotaping has been such an eye-opener. It’s been really a deep experience for me, just a good learning experience.

Through the process, Jill realized how she had neglected to connect her art projects to the big ideas in art. The certification process really got her thinking.

I can tell you right now, what I’ve learned is that I do not teach the big ideas to the kids. That’s the big hunk that I was missing -- the connections that I should have been making for kids. As I read through those standards I thought, “Well, why have I never taught that to my kids?” I think somewhere along that way I kind of lost that whole thing about teaching the kids why artists make art or the functions of art, those big ideas, you know, all that cool stuff. The connections weren’t being made and that was the most valuable item.

Jill felt that she has a better understanding of how to make those connections for her students and continue to use reflection in her teaching.
I’ve got to re-evaluate my art lessons and make those ties for kids. This whole National Board thing has kind of given me the background to do that. Now I think I can figure out how to do that, and present it so third graders can get the big picture.

Seeing herself on videotape was also a valuable experience for Karen. I think I’m a better teacher today just for having gone through that. I remember the first time that I videotaped myself and I felt like the stern teacher saying, Ok, we’re going to be on page 50 -- now!” I’m not kidding, I mean I looked at that tape and thought, “Who is that lady?” So I changed my teaching practices right then. It was like ok, you have to think about how you act and you have to smile at these kids, you have to tell them “We’re going to do something really fun today!” instead of “Get your book out.” I think about that all the time now.

While explaining the value of going through the certification process the first time, Jamie clearly learned the importance of measuring lessons in terms of student learning.

The first year was valuable as far as my own professional development, as far as reflecting on what good teaching is. One thing that was really eye opening to me was asking the question, “What do the kids really get out of it?” If you have a favorite lesson -- it’s beautiful and it goes well and you are married to it. But then you sit down and ask, “How can I show student learning?” Oh, the kids didn’t get anything out of this. It wasn’t anything about student
learning. It was about “I love it.” I was having fun and it’s cute and everybody thinks it’s a neat idea. The parents love it; everybody loves it. The kids are having fun, but really, no learning is taking place at all. That was really eye opening.

After certifying on her second attempt, Lori felt more reflective and had a stronger understanding of the content she was teaching. "I knew to consider the goals and objectives of lessons more. I felt like I knew my students better." She explained her need to share what she learned with others.

For an independent project I had to do for a class, I created a CD about National Board. I want to share it with my district and the MEA. I just want everyone to know how valuable it is and what I learned from the process.

Kendra explained that the reflective process helped her learn to ask questions and make changes accordingly. She finds herself thinking more carefully about how valuable her lessons will be to her first graders.

I realize that good teachers are all different and the process really emphasizes that there is no one right way, and what is key is change. Once I really got into it I found that it made a deeper cut into really looking at myself. You have to evaluate yourself and make the change, if necessary. Ask, “Why do you do it? Why do you do it?” and if it didn’t work, "What am I going to do now?" I'm just continually asking myself, “Why are you doing that?” and looking at lessons that I have done in the past. I look at them and say, “Ok, is
this really what I want to do with this group?” It just really keeps me thinking.

Validation of Teaching Practice

In many ways, the certification process helped participants realize their strengths and gain a feeling of self worth. Many participants felt a sense of justification for the way they were teaching and felt that the process gave them confidence to pursue other challenges.

Special education teacher, Betsy, was one of the first in her district to "stumble onto National Board". When asked how the process affected her teaching, she replied, "It is such a confirmation…it’s a year of focusing on yourself and who you are as a teacher."

Kendra, who certified on her first attempt, also sees the process as an affirmation of her teaching.

It was just me doing what I do everyday and I guess for somebody or all of these individuals to look at what I do every day and say, “That’s pretty good stuff.” It feels pretty good.

Kelly, who certified on her second attempt, explained how completing the process twice was even more valuable. She explained how it has given teachers a sense of renewal.

I think that part of the reason people get burned out in the classroom is because they hit that plateau and it’s just like when our kids hit a plateau, I mean that’s a bad place to be. You don’t want to stay there because then you
might as well seriously leave and find something else to do that will fill you
and challenge you and take you up to a higher personal level. And that’s the
National Board, that’s what it does. It takes you up to your plateau, and after
you have done it, you never look at teaching or what you’re doing in the
classroom the same way. It touches everything. My greatest accomplishment
was going through the National Board process. That’s my greatest
accomplishment in what I do in the classroom.

Earlier she shared her need to become certified and prove that the teachers in her
district were as talented as those more affluent districts. Here Kelly explains the
confidence she has and respect she receives as a National Board teacher.

I think it helped me grow as a teacher leader and it has given me a lot more
confidence to speak out. There is a certain amount of respect that goes along
with it. Now, people say, “You’re Nationally Board Certified. You could
teach anywhere that you want to teach. Why do you teach in your district?”
It’s exciting to say, “I teach here because that’s what I love to do. I’m an
urban educator and that’s what I like and that’s where I’m needed. So why
wouldn’t I teach here?”

When asked what the process meant to her she explained how the time and effort
were worth it.

It was a validation of everything that I truly believed as a teacher. The
process was legitimate. It was a fair assessment of my teaching even when I
didn’t certify the first time. As I was going through it and was pulling out my
hair and was going through all the normal angst of completing, I still felt that it was improving my teaching.

Cindy and her teaching partner hoped National Board Certification process would justify their teaching and assessment of their students. Not only did they feel justified, they felt like it validated their whole program.

I think it gave me some acknowledgement that what I was doing was a good thing to be doing and that I needed to continue. I think it was our program that was helping me do the right thing as a teacher.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Michigan elementary National Board Certified Teachers and candidates as they completed the certification process. This chapter included a brief background of National Board Certification as well as descriptions of the methodology and demographics of the participants. In addition, an analysis of the data and discussion of the findings were presented. The results of this study clearly answered the research questions in that they identified the roles that motivation, support and pressure played in the participants' decisions to pursue NBC, as well as the influence the process had on their teaching. Table 4 shows a summary of the answers to the research questions as well as the emergent themes.

In this analysis, Candidate Self-Perception, Motivation for Pursuing National Board Certification, Support Received Through the Certification Process, Factors Affecting Certification, and Affect of Certification Process on Teaching were
revealed as the major themes that emerged. Each theme was further divided into sub themes. Finally, the findings were discussed as they related to each of these themes and sub themes.

Significant findings indicated that the participants were effective teachers highly motivated by internal factors to seek National Board Certification. Many saw NBC as a way to prove their effectiveness. These teachers were pioneers and felt pride and accomplishment for seeking NBC. They had drive and determination to improve as teachers, both for themselves and their students. They valued informal support from colleagues and friends but believe more formal support is needed in Michigan. Finally, they believe the NBC process made them better teachers. The fifth, and final chapter, contains a review of the findings, identifies the most significant findings, makes a comparison of the research, and includes recommendations for further research, implications, and the author's self-reflection.

Table 4: Answers and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers to research questions</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBC candidates seek certification for many internally motivated reasons</td>
<td>Validation, Pioneers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC candidates seek support from informal sources, especially colleagues</td>
<td>Informal support, Collegiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC candidates believe the certification process positively affects their teaching</td>
<td>Validation, Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V: REVIEW OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SELF-REFLECTION

The results of this study reveal several important findings, each of which help us better understand their experiences as NBC candidates. The results show that NBC candidates are confident, determined teachers with a love for learning, a need for reassurance, and a reliance on informal support systems. The participants eagerly shared their thoughts and provided significant insights into their journeys. This final chapter begins with a brief review of findings, identifies significant findings, continues with a comparison of research, and concludes with recommendations for further research, implications, and the author's self-reflection.

Review of Findings

While several studies have looked at NBC, many have focused on student achievement, leadership, and the process itself -- few have qualitatively studied support and motivation; few have explored the experiences of candidates and studied their perceptions and interpretations. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insights into the experiences of ten Michigan elementary National Board Certified Teachers and candidates as they completed the certification process. It was my intent to share their experiences, identify the role motivation, support, and pressure played in their decisions to certify, as well as in their experiences as candidates, and, finally, I wanted to explain the influence that the NBC process had on them as educators. As an NBCT, I realized the potential for my opinions and perspectives to blend with the data and bracketed my experiences "in order to understand those of the participants in the study" (Creswell, 2003, p.15).
Through in-depth interviews and thorough data analysis, several interesting patterns and relationships emerged.

A review of the existing literature indicates a strong connection between quality teaching, professional development and meeting student needs. "The professional development of experienced teachers is of greater importance to school improvement than ever before" (Bullough, et al., 1998, p. 1). It has also been shown that teachers who attempt National Board Certification experience the process in very different ways, for different reasons, with varying degrees of support, and with different motivations. As mentioned earlier, few phenomenological studies have been conducted that look at NBC candidate's experiences with regard to support and motivation; therefore, the results of this study assist us in identifying commonalities among the experiences of NBC candidates.

The participants' stories provided valuable information and insights into their experiences as NBC candidates. As I read and reread their stories, patterns and themes emerged, and the data was organized, reviewed, and coded. Member checks were conducted with each participant for clarification and accuracy, while field notes were bracketed and reviewed (Creswell, 2003). This process resulted in several interesting findings that will add to the growing body of existing literature on National Board Certification. The many findings of this study are identified below in and the significant findings are further explained.
Life-long Learners and Pioneers

First, the findings of this study strongly support the research that states that confident, quality teachers with advanced degrees are more likely to become NBC candidates. These are the types of teachers that are already great teachers doing great things in their classrooms. They are confident, yet humble, and are not looking for fame, but acknowledgement.

The participants were looking to improve as teachers and realized the value of using reflection on their practice and how it improves their teaching. They were pioneers in their buildings, districts, or curricular area, willing to take on the challenge of the rigorous process that is National Board Certification. While completing the process they sought help from colleagues, administrators, friends, and family, and regardless of the results, they felt a sense of pride and achievement as candidates.

Next, this study shows that teachers become NBC candidates because they want to improve their teaching. This agrees with Hunzicker (2004) who states that teacher change is strongly associated with internal motivation such as support, personal experiences, and attitude. Like most teachers who are not driven by fame or fortune, these participants were not motivated by external factors or seeking NBC for financial reasons or recognition; they simply had a desire to improve their teaching. The participants were confident, reflective, and highly motivated by internal factors. Although some external factors and pressures were mentioned, such as financial
incentives and certification requirements, these factors were secondary to the drive and desire that led them to make the decision to certify.

Validation of teaching and internal motivation

NBC candidates believe they are effective teachers who are internally motivated to pursue NBC. Over and over, participants stated that they pursue NBC for validation of their teaching. Several participants explained their need to prove that what they were doing in their classrooms was effective. They believed that by achieving National Board Certification, they would be recognized by their peers, and others, as accomplished teachers.

Informal Support and Collegiality

Candidates emphatically believe that support is essential to certification and Michigan needs more of it. The issue of informal candidate support was identified both as a form of motivation for NBC candidates and as critical factor affecting certification. It was shown that participants believed informal support, motivation, and time played positive roles in their experiences as candidates. This agrees with Lustick (2002) and Sykes (1999) that formal NBC support from state and professional organizations, unions, Internet listserves, and other NBCTs, varies greatly from candidate to candidate, district to district, and state to state. Participants all felt that formal candidate support is lacking in Michigan.

Candidates seek certification if they feel that they will be supported. While formal candidate support was not as critical to the certification success of the participants, informal support from colleagues and others clearly made a difference.
This support was identified as one of two types, formal or informal. Results showed that formal support is less critical than originally thought and pressure from external sources, such as federal requirements or district administration was not a factor. In most cases, formal support was either unavailable or participants were unaware of it. Therefore, participants were forced to find informal types of support. In one way or another, all participants found great informal support in colleagues, friends, and family members, many who had little or no knowledge of NBC.

Validity of Teaching Practice and Professional Growth

Finally, the participants overwhelmingly agreed that completing the certification process provides many benefits to teachers. The final finding indicates that these teachers believed in the certification process and, regardless of the outcome, felt it improved their teaching. From providing a renewed commitment to validating their teaching, participants strongly agreed with the research that the NBC certification process improves collegiality, creates leadership opportunities, and is seen as a valuable professional development experience.

Comparison of Research

The findings mentioned above clearly help us better understand the experiences of NBC candidates. These are driven individuals with a desire to improve. These results clearly add to the growing body of literature. Table 5 shows a comparison between previous research and the significant findings of this study.
Table 5: Comparison of Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Research</th>
<th>Dewitt (2007) Research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers pursue NBC for intrinsic reasons such as professional development</td>
<td>Teachers pursue NBC for intrinsic reasons and are searching for validation in their teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lustick &amp; Sykes, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of support available to candidates affects certification success</td>
<td>The amount of formal support &amp; pressure on candidates does not affect certification success: informal support is critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lustick, 2002; Sykes, 1999)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Validation of Teaching Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC provides teachers with a renewed effort, refreshed commitment to teaching, and effective professional development (Wiebke, 2000)</td>
<td>The NBC process provides teachers with confidence, a renewed spirit, and a validation of their teaching practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Significant Findings**

The results of this study on the National Board Certification process identify important findings that add to the growing body of research on NBC. In order to better understand the significance of these findings, they have been summarized in Table 6 and labeled as critical findings.
Table 6: Critical Findings

CRITICAL FINDINGS

1. NBC candidates are effective teachers, life-long learners, and pioneers
2. NBC candidates want validation and are driven by internal motivation
3. Informal support and collegiality play a critical role in NBC certification
4. NBC candidates believe the NBC process validates their teaching practices and enhances their teaching

Critical Finding #1: NBC Candidates Are Effective Teachers, Life-long Learners, and Pioneers

Great teachers seek National Board Certification. "Teachers who volunteer to undertake Board certification are superior teachers to begin with" (Lustick and Sykes, p.3). They are confident, accomplished teachers who want acknowledgment and validation for themselves and for others. They use reflective practices in their teaching and have a strong understanding of the needs of their students. They see the importance of collegiality and the power of working with others.

The most common reason participants gave for choosing to pursue National Board Certification was the desire to improve and grow as teachers. They see the need to improve. Research on professional development shows that teachers want professional development that provides new ways of looking at what they are already doing (English Update, 2002). Some participants, like Jill, wanted to "find what was missing" in their teaching, while for others, such as Kendra, it was "directly related to what I was doing" in the classroom. They are also clearly motivated to improve their
teaching practices and take a closer look at themselves in hopes of becoming even better.

NBC candidates are also pioneers in Michigan. By making the choice to become National Board teachers, these elementary teachers have become pioneers in their state, schools and role models to their colleagues. They are driven by internal motivators and are willing to take on challenges.

Critical Finding #2: NBC Candidates Want Validation And Are Driven By Internal Motivation

Participants feel the NBC process will meet their emotional need to be validated. Participants revealed that they were confident in their teaching practices and felt, like Cindy, that becoming Nationally Certified would "document and acknowledge that." Teaching in a struggling urban district Kelly felt even more determined to prove "that I was an effective teacher, as effective as my superior counterparts." These teachers know they are doing great things for kids and want to be recognized as effective teachers.

Internal motivation emerged as a positive factor affecting certification and the findings indicate that, according to participants, it may be the one of the most important factors. Many participants believed as Betsy did, "If candidates don't have the internal motivation, they're not going to survive." As mentioned above these teachers did not seek certification for financial gain or recognition, but as a way to improve as professionals. It is clear that most participants saw National Board Certification as a challenge and were determined to succeed -- failure was not an
option. As Kelly put it, "I have never not achieved anything that I set out to achieve."
Candidate Jill agreed, "I'm in this to the bitter end."

Internal motivation became increasingly important to the participants who did not certify on their first attempt. As Fran described, "After not making it the first time, I knew I'd be even more motivated to do it." Although discouraged and disappointed, those who had been banking candidates felt the drive and determination to continue and attempt certification again. Jamie stated that, although there was no tangible reward for certifying, "I couldn't quit." She explained the example she wanted to set for her students, "You can't bail out as soon as it gets a little hard."

External motivation did not appear to be a factor in the decision-making process as only a few participants mentioned financial incentives and federal and state requirements as motivational factors. By becoming Nationally Certified, Lori was meeting federal Highly Qualified Teacher requirements and Kendra was receiving state certification credits towards renewing her teaching degree. Kendra and Karen mentioned financial incentives offered by their districts for certifying. Each saw these perks as secondary to their primary motivations.

Critical Finding #3: Informal Support and Collegiality Play a Critical Role in NBC Certification

In support of the literature that shows that resistance to change can be overcome with strong support and the desire to improve (Bullough et al., 1998; Borko & Putnam, 1995), many teachers decided to take on the NBC challenge because they felt they had the support and encouragement of those around them to make it through.
Informal support played a large part in a teacher's decision to certify. All participants
mentioned people in their lives that they knew they could count on for help
throughout the process. Whether it was having a teaching partner who was also a
NBC candidate, or a supportive principal, or a support group to meet with, these
teachers felt that, without help in one form or another, they would not have become
candidates. In Karen's case, she felt she had not had much support during her first
attempt and, because of that, decided not to retake. "There was no support close to
home. That was a big part, lack of support."

As mentioned earlier, informal support emerged as a central theme to this
study. In agreement with Bennett (2004), these participants believed that in many
cases, candidate support meant the difference between achieving certification and not
achieving certification. One participant that did not certify on her first attempt,
however, said she felt even more support the second time around. Informal support
came in many forms and in varying degrees, and came from colleagues, building
principals, and friends, while formal support came in the form of NBC workshops,
study groups, and Internet listserves. Formal types of support and pressure from
external sources, as stated above, were not as critical to the certification process as
predicted.

As stated earlier, collegiality is a critical part of the certification process. The
findings on support agree with the research that states that effective professional
development is believed to be reliant upon disrupting isolation and increasing
professional collaboration and community (Bondy & Brownell, 1997; Cobb &
Bowers, 1999; Connolly, 2000; Mycue, 2001; Rogers, 1999; Weld, 1998). It is certainly true that support from colleagues gave participants the emotional and psychological lift that they needed as candidates. Julie felt that working with her teaching partner kept her accountable. Working with her everyday made her feel like she had to keep up. Similarly, Kendra's colleague gave her "the motivation to keep going".

Betsy and Kendra worked with NBCTs in their districts while Jill and Cindy worked with teaching partners who were also NBC candidates. Having someone familiar with National Board provided the participants with someone who knew what they were going through. Kendra explained, "I knew she'd have the answer to my questions" and Cindy stated, "I knew we could do it together."

Leah, Jill, Karen and Kelly felt support strong from their building principals, and Cindy, Kelly and Kendra attended formal support group meetings where colleagues were helpful in reading entries, assisting with assembling portfolios, listening to frustrations and offering another perspective. As Kelly put it, "Once you see if from a different perspective and read it over again, things that you left out are just glaringly obvious."

The most surprising account of working with a support group came from Lori, who found a support group in Birmingham, Alabama. After unsuccessfully attempting certification and searching for a teacher in Michigan seeking certification in her area of Library Media, she turned to the Internet and found a group that met her needs. "After talking online with the leader for a while, I decided to drive down to
meet with them in person. They helped me better understand the process. I couldn't have done it without them." This experience indicates the strong need for support that NBC candidates feel and the lengths to which they will go to find that support.

**Critical Finding #4: NBC Candidates Believe the NBC Process Validates Their Teaching Practices and Enhances Their Teaching**

As stated previously, a benefit mentioned by many participants was the validation of their teaching that the NBC process provided and the feeling of self-worth that participants felt as they progressed through, and in many cases, successfully completed, the NBC process. Many participants entered the process with something to prove. They felt they were good teachers and hoped that NBC would confirm it. When asked probing questions about how the process affected them as teachers, many responded with enormous smiles and explained their sense of pride. They said they felt a sense of justification as teachers and had gained confidence to work with others as teacher leaders and to pursue other challenges.

The certification process has been identified as "a form of professional development that actually enhances teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions in candidates regardless of whether or not they achieve certification" (Lustick and Sykes, 2006, p.2). In addition, research shows that National Board Certification is resulting in positive changes in teachers' classrooms, in their school districts, and in the larger education community (NBPTS, 2001). Finally, "evidence suggests that candidates whether they pass or not, find the experience valuable to their professional growth" (Lustick and Sykes, 2006, p.3). This research is strongly supported by the
opinions of the participants, who believe the NBC certification process improved their teaching in many ways.

The findings also support the idea that professional development opportunities vary tremendously from teacher to teacher and can be a highly individualized experience (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). Like many NBCTs, the participants of this study agreed that the certification process was the most valuable professional development opportunity of their careers because of its individuality.

By far, the most common response to questions regarding influence on teaching was learning to use the art of reflection to improve as a teacher. Every participant in the study was excited to share how her understanding and practice of reflection had been refined. An enthusiastic response came from Leah, who said, "A lot of what National Board was to me was the reflecting -- writing, thinking and re-thinking..." She explained wanting to share the importance of reflection with other colleagues and felt that reflection was the most valuable tool she had learned as a teacher. Here, Kendra explains the process she goes through as she plans her lessons.

I'm just continually asking myself, "Why are you doing that?" and looking at lessons that I have done in the past. I look at them and say, "Ok, is this really what I want to do with this group?" It just really keeps me thinking.

According to participants, another benefit of the certification process was learning to better understand student needs. Like most of the participants, Lori wanted to share what she was learning with others in her building. "I just want everyone to know how valuable it is and what I learned from the process." She
realized that she had a better understanding of the content she was teaching as well as
a better understanding of the needs of her students. "I knew to consider the goals and
objectives of lessons more. I felt like I knew my students better."

Summary

The ten participants that participated in this study were, are, and will always
be accomplished teachers, whether or not they are National Board Certified Teachers.
Through the research sub questions and resulting themes, the findings indicate that,
while each participant had a unique story to tell about her experiences as a National
Board Candidate, there were many similarities and interesting findings that defined
their experiences.

The results of this study indicate that NBC candidates are life-long learners
and highly motivated to become NBCTs, driven by internal rather than external
factors. Regardless of financial incentive, federal and state requirements, or degree to
which they would be recognized and/or celebrated, they have the desire to improve as
teachers and are willing to take on the rigorous and time-consuming challenge. They
feel a need to have their teaching validated, and are driven by the desire to succeed.

The results also indicate that regardless of the type or amount of support they
receive, NBC candidates view informal candidate support as a vital element in their
pursuit of certification. Formal support, as well as pressures from districts,
administration, and federal requirements was not a factor in their certification,
however participants strongly believe that formal candidate support in Michigan is

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needed. Many NBCT's, are working as support providers, organizing support groups and working towards creating a stronger formal support network throughout the state.

In conclusion, this study indicated that NBC candidates view the certification process as a valuable professional development opportunity and agrees with the literature that "provides abundant evidence of specific instances of teachers benefiting from the assessment procedures" (Lustick, 2002, p. 3). It is clear that the certification experience has changed them as professionals, and through the process, they have deepened their content knowledge and developed, mastered, and reflected on new approaches to working with their students (Linquanti, 2001, p. 4). The remainder of this chapter includes recommendations for further research as well as the author's self-reflection.

Recommendations, Implications, and Self-Reflection

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to add to the limited qualitative research on National Board Certification. The goal was to better understand the experiences of Michigan elementary teachers as they pursued National Board Certification, with regard to the role motivation played in their decision, the role support and pressure played in their decision, and the influence the process had on their teaching. While the data strongly supported the idea that NBC candidates are strongly driven by internal motivation and that support plays a vital role in the certification process, further qualitative research is strongly recommended to better understand the following:
While a diverse group of Michigan elementary teachers was chosen to participate in this study, it is suggested that further research be conducted that expands participant demographics. First, this study is limited to elementary teachers and could be replicated to include secondary teachers as well. The research is also limited to teachers in Michigan could be expanded to include states with larger numbers of NBCT's. In keeping with the research that states that male teachers are significantly less likely to apply for certification than female teachers (NBPTS, 2001), no male teachers chose to participate, therefore, this study was conducted with only female participants and could be replicated to include the male point of view.

It was my intention to include multiple teachers from each level of certification completion; however, just one candidate and no banking candidates elected to participate. I believe this was, in part, due to the time of year that the study was conducted. Because candidate portfolios are due at the end of March and interviews took place in January and February, I believe candidates felt their time would be better spent working on portfolio entries than participating in this study. In addition, just one non-certified candidate elected to participate. I believe that these candidates are generally frustrated with the process and unhappy with their results, therefore, are less willing to share their stories. With care and thoughtfulness, however, I believe it would be possible to convince these candidates of the value of participating in a study that looks at the reasons they did not certify and what is needed to make these essential changes for others in the future.
Results of this study identify the need that many teachers feel for validation of their teaching. Several participants mentioned this as a motivational factor for becoming certified. I suggest that researcher take a close look at the reasons for the need of teachers for validation and the factors that contribute to them feeling validated. Such a study would be especially helpful for building and district administrators.

Another possible study could look at teachers who certified on their first attempt and those who didn't, by studying support as well as other factors that affect certification. Such a study would be valuable to teachers considering NBC and to those who support them.

Finally, it was mentioned in this study that candidates felt a sense of confidence and took more leadership roles within their buildings. I recommend a study looking at the teacher leadership opportunities that NBC teachers and candidates are presented with as a result of their participation in the process. This would, again, be valuable information for building and district administrators as well as NBCT's and those considering NBC.

Implications

As stated previously, the research on National Board Certification is limited, especially in the areas of candidate support and motivation. It is my hope that this study will assist teachers, administrators, universities, the NBPTS, and policy makers in the state in better understanding the NBC process and its benefits, as well as the role motivation and support play in achieving Board certification.
The results of this study indicate that NBC candidates find the certification process to be a valuable professional development and reflective process, as well as a way to build collegiality and seek validation. These findings provide insights and information to teachers throughout the country interested in learning more about the NBC process and benefit school district administrators, university educators, and state policymakers involved with or interested in learning more about National Board Certification. In addition, the findings on reflection, the need for validation, and the importance of collegiality could be used in the design of professional development. Finally, it is sure to be a valuable resource to researchers as they continue to study this advanced teacher certification option.

Self-Reflection

As an NBCT, I understand the motivation, determination, and personal commitment required to complete this process. I also understand the sense of pride and accomplishment teachers feel as they complete the process. As I listened to each teacher tell her story, I was struck by a number of things. First, I was amazed at how similar their experiences really were. These teachers come from different parts of the state, different districts, different educational backgrounds, and different points in their careers, yet their experiences, as NBC candidates were, in many ways, similar to mine.

Secondly, I was amazed at how eager, open and willing to share their stories the participants were. They, too, wanted their stories heard. Each participant responded to my invitation to participate with such interest that it made me feel like
they were as eager to talk with me as I was with them. I was pleasantly surprised how much I learned about myself as a teacher and a person by listening to them share their experiences. For this, I am truly grateful.

Finally, as a National Board Certified Teacher, I have become accomplished at the art of reflection and have learned the power of reflecting on my experiences. As a researcher, I have learned that success comes from working with others through collaboration. This study is a result of both. It is a result of my interest in wanting to better myself by better understanding the experiences of teachers like myself, a lifelong learner and perpetual student who learned from her family the importance of getting an education and to "Never stop learning". It is also a result of learning the value of collaboration from my amazing husband and supportive colleagues, without whom, I would never have become a National Board Certified Teacher or completed this project. Quite simply, I was eager to share the voices of others and their experiences in hopes that my story could be told.
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### APPENDIX A: NBC CERTIFICATES AND STANDARDS OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards Subject Areas</th>
<th>Available Certificates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Generalist              | Early Childhood Certificate  
                          | Middle Childhood Certificate |
| Art                     | Early and Middle Childhood Certificate  
                          | Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Career and Technical Education | Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| English as a New Language | Early and Middle Childhood Certificate  
                          | Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| English Language Arts   | Early and Middle Childhood/Literacy-Reading Language Arts Certificate  
                          | Early Adolescence Certificate  
                          | Adolescence and Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Exceptional Needs       | Early Childhood through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Library Media           | Early Childhood through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Mathematics             | Early Adolescence Certificate  
                          | Adolescence and Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Music                   | Early and Middle Childhood Certificate  
                          | Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Physical Education      | Early and Middle Childhood Certificate  
                          | Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| School Counseling       | Early Childhood through Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Science                 | Early Adolescence Certificate  
                          | Adolescence and Young Adulthood Certificate |
| Social Studies-History  | Early Adolescence Certificate  
                          | Adolescence and Young Adulthood Certificate |
| World Languages Other than English | Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood Certificate |

Developmental levels: Early Childhood (Ages 3–8), Early Childhood-Young Adulthood (Ages 3–18+*), Middle Childhood (Ages 7–12), Early/Middle Childhood (Ages 3–12), Early Adolescence (Ages 11–15), Adolescence/Young Adulthood (Ages 14–18+), Early Adolescence-Young Adulthood (Ages 11–18+).*Exceptional Needs (Ages 0–21+).
APPENDIX B: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

EXPERIENCES OF MICHIGAN ELEMENTARY NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION CANDIDATES

NBPTS Certification Process

MICHIGAN TEACHERS and EFFECTIVE TEACHER MOVEMENT

NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHERS

Knowledge + experience
Professional development
Reflection

MOTIVATION
SUPPORT
INFLUENCE

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APPENDIX C: INITIAL EMAIL FOR IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Congratulations, (name of potential candidate)!

As an elementary educator with drive and determination you chose to pursue National Board Certification, the greatest accomplishment an educator can achieve.

Because of your experiences as a NBC Candidate, you are being invited to participate in my doctoral dissertation project entitled "Experiences of Michigan Elementary National Board Certification Candidates", a study in which I hope to better understand the experiences of elementary teachers in Michigan as they completed the National Board Certification process. Through one-on-one interviews I hope to learn what makes teachers choose National Board Certification and what they think about the process.

Whether or not you have completed the process, and whether or not you are Nationally Board Certified, your experiences as a candidate are invaluable. By agreeing to participate in my study you are providing valuable information to many -- educators that one day may consider pursuing National Board Certification, administrators learning how to better support NBC candidates in their districts, and higher ed. educators preparing future teachers.

If you would like to assist me in my study, please email me at kdewitt@plainwellschools.org to learn more. In addition, if you know other Michigan elementary NBC candidates or NBCTs who may be interested in participating, please forward this email to them.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kristen Dewitt
WMU Doctoral Student
APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE CONSENT FORM

Western Michigan University
College of Education, Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership
Principal Investigator: Sue Poppink, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Kristen L. Dewitt

I have been identified as a potential participant to participate in a research project entitled "Experiences of Michigan Elementary National Board Certification Candidates". This research is intended to study the process of National Board Certification as experienced by individuals who are currently completing, or who have completed, the certification process. By signing this consent form I agree to complete a Participant Questionnaire that includes questions regarding my current teaching position, school district, educational background, and level of National Board Certification. After returning this signed consent form, I will be contacted via email regarding my participation in the study and am under no obligation to continue with the study.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks and potential benefits to me as the participant. One potential risk of participation in this study is that I may be uncomfortable responding to information about my experiences as a National Board candidate that could be sensitive in nature. I understand that Kristen will take great care in ensuring trust and confidentiality throughout the project.

One potential benefit from participating in this study is the opportunity for me to reflect on my experiences as a National Board candidate. Teachers, especially those interested in seeking National Board Certification, and other educators may also benefit from the knowledge that is gained from this research.

I understand that all of the information collected from me is confidential. This means that my name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and Kristen Dewitt will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in Kristen Dewitt's home office, after which, it will be destroyed.

I may refuse to answer a question or to participate, and I may quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have questions or concerns about this study, I may contact Sue Poppink at (296) 387-3569 or Kristen Dewitt at (269) 779-6731.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

_________________________________________  ________________
Signature                                           Date

Please print two copies, sign and date each copy, keep one for your records, and return one copy to:

Kristen Dewitt
1333 W. Maple St.
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
APPENDIX E: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your interest in participating in a study of the National Board Certification process. This study is being conducted as a partial fulfillment of a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership through Western Michigan University. Due to the limited number of participants and a desire for diversity, 10-12 participants will be selected based on the demographic information below.

Please email this completed questionnaire to me at kdewitt@plainwellschools.org. I will email you within one week of receipt of this questionnaire regarding your participation.

Name: _________________________________________________________________

Email address: __________________________________________________________

School district: __________________________________________________________

Current position: ________________________________________________________

Years of teaching: _____________________ County of residence: ________________

Highest degree earned (circle one): BA MA Ph.D. None of these

Level of National Board Certification. (Please check one)

_____ Candidate: Applied for NBC; Portfolio and/or assessment process in progress

_____ Candidate: Completed portfolio and/or assessment process; waiting for result

_____ Retake Candidate: Non-certified previous attempt; retake process in progress

_____ Retake Candidate: Non-certified previous attempt; retake completed, waiting for result

_____ Non-certified Candidate: Non-certified previous attempt; decided not to retake

_____ National Board Certified Teacher; Certification area: _____________________

_____ Other; Explain: ____________________________________________________

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APPENDIX F: E-MAIL NOTIFICATION FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for returning your questionnaire and for your continued interest in participating in this study of National Board Certification. You are being asked to participate in this study due to your experience with the National Board Certification process. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership through Western Michigan University.

☐ If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to attend a 60-90 minute, recorded interview during which you will be asked questions regarding your work history, age, and experience with National Board Certification.

☐ Approximately two weeks later, you will be asked follow-up questions and clarification of your responses in a second 60-90 minute, recorded interview, either in person or via a telephone conversation.

☐ In addition, you will receive email correspondence throughout the study for further clarification, to communicate additional study information and to share research findings.

This study is restricted to elementary teachers in Michigan; however, your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not appear on any notes, transcripts, or documentation included in this study. Pseudonyms will be used and your position and place of employment will be described generically.

The investigator in this study is Kristen Dewitt (269-779-6731). The supervising professor is Sue Poppink (269-387-3569). If you have questions or concerns at any time, please feel free to contact one or both of us.

☐ You will be contacted by phone within the week to discuss your possible voluntary participation in this study. Should you agree to participate, you will be sent a consent form, which will require your signature prior to the first interview.

Thank you, again, for your interest in participation in this study. The results of this study may be beneficial in assisting teachers considering National Board Certification and may be of interest to higher education institutions and school districts interested in learning more about the experiences of teachers as they seek National Board Certification.
Western Michigan University
College of Education, Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership
Principal Investigator: Sue Poppink, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Kristen L. Dewitt
Title of Study: Experiences of Michigan Elementary National Board Certification Candidates

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "Experiences of Michigan Elementary National Board Certification Candidates". This research is intended to study the process of National Board Certification as experienced by individuals who are currently completing, or who have completed, the certification process. If I choose to participate in this study, I will be asked to attend a 60-90 minute, recorded interview during which I will be asked questions regarding my teaching background and experiences with National Board Certification.

Approximately two weeks after the first interview, I will be asked follow-up questions and clarification of my responses in a second 60-90 minute, recorded interview, either in person or via a telephone conversation. In addition, I may receive email or telephone correspondence throughout the study for further clarification, to communicate additional study information and to share research findings.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. One potential risk of participation in this study is that I may be uncomfortable responding to information about my experiences as a National Board candidate that could be sensitive in nature. It is clear to me that Kristen will take great care in ensuring trust and confidentiality throughout the project.

One potential benefit from participating in this study is the opportunity for me to reflect on my experiences as a National Board candidate. Other teachers, especially those interested in seeking National Board Certification, may also benefit from knowledge that is gained from this research.

All of the information collected from me is confidential. This means that my name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and Kristen will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in Kristen's home office, after which, it will be destroyed.

I may refuse to answer a question or to participate, and I may quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have questions or concerns about this
study, I may contact Sue Poppink at (296) 387-3569 or Kristen Dewitt at (269) 779-6731. I may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, (269) 387-8293, or the Vice President for Research, (269) 387-8298, if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated has approved this document for use by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner of this document. I will not participate in this study if the stamped date is more than one year old.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

________________________________________________________________________  
Participant Signature  Date
Demographic Information -- All participants:

1. Name

2. Professional background (i.e. teaching experience)

3. How long have you been teaching? How long in your current position?

4. At what point are you in the National Board Certification process? (Choose one)
   a. NBC candidate
   b. Banking candidate -- chose to retake
   c. Non-certified candidate -- chose not to retake
   d. NBCT
   e. Other, please explain: ________________________________

All participants:

5. How do you see yourself as a teacher?

6. How/when did you first learn about National Board Certification?

7. What did you think about National Board Certification before you began the certification process?

8. What factors contributed to your decision to seek National Board Certification?

9. Did support play a part in your decision to become nationally certified? How so?

Prompt: Did other internal motivations play into your decision?

10. Did pressure play a part your decision to become nationally certified? How so?

Prompt: Did other external motivations play into your decision?

11. What do you think about the certification process?
**NBCTs only:**

12. Which factors do you think played a part in your success?

13. What did you think about NBC after successfully completing the National the process?

14. How has successfully completing this process influenced your teaching?

**NBC candidates only:**

12. What factors do you think will affect your chances of achieving certification?

13. What do you think about the National Board Certification process so far?

14. How has the certification process influenced your teaching?

Prompt: How will completing the process influence your teaching?

**Non-certified candidates only:**

12. What did you think when you learned that you did not achieve the first time?

13. What factors do you think affected your chances of achieving certification?

14. Why have you decided not to reapply for candidacy?

15. What factors influenced your decision to not reapply?

16. Was motivation a factor in your decision? How so?

Prompt: Did other internal motivations play into your decision?

17. Was pressure a factor in your decision? How so?

Prompt: Did other external motivations play into your decision?

18. How has completing the certification process influenced your teaching?
Banking candidates only:

12. What did you think when you learned that you did not achieve the first time?

13. Why did you decide to reapply?

Prompt: What factors influenced your decision to reapply?

14. Was motivation a factor in your decision? How so?

Prompt: Did other internal motivations play into your decision?

15. Was pressure a factor in your decision? How so?

Prompt: Did other external motivations play into your decision?

16. What do you think about the re-certification process?

17. How did going through the process again impact your teaching?

Last question for all participants:

Is there anything else you wish to share related to the topic of National Board Certification?
Date: December 19, 2006

To: Sue Poppink, Principal Investigator
Kristen Dewitt, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Mary Lagerwey, Ph.D., Vice Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 06-11-22

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Experiences of Michigan Elementary National Board Certification Candidates” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: December 19, 2007