

Introduction

What is an accomplished teacher? When asked to describe the teachers who have made a difference in their lives, people often talk about teachers who were demanding, but fair, who would not accept substandard work, and who encouraged their students to do and learn things that they had previously thought were beyond their grasp. They remember teachers who showed interest in them as individuals, not merely as members of a class. And they often mention teachers who were interesting, well informed adults who were able to make their subjects come alive in the classroom.

Consider the teachers you've had over the years. How many of them possessed those qualities? Most of us are lucky to name a handful at best. Recognizing the need to improve the quality of America's schools, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was formed in 1987, following publication of the Carnegie report *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. The purpose of the NBPTS was 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 in American schools. In 1989, the NBPTS published its Five Core Propositions which, when taken together, define accomplished teaching and provide a structure and direction for systematic professional development. Since that time, committees comprised largely of teachers have written standards that describe in detail how the Five Core Propositions apply to each of the certificate areas, and, by 2003, nearly 24,000 teachers earned the credential of National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT). As teachers complete the required assessments they must look deeply into their practice and justify every instructional decision within the context of the standards for accomplished teaching in their particular area of certification. As a result, teachers who have experienced this process are aware of what teachers should know and be able to do and are able to make appropriate choices within that framework. But more importantly, students now have a better chance of experiencing teachers who are reflective, competent, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and compassionate.

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The word *rigorous* has been commonly used by candidates seeking National Board Certification, not just in reference to the standards, but as a description of the assessment process itself. Over the period of one calendar year, candidates document their practice in portfolio entries, and they demonstrate their content knowledge on a written examination. The process on any given day may be regarded as difficult, exhilarating, discouraging, time-consuming, or enlightening, but it is almost always powerful and revealing. Some candidates complete the process in isolation, whereas others work in groups. Some enter the process before they're professionally or emotionally ready; others enter with little or no understanding of the rigors of the process. Most candidates, no matter how prepared they think they are going into the process, look back after it's all over and say, "If only I'd known. . . ." This book is designed to address many of these issues.

While working on my National Board assessments, I enjoyed support from my colleagues, family, and friends, but I wished I had (a) been more adequately prepared for the process before my clock started ticking; (b) been guided through the process more systematically; and (c) been prepared for the emotional rollercoaster that accompanied the process, the waiting period between completion and scoring, and the period following certification. This book is designed to help teachers understand the components of accomplished teaching as defined by the NBPTS, determine their readiness to enter into the National Board Certification process, and provide them with the skills and tools needed to move through that process with confidence. It can be used by teachers when deciding if National Board Certification is for them; by candidates working alone or in groups; and by teachers, administrators, staff developers, and/or professors who provide support to teachers as they complete the National Board Certification journey.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Navigating National Board Certification is much like preparing for any journey. In order to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip, it is first important to assess your skills and resources in relation to the conditions of the place you wish to visit (e.g., do you have the skills necessary to bike the trails or swim in the waters, do you have the necessary equipment, etc.). Once you've determined that you possess the necessary skills and resources, it's important to plan your journey (the places you hope to visit, the provisions you'll need to bring, clothing you'll need to pack, maps required, etc.). Finally, your journey begins. No matter how much planning you've done ahead of time, however, situations inevitably arise for which you were unprepared (flat tire, late plane, unexpected storm). But your skills, creativity, and traveling companions help you navigate safely to your final destination. Upon your return home, you reflect on the entire experience and begin planning for your next journey.

This book has been designed to help you navigate the entire National Board Certification journey. Part I, Choosing Your Destination, will help you determine if National Board Certification is an appropriate destination for you. You will be introduced to the Five Core Propositions, the standards for your certification area, the portfolio, and the tests that assess your content knowledge. Throughout this section you will complete a number of charts that, taken together, will reveal the

strengths and weaknesses of your practice and help you determine if you are ready to apply for National Board Certification.

Once you have determined that you have the skills necessary to pursue this goal, Part II, *Packing Your Bags*, will help you make all necessary arrangements for completing the requirements of the portfolio and the content knowledge assessment. In this section, you will plan the units of study you will later highlight in your portfolio, create a support system, schedule your time, and practice making videotapes.

Part III, *Making the Journey*, will assist you on the actual journey. In this section you will analyze student work, analyze your videotapes, refresh your writing skills, and make final preparations for the content area examinations.

When all components of the process are completed to your satisfaction, you'll submit your work to the National Board and begin the journey back home. In Part IV, *Returning Home*, you will reflect upon your journey, celebrate the fact that you completed it, and begin the process of choosing your next professional destination.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

It is helpful to think of this book as a tour guide. Typically a tour book includes incredible amounts of information designed to make a trip more enjoyable: descriptions of locations, maps, charts, rules/regulations that are specific to the sites being visited, suggested routes, and general advice. Travelers may choose to read the book in its entirety prior to making the trip; they may read selected portions of the book while planning the journey and fine-tune their plans by referring to the guide throughout their trip; or they may choose to wait until they board the plane to begin reading any of the information provided.

Like most tour books, this volume includes a great deal of information about each leg of the National Board Certification journey. Travelers (teachers) who have very little knowledge of the NBPTS Five Core Propositions and Standards and who have little experience analyzing their own practice will want to begin their journey with page one, completing all of the activities slowly and thoughtfully. Teachers who enter the process with a working knowledge of the Core Propositions and Standards and those who are already candidates, however, may wish to browse the material in Part I, Chapter 1 (*What Is Accomplished Teaching?*) and proceed directly to Chapter 2 (*Am I Ready for the Journey?*). Because of the sequential nature of the material presented in each of the successive chapters, I highly recommend that candidates choose not to skip directly to *Making the Journey*. Although completion of the portfolio and the assessments is emphasized in *Making the Journey*, candidates will find the process much easier to navigate if they complete as many of the preliminary activities as possible.

NAVIGATING THE NBPTS WEB SITE

A great many resources are available on the NBPTS Web site (<http://www.nbpts.org>). Throughout this book, you will be directed to places on this site. Like most good Web sites, this one is constantly being updated and improved. It is quite likely,

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therefore, that the information you seek on the site may not be found in quite the same place as it was when this book was written. Once you find the required information, you may wish to bookmark the exact location. Doing so will save you a great deal of time as you progress through the National Board Certification journey.

LET'S GET STARTED!

Now it's time to begin what is sure to be the most incredible and rewarding journey of your professional life. Use the activities in this book to guide you through each leg of the National Board Certification journey. While doing so you will not only improve your chances of becoming certified, but you will most assuredly raise the level of your practice to heights that heretofore were unimaginable!

NOTE

Although representative of typical National Board experience, all situations, scenarios, and portfolio excerpts included in this book are fictitious.