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Lesley E. Sheek
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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF NATIONAL BOARD FOR
PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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2007

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

LESLEY E. SHEEK

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional experience of Nationally Board certified teachers as they planned for and taught students after attaining National Board certification. A qualitative, phenomenological methodology (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998; Meloy, 1994; Moustakas, 1994) was used in this study. For this study 10 early childhood generalist and middle childhood generalist Alabama Nationally Board certified teachers were interviewed.

Using a three-interview process (Seidman, 1998), narrative information was gathered. Transcripts from each interview were analyzed and coded according to the emerging themes. Six major themes emerged from the interviews with the participants: teaching experiences, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards process and implications, curriculum requirements, student needs, standardized testing, and federal mandates.

This study presents the participants' views on the current state of education. The participants reflected on the effects of their National Board certification, how it influenced their curriculum decision making, their reactions to federal and local mandates, the influence of standardized testing, the impact on their leadership roles, and

their dedication to professional development. This study allowed the teacher's voice to be heard.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Vignette

An elementary teacher who recently received National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification walks into her classroom to prepare for the beginning of a new school year. Her Alabama state courses of study lay opened to her grade level's content standards pages. Beside them sits a memo from her principal about lesson plan requirements, the deadline for completion of informal reading assessment administration and a reminder of documenting reading intervention time with struggling readers. Along with these items rests a standardized test report and disaggregated data detailing her previous students' test scores. With this pile of information spread out in front of her, this National Board certified teacher (NBCT) begins planning for her new group of students. How will she use the items spread upon her desk? Where does her National Board certificate fit into this picture? How has that process affected her as a professional?

NBPTS is touted as the highest professional attainment possible for a teacher. It is arguably the pinnacle of successful teaching and has been achieved by 1,097 teachers in Alabama and 55,317 in the nation (NBPTS, 2006a). That leads to the issue of teacher quality.

Teacher quality is a debatable topic in today's educational arena. Laws, most notably, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), have been passed to ensure that every classroom holds a highly qualified teacher. With this law, however, other mandates have come as well. State, local, and federal mandates in some instances have resulted in highly qualified teachers being required to teach from scripted materials. The present state of education is highly

politicized, and both political parties base election campaigns on school improvement.

Researchers contend that the outcome of student learning is greatly affected by the quality of the teaching the student receives (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). If a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is the norm, are scripted programs needed, or should teachers use their professional judgement to decide what every student needs?

Schools not meeting the ever stricter standards, those not showing growth in every sub-population of their students, face a punitive system. The need for the best teachers is arguably at an all-time high with this push for tougher standards. NBPTS professes to prepare the most capable teachers through a rigorous, year-long professional development process (NBPTS, 2006b).

Presently, professional development is changing to meet the needs of dynamic teaching in a standards-driven society. Day-long workshops are beginning to lose ground to more in-depth professional development designed to meet teachers' needs. National Board certification is such a process. After gaining National Board certification, teachers evaluate student learning in their own classrooms and reflect on their own practice, seeking to most effectively affect their students' academic growth. Through this intensive reflection they are set apart from their peers as professional teachers capable of being teacher leaders within their schools and school districts.

Statement of the Problem

Questions abound regarding the impact of the National Board process on the teaching practices of those who have gained certification. Since teacher quality is presently at the forefront, some wonder if NBPTS equals better teaching and better student outcomes. While

some teachers have documented their journey through the process (Mahaley, 1999; Moseley & Rains, 2002), most of these accounts have been limited to an individual teacher's view of the steps in the process rather than the lasting effects in the classroom. Others have written books on ways to succeed at attaining National Board status (Barone, 2002; Mack-Kirschner, 2003; Steeves & Browne, 2000). Research documenting teachers' reports of their on-going professional practice after achieving National Board certified status is void in the literature.

In the current state of education, how do teachers with National Board certification react to federal and state mandates? Few articles have been published to document the reactions of teachers and administrators, those given the challenge of implementing the government mandates. Teaching researchers and analysts, on the other hand, have been outspoken about the political and economic causes of federal mandates, especially No Child Left Behind. What opinions do teachers esteemed as the most qualified hold? How do they maintain their professionalism in an era of scripted teaching? The voice of NBCTs needs to be heard in this politicized era of education.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional experience of NBCTs as they planned for and taught students after their certification. This study strived to identify how NBCTs contend with federal, local, and state mandates. Information was drawn from Alabama's Early Childhood and Middle Childhood Generalist NBCTs. The major research questions were:

1. How has National Board Certified status affected your teaching practices?
2. What role do local, state, and federal mandates play in affecting your teaching practices in light of your National Board Certified status?

Definition of Terms

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2002) refers to the rigorous year-long process chosen by teachers to attain National Board Certified status. NBPTS was founded in 1987 and is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. Its governing board of directors consists of 63 members, and the majority of these members are teachers. NBPTS holds a three-part mission: to set rigorous standards for accomplished teaching, to create a voluntary system to certify teacher who meet the standards, and to increase student learning through educational reform. (NBPTS, 2006c).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) is the comprehensive education reform law developed by President George W. Bush and passed by Congress in 2001. It was signed into law in January of 2002. It is also known as the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or Public Law number 107-110. “The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 embodies the four principles of President George W. Bush’s education reform plan: stronger accountability for results, expanded flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, ¶ 1).

Standardized testing is defined as the tests administered to fulfill the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Every student in Grades 3-8 must take a standardized test in math and reading, with science to be added in 2007. This research, conducted in Alabama, will specifically refer to the Stanford 10 (SAT 10) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Initial Literacy (DIBELS) when discussing standardized testing in the state.

Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) is a K-12 statewide initiative managed by the Alabama Department of Education. “The goal of ARI is to significantly improve reading instruction and

ultimately achieve 100% literacy among public school students” (Alabama Department of Education, n.d., ¶ 1). ARI trains teachers to improve reading instruction. The Alabama Reading First Initiative is federally funded, with \$15,000,000 from the federal government to fund 90 schools. This money will pay for the 90 schools to have a reading coach, to purchase a scientifically based comprehensive reading program, to purchase scientifically based reading assessments, and to pay for teacher staff development. Originally designed to help rural and poor schools in Alabama, presently the goal of the initiative is to make every school in Alabama an ARI school (Alabama Department of Education, n.d.).

Mandates refer to the requirements passed down to schools and teachers from educational governing bodies. These mandates will be specified as local, state, or federal, and at times they will overlap.

Early Childhood Generalist refers to the NBPTS certification offered to teachers whose students are 3 to 8 years old. Generalist certificates were developed for teachers who work with students in a variety of curriculum areas. Participants in this study with Early Childhood Generalist Certification taught at the kindergarten through second grade levels.

Middle Childhood Generalist refers to the NBPTS certification offered to teachers whose students are 7 to 12 years old. This certification overlaps with the age range of the Early Childhood Generalist. Participants in this study with Middle Childhood Generalist Certification taught at the third through fifth grade level.

Significance of the Study

When news reports describe the state of education, they are often focused on one of two topics: test scores and the government’s mandates to improve the state of education. The missing

piece in these reports and in the government's mandated plan is the voice of the teacher, the practitioner in the field. Schools will not be improved because of an imposed mandate (Horn, 2003; Karp, 2002). School improvement will be determined by the instructional leaders who work with students. Discussing the issues of teaching in public education today with NBCTs was a natural choice. These teachers, who have determined to work in a year-long process of reflection and professional development, are the certified masters in the field.

This study was designed to review the effect of National Board certification on the teachers who elected to take part in that process. A review of related research shows that few studies have attempted to investigate the impact of certification on the teaching practices of NBCTs. This study identified themes regarding the role NBCTs feel they have in making curriculum decisions, and the impact of mandates and laws on the field of education. The primary focus of this study was Alabama's teachers and the mandates affecting Alabama schools.

The information derived from this study will also be useful to other teachers considering applying for National Board certification. By identifying the effects on teachers after they have gone through the process and have faced the current state of education, others can make a more informed decision about whether or not to pursue National Board certification. In addition, school boards and administrators can use the information provided in this study to identify ways to support the NBCTs so they can best enhance student learning.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The assumptions of the study were:

1. Teachers answered the on-line survey and interview questions in a manner that reflected their true beliefs.
2. The National Board Certified Teachers had fulfilled the requirements to gain that status honestly.
3. The sample used in this study was representative of the population as a whole.
4. All teachers have mandates, local, state, and federal that impact their work with students.

The limitations of the study were:

1. The validity of the on-line survey may be challenged because complete anonymity of respondents was not possible.
2. One participant reported working in an urban setting in the on-line survey, but in the interview referenced her work in a suburban school. This disparity reflected the location where she received her National Board certification, the urban school, and the location where she taught during the interview process, the suburban school.
3. The population transferability of this study is limited to other National Board certified Early Childhood and Middle Childhood Generalists in the state of Alabama.
4. Although efforts were made to identify the themes affecting NBCTs, it was not possible to include all possible themes that could significantly affect this construct.
5. The participants had a general positive attitude toward National Board certification. Only one participant expressed negative feelings about the year spent going through the certification process.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

In an era of unprecedented legislation affecting education, the literature about best teaching practices, school improvement, and ideas of how to achieve these effects abounds. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has increasingly drawn attention from researchers as the number of teachers Nationally Board Certified has increased. The following review of literature reflects recent discussions of the NBPTS along with issues related to it. The literature review is divided into the following sections: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Curriculum Mandates, Federal Mandates, and Standardized Testing. This literature reflects the themes that emerged in the interviews with the participants of this study.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

The NBPTS has been the focus of this paper. The participants of the study are all Alabama Nationally Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). This section contains literature related to the following topics: the impetus for NBPTS, support for NBPTS, teacher professionalism, effects of NBPTS on student achievement, and criticisms of NBPTS.

Impetus for NBPTS. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987. It presented itself as,

an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan, and nongovernmental organization whose mission is to advance the quality of teaching and learning by maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards, and advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in

American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers. (NBPTS, 2006b, ¶ 1)

The impetus for the creation of the NBPTS was a 1986 report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, called “A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century” (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986). In this report, a call was made for the creation of a professional organization to certify master teachers. The Carnegie report recommended the formation of the NBPTS to create a standardized set of teaching criteria and a format to assess if teachers achieve this performance level. The Carnegie Corporation had created medical standards in the early 1900s and this Forum report was aimed at revolutionizing teaching much in the way their Flexner Report (1910) created standards and gave prestige to the medical field. From this beginning, the Carnegie Forum launched the NBPTS with the Carnegie Corporation funding five million dollars for the project over a five-year time period (Boyd & Reese, 2006; Kelley, 1999). The NBPTS met wide support from “state governors, teacher unions and school board leaders, administrators, college and university officials, business executives, foundations and concerned citizens” (Ingvarson, 2002, p. 28). Kelly the founding president of NBPTS explained that the proponents of the standards movement did not understand professional life in the classroom. They did not understand how a teacher makes curricular decisions. This, he said, is why America needed NBPTS and its five core propositions for what teachers should know and be able to do. He also said teachers must be integral in reform, “directly involved in educational policy and educational reform” (as cited in Coleman, 2004, p. 1030). This model of teacher leadership and decision making is evident in NBPTS.

In January 1995, after several years of organizing and developing the first standards and assessment measures, NBPTS certified the first group of 86 teachers (NBPTS, 2006b). As of November 2006, the number of NBCTs in the United States numbered 55,312 and in Alabama

there were 1,097 NBPTS certified teachers (NBPTS, 2006a). To become National Board certified, each of these teachers had to complete a rigorous certification process which included creating a portfolio consisting of videotaped lessons, student work samples, teaching artifacts, the candidate's own analysis of their teaching practice, and an essay examination to validate the content area knowledge in their subject areas (Boyd & Reese, 2006). This portfolio represents mastery of the five core propositions of the NBPTS listed here: 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 students' learning; 4) teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and 5) teachers are members of learning communities (NBPTS, 2006c). Participating in the process requires a fee of \$2,300. Becoming NBPTS guarantees a monetary reward in each of the fifty states, with each state setting its own amount. In Alabama, NBCTs receive a yearly salary stipend of \$5,000 and a one time allotment of \$5,000 to spend on classroom materials (Alabama State Department of Education, n.d.).

Support for NBPTS. Proponents of NBPTS substantiate their support of the system by claiming it increases the public's perception of teachers as professionals. Goldhaber and Perry (2004) report, "National Board Certification represents one of the most significant reform efforts in the area of teacher quality in the last two decades" (p. 259). Through its rigorous standards they claim it has the power and needed support to directly increase the quality of teaching and thereby raise the standards of public education. This promotes a positive attitude toward public education by the general public (Buday & Kelly, 1996; Serafini, 2002). Through national standards, the status of teachers is raised, much as the medical boards raised the prestige of

doctors (Helms, 2001). This in turn increases support for a continuation of these professional development standards (Goldhaber & Perry, 2004).

Besides increasing the prestige of teaching, NBPTS advocates claim national certification gives professional teachers the incentive to remain in the classroom, which would ultimately affect student achievement. An increase in student achievement would also help to increase the prestige of public education (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Goldhaber & Perry, 2004). An additional benefit of a national certification process is teachers could move between states meeting the requirements to teach in a variety of locations (Shulman & Sykes, 1986). Shulman and Sykes (1986) described state licensing as the meeting the minimum teaching requirements. National Board certification would signify a significant achievement, they claim.

Finally, legislatures and government bodies have enacted laws concerning schools that often frustrate educators. The NBPTS would be a teacher governing body created and managed by educators to challenge these political realities (Kowalski, 1988). In addition, having teachers take the reins in creating the standards, makes them an integral part of the process and responsible for their own professional development (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002). Having educators vocalize their opinions about how children best learn would benefit the children they serve.

Some credit National Board with creating an acceptable form of merit pay (Boyd & Reese, 2006; Cavalluzzo, 2004). Cavalluzzo (2004) identified nine indicators of teacher quality in her research on the effects of the teacher on student outcomes. Of those nine indicators, she found NBPTS possess seven at a statistically significant level, founding her support for Nationally Board certified status as a justification for merit pay. She went on to encourage school districts to implement professional development similar to NBPTS to raise the quality of

teaching throughout the district and impact a greater number of teachers. Teachers' associations and the profession as a whole have recognized National Board as a valid form of performance assessment and instituted a differentiated pay scale for Nationally Board certified teachers. Where other measures to institute merit pay have failed, the incentives of NBPTS have been successful.

Teacher professionalism. Teachers who have successfully completed National Board certification proclaim its value in their profession. While limited research is available about the effects of the certification process, anecdotal reports reflect positive opinions on enhancing teaching practices (Galluzzo, 2005; Heller & Gordon, 2002; Kerr, 2005; Serafini, 2002). A NBPTS teacher, Lovingood (2004) for instance reported, "NBPTS is not looking for perfect teachers with perfect students in perfect classes. They are looking for teachers who know how to adapt to situations, who can provide for different learning styles, and who want to become better" (p. 20). Because teachers must have at least 3 years of experience before beginning the National Board certification process, renewed interest in teaching may replace possible feelings of burnout that can occur in the teaching profession (Buday & Kelly, 1996; Feldman, 2004; Shapiro, 1993). Johnson (2001) called this process a "staged career," one where teachers continue growing as professionals as they gain experience. He stated that a staged career could, "attract and retain excellent teachers, revitalize pedagogy, strengthen instructional programs, and create more responsive schools" (p. 394). In this way the most qualified and respected teachers would have an incentive to remain in the field.

Professionalism is the heart of the National Board process. The NBPTS proposes that teachers should know the content and methodology of their subjects (Seifert, 1999). Respect for students is another key component of professionalism according to NBPTS (Helms, 2001).

Professionals should consult with, support and edify one another. According to Lieberman and Miller (2005), “teaching is regarded as highly intellectual work, grounded in professional communities where teachers assume responsibility for the learning of their students and of one another. Teachers assume roles as researchers, mentors, scholars, and developers” (p. 152).

These master teachers, as reported Kerchner, Koppich, and Weeres (1997), mentor other teachers by sharing their knowledge of effective teaching.

One way the NBPTS proposes that teachers can do this is through becoming members of learning communities, such as by joining professional organizations like the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics or National Science Teachers Association (Seifert, 1999; Wong & Wong, 1998). Berliner (1992) stated that professional teachers reflect on their practice and discuss student learning with other teachers. This, he reported, is a characteristic of good professional development and is certainly supported by the NBPTS. Many teachers collaborate while working on the analysis of their portfolio entries. Districts too help in this process by creating mentoring groups to facilitate this collaboration (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002). The portfolio system for certification requires that teachers present their knowledge and talent for instruction while meeting current research standards. The portfolios provide evidence of both classroom and student work samples (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002).

The NBPTS also supports teacher professionalism through the professional development provided to the assessors. Teachers are trained over a 4-day period to score just one of the six entries and four exercises. They spend weeks during the summer working as an assessor and report the experience as one of their most beneficial professional development activities (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002; Galluzzo, 2005). These assessors have the

opportunity to observe through this process in the countless classrooms of the teachers they assess, glean ideas and innovations from the teachers they see.

Reflective practice is one method of gaining professionalism according to much research (Loucks-Horsley, 1999; Osterman, 1990). Teacher education is moving toward professional development that focuses on making wise decisions to meet individual student's needs (Loucks-Horsley, 1999). Recent attempts have been made to prepare and present professional development opportunities for teachers that enhance learning. Loucks-Horsley (1999) reported, "It [professional development] has emphasized the importance of teachers understanding deeply the content they teach: of knowing the 'big ideas' of their disciplines, how their students understand those ideas, and what strategies, examples and materials aid their learning" (p. 49). She added that professional development is on-going and in-depth today. Opportunities are more tailored to the needs of the teachers in attendance (Fickel, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Loucks-Horsley, 1999).

How is teacher professionalism measured? In an era of standards, many say teachers are meeting high standards. NBPTS, along with the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) all have worked to professionalize teaching and teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Gallagher & Bailey, 2000). NBPTS has affected teacher education as many colleges of education have embraced the core propositions in their preparation of students (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002; Galluzzo, 2005). In addition to colleges of education, other groups such as NCATE are aligning their standards with NBPTS (Galluzzo, 2005). Galluzzo (2005) reported many school districts are using the NBPTS core propositions as the foundation for their professional development programs.

Professional organizations support NBPTS as well. The National Council for the Social Studies, for example, encourages its members to become Nationally Board certified. In fact, they terminated their own advanced certification program and instead support NBPTS certification as evidence of exemplary social studies teaching (Helms, 2001).

Effects of NBPTS on student achievement. The question for some, especially those who control the educational purse strings, concerns student outcomes for those taught by NBCTs. Researchers have professed that the quality of the teacher can greatly account for the varying degrees of student success (Galluzzo, 2005; Goldhaber & Perry, 2004; Ferguson, 1998). According to Australian Council for Educational Research (2002), “Investing in effective modes of on going professional learning is regarded increasingly as one of the most effective means of improving student learning outcomes” (p. 1). Armed with this idea, several researchers set out to determine the student outcomes of those taught by NBCTs. These researchers found contradictory effects. For instance, Hess (2004), Wilcox and Finn (1999), and Stone (2003) each conducted separate studies and found no evidence of increased student achievement in students of board certified teachers. Hess (2004) was very outspoken about the National Board processes’ ineffectiveness when he wrote of the National Board’s attempt to measure teacher quality by their ability to write convincingly about their reflective teaching practices rather than measuring them based on their students’ achievements.

Wilcox and Finn (1999) suggested that NBPTS cannot prove that its certification process produces higher student achievement. They expressed disappointment that the NBPTS has been so successful at garnering support from the arenas of politics, business, and education, yet its focus, they claim, is on inputs and the quality of the teacher rather than on outputs and the impact the teacher has on students. While these researchers have used student standardized test data to

assess the effects on student outcomes, other researchers see their reports as too narrowly focused. Galluzzo (2005) challenged the assumption that a standardized test truly measures the dynamic of teaching. Do NBPTS teachers create more success in their students than what can be quantified on a standardized test? His research centered on evaluating the portfolios of those teachers who gained NBPTS certification.

Stone (2003) evaluated 16 Nationally Board certified Tennessee teachers based on the state's accountability system that measures the teacher's ability to improve students' achievement. Based on his findings, all 16 scored in the average, not the exceptional, range. He said of his study, "It is the only one that suggests that NBPTS should stop certifying teachers until it can clearly demonstrate the value of its credential" (p. 62). His results were noticed by NBPTS, whose affiliate, the Education Commission of the States, commissioned a group to review Stone's study. They found his study to be valid and accurate but not generalizable since the sample size was limited. They recommended that other studies be conducted to determine the impact of National Board on student achievement but did not dismiss Stone's study.

Because of such research (Hess, 2004, Stone, 2003, Wilcox & Finn, 1999), the National Board commissioned its own independent studies with funds from private donors and from the U.S. Department of Education (Boyd & Reese, 2006). The Rand Corporation managed the studies. NBPTS conducted a study evaluating student work samples of certified and non-certified teachers. The study determined 74% of the NBCTs' students showed a high level of comprehension of the concepts represented. Non-certified teachers' students showed high comprehension in 29% of their work samples (NBPTS, 2000b). Another study conducted by Goldhaber and Anthony (2004) reported that North Carolina third through fifth grade students of

NBCTs scored 7 to 15 percentage points higher on tests than the teachers who failed to earn their National Board certification.

In another NBPTS sanctioned study, Silver, Mesa, Benken, and Mairs (2002) reanalyzed the portfolios of mathematics teachers and found that those certified through the National Board process made higher learning demands on their students. Cavalluzzo (2004), in a National Science Foundation funded study, examined 108,000 ninth and tenth graders' mathematics records to determine the impact their teachers had on student performance in this area. She found,

When compared with students whose teachers had never been involved with National Board Certification, we found that students with otherwise similar teachers made larger gains if their teacher had National Board Certification and smaller gains if their teacher failed or withdrew from the National Board Certification accreditation process. (p. 3)

Continuing research needs to be done to reflect the outcomes of National Board certification.

Criticisms of NBPTS. The NBPTS process has not gone without criticism. Some have questioned the general need for standards for teachers as well as the way the standards have been designed. These researchers question the possibility of effectively assessing teaching, a dynamic occurrence (Serafini, 2002). Another fault reported is that NBPTS advocated only one teaching orientation: constructivism (Ballou, 2003; Serafini, 2002). Serafini (2002) pointed out that when selecting committees to represent the teaching field and create the standards, those with certain teaching styles, constructivist, were preferred over others. The hierarchy of teachers has also been a concern for some. These researchers question if NBPTS will create a cast system within the teaching profession, causing a rift between those with certification and those without certification (Serafini, 2002). Some of the difference in those who complete the certification process and those who do not could also be attributed to the registration fee. Does the \$2,300 cost for going through the process prevent capable teachers from reaching certification (Serafini,

2002)? Finally, at present, all 50 states have instituted a set of incentives for teachers who achieve National Board certification (Goldhaber & Perry, 2004). Some have questioned their state's ability to continue to pay for the cost of certification and the accompanying costs of paying for such incentives, estimating states are spending over \$100 million each year on incentives for NBCTs (Progressive Policy Institute, 2004). This section will present counter arguments for these criticisms.

The need for teaching standards was recognized not only by the Carnegie Forum, which introduced NBPTS, but by other professional organizations. In addition to NBPTS standards, professional organizations were creating standards for their disciplines in the 1990s. The National Council for the Teaching of Mathematics created one of the first sets of standards that included what teachers should know and be able to teach to students (Ingvarson, 1999). The difference in the NBPTS and the standards of the other disciplines is that NBPTS addresses all aspects of teaching, not just one subject area.

In designing the standards, the NBPTS, worked toward procedural validity by appointing a committee of distinguished teachers in the field for which the standards were being written. The committees were comprised of other members such as experts in child development or other relevant subjects. When standards are being written, the committee remains together for three years, the general time period needed to create standards for a particular certification area. In addition to NBPTS and public review, the draft of the standards created by the committee is also reviewed by the professional organizations related to the field the standards are being written for (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002). In these ways, NBPTS created and continues to create the most relevant standards possible.

NBCTs reported no concerns over a focus on constructivist leanings in the NBPTS core beliefs. For example, Kerr (2005), a teacher who achieved NBPTS certification, wrote of NBPTS,

I believe in and support National Board Certification, because it is based on criteria that promote inquiry, and could move education toward a multifaceted outlook. Instead of rewarding only one “right answer,” a multifaceted outlook would offer recognition for many forms of excellent teaching. (p. 22)

While teachers such as Kerr reported the positives in this system, some others who are presently being required to follow a scripted program by their district standards may not be able to achieve NBPTS certification. When researcher Ballou (2003) asked a representative of the NBPTS about this conflict the response was,

The fact that the teacher had been told to use a poor teaching method would not be accepted as an excuse. It would be the responsibility of the teacher to “get under the script,” to exercise “creative insubordination” in order to teach effectively within the prescribed framework. (p. 203)

In such a situation, the teacher would have to choose between meeting National Board standards and following district requirements. For some teachers the challenge of National Boards is greater than the work involved, it also requires taking a stand against teaching mandates.

While some researchers have questioned if NBPTS creates a hierarchy within the teaching profession, much attention has been given to the teamwork involved in completing the NBPTS process. Many NBCTs have described the collegiality they felt as they went through the process. They explained how it drew teachers going through the same experience closer together (Lovingood, 2004). More research needs to be done to evaluate how the certification affects the relationship between teachers with and without certification.

While NBPTS has much support and the number of teachers successfully completing the process is exponentially increasing, questions still remain. More research can be conducted on the feasibility of the incentives the states provide, the relationships between NBCTs and their peers, the effects of NBPTS on student achievement, and the ability of NBPTS to raise the caliber of teaching professionalism in our nation. Continued growth and support for NBPTS will likely rely on the answers to these research questions.

Curriculum Mandates

In discussing the issues of current education, most of the participants in this study reflected on their lack of teacher autonomy in regards to curriculum. State and local courses of study had taken precedence in many instances over student centered learning goals. This section will discuss the literature related to curriculum mandates. The specific topics of interest in this area are curriculum requirements and teacher autonomy.

Curriculum requirements. State content standards and standardized testing have become the norm in public education since the introduction of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation. The voice of the public school teacher in curriculum decision making has been drowned by the voices of legislatures and state boards of education clamoring to show their students are the best and are making progress in this stressful era in education (Lee, 2002). What used to be at the discretion of local educators, parents, and teachers has been replaced with content standards from the state. Those with National Board certification are not given more authority when making curriculum decisions compared with colleagues without National Board certification. Advocates of student standards, such as Goertz (2000), claim standards increase homogeneity of learning objectives, providing teachers with a clear focus of the goals for student

achievement. Tucker (2002) called this a “Political Accountability Model” (§ 15). Student learning, he claimed, is not at the heart of the standards. Rather, the politicians’ interests are in incentives and penalties, both dependent on the outcomes of test scores.

While some suggest that the standards will make teachers and schools more accountable, Rotberg, Futrell, and Lieberman (1998) concluded,

Conventional wisdom holds that student achievement will improve if we develop curriculum standards, give students more tests, and make teachers accountable for test scores. Among the fallacies underlying that wisdom is the assumption that accountability will enable teachers to apply new curriculum standards and teaching methods even if they are inconsistent with the teachers’ previous training, with contemporary school practice, and with the accountability measures themselves. We have always tended to underestimate the gap between developing curriculum standards and implementing them in the classroom. (p. 462)

Teaching the standards without considering the learners becomes rote learning (Lee, 2002). The reality today is there is little concern for difference in learners when standards are being created and disseminated (Rigsby & DeMulder, 2003). There is also little concern for the professionals working with the students and the knowledge they bring to the classroom. When mandates are passed down, little notice or concern is taken of NBPTS status.

In addition, the lists of standards provided by states can be exhaustive. Marzano (2003) calculated there were, on average, 200 standards and 3,093 benchmarks in fourteen different content areas that teachers were to address in each school year. He further calculated the instructional time allotted in a school year and determined it was inadequate to cover each of the requirements. His findings help explain why the standards of some subjects, in particular those on standardized tests, take precedence over other topics such as social studies (Hinde, 2005; Karp, 2002). Rice, Pappamihel, and Lake (2004) reported science is not emphasized presently as a result of NCLB (2001). Teachers understandably will devote their instructional time to the standards for which they are held accountable.

Not only do teachers have inadequate time to meet the standards set by their states, but teaching to the standards is particularly problematic as teachers are encouraged to increase their pedagogical and subject matter competence through the National Board process (Rigsby & DeMulder, 2003). In the case of NBCTs, because they have gone through a professional development process that has revolutionized their way of teaching, accommodating the standards is especially difficult. After such professional development, is it possible to accept the required mandates? Or are the two ideas—reflective teachers and student mandates—mutually exclusive? As Rigsby and DeMulder (2003) pointed out, most state mandates bypass teachers’ professional judgments. In this case, NBCTs must ignore their developed professional tendencies such as self-regulation and use of student evidence in favor of strictly adhering to the curriculum requirements to meet the pressure of standards. How can NBCTs, arguably the most professional teachers, continue to teach in regions where they are required to use scripted teaching materials? Smith and Knight (1997) reported,

Reliance on packaged programs developed by experts outside the local school is a typical way of addressing problems in schools and school districts. This apparent infatuation with implementing the “newest solution of choice” mirrors the expectation of large numbers of teachers that they and their colleagues need to rely on the prescriptions of putative outside experts rather than on their own professional judgments. The teachers we work with reject this idea. (p. 45)

Brabham and Villaume (2003) reported that teachers have found that, “legislators and U.S. Department of Education officials were operating from an unfounded assumption that scientifically based reading research can be packaged into teacher-proofed commercial programs and that implementation of these commercial programs will result in reading success for all children” (p. 700). Using such materials to meet the externally imposed rules, said Hargreaves (2003), places value on results over process and limits learning to transfer rather than making

meaning and constructing knowledge. This status of education is hard for many teachers to accept.

Teacher autonomy. One result of the increase in mandated curriculum requirements and standardized testing is the demoralization of the teaching profession. On the other hand, many teachers profess a calling to bring the joy of learning to students and to make a difference in children's lives, and it is for these reasons that they entered the field (Hinde, 2005). This personal connection with what is taught, and with the students to be taught, is quickly being replaced, however, by scripted materials requiring no teacher expertise to deliver (Lee, 2002). Lieberman and Miller (2005) reported, "This stance also views teaching as technical and managed work that requires close supervision and a system of externally determined and administered rewards and sanctions" (p. 70). Heath (1994) reported that teacher professionalism is being replaced by pressure on teachers to ensure their students perform well on standardized tests. He said,

Schools will not get better unless their adults are open to new ideas, encouraged to risk imaginatively and flexibly, implement their own ideas, provided time to care for individual students, spurred to enthusiastically infect them with the desire to learn, and expected to make mistakes about which they laugh and from which they learn. (p. 265)

The standards of today do not allow the freedoms necessary for effective schooling. Professional judgment is replaced by test preparation. Rigsby and DeMulder (2003) reported, "Many teachers found the testing associated with the standards to represent real threats to their autonomy and to be based on assumptions that contradict their own conceptions of how children learn" (p. 6).

Wood (2000) argued that for teachers to truly be accountable, they must consider what the standards and mandates recommend and temper them with professional teaching such as that offered through NBPTS. In fact, NBPTS standards not only address student achievement standards but also professional development standards for teachers (Rigsby & DeMulder, 2003).

These objectives, student achievement and professional development for teachers, should always be highly connected (Kohn, 1999b; Meier, 2000). The National Board argues that successfully achieving standards for teaching should be the way to keep teachers accountable and that teachers who fulfill the NBPTS core propositions define their success by their ability to understand and meet the needs of their learners (Rigsby & DeMulder, 2003). In this view of teachers, they are presented as professionals who work in a highly intellectual profession and take responsibility for their students' and colleagues' learning (Lieberman & Miller, 2005).

Rigsby and DeMulder (2003) found that NBCTs were not opposed to high expectations and curriculum standards. The teachers did, however, object to the external imposition of these standards. They claim the mandates ignore their own professional, "knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of pedagogy, and specific knowledge of the strengths and needs of the learners" (p. 9).

With the increase in mandates and decrease in teacher professionalism has come a shortage in teachers. Lieberman and Miller (2005) reported that for the first time in U.S. history more teachers are leaving than entering the teaching field. Not only are teachers retiring but many new teachers are leaving the profession as well. In addition, teachers must meet the highly qualified criteria which may also affect the dwindling numbers of educators (Lieberman & Miller, 2005). How will the state of education recover from the pressures and outside impositions placed on it by those in political authority? The answer to that question will hopefully come from organizations such as NBPTS working to increase the teachers' role in conversations regarding learning expectations and teaching methods.

Federal Mandates

No Child Left Behind. The federal government has increased its role in public education since the inception of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1964. This law has recently been updated and is known as the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is better known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001). Since this initial entry in 1964, the government has continuously expanded its role (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). NCLB (2001) “established the U.S. Department of Education as a responsible party for increasing student achievement in public schools” (Bowen & Rude, 2006, p. 24). The NCLB (2001) law includes six primary principles: accountability, highly qualified teachers, scientifically based instruction, local flexibility, safe schools, and parent participation and choice (Turnbull, 2005).

Along with this law came the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 2004 to align with NCLB (2001) (Bowen & Rude, 2006). Under the NCLB (2001) accountability standards, all students, including students with disabilities, are held to high outcomes of student achievement. According to the government, “NCLB has removed the final barrier to full participation in the classroom, completing the effort begun 30 years ago with the passage of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, ¶ 19). Along with the full participation in the classroom has come an increase in accountability for students with moderate or severe disabilities. NCLB (2001) has set guidelines that all students must be tested on grade-level materials each year. They have allowed 2%-3% of students, however, with the most severe disabilities to take alternative assessments that align with the state’s academic standards (Flowers, Browder, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006). Federal mandates state Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is required for every student. Students with Individualized

Education Plans (IEP) are selected as a subgroup that must be reported. Other subgroups which schools must report are “major ethnic/racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, and limited English proficient students” (Bowen & Rude, 2006, p. 26).

Many have expressed their opinion in the wake of the NCLB (2001) legislation. Whether people are for or against the law, it has been called “the most significant piece of federal education legislation in history” (Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006, p. 32). For some, the federal government’s increased input into the daily classroom life offers promise of increased student achievement (Donlevy, 2002; Sclafani, 2002-2003). For many others, however, the federal government’s increased role creates fear. Davis (2003) wrote, “For many educational practitioners and researchers, specifically, these new directions should be not only problematic, they should be profoundly troubling. They point in directions that promise increased centralized and federal control of local school procedures and decisions” (p. 103). He went on to add,

Federally advocated ‘best practices’ will be determined now and in the future according to a medical model applied to educational research. This model seeks causal relationships and requires statistical analyses of data. Other research traditions—including case studies, qualitative analyses, historical inquiries, and surveys, for example—lie outside of this narrowed privilege. (p.103-104)

His predictions have come to fruition as the government has changed the realm of educational research. The government, through NCLB, has amended what is considered educational research. In the government’s view, only scientifically based research (SBR) is permissible.

The definition of SBR, according to Eisenhart and Towne (2003), came about with the Reading Excellence Act (REA) of 1999 (Public Law 105-277). This law was repealed when NCLB (2001) was enacted. The definition was written by a staff member of the House and Education and Workforce Committee, Robert W. Sweet, Jr. He explained that to define SBR he searched the internet for a definition and then sent his ideas to approximately 20 cognitive

university-based researchers for their input. It is notable that the researchers' backgrounds were mainly in cognitive psychology. After this process, the language was inserted into the REA law. The idea behind this push for SBR is that science will help make schools effective (St. Pierre, 2006). In fact, there are 111 references to SBR in the NCLB (2001) document (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002). St. Pierre (2006) cited that SBR in NCLB (2001) [Section 9101 (37)] reads:

The term “scientifically based research” – (A) means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and (B) includes research that – (i) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment; (ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn; (iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators; (iv) is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls; (v) ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and (vi) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review. (p. 45)

NCLB (2001) has “completely reshaped federal involvement in American education” (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003, p. 6). Through its definition of SBR, the government has given preeminence to causal relationships. This has made randomized experimental trials the ultimate research source to establish causal relationships (St. Pierre, 2006). The kinds of qualitative research or action research and reflection supported by teachers and by NBPTS are not valid in this limited view of acceptable research.

Of course, not all parties are in agreement with the government's narrow view of educational research. The American Educational Research Association (AERA), in protest of the government's reliance on randomized experimental trials, produced a rebuttal called the

“Resolution on the Essential Elements of Scientifically-Based Research” (St. Pierre, 2006, p. 47). Some of the key components of the rebuttal are that there are multiple sources of quality research and a variety of valid research designs and methods. Their rebuttal added that the question to be researched should guide the decision about the type of research conducted.

Besides the AERA, others have argued that NCLB’s (2001) reliance on SBR is flawed because it is not the only way to prove causal relationships, because it is not always ethical to randomize treatments, and because randomized experimental pilot programs may be too small to provide reliable conclusions (St. Pierre, 2006). After hearing these complaints, the government supported its original focus on SBR and carefully outlined the methods to be used in educational research (U.S. Government, 2005).

Others argue that the government is requiring of schools what it does not require of itself. Johnson (2006) wrote, “Real research is not used to support the majority of requirements of this bill; rather, it seems to be based on “I-think-isms,” factory models of education, business paradigms, and conservative ideology.” He added, “It provides simplistic solutions for complex problems that are validated only by popularity and perception” (p. 34).

One effect of the government’s involvement in education is the problem of “governance and regulation” (Lagemann, 2000, p.238) that have impeded the development of a professional community. Today, educational policymakers are politicians rather than teachers, practitioners in the field (Shaker, 2000). This is in stark contrast to the professional community foreseen by NBPTS, where teachers are at the forefront of professional decision making about education. While NCLB (2001) looks at education through a behaviorist viewpoint, where outcomes are easily measurable, NBPTS supports learning that is the “construction of knowledge, and places a high value on instruction that encourages student initiative and inquiry” (NBPTS, 2000, p. 1).

One of the ways the NCLB (2001) act has affected schools is through Reading First and Early Reading First grants. The money can be spent only on government-sanctioned programs and scientifically based materials (Laitsch, 2003). Many of these programs are drill and remedial models of instruction. These programs contradict much of what is known about reading instruction and the importance of reading volume, and ignores holistic approaches to reading instruction. They have been described as “theoretically, empirically, and conceptually deficient” (Coles, 2004, p. 346). While these government-sanctioned programs support phonics instruction, a necessary component of reading’s foundation, they do not encourage a love for reading, a development of comprehension strategies, or a desire to voluntarily read. All of these factors contribute to being a successful reader (Allington, 2001). As Popham (2001) pointed out, if these programs are successful in raising students’ test scores, then it proves that the tests are only measuring low-level outcomes. Gardner (1995) and Sternberg (1996) agreed with Popham, that standardized tests offer a very incomplete view of the learner because they can only measure a limited amount of a test taker’s intelligence. Tomlinson (2002) stated that proficiency is not a high enough expectation for our students. Yet the NCLB (2001) only hopes for proficiency. Others have argued that NCLB’s (2001) focus on proficiency rather than excellence may continue to put at risk the very students it promises to help, those from poor and minority backgrounds (Amrein & Berliner, 2002a; Elmore, 2003; Gallagher, 2004; Golden, 2004; Neill, 2003b; Tomlinson, 2002). This governmental push for accountability through standardized testing is in stark contrast to NBPTS’ adoption of performance assessment as its methodology of choice (Shaker, 2000). Educational researchers have diversified their methods of assessment and moved away from quantitative findings such as those espoused by NCLB (2001), in favor of

qualitative methods and performance assessments such as those supported by NBPTS (Shaker, 2001).

Laitsch (2003) noted that many states have had to revise their assessment systems in favor of ones in which schools can show AYP. In the rush to fulfill requirements of the NCLB Act (2001), state standards and what is tested are not necessarily aligned. How then can states, schools, teachers, and students be held accountable? Questions have been raised about the validity and reliability of these tests (Popham, 2001; Smith & Fey, 2000).

What of professional teaching? Can NCLB (2001) and National Board stand together? Weaver (2004) discussed the complexity of meeting NCLB (2001) mandates and the heart of teaching. She reported, “The NCLB mandates will challenge one of the most important aspects of the culture of teaching-taking children where they are, and extending their learning as far and wide as they can go” (p. 258). The calls for AYP, increased test scores, highly qualified teachers, and labeling of failing schools have little to do with student learning, quality instruction, or individual student progress (Mayer, Mullins, & Moore, 2000).

Johnson (2006) suggested, “Because No Child Left Behind is not based on educational research or research-based theory, it offers no new innovations nor does anything to improve the fundamental quality of education” (p. 34). Gentry (2006) wrote,

NCLB is a politically charged, top-down, hostile take over of America’s schools that has, in effect, ignored progress of individual children in favor of closing gaps and emphasizing perceived proficiency scores for schools and groups of children using questionable standards and measures of achievement. Little exists in the act to encourage schools, as they are held accountable to a throng of unfounded requirements, to develop individual differences, creative thinking, innovation, or individual potentials, some of the very things in our public education system that, in the past, have helped to make ours a great nation. (p. 24)

High-stakes testing in general may be the heart of much of the dilemma. Many teachers feel compelled to use the scripted government materials to prepare students for the standardized

tests by which their practice will be judged. Much has been written on the consequences of focusing education on testing. Perrone (1991), in an Association for Childhood Education International position statement, wrote of the harms of standardized testing. Among these detrimental practices were pressure on teachers to spend time preparing students to take tests rather than meeting students' educational needs and interests; placing a limit on the educational possibilities for a group of students because of the limiting of the curriculum; and a limited opportunity for cooperative learning and problem solving. None of these practices seem to encourage AYP.

Gentry (2006) also pointed out that the majority of the public and the teachers themselves would agree that teachers should be accountable for the learning that takes place in their classrooms. Since teachers and students are judged by standardized tests rather than by criterion-referenced tests based on the actual curriculum standards, these scores have little correlation with what teachers actually do in the classroom. While these scores are the basis for teacher accountability, other factors probably have more impact on the scores than they are credited for. These other factors that affect student performance include parents' levels of education and socioeconomic status (Marchant & Paulson, 2001; 2005; Popham, 2001). In a study evaluating the link between testing and student achievement in light of demographic information, Marchant, Paulson, and Shunk (2006) support the inclusion of family income and parent education. They found these factors accounted for the differences in student outcomes in testing and were a valid predictor of achievement. They went on to say,

When up to 70% of the variability among states' aggregated NAEP scores can be predicted by the average demographic characteristics of the states' test-takers—factors outside of the control of educational policies—educators and policy makers should be careful when attributing differences among states' performance to the policies alone. Likewise, when looking at changes in aggregated scores over time, it would be

inappropriate to attribute those changes to educational policies or practices without careful consideration of other factors known to be associated with those scores. (p.22)

In addition, rather than judging teachers on outcomes, many educational researchers say teachers should be accountable for using best methods in their classrooms, strategies that are validated as effective for enhancing learning (Brophy, 1986; Cunningham, 1999; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). These are the strategies supported by NBPTS. This push for testing leaves little room for the joy of learning in the classroom. Tested subjects have gained time and energy precedence, leaving little of either for electives, the arts, recess, and other activities (Amrein & Berliner, 2002a; Kohn, 2000; Popham, 2001). Rather than focusing on the growth of the student, these tests and NCLB in general focuses on group scores and their comparison (Gentry, 2006).

Much of the growth of testing has been due to the many social reform pushes through the past century. In the 1950s, the United States dealt with its inferiority complex over Russia's launch of Sputnik. This fear of falling behind in world scientific realms led to more testing. The optical scanner was a revolution also of the 1950s, which accelerated the use of standardized tests. Companies such as ETS and Scantron were formed based on this new technology (Clarke, Madaus, Horn, & Ramos, 2000). Again this growth in technology led to increased efficiency in administering tests. New state and federal legislation mandated testing. In 1960 only one state mandated testing. By 1985, this number had grown dramatically to 35 (Clark et al., 2000). Today with NCLB (2001), all 50 states require yearly testing (Marchant, Paulson, & Shunk, 2006).

Besides increased technological developments, new designs were created for comparing scores. Districts and states were interested in comparing the level of their students' achievement with that of others. The Australian Council for Educational Research (2000) calls this high-stakes, when accountability leads to serious consequences. As the competition between states

and educational systems grew, so too did the use of mandated curriculum and content standards. Along with these standards came a need for assessments to test for them. Therefore, testing companies were paid huge amounts to develop such tests. Many of these testing companies are also those who produce textbooks and classroom materials. What materials are better to use in classrooms of today than those created by test makers, say some educators. The cycle of need and expense was thus created, leading to the multi-million dollar testing industry of today (Clarke et al., 2000).

Of particular concern is that while students range in their talents, intelligences, backgrounds—the list goes on and on—NCLB (2001) expects all children to perform at or above grade level on standardized tests. Schools that make their progress goals can be rewarded for their students' achievement, while those who do not become labeled as schools in school improvement. In the surveys commissioned by the NBPTS, teachers are “overwhelmingly opposed to using test results to award teachers/administrators financial bonuses” (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003, ¶ 27). In reaction to student test scores, Johnson (2006) wrote,

...but the fundamental fact about averages is that they are, by definition, average. They are halfway between one end and the other, and some are always below average and some above average, all aligned in a bell-shaped curve used to describe the distribution of scores. While it is good to insist on high standards, if every student reads at grade-level average, pretty soon “average” is below average and above average is average as our bell-shaped curve continues to shift dangerously to the right. (¶ 9)

This circular argument is clearly shown as, with each improvement in test scores, the testing companies re-norm the tests to make it harder to score at the average and above average level. States are creating their own tests to better match their curriculum, but Petrilli and Finn (2006) report, “Evidence is mounting that they [states] are responding by lowering their standards, making tests easier, and shielding their schools from accountability” (p. 49). To support their claims, they cited data from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, which reports that while 20

states showed gains on their 8th-grade reading exams, none of these states showed students scoring at the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). One possible conclusion is that the states' tests are easier than the NAEP. Some have argued that the students supposedly at the heart of this law, those who have fallen behind in the "achievement gap," are the most underserved through NCLB (2001). National research on the effects of testing on impoverished students by Moon, Callahan, and Tomlinson (2003) has shown that students from poverty are "less likely to be exposed to challenging curricula and instructional methods. Results from this study would suggest that accountability through student testing is a vehicle to restrict educational opportunities from those who need opportunities most" (Summary and Conclusion section, ¶ 6). The question remains of whether all this testing is encouraging student learning, which is ultimately what really matters (Amrein & Berliner, 2002b; Lee & Wong, 2004; Linn, 2000; Steinberg, 2003). In addition, Amrein and Berliner (2002b) analyzed longitudinal NAEP scores and concluded that there was no evidence to support using standardized high-stakes testing to improve student achievement.

Highly qualified teachers. The federal government, through NCLB (2001) supported professionalism as it called for all teachers to be "highly qualified" by 2006 (Progressive Policy Institute, 2004). Rod Paige, former Secretary of Education, remarked, "We know that a high-quality teacher is the single most significant factor on how well students achieve" (Brewer, 2003, p. 4). Along with his assertion that student achievement depends on a quality teacher, he went on to describe the limited need for schools of teacher education. The NCLB (2001) law calls for teachers with strong verbal ability and content knowledge and ignores the need for education related coursework such as student teaching, citing these topics as burdens to entry into the field (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001), however,

disagreed with the secretary's findings. Their analysis of 57 research reports showed that successful completion of a teacher education program was directly linked to teacher effectiveness.

Licensing teachers was not as easy before NCLB (2001) was enacted, as the highly qualified discussion might make it sound. States set requirements for teacher candidates that their students generally had to maintain a minimum grade point average, and the teachers had to pass a basic skills test (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). NCLB (2001) followed in requiring teachers to have a degree in their field of teaching and/or pass a competency test in the field. While the NCLB's (2001) report about the state of teacher education looked bleak, the truth was that 95 percent of high school teachers in 1998 had a degree in the subject area they taught (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Ten states required elementary teachers to have a major in a subject area concentration as well (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). While the NCLB (2001) act focused on a need for increased teacher expertise, much of the conversation is rhetoric since the majority of the nation's teachers already fit this definition.

In the wake of NCLB (2001) other groups have tried to define highly qualified teaching. NBPTS, for instance, is recognized by the NCLB (2001) act as one of the ways to highly qualified designation (Goldhaber & Perry, 2004). Since NCLB (2001) looks only at the academic background of the teacher, however, it is very different from the holistic NBPTS (Mullen & Farinas, 2003). Just as NCLB (2001) was coming into law, the National Research Council (2001) pronounced NBPTS as the model for highly qualified teaching. Besides the National Research Council, other groups, such as the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), set their own standards of what constitutes a highly qualified teacher. In fact, NCATE deemed the

NBPTS's advanced certification as "the authoritative measure for judging whether a teacher was highly accomplished" (Mullen & Farinas, 2003, ¶ 19). The term *highly qualified*, according to Bond, Smith, Baker and Hattie (2000), serves as an umbrella term for accomplished, effective, expert, and good.

This is perhaps the most ominous time in U.S. history to be a student in school. With the pressures on teachers to have their students performing, it is among the most stressful times for educators. In fact, 50% of new teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years of teaching. This is causing a teacher retention crisis (Hunt & Carroll, 2003; Johnson, 2001). Today's tests focus on rewarding schools that meet high achievement goals and punishing those that fail. Schools are competing for approval, and parents are gaining the right to choose the schools their children will attend. In essence, schools are following a business model. Where does National Board certification fit into this picture? What effect do Nationally Board Certified teachers have on curriculum mandates?

Standardized testing

A large part of the current NCLB (2001) federal legislation involves student achievement testing. One of the provisions of the law states is that by the 2005-2006 school year, all students in grades 3 through 8 must take a yearly test in reading and math, and students must take one test in reading and math in grades 10 through 12. By the 2007-2008 school year, states must administer a science assessment once in grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. In addition to these testing requirements, at least 95% of the school's population must participate in the tests. This includes students with special needs and students who are English language learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The testing required by this federal mandate lacks the support of the NBPTS. While governors and state legislatures in every state have embraced standardized testing as the means to judge student learning and to rank the schools in their states, NBPTS contends that standardized test performance reflects a narrowed view of learning (Cunningham & Stone, 2005). NBPTS asserts that accountability and school reform based on increasing students' test scores is detrimental. This thinking, they explain, limits teaching for critical thinking. Rather this teaching focuses on result-oriented teaching methods. NBCTs instead teach with a process-oriented style (Smerdon, Burkam & Lee, 1999).

Critics of NBPTS say that the certification process itself places negligible importance on student achievement measured by standardized achievement tests (Cunningham & Stone, 2005). One of the five core propositions of the NBPTS states teachers need to be versed in the "goals, objectives, and priorities" of the standards required for their students. This core proposition goes on to explain that teachers should discuss student learning objectives with their colleagues and make teaching decisions based on their professional judgment and knowledge of their students' needs (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002). In this way, NBPTS focuses on the teachers' professional decision making, paying little attention to the national rhetoric involving testing.

In researching the effects of NBCTs on their students' learning outcomes, Bond, Smith, Baker, and Hattie (2000) wrote they made a

...deliberate design decision in the present investigation to use measures of student achievement other than commercially or state-developed multiple-choice tests of generic academic subjects such as reading and mathematics. It is not too much of an exaggeration to state that such measures have been cited as the cause of all the nation's considerable problems in educating our youth. To be sure, the overuse and misuse of multiple-choice tests is well documented. (p. 141)

Since the study was commissioned by the NBPTS to validate its teachers' impact on student achievement, the authors' opinions matched that of the NBPTS. Ballou (2003) added that, to NBCTs, what matters is teaching in a student-centered, constructivist style whether or not this teaching improves student scores on standardized tests. In this era of a single measure of student achievement meriting approval as a consequence of NCLB (2001), NBPTS philosophy stands in sharp contrast. This contrast is not without merit. The following section will highlight some of the reasons NBPTS does not support standardized testing.

Opponents of standardized testing cite many reasons for their disapproval. Reasons include the flaws in the testing design and scoring, the difficulty of tests for the purpose of creating the bell curve for norm-referencing, and the limitations on learning because of a test-driven curriculum.

Neill (2003a) described the flawed view of the testing industry along with that of politicians that tests will raise student achievement. One problem with this view is that many states have far too many standards for students to learn any topic in-depth and well. Then tests must be designed based on what can most easily be measured within a short time period by a multiple-choice test (Neill, 2003a). These tests do not adequately evaluate the standards students are to learn. These researchers found that standardized tests are often poorly constructed and cannot measure the standards effectively. How can they then be used as the sole indicator of student achievement?

In some school districts and some entire states, passing a standardized test is required to be promoted to the next grade level. This affects even elementary aged students, students taking these kinds of assessments for the first time in their young academic careers (Greene & Winters, 2006). The American Education Research Association (AERA) set standards for testing. They

stated, “In educational settings, a decision or characterization that will have a major impact on a student should not be made on the basis of a single test score” (AERA, 2000, ¶ 6). One reason for this limitation on testing is the issue of the margin of error on a one-time measurement of student achievement. Another reason is that tests provide one or two ways of measuring student learning: multiple-choice and short-answer formats. Students are limited in their ability to show their learning through these methods.

Along with these issues, students may struggle with the standardized format of testing (Neill, 2003a). Students often suffer from increased anxiety associated with testing which is detrimental to achievement (Jones et al., 1999; McCabe, 2003). Little attention is given to the artificial classroom setting on testing day(s). Students must stay seated throughout the length of everyone completing the test. They may not work on any other assignments or even take out a book to read. Their teachers are limited in their interaction, able only to read the scripted test administrator’s guide. There are many ways to measure student achievement, and teachers do this constantly. The accountability requirements of federal mandates are artificial ways of measuring student learning.

Teachers too suffer from stress due to standardized testing. Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) reported teachers in their nationwide survey suffered increased pressure from their principal and superintendent related to test scores. They also found that increasing numbers of teachers in high-stakes testing situations were trying to transfer to grades where testing was not required. With pressure like this students suffer from lowered motivation to learn and schools have lowered morale among their professionals, according to the survey’s results. The impact of the testing portion of the NCLB (2001) federal mandate has created a difficult learning environment.

Another major problem with standardized tests is they question students on materials that has not been taught in order to create the bell curve, or norm-referencing (Neill, 2003a). The tests must be able to rank students, so they have to be too difficult. Test makers actually remove questions too many students answer correctly when they pilot new tests (Haney, 2002). This makes the fairness of the test questionable.

When testing is the sole measure of student achievement, learning is diminished. Neill (2003a) reported,

In high quality education, students conduct science experiments, solve real-world math problems, write research papers, read novels and stories and analyze them, make oral presentations, evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of fields, and apply their learning to new and ill-defined situations. It is rather self-evident that standardized tests do not measure these forms of knowledge and skill. (p. 4)

Higher order thinking is not encouraged with testing. Measuring this caliber of learning would require open ended, extended work projects (Shepard, 2000; Pellegrino & Chudowsky, 2003). Therefore standardized tests limit the time teachers can devote to quality education in favor of preparing students for the one measurement upon which their school year will be judged (Stecher, Barron, Chun, & Ross, 2000).

The content of the tests becomes the content of the curriculum. Researchers have discovered that teachers put increased emphasis on the subjects and topics included on tests (McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 1999). Along with this emphasis on tested areas comes a de-emphasis on non-tested areas (Smith, Edelsky, Draper, Rottenberg, & Cherland, 1991). Testing preparation is not the complex teaching required by working with true units of study. In fact standardized tests limit the professionalism and professional decision making of the teachers involved (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003). This type of teaching is in sharp contrast with that supported by NBPTS.

In fact, the NBPTS conducted surveys of teachers to find their opinions of testing programs in their states. Among their many findings, teachers reported,

...their state testing programs lead them to teach in ways that contradict their own notions of sound educational practice. These results suggest that regardless of the rewards and/or sanctions associated with test results, the implementation of state testing programs has changed teaching in ways that many teachers feel negatively impacts the quality of instruction students receive. At the very least, teachers are uncomfortable with the changes they feel they need to make to their instruction to conform to the demands of the state testing program. (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003, ¶24)

Clearly, this stripping of professionalism is in opposition to the NBPTS' perception of quality teaching. Since the quality of teaching has been affected because of testing programs, this also raises questions about the need for highly qualified teachers. If the government's sanctions reduce teachers to test preparers, little expertise is needed for such a chore.

One other concern with this emphasis on test preparation, according to Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003), is the validity of the tests. When schools make improvements, should those improvements be attributed to student learning gains or to an increase in test preparation? Many states provide item specifications and sample problems for teachers to give their students to prepare them for testing. What impact do these preparatory materials have on the validity of the test?

Some suggest that the government's goal is to replace real teaching and learning with a testing curriculum. This method, they say, is cheaper than funding what students actually need to succeed, like meeting the social and economic hardships faced by so many of America's children (Hill, 2003). Perhaps that is ultimately the government's goal, to remove the focus from the real issues our country's children face. NBPTS strives to raise the quality of teaching in a highly political era in education.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Purpose

In the current politicized educational arena where government mandates and teaching materials are guiding much of what is taught for the sake of accountability, educators' opinions and professional expertise is largely ignored. The purpose of this study was to describe the impact of National Board Certification on the teaching practices of the study's participants. These participants were selected for their commitment to professional growth as well as student achievement in their pursuit and accomplishment of attaining National Board certification. This study was qualitative in design, "formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2), by interviewing Nationally Board Certified teachers (NBCTs) and giving their experience a voice.

Research Design

This study used a phenomenological qualitative research design. In phenomenology, the researcher, "captures and describes how people experience some phenomenon – how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p.104). The phenomenon reported in this research is the impact of the National Board certification process on the teaching practices of the 10 NBCTs interviewed for this study. The findings were collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews, one of the three possible qualitative data collection methods described by Patton (2002). Participants for this study were selected from Alabama's 325 Early Childhood Generalist and Middle Childhood

Generalist NBCTs as of November, 2004. This particular group was chosen because I am an early childhood educator who teaches third grade. The Early Childhood and Middle Childhood Generalist Certificates overlap at third grade, making both groups of teachers of particular interest to me.

Participants

After receiving IRB approval to begin this study, I obtained a mailing list of the Alabama NBCTs from an official at the Alabama State Department of Education. I mailed each of the 325 potential participants an invitation letter to take part in a web based survey (see Appendix A for an invitation letter and Appendix B for the web survey). The survey's purpose was to help me select participants who held strong opinions about the National Board process and curriculum mandates. I searched for those who strongly favored or opposed either of these topics. From the large pool of potential participants, I planned to choose 10 with which to conduct in-depth interviews. The respondents who reacted strongly to the questions and had definitive opinions about the questions would be the 10 chosen to interview.

In the survey, respondents provided basic demographic information and answered the following three open-ended questions: (1) Describe how preparing for National Board Certification changed your teaching practices. (2) Describe how implementing the mandates of No Child Left Behind have affected your teaching practices. (3) Describe how curriculum mandates (local, state, or national) have changed your teaching practices.

The survey was active for a two week period, from April 15 through May 6. Because it was the end of the school year, I chose to use this time frame to encourage teachers to complete the survey and allow me time to contact the participants before summer break.

From the 325 teachers contacted, 121, or 37% responded by accessing the survey on-line and answering the questions. Of the 121 respondents, 80 or 67% provided their contact information to be interviewed. Because this was a qualitative study, a 37% response was acceptable, unlike the 50% needed for a quantitative study.

At the conclusion of the survey dates, I downloaded and printed the survey responses and sorted them into grade level groups, kindergarten through fifth. Teachers not presently working in a self-contained classroom, such as those who at the time of the survey were reading coaches, math coaches, enrichment teachers, etc. were sorted into an “other” category. After grouping each response by grade level, I went through each grade level, sorting out the surveys with unanswered questions, those who had not completed the open-ended section. During this sort, since 81 of the 121 surveys provided their contact information, I removed the teachers I personally know. Next I read the remaining responses looking for key ideas and opinionated responses. Key ideas such as “National Board changed my practices, I must teach mandated standards, and I don’t worry about state mandates,” ensured that a person was selected. Responses such as, “I am a gifted teacher and have not really been affected by No Child Left Behind,” were not selected for follow-up interviews. One of the participants selected wrote of curriculum mandates, “They have changed my practices from the point that I must teach mandated skills and objectives they say. I still choose the way that I teach those mandates.” Her response showed that she had a strong opinion on one of my core questions. In this manner, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants.

Of the 121 responses, only two participants described the National Board Certification process as having no effect or a negative effect. Neither of these two participants offered their contact information. One wrote, “For the most part, I did not change the way I had been

teaching,” in response to how did preparing for National Board Certification change your practices. The other respondent, a first grade teacher in an urban setting wrote, “I felt that I did not get as much accomplished during the course of the year. I let a lot of little things go. It was a very stressful time.” Since neither of these two teachers provided their contact information, I could not follow-up with them and explore these neutral and negative reactions to the National Board process.

After sorting the responses by grade level and degree of interest, I narrowed the set by looking for a mixture of rural, suburban, and urban teachers. I further narrowed the potential participants’ responses by selecting a variety of years of experience. Finally, I considered race and gender. From these criteria, my participant pool included teachers from various grade levels, of different school districts, with a variety of number of years of experience. This created a diverse participant pool which allowed for multiple perspectives.

Through purposeful sampling I arrived at a final set of 10 participants. In purposeful sampling, “People are selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton 2002, p. 40). Table 1 shows the demographic information for each of the 10 participants. While I have described how I selected the participants, another person did not sort to check my selection, which is a limitation of this study.

Table 1
Participant Data

Participant	Years of Teaching Experience	Grade Level	Years Nationally Board Certified	Gender	Ethnic Background	School Setting	Interview Method	Time Period of Interviews
1-Barbara	7	4	1	Female	White	Rural	Personal interviews	2 weeks
2-Alex	11	5	6	Male	White	Suburban	Personal interviews	1 month
3 –Pat	10	5	4	Male	White	Suburban	Personal interviews	1 week
4-Karen	13	1	2	Female	White	Suburban	E-mail interviews	2 months
5-Melinda	14	3	3	Female	White	Rural	Personal interviews	2 weeks
6-Tammy	19	Reading Coach	2	Female	White	Suburban	E-mail interviews	2 weeks
7-Nancy	26	1	3	Female	White	Rural	E-mail interviews	2 months
8-Grace	7	3	1	Female	White	Suburban	Personal interviews	3 days
9-Julie	14	3	6	Female	White	Suburban	E-mail interviews	2 months
10-Linda	9	K	4	Female	Black	Urban	E-mail interviews	1 month

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected in a series of three interviews with each participant following the process outlined in Seidman (1998). This three-interview series followed Seidman’s model of “in-depth, phenomenological interviewing” (1998, p. 11). He described how the first interview outlines the participant’s experience. The second interview asks participants for details about the experience. Finally, the third interview asks participants to reflect on the meaning of the experience.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants signed a consent form. During the three interviews, we discussed a prewritten list of guiding questions along with others that emerged during the conversations (see Appendix C for list of guiding questions). The time for completing the three interviews varied with each participant due to summer scheduling. The

format for recording the interviews also varied due to location throughout the state. Five of the participants participated in tape-recorded interviews. The remaining five participants e-mailed their answers to the guiding interview questions. With the e-mailed responses, I read the answers provided, asked follow-up questions, and sent the next set of questions, as we progressed through the three-interview process. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and each participant was sent a copy to review, edit, and finally keep for their records.

Data Analysis

In this study I interviewed 10 early childhood and elementary NBCTs to learn how their experience with National Board certification affected the way they teach, to learn about their planning methods after becoming certified, and to find if and how government and local mandates affected their teaching. After recording the interviews I conducted data analysis. “Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts...to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 157). After each series of three tape-recorded interviews was finished and transcribed, I began the analysis by checking the interview transcripts against the tape recordings. To verify the data and enhance trustworthiness, I conducted member checking by mailing a copy to each participant for review. Member checking is a process through which respondents verify data and its interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). None of the participants responded to my request for them to send corrections, clarifications, or more information.

Once all the data were collected, I reread the interviews and began making a list of emerging themes. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe a theme as “some concept or theory that

emerges from your data” (p. 189). To ensure credibility I asked a peer debriefer to code my data and compare her results with mine. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). I chose this particular interview set for comparison because this participant described being required to comply with the most stringent curriculum mandates of the 10 participants. Her experience provided an in-depth discussion of the main purpose of this study; to describe how National Board certified teachers react to curriculum mandates. Since this interview was rich with description of the paper’s main focus, I wanted to ensure that my coding system would align with a peer debriefer’s coding and provide inter-rater reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Choosing this one interview set for peer debriefing is a limitation of this study. Due to the volume of information collected from the 10 participants, using one interview set for peer debriefing was a manageable solution. Future studies may wish to include the peer debriefer in coding all the interview data.

After analyzing the data, my peer debriefer developed eight major themes for the interview set. I had developed nine major themes. Her themes included National Board certification, background experience, teacher education, NCLB (2001), curriculum requirements, remediation, mandates, and standardized tests. My original themes included National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), teaching experiences, teacher education, NCLB (2001), highly qualified teaching, curriculum requirements, student needs, state programs, and standardized testing. After comparing our lists we came to a consensus on six themes and agreed upon a common language. For instance what she termed remediation, I had termed student needs. She and I had both noticed the topic of highly qualified teaching in the interview, but she

had included it within the broader theme of NCLB (2001). We agreed upon its inclusion in the NCLB (2001) set and changed the section's title to federal mandates so it was open to all federal mandates. Through our discussion, we decided that my category termed state programs could align with curriculum requirements. Finally, we decided that teaching experiences and teacher education could be combined because both data sets provided background information about the participants. We agreed upon a common terminology for each theme. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that having a peer debriefer during this stage of data analysis helps to ensure credibility.

After determining the final list of themes, I assigned our agreed upon themes to all the interviews. To do this, I used colored stickers which matched a master key of all the themes. After coding all the sections I made copies of the interview transcripts, keeping a master copy of each one. Then I created a folder to hold each theme. I went through each interview and cut out units of data and filed each in the appropriate folder. When a section was coded in more than one way, I used the copies to file it in more than one folder. In some instances as I reread the data and found a section coded in more than one way, I was able through this rereading to narrow the data to a single theme. In this process, I was taking the data and putting it together in a way that could be explained for an audience. Patton writes, "Simplifying and making sense out of that complexity constitutes the challenge of content analysis" (2002, p. 463). This was my challenge during this stage of the process.

Once all the data were separated into folders, I went through each folder and read the data. For each unit of text, I wrote a word or phrase describing the data. The phrases became the subthemes within each major theme. Again, I listed these in outline form to ensure that when I wrote the findings, the paper would transition smoothly. By continual rereading and rethinking, I linked subthemes where possible to avoid overlap. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) wrote, "Analysis is

a process of data reduction” (p. 183). I worked toward organizing the data to make it a cohesive and concise set of information. I finalized the six themes and their subthemes. These are listed in Table 2. Following the table I will describe each of the themes and subthemes.

Table 2
Themes and subthemes.

Theme	Subthemes within each theme
Teaching Experiences	Participant background information
NBPTS Process and Implications	Impetus for seeking National Board certification
	The process of National Board Certification
	Effects of NBPTS on teaching
	Professionalism credited to NBPTS
	Professional development
	Responsibility resulting from NBPTS
Curriculum Requirements	Planning and reflection
	Curriculum control
	Teaching strategies
Student Needs	Effects of mandates
Standardized Testing	Beliefs
	Influence on curriculum decisions
Federal Mandates	Knowledge of NCLB (2001)
	Highly qualified teaching
	Testing and NCLB (2001)

Rigor of the Study

Giving the participants a copy of their typed interview transcripts provided reliability through member-checking that the data set was accurate and reliable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The 10 sets of three interviews with the participants were reread and coded into various categories. A peer debriefer, who is an early childhood education doctoral student, with a master’s degree in elementary education and ten years of classroom experience, also coded the data. After she originally arrived at 87.5% consistency with my coding system, we came to a

consensus on the final six themes. I maintained all coded interviews to provide an audit trail. In this manner, the findings presented in this paper may be confirmed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Transferability

This qualitative study did not seek to be transferable, rather it described the reactions of Nationally Board Certified teachers to their past and current experiences related to their certification. As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explain, qualitative researchers carefully document their work and leave it to the reader to generalize findings to fit their situation. By writing with thick description, this paper leaves any potential of transferability to its readers.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology for this study, including the research setting, participants, data collection, and study design. The research setting was the state of Alabama. The participants were Nationally Board Certified Early Childhood Generalist and Middle Childhood Generalist teachers. They were selected through an on-line survey using purposeful sampling. The data collection was done by a three-interview process. The themes of the study, how they emerged, and how they were analyzed were documented. Each of the themes is presented in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

What follows are the findings of a phenomenological study of early childhood and elementary National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) on their experiences in the classroom since becoming Nationally Board certified. The purpose of this study was to describe the impact of National Board certification on the teaching practices of the study's participants. In an era of unprecedented emphasis on standards, student achievement, and with an ever-increasing role of government mandates in education, this study sought to expose the curriculum decisions and teaching experience of professional teachers.

In this chapter, I will describe how I evaluated and organized the data I collected. For a full explanation of the data collection and methodology, see chapter 3. I will use the teachers' words to explain their views on teaching in relation to their National Board certified status.

Teaching Experiences

Much of the first interview with each of my participants focused on background information. Traditionally, this section would be included in chapter 3. Since both my peer debriefer and I, however, found this to be a theme, it has been included in the themes of the paper. In the following section, I will describe each of the 10 participants using the information each provided. The purpose of this section is to provide background information to help the reader identify with the participants.

Barbara has been Nationally Board certified for 1 year. She has her master's degree. Barbara has taught for 7 years, 1 of those years in a rural school, 1 year in a private school, and 5 in a suburban school. She has taught fifth- and sixth-grade departmentalized science and social studies at the private school, fourth and fifth grades in the suburban school, and presently teaches fourth grade in the rural school.

Barbara said, "I really and truly always wanted to be a teacher ever since I started school." Her most recent teaching situation was in the rural school setting. She credits her National Board certification with securing this position. "I definitely think having the National Board helped me get my job," she said. Barbara added,

I would run into, when I interviewed, they would see where I had taught [upper income, suburban district], and they would say, "Oh, we are a poor system. We don't have that kind of money that they have." And, "Do you think you could teach here because we're not like that," and stuff like that.

Being in the rural school was a big change for her, and our conversations for this paper reflect its influence. She provided many examples of the differences in the schools where she has taught. For instance, there were no paper towels in the rural school, and when she questioned this she was told, "We're in a poor system, and we can't afford those." In addition, parents were not involved the way they had been in her previous schools: "I never laid eyes on half of my parents. Never saw them." Her varied teaching experiences are shown in her responses reported in this chapter.

Alex has 11 years of teaching experience and he has been National Board certified for 6 years. Before becoming a teacher, he was a military counselor for 4 years. During his teaching career he has taught at two schools. At his first school, he taught science in a departmentalized sixth grade, and at his second school he taught fifth grade. Both schools are in suburban areas.

Some of the years he team taught, but presently he teaches in a self-contained situation. He described his philosophy toward teaching:

I tell parents, I'm not here only to teach your kids to the best of my ability, but to teach them to be the best people that they can be. And I feel like for me personally as a teacher, it is not only my job to teach them well but to care about them.... I feel like if you really weren't 'called' to the profession in a sense, then really you probably weren't going to be effective.

Coming to education after having a career in counseling affects his attitude toward teaching, Alex said. Presently he is working toward a degree in administration.

Pat has taught fourth and fifth grades for 10 years at the same intermediate suburban school. In college he began studying engineering when he realized education was a better choice for him. He completed his undergraduate and master's degrees and has just completed his administration degree. He has been a NBCT for 4 years. Pat's school offers an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. He explained the curriculum:

The whole basis of IB is inquiry based. But it takes it 10 steps further. You have a worldwide curriculum. I have to be able to write a curriculum that I could take to Sweden and they could teach it just as effectively. So I can't do Alabama geography, but I can do geography of the world.

He explained that the IB curriculum was developed to meet the needs of students who transfer worldwide, such as those whose parents are in the military. Pat helped to bring the IB curriculum to his school.

Karen has taught for 13 years and has been a NBCT for 2 years. She has taught kindergarten, first grade, and ages five through seven multiage in another southeastern state. She has taught first grade in Alabama. Her previous school was in an "extremely low socioeconomic area," she said. There were about 800 children in the school, all on free breakfast and lunch. She then transferred to an affluent area. In Alabama, she said, "I have taught in a school with a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, languages, and abilities." On becoming a teacher she

credits her family, since many members are teachers: “I just fell in love with opening up a new world to children and having them succeed,” she said. Karen described her teaching experiences:

I have taught kindergarten in an area where children had never held a crayon or seen a blank piece of paper to color or draw on. These children needed Pre-K materials. I basically had to start with what their mothers were supposed to have done from birth, singing, playing hand games, peek-a-boo, etc. to stimulate their minds. I used a lot of music, love, songs, books, etc. I was very hands on, in the floor with them, doing the activities with them as if I were a child. Lots of modeling was used. There were some days when I just sat in the rocker, held each child one at a time and rocked and ‘lap read’ to them. They would all just wait their turn. They craved a loving touch. I bought their first baby dolls and toy cars. I gave them underwear, socks, and food. I was Mommy and teacher. That’s about as ‘struggling’ as it gets in terms of what the education system views as strugglers. Most of these children did not even know their real names, much less how to spell it. They were called Ree Ree or Boo, or some other nickname. They were not really struggling in my mind. They had just never been exposed to anything other than TV, and not appropriate shows either. Most bloomed and soaked up everything like sponges. Several had learning delays due to crack, alcohol, or other drugs.... In my present school I have followed the same philosophy that I had with the ‘strugglers’ from my first school. I just meet the children where they are. I try to individualize as much as possible. I use lots of hands on, inquiry based activities. I use music, song, poetry, books; my personal library has about 1,500 books. I conference with the children and provide enrichment and reteaching materials as needed.

Karen’s background has influenced the teacher she is today.

Melinda has taught in a rural school for 14 years and has been a NBCT for 3 years.

Teaching was not her first career. She said,

I think when I was a little girl that I wanted to be a teacher and just did not have the opportunity for a long time. I think it just always was something I wanted to do in the back of my mind, and I did not do it right away.... I was 27 when I started full time to school, but I had done a variety of things, so I felt like once I started it was just right.

Melinda taught on a departmentalized fifth-grade team for the first 5 years of her teaching career.

For the past 9 years, Melinda has taught in a third-grade self-contained class, but of the time she taught in a departmentalized situation she said,

I did not like departmentalized. It felt like the children were shuffled in and out. I had them for such a short period of time that I was not able to meet their needs. So I did that for 5 years and when I had an opportunity to move, I moved.

She went on to describe her school as very poor. It is a Title I school with over 50% of its students on free and reduced lunch. The community she described as a rural, farming setting. Most of the students are stationary, with few transfers into or out of the school. At the time of this study, she was working to complete her education specialist degree.

Tammy has taught for 19 years and been a NBCT for 2 years. She taught second grade at a private Christian school for 3 years, kindergarten in a public school in her suburban hometown for 2 years, and in a first-grade, second-grade looping class in a suburban area for 14 years. She credits the private Christian school with providing a nurturing beginning to her career. Of the school she said, “It was a wonderful, supportive environment with many professionals there that helped shape my teaching. I still rely on the strong reading, phonics training I received while teaching there.” At her hometown school she said,

I taught lower middle-class children with half to one-third being minority children. The school was located in the downtown area of our small town, with a population of about 35,000 back then. We walked to many places, library, Coast Guard station, restaurants, newspaper, etc., for field trips several times each month to build background experiences for these children. I had 27 kindergarteners with a full-time assistant in my class. I loved my job and worked late into the evenings most days. I was single. After 2 years I applied for and received a few scholarships to complete my master’s [degree]. I quit and went to school for a year to take advantage of this opportunity.

At the time of the study, she worked as a reading coach in a low socioeconomic area. Her magnet school serves above average and gifted children from across the city, and the students represent a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. “High achieving children are invited to attend our school,” she said. She described all the professional development activities her school and her district participate in. These include the Joe Renzulli Enrichment model, Talents Unlimited, Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), and the Mobile Math Initiative. Her school is working to become an IB school. She said, “Professional development is very strong in my district, and

we're always learning new things. Our test scores are strong due to the abilities of our students and the committed, strong, highly trained teaching staff. Parent involvement is strong."

Nancy has been a NBCT for 3 years. She has taught for 26 years, all in the same community. She came to teaching as a volunteer tutor. Having a degree in English when she began tutoring, she returned to college to become a teacher after recognizing a need in this community for quality teachers. She described the area as extremely rural:

The largest town [in the county] has about 2,500 people and is 35 miles from where I live and teach. We have few services, stores, medical facilities, gas stations, etc., and the children in the schools are definitely limited by the environment of isolation and of poverty. There is one major industry in the county, a paper mill, but many of its employees come from the neighboring county. The economic structure of the county is desolate: 97% of the students at my school are considered to be living below the poverty level according to the free lunch statistics. All the other schools in the county have the same student population, high levels of poverty and rural environments.

She uses her expertise to work in an area where she feels needed.

Grace has taught third grade for 7 years. She has her master's degree and has been National Board certified for 1 year. She describes her school as a suburban, Title I school with a transient, predominantly African American population. Grace explained that in the 7 years she has taught her school demographics have changed. "Our teacher population is predominantly white female. Our teacher turnover rate is every year we lose at least half of the faculty." Of the students she said, "The kids are just unique. Some of them because they move so much don't open up as much. Some of them are very violent. They are angry. It is just a different group of kids." She expressed frustration over her current teaching situation.

Julie has taught for 14 years in first and third grades. Before teaching in a suburban Alabama school, she worked as a substitute teacher and as a teacher's aide. She said of her school, "We have students from a wide variety of socio-economic and experiential backgrounds.

Our races are mainly white and black, but we have had several Hispanic, Asian, and Indian students as well.” She has been a NBCT for 6 years.

Linda has taught for 9 years and been a NBCT for 4. At the time of this study, she was teaching in an upper middle-class neighborhood school. The K-5 students were zoned to attend the school, but the middle school students were admitted based on test scores. To be admitted, most students must have scores in the 90th percentile. Her previous experience, however, was in a school located in a housing project. She said most of the students attending that school were from single-parent homes and 98% of the students received free or reduced lunch. This school has been identified by the State Department of Education as low performing. She credited her work at this school with teaching her to work with struggling students. Of working with kindergarten and first-grade students there she said,

Most of my activities have always been done in small groups and by individualized instruction even before it became the ‘in thing’ because I had to determine a way to tailor my instruction to the individual needs of my students. And because most of my class was struggling, I have always used many different means to teach skills so I could make sure that all of my students would ‘get it.’

During the past 5 years, she had taught at the suburban school with students from an affluent background. Of this experience she said, “It has been fun and exciting opening the door to learning for young students.”

While talking with these teachers, I found that much of our conversation was influenced by their teaching situation and their experiences. Because it was so often mentioned, background serves as a theme that helps to identify the experience of each participant.

NBPTS Process and Implications

I began this research with the hope of discovering truly professional teachers: ones committed to students' learning and needs who do not feel pressured to modify their teaching practices to adhere to mandates. NCATE defines the professional teacher as one who,

knows the subject matter and a variety of ways to teach it to ensure student learning, is able to manage classrooms with students from widely divergent backgrounds, is able to explain why he or she uses a particular strategy based on research and best practices, reflects on practice and changes what does not work, and nurtures the growth and development of each student in his or her classes (NCATE, n.d., p. 2)

This is why I selected NBCTs. These teachers have all committed to the year-long rigorous process of National Board certification to earn the title of professional teacher. From this group, I hoped to learn if there is a point in a teacher's career where she achieves complete teaching confidence. Does National Board certification help a teacher truly become an autonomous professional, or only make a teacher more aware of the issues in education, so reflective that everything is questioned? I began by asking teachers to describe their National Board experience; what brought them into the experience, how did it affect the way they teach, and how did it change the way they view their professional roles. In this section I will explore the teachers' thoughts on this phenomenon of National Board certification through discussion of the following subthemes: impetus for seeking National Board certification, the process of National Board certification, effects of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) on teaching, professionalism credited to NBPTS, and responsibility resulting from NBPTS.

Impetus for Seeking National Board Certification

One of my interests in this study was to find if certain teachers have a natural desire to continue to refine their teaching practice. Are there certain teachers who strive for advanced

learning? Are these the teachers that seek National Board certification? I was curious about the teachers' motivation to pursue National Board certification. When asked about their reasons for deciding to apply for certification, the responses included (a) financial incentives, (b) Alabama's grant paying for the process, (c) Instructional leaders' encouragement, and (d) the challenge of NBPTS. I will describe the participants' comments on motivation in this section.

Financial incentives. One of the biggest influences on the decision of these NBCTs to become certified was the financial incentive. While some credited the salary increase with National Board certification as only part of the reason, others such as Tammy said, "The motivational factor for me was the financial incentive provided by the state." Linda stated, "I was initially drawn to the process because I had heard about the money, \$5,000 classroom bonus and \$5,000 salary bonus. I also wanted to know what it was all about because I had heard it was terribly hard, and I love a good challenge."

Barbara too said the pay increase was a motivator. A graduate course she was enrolled in had been developed to help teachers prepare for the National Board certification process. This class motivated her to pursue certification. Barbara recalled, "I took that class because I was interested in the process and there were several teachers at my school who had already gone through it. They were all early childhood." Being the first to work toward the Middle Childhood Generalist certification prompted her to use the work from the class to apply for the state grant. She had decided since she had done the grant's work through her coursework, she would go through the National Board process if she received the grant.

Alabama's National Board Certification grant. Others explained that the state's grant to go through the National Board certification process influenced their decision. After hearing at a faculty meeting about the state grant, Alex thought, "Well, I've wanted to do that. It is a little

scary. It seems like a really big commitment, but I'm going to go ahead and try and see because it's going to be paid for." Melinda had a similar experience. She said,

I had been hearing about it [NBPTS] for several years, and I was afraid of it because I had heard about all the work that was involved, but I was interested, and then I found out that the State of Alabama gives grants for teachers. So I decided to give it a shot.

She added, "The money was an incentive but also just the accomplishment of it. I felt like it was a way to affirm what I did." She went through National Board certification with two other teachers from her school. The group enrolled in a course offered by a state university to help prepare the work they submitted.

Instructional leaders' encouragement. District-level support varied among participants. Some districts provided video equipment and personnel who helped teachers going through the process. Grace had a district-level cohort who served as a mentor. After completing her certification, Grace has returned to the program to serve as a mentor herself.

When asked about her system's support of NBPTS, Melinda answered, They [her school board] were not really even aware of what it was at that point. There was no one in our system that was nationally certified. I did have a principal at that time, who also didn't know anything about it. And while he was happy for me to do it, he didn't really know what to do to help me.

Although Melinda had no encouragement to seek National Board certification from her instructional leaders, others were greatly affected by their influence. Karen said a mentoring professor during her undergraduate studies mentioned it was something she should one day try to achieve, that it would be a valuable certification. She recalled that those words of encouragement helped her make it a personal goal.

Pat cited his principal as a big factor in becoming certified. In fact, he stated, "My principal told me to." He also said the salary increase was a factor and that he wanted to be among the first at his school to do it and to be able to help others who later seek the certification.

Two other teachers went through the process with Pat, another common trait among the participants. Many had a co-teacher complete National Board certification with them. Some took part in mentoring programs either offered through the district as in Grace's case or through a local university as in Melinda's case.

The challenge of NBPTS. Julie sought the challenge of the process. She said,

I was at a period in my career when I was stagnating. I saw a flyer for National Board hidden behind something on a bulletin board somewhere. When I read the 'Five Core Propositions,' I couldn't believe how much they went along with my philosophy of teaching. I thought about it for a year and prayed about it. I asked my principal what he thought, and he said he wouldn't recommend me trying it because I had so much going on and spent so much time on school, so of course, I had to show him and went ahead and certified the first time.

Another participant, Alex, summarized the way he tells others about National Board:

I tell people, don't do it for the money. Don't do it for the certificate. But you do it knowing that it is going to be a big enough pain that hopefully you go into it bright eyed. Let it change your practice because that is really what it is designed for. And then all the other stuff is just extra on top if you get it.

For the participants in this study, financial incentives, the state grant, encouragement from instructional leaders and a drive for accomplishment encouraged their initial steps toward National Board certification.

The Process of National Board Certification

To better understand the decision-making processes of NBCTs, I asked questions related to the year they spent completing the National Board process. I hoped to learn how that year affected the way they thought about education and how they planned for that group of students as well as future students because of National Board certification. The two topics the teachers discussed were stress and reflection. These topics will be developed in this section.

Stress. “Intense” was the word that was repeated when these teachers were asked to describe their experience with the National Board certification process. Some compared it to getting a master’s or education specialist’s degree at warp speed: the short time it took to go through the National Board certification process, when compared to the time it takes to get a graduate degree.

Karen expressed a love/hate relationship with NBPTS: “Some days, I was excited that I was learning so much. Other days, I wanted to turn my brain off and shout, ‘No more. I do not want to learn or question another thing.’” Grace expressed stress in the process because she did not get her materials until December or January. Since she was completing National Board certification as part of her graduate course, she did not start as early as most teachers. Before getting the box, she had been told to collect some samples and do some writing, but she recalled “at a meeting in December, “We realized what a panic we were creating.” She credited a wonderful mentor for helping her make certain she had everything she needed, which helped her succeed in achieving National Board certification.

Tammy said of the process, “I felt I spent most every ‘free’ moment thinking about the requirements of each portfolio entry and how I could best represent them.” She explained how a cohort of teachers met and reviewed each others’ work, gave suggestions, and helped one another. She added, “I dreaded coming home on Friday afternoons for the weekend because I knew my weekend would be full of typing and analyzing videos.” Her thoughts on the National Board experience stood apart from those of the other participants. She reported,

During this year, I felt like a really terrible teacher. My focus was on my work. It is a selfish process. It’s all about me. Whatever portfolio unit I was working on got all my attention. Other subjects didn’t get what I was used to spending on them. I was glad to get back to teaching the following year.

Julie too felt stress during her National Board certification year. She described her year as a, “crazy one.” She said,

I worked many nights until 3:00 a.m., then got up to go to work the next morning.... I didn't do thousands of videos. I figured my teaching either met the standards, or it didn't. It was stressful, but I learned so much.

The process for these participants was one of intense pressure.

Pat, too, talked of the pressure of completing National Board certification:

People hate me. People hate me. People hate me. I'm a procrastinator, and I like to put things off, and during the year I just threw stuff in a box, and I taped myself teaching about three times, never looked at them [the videotapes]. Went home on the Friday of spring break and did not leave the house, and I finished the next Sunday of spring break, and I turned it in on Monday, and I was done.

Pat offered advice to other teachers. He said, “Don't do what I do.” He went on to say that he hears teachers say that the process is stressful. His advice is,

You know if you stress about it and you focus and worry and worry, then it is going to be stressful. But say, I have nothing to lose here. Let's just do the best I can for the time I want to allocate to it and see what happens.

While the process was lengthy and stressful, the participants were able to see the benefits as well.

Reflection. Other participants shared Pat's outlook and did not look at the National Board certification process as a time of terrible stress. Both Linda and Alex discussed how they sought National Board certification as a learning experience. Being a relatively beginning teacher of 4 years when she started the process, Linda shared that she hoped, “the process would help me reflect on things I had been doing so far and help me to define problem areas, or areas of weakness for me, in other words, help to make me a better teacher.” Nancy too, expressed how it was hard work but a time of great reflection. She said,

I spent a lot of time with my two colleagues [who were also going through National Board] reflecting on standards and on what the National Board process actually meant to teaching. I think the constant reflections became very important to me. I learned to use it as a tool to keep myself related to my students and reacting to their needs as we moved through the curriculum standards.

Barbara explained how she became a better teacher by going through the process. She said,

I feel like I have definitely grown from doing it.... Basically the way it is set up, you are going to really reflect on what you do and really go through and ask yourself why you do it and look at those kinds of things. And anytime you do that, I think you are going to gain knowledge.

Melinda summarized the sentiments of these NBCTs in her statement: “I had to think about everything I do.” Reflection was a key part of the NBCTs’ success.

Effects of NBPTS on Teaching

The purpose of this paper was to find how government mandates and standardized testing affect NBCTs’ classroom practice. To better understand their opinion on these issues, it is important to discover how these teachers felt National Board certification affected their teaching practices. For some, the process did not radically change their practices but rather reinforced their beliefs in the validity of the way they teach. No one reported completing the process without learning and growing. As Melinda explained, “That year of National Board certification changed everything for me.” This section includes the teachers’ explanations of how the National Board certification process placed an importance on reflection and their personal growth as professionals, products of the process that they continue to rely on when planning for and working with their current students.

Reflection. “Reflection” was the word most often used to describe the key to National Board certification. Nancy said, for instance, “I use reflection more than I did before to build strategies and to evaluate what I am doing.” Alex summarized this need to reflect when he stated, “I would say that National Boards encouraged me to think more; it took me further.... I was

thinking about growing and about being better, and I certainly hoped that I would be better having gone through National Board, and I did become better.”

Those who said they were terribly stressed during the process also said they took away a sense of reflection that permeates their current teaching. Tammy, whose experience was unique among those interviewed for this paper, said when she plans lessons, she thinks about the National Board questions: “What is my goal? Why am I teaching this? How can I best meet all my students’ needs?” While the process of National Board certification was fatiguing, what she learned during it carries over into her practice today.

Growth. The participants credit NBPTS with significant changes in their teaching and their students’ learning. Linda said,

Since becoming certified, my teaching has dramatically changed. I now look at and question all of the activities and strategies that I use in my classroom to see if they are really impacting my students’ learning. The process has truly helped me to constantly reflect on everything that I do in my classroom.

Karen recalled, “It was a hard year, a busy year, but I would not take a million dollars for the growth I achieved or the lessons I learned.” Now, she added,

I am acutely more aware of why I am doing something. I always question, “What are the children getting out of this?” I am more outspoken and feel that I am more of an advocate for the children. National Board has given me the license so to speak, to slow down and let the children really guide the learning.

Melinda too credited National Board certification with dramatically changing her teaching and making her stronger and more reflective. She said,

Actually it [my teaching] changed quite a bit. Before I wouldn’t say that I was a weak teacher, but I went by a lot of just what I thought were good ideas, and I would hear about something and I would think, “Oh, that is good. I’m going to try that.” Since then, there was so much reflection involved in National Board certification, and I had to think about everything I do. Everything. And figure out why I do that and have a rationale behind it. That has changed me, and I have to have a really good reason now. I have to have a rationale for what I do. There is a lot of research behind practices that I do now. I did find out a lot about best practices during that time, of what has been proven to work

and what hasn't. I would say I have cut out a lot of mediocre kinds of things and gone to the heart of the matter knowing why I did it, know that I had a reason for it and knowing what that reason is.

She gained confidence in her ability to articulate why she made curricular decisions through completing National Board certification. Grace, too, said that she no longer teaches topics because someone suggests that is what is done in third grade. She said, "After doing it [National Board certification] ... I'm more student focused." National Board certification has changed her perspective from one that was teacher driven to one that is student centered.

Julie also was greatly affected by the process. She said,

Becoming Nationally Board certified validated many of the beliefs I hold about teaching and what good teaching is. It was so neat to look at the standards and think, "I really need to work on that," but to also be able to look at them and say, "You know, I do a pretty good job with that one."

Others went into the National Board certification process feeling confident but looking for growth or validation. Linda described herself as a confident teacher with 4 years of teaching experience. She said, "I did think that the process would help me reflect on things I had been doing so far and help me to define problem areas or areas of weakness for me. In other words, help to make me a better teacher." Julie said, "There were things I felt that should be done a certain way, and before National Board I did not feel validation about some of those. I also felt like I did not have a voice." This process helped her gain confidence in herself.

One teacher among the participants did not feel the effects of the National Board process to the same extent as the other participants. Barbara spoke of her teaching, "Well, it really didn't change afterwards. After I went through National Board, I kept doing the same thing." She and her teammates had always met every week to plan together. Also, Barbara worked in a district where the curriculum leaders from central office met with teachers to help them plan and work on action research to encourage student learning. She talked about professional development she

and her teammates continuously pursued and discussed their use of professional text study groups. She said of her district, “I mean teachers that had been teaching 20-something years were still growing, still looking for better ways to do everything, still into professional development.” Reflecting for National Board certification was something she was accustomed to through her professional career: “Actually the whole process at times would make you question what you were doing. And then sometimes it would really validate what you were doing.” While not as greatly influenced by National Board as the other participants, she did explain that it at times validated her practices.

Pat’s perspective on National Board certification was unique. Having just completed his degree in administration, he described how he thought about National Board certification from an administrative mindset. He said,

You know the huge thing is trying to figure out what effective teaching is, especially from the role of principal. Hopefully, National Board proves to people that I know what effective teaching is.... I did look at it [National Board certification process] a lot more from a theory and a teaching standpoint than from the student standpoint.

Professionalism credited to NBPTS

One of the five core propositions of the NBPTS is that teachers are members of learning communities (NBPTS, 2002). This proposition is further explained: “Accomplished teachers contribute to the effectiveness of the school by working collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development” (NBPTS, 2002, p. 4). The participants in this study reflected on the role NBPTS had played in their professionalism. The majority of the teachers expressed an increase in leadership roles within their schools and at a district level. Three participants, however, stated they already had leadership roles before completing the process. One participant cited being a more informed teacher, knowledgeable

now about issues affecting her profession and a better colleague because of it. Two others did not discuss their increased professionalism, but rather described how their National Board status helped in their job search. This section describes the participants' thoughts on their professionalism after NBPTS, divided into the following topics: (a) leadership roles, (b) roles already established, (c) employer interest, and (d) plans for the future.

Leadership roles. When asked if leadership roles had emerged as a response to National Board status, the answers varied. "Yes," Melinda replied. "I do think that the principal we have, she has seen the dedication that we [she and the other two National Board certified teachers at her school] have, the commitment that we have, the results that we have, and she does listen to us. We are all on the school leadership team and I am actually the chairman this year. So we do have a voice and she does listen." Melinda also serves on her school district's Superintendent Supervisory Committee, which is a selected group of teachers.

Karen listed leadership roles in her school, including being grade-level leader for 2 years and serving on the staff development committee. She also said she has presented at workshops for a state university. She said, "Having my National Board status made me more desirable as a speaker." Linda said since gaining National Board status, she has held a seat on several district leadership committees and has become an ARI coach for her school system.

When asked if National Board certification has affected her professionalism, Linda confidently responded, "Absolutely! I'm sure I would not have been recommended or chosen to serve on some of the committees had it not been that I was Nationally Board certified." She went on to list her leadership roles. These included serving as the ARI system coach for her school district and serving on, "several district leadership committees," she said. Beyond her school and

district, she also said that opportunities at the state level had become available, a position she attributes to her National Board status.

Nancy said,

I think I am more of a colleague [after completing National Board certification]. I am better at discussing the really important aspects of the issues. Before the National Board certification process, I tended to stay in my classroom with my students and work hard. Going through the process made sharing a priority, and I learned to become more involved in my teaching community.

Whether it's at the school, district, or state level, NBPTS has affected the participants' leadership roles.

Roles already established. Julie said her leadership roles were held before she became Nationally Board certified. She is a technology mentor for her district and has served as chairman of the budget and planning committees at her school. She was a member of the accreditation steering committee and has been an officer for her district's education association.

Others such as Tammy said, "My name may be more well known to some in administration, but I don't see that it has changed my status with my peers." She is a trainer for Talents Unlimited, was selected to represent her school at an IB training session and was an observer/debriefer with the Mobile Math Initiative training in her school district. Even before National Board certification, she says, she presented at workshops and served as a mentor to new teachers.

Like Tammy and Julie, Pat was serving in many leadership roles before gaining National Board certification. He started the video lab that broadcasts his school's morning news show. He started a patrol system to free teachers from doing morning and afternoon bus duty, and he also serves on the school's leadership committee. These were leadership roles that were not created as a result of NBPTS.

Employer interest. Two participants attributed their current teaching positions to National Board certification. While Alex did not mention his professional roles attributed to National Board, he did note that having National Board certification might have influenced the decision to hire him at his current school. He said,

I think it helped. I think National Board was being recognized more, and I think it was definitely something that people looked at.... I think he [the principal] was really receptive to that [National Board status]. I don't know that he wouldn't have hired me if he didn't like me or if the interview had not gone well, but it certainly was something that I think was appealing.

Barbara too credited National Board certification with helping her secure a job when she moved to a new community. Both Alex and Barbara explained that their new principals bragged to the staff about having Nationally Board certified teachers on their staff, which raised a hurdle for them to cross to be accepted by their new teammates. For hiring purposes, National Board certification may be an asset.

Plans for the future. When asked about the future and what it holds, the majority of the participants said they plan to continue teaching. Both of the male participants were hoping to move into administration. Melinda, who was working on her education specialist's degree, described her future plans,

I do have other aspirations. Right now I feel the classroom is where I want to be. I do want to work more closely with our local university here and maybe teach an adult class. I feel like I do have a lot to share from classroom experience and feel like I probably will branch out. But I think I may keep that classroom for several more years.

While a few participants had goals outside of their present classroom situation, most intended to continue to teach in the near future.

Responsibility resulting from NBPTS

Along with National Board certification has come for some an increased sense of responsibility. Such areas of responsibility include (a) taking a stand in curriculum decisions, (b) mentoring other teachers going through the National Board certification process, and (c) increasing student achievement. I was keenly interested in whether National Board certification would prompt teachers to take a stand on issues and mandates they faced. This section includes three participants' descriptions of how NBPTS affected their feelings of professional responsibility.

Taking a stand in curriculum decisions. National Board certification helped several participants to speak out about their teaching beliefs. One participant described a push in her district to use a reading program endorsed by a state reading specialist called "Read Well." This participant, Karen, spoke out against the program, citing her school's reading test scores as not warranting the need for such a program. She said, "Because of my knowledge, our school and one other one who also had high reading scores were not made to use 'Read Well.'" She added,

If it is not in the best interest of the children, then I will fight it as I did "Read Well." Having National Board status is a responsibility. Now more than ever, I must be an advocate for the children. If I don't, who will?

Julie shared another example of the responsibility the participants reported feeling. She said,

I have more courage to stand up and fight for my children when necessary. For example, I had a student this year who had been retained, been through BBSST [acronym for her student services team] for 3 years in a row, and still struggled. I knew he had a learning disability, but the "powers that be" felt that he would not qualify and were not going to test him. The guidance counselor and I refused to take "No" for an answer. He was finally tested and qualified for LD (learning disability) services. I don't know that I would have been taken seriously in my stand before National Board.

For these teachers, National Board certification has increased their responsibility for the decisions that affect their students.

Mentoring other teachers going through the National Board process. Grace spoke of desiring to have a student teacher to pass on her knowledge of teaching. She also had served as a mentor to teachers going through National Board certification, sharing her expertise to help them with the process. Nancy said she is compelled to be more involved in her learning community.

Pat and Melinda both felt responsible to encourage others. Pat wanted others to pursue National Board certification. He said, “I keep begging them and I keep telling them, we even have a bank that will let you borrow the money, and if you pass it [National Board], then you just pay them back with your first bonus.” Melinda, who was completing her education specialist degree, explained that just before our interview she had received a phone call from a co-teacher interested in starting the program. When I asked her about mentoring others, she humbly responded, “I just encourage. I just encourage others because I feel like there is growth there and it makes me more aware of things.” Melinda described her feelings of responsibility for another reason as well. She felt an increase in performance responsibility: “I think the pressure is greater on getting them to perform up to grade level,” after having National Board certification.

Increasing student achievement. The other participants did not mention any increased responsibility as a result of National Board certification. While Barbara did not directly mention an increased responsibility, she did mention her new school’s desire for her to bring an outsider’s perspective to her teammates since most of them had gone to school in the town and graduated from a local college. She said,

A lot of them lived in that little community, that rural area where I taught and lived there all their lives.... Maybe they [the principal and school leadership] were hoping I was going to come in there and do some changing, but that is just a lot to ask of somebody. I’m in the minority and you don’t want to come in a rock the boat.... They don’t want to

change what they are doing. They want you to do what they are doing and go with the flow and move on.

Curriculum Requirements

As a school year proceeds, teachers constantly make decisions concerning best practices to meet student needs and satisfy teaching requirements. Teachers select professional development that will help meet these needs. They decide what will be taught, wading through the plethora of materials created every year to raise student achievement. In this section, I will examine the factors that influence the participants' curriculum decision making. Subthemes that emerged in the interviews include: professional development, planning and reflection, and curriculum control. Each of these topics is described in the following section.

Professional Development

The heart of NBPTS is professional teaching standards. Curriculum is the backbone of professional teaching. It is the information presented to students. This issue was a recurrent topic in all the interviews. In this section the teachers shared their thoughts on the following topics: (a) professional development opportunities, (b) professional literature, and (c) professional goals.

Professional development opportunities. Professional development is the goal of NBPTS. While interviewing these 10 NBCTs, I found that each one had a personal drive for professional development from the inception of their teaching careers. Karen said, "I attended tons of workshops to build my teaching skills." Alex explained that throughout his career professional development has been at the forefront. He described a month long writing project for teachers he participated in and courses in math education he has taken over the summers offered by his district. He said of his choices in professional development, "It was a huge commitment, and I

guess those are the types of things I do.” Tammy also described extensive professional development offered by her district stating, “Professional development is very strong.” While the teachers supported professional development, the other participants did not offer specific examples of on-going professional development.

Professional literature. The results were mixed when I asked the participants if professional literature affected their practice. Everyone cited *Best Practice* (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005), the text recommended by NBPTS. Others recalled literature from undergraduate years. I asked the teachers what literature guides their practice. Grace described the usefulness of *Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne. She said,

After reading that I understood a lot of reasons, even though they are not necessarily [living in] poverty, a lot of their parents were, or their grandparents were. And so understanding where they come from or where that history could be, I can figure out a way to word things better. To say, “I know this is what you do at home, but this is school and they are two different places. What you do at home, you do at home, but here, these are my rules and these are what you need to follow. We don’t follow street rules. We don’t follow home rules. We follow school rules.” So that helped a lot.

Tammy said,

I’m afraid I’m not a big professional literature reader. I have participated in book shares after school with other teachers. The last one was a Reggie Routman book on reading...I’m more motivated by practical ideas from teachers who are still in the classroom.

Barbara said, “I don’t know that I could say that there is one [book title] in particular. I mean there are so many, especially when I was in graduate school that I remember picking things up, especially in writing.” In relation to writing, she said, “I pulled a lot of things and changed a lot of what I did with Donald Graves’ book, *Let’s Look at Writing*.”

Nancy said,

I am trying to work through Vygotsky and his brain-based theories as they apply to my students. It is a challenge. There are many things to balance. The Renzullis are also important to me and I use much of their theory to build opportunities for my students.

Alex expounded on the professional literature that has impacted his career. He credits Ruth Parker's *Mathematical Power* because it discussed instruction in a fifth grade classroom, which helped him apply the principles. Stephanie Harvey presented at his school and *Strategies that Work*, "just really opened up the idea of using nonfiction in class as well as fiction." He discussed, *A Different Kind of Teacher* by John Taylor Gotto. Gotto was a former National Teacher of the Year, and his book, Alex explained, could be considered controversial. In the book Gotto advocates mentorships and apprenticeships and spoke against public education. During our conversation, Alex read a few excerpts from the text that he had highlighted as important. For instance he read the words of a thirteen year old, Jamal, "Mr. Gotto is always saying the idea of a stranger teaching me is just a scam. The only person who ever teaches you anything is yourself. Each of us has a one of a kind identity just as we all have one of a kind fingerprints and what education means is to develop that unique personality so that we all know who we are. Self-discovery is at the bottom, being somebody real." Alex went on to list, *In the Middle*, *Best Practice*, *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and, *A Touch of Wonder*. This last book, "talks about falling in love with life." It's a well worn copy that Alex has enjoyed often and he credits it with making him the teacher he is. He explains his love for this literature,

Books just inspire me just to think about life in an amazing and wonderful way. And I know that influences my instruction. I want my students to be committed, creative, courageous, compassionate, and that doesn't sound really educational but I really believe that is part of my vision for these kids.

Through these conversations it was evident that the teachers' reliance on and reaction to professional literature was as varied as the participants themselves.

Professional goals. Each individual had set personal goals for this school year. Two

participants, Pat and Alex, were working on their administrative degrees. One participant, Linda, was working on her doctoral degree. Another participant, Melinda, was finishing her educational specialist degree. Others had chosen one aspect of their classroom practice to focus energy on improving. All the teachers had a goal in mind.

Planning and Reflection

What guides the planning of Nationally Board certified teachers? Do they follow a plan set by their districts? Do they use the Alabama Course of Study for each subject? Do they meet with co-workers to discuss best practices? Do they consult professional literature? Do they use basals and follow curriculum maps mandated by their districts? There was no clear, simple answer to this question. This section will address the planning styles of the teachers who discussed this aspect of their work.

Alex described his thoughts on planning for instruction:

Well last year I couldn't have been any happier with the writing. Now that doesn't mean that I don't still think that I could grow. Like this year my students don't seem as enthusiastic as my students last year. So right now I am thinking, "Is it me? Am I doing something different or is this group of students different and if that is the case, what do I need to do to adjust?" So there is a lot of process there. Math I just intuitively know that that is something I'm going to want to come back to, but I feel like I'm really enjoying the strategies that I'm implementing, like number talks. I really enjoy doing that with my students. Like, I'm honing that.

Alex reflected on areas where he would like to be a stronger teacher and worked to improve in these areas.

Having National Board certification affected the way Grace planned for teaching. She said, "I used my standards more. I used my course of study more. I looked at how is this going to work with my children. Is this going to benefit them more than doing this? I weighed things that

way more than I ever did before. So yes, National Board was a definite point of view shift.” For her, National Board certification affected her daily planning.

Karen also said that she used the course of study, “but we cover much, much more than what is listed as minimum requirements.” Linda too said, “When planning curriculum, skills, activities, strategies, I just make sure that I am covering parts of the curriculum that are required by the state.” Nancy, however, mentioned her use of professional leaders such as Vygotsky and Renzulli to “build opportunities for my students.”

Grace explained how she has changed her teaching through the National Board process. A lot of the stuff I did before was just things that people had said you did in third grade. There was no real basis for it. No real thinking behind it. A lot of the things at school that we did were just all for the teachers. You know teacher focused. After doing it and looking at and understanding what a standard is, understanding why there are national standards and how they relate to the course of study and how all that connects, I’m more student focused. Even workshops that I go to and things that people ask me to do at school, if it is not going to help my children in any way, I won’t do it. I will tell them point blank, it’s not going to benefit my kids to have me out of the classroom four hours every other week. So I honestly tell them that it is not going to help my kids any. Most of my workshops that I go to are what can I do, how is this going to benefit my kids, not me. Not just get hours for something later on down the line.

National Board certification has caused her to reflect on her practices and how she utilizes classroom time.

Barbara and Melinda did not talk about their planning outside of the controls placed on their decision making. Their voices will be heard in the next section.

Curriculum Control

Local teaching standards directly affected the freedom to make curriculum decisions according to these Nationally Board certified teachers. These local standards are directly affected by state and national mandates and the district leadership’s interpretation of them. With the exception of one participant, Tammy, each teacher described a position on curriculum control.

Several participants faced stringent controls on their curriculum decision making. Others expressed great freedom and confidence in their own abilities. This section will be divided into two subsections, stringent control and professional freedom to clearly show these two points of view.

Stringent control. School leadership and mandates dictate curriculum decisions in some of the participants' classrooms. Linda said, "I don't feel that I have a role in making curriculum decisions. I feel that I only have a choice in how I teach the curriculum, not what I teach." Another participant, Barbara, had the unique experience of changing districts from one characterized by progressive teaching methods to a more rural district during her second year of National Board certification. In her previous school district she says, "I was pretty free to do however I wanted to. And I wasn't required to use a textbook or to do it this way." The district where she transferred required more uniformity. She described how the number of spelling words given each week was dictated along with the number of grades per subject; "Nine spelling, nine reading, nine in everything but social studies and sciences was six." At her school they ability grouped for reading. She said, "So pretty much I had to give the same tests they had created and go by the book and that kind of stuff, which is not the way I wanted to teach reading and I had never. We didn't have to use a basal [at her previous school]." She was told that if she wanted to use chapter books or literature circles she would not be able to count this work as a grade. She added, "I didn't have time to do that anyway because I ended up having to drill." Her district and local school made many of the curriculum decisions that affected her classroom.

Melinda described a similar experience. Her school district uses curriculum maps that dictate the units she teaches. She attributes much of this control to a district leader who led their Title I program and was linked to Washington, D.C. "He came back [from Washington] and told

us that No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) was going to change education as we know it. He started going into the details about the adequate yearly progress and the financial punishments that could come along with it and it has changed. Our district has changed and it is probably, we may be ahead of some of them because of what his position was, but we started immediately to make changes.” Not only was the curriculum affected by these maps, but Melinda explained that teacher choice has been stripped away. Students are ability grouped in Melinda’s school as well. She described the way she feels. “It has changed everything for us down to being told what to do when in our classrooms.” Melinda gave examples of the kindergarteners no longer taking naps and the elimination of recess, art and music. If she wants to teach a story other than the one in the curriculum map, she could but only in addition to the planned story. Of these mandates she said,

It makes me feel as if I don’t have any choices in meeting whatever those needs are for my students. I don’t get to make those decisions. I just have to go along....I don’t feel like I am treated as a person who knows what I am doing sometimes. I feel like we are looked down upon as not having the knowledge to make choices and to make good choices. We just have to be told step by step everything to do.

Melinda complained about trying to find time for all that is expected to be taught. “For us it is going to come from our science and social studies. We’ve already been told that.” In Melinda’s situation local decisions have been affected by NCLB (2001), usurping Melinda’s curriculum control.

State programs in addition to NCLB (2001) have affected curriculum decisions among National Board teachers. When asked about cooperative grouping for instructions, Grace said she used to use groups often. She recalled,

Last year we didn’t [use cooperative groups] because ARI was just constantly on us to do different things. But I am going back to doing it this year. I’ve decided that I know my kids better than ARI does, and that I know these kids and what is going to work for them. And I’m going to go back to showing you. “This is how you have to work together. You can’t do it by yourself. There are some things you need to rely on others for and this is how we are going to do this.” I’m gonna go back to that approach because it worked. I

could tell a difference in my kids, the way they treated each other and just how well behaved they were. They worked better that way.

While mandates have had their effect on her teaching, Grace is taking charge and returning to the way she believes her students learn best. ARI forced her to use strategies she felt were less effective for her students.

Professional freedom. Others felt empowered and in control of curriculum decisions.

Nancy explained,

I actually have a great deal of latitude in making curriculum decisions. Basically I have to teach children to read. I am rather free in choosing the manner and the materials I use. I have achieved strong results for my students so I am pretty much permitted to follow my own system of instruction.

Nancy's confidence and her results allow her to make curriculum decisions. She explained her teaching style:

I tend to be really personal with my students. I mean that I want to reach each of them individually. I want them to develop projects based on their own interests that use the skills I have taught. There is always a lot going on in the classroom and most of it is student directed. There is a structured instructional time and there are goals and objectives for the students which we establish together. I conference with them at least once a week and I try to involve as much independent project development as first graders can manage. That is certainly dependent upon each student's ability and interest. Small groups are also part of my management process. Students work together to meet the project goals. I expect products and I ask other teachers, the media specialist, parents and administrators to share ideas, strategies and resources with the students. The students become dynamically involved with their own educational goals.

After gaining Nationally Board certified status, Julie explained, "If I feel strongly about curriculum issues, I may be the 'red-headed stepchild' and do things differently than 'the norm.'"

Pat also shared a confidence in his teaching. He said,

I teach higher order thinking. I teach critical thinking. I teach problem solving, and the curriculum doesn't teach kids the way I teach at all. And the standards don't cover the way I teach at all. I don't think I've opened a course of study for years. I know what they need.

Alex too expressed a freedom in selecting curriculum for his students. He said

I feel like here [in his school] I am given a lot of flexibility in terms of if I feel I want to add to the curriculum. If I want to, I can emphasize certain topics over certain other topics. It is not uncommon to have a group of kids that are weak in multiplication for instance...if I determine that they are not ready yet or if they need some review or practice, I'll back up....And obviously science has been one area where I was kind of pegged as the one who needed to do that and the science workbooks that we use in fifth grade along with our kit, I wrote. So I guess it doesn't get any more involved than that and it was fun for me because I was able to write what I would have done with the kids and share that with other teachers. And of course I hope that they modified it and made it fit their needs and I hope that it was open-ended enough that they could be flexible. So with curriculum, yeah, I do feel like I have been involved in designing the framework that we use our at our system level and then within our classroom I feel like I'm given flexibility to do what I need to do.

These teachers are confident in meeting students' needs and exercise curricular freedom.

Student Needs

The participants spoke often of student needs, both for students considered as strugglers and those students who excel in school, that student needs is one of this paper's major themes. In this section I will address teaching strategies and the effects of mandate as these topics relate to student needs.

Teaching Strategies

A recurrent phrase kept appearing in the interview transcripts. That recurrent phrase was best summarized by Karen when she said, "I meet children where they are. I try to individualize as much as possible." Julie said, "I believe in setting high standards for all students, and then helping them meet those expectations." She described how students have a variety of needs and are individuals. "What works for one may not work at all for another." So she and the other participants explained that they must differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students.

When interviewed during the summer break, Melinda knew that she would have a student labeled EMR in her class in the upcoming school year. She also knew that at the end of second grade, he was able to read only seven words according to reading tests given by his previous teacher. She said, “So I am going to be working really, really hard with the little boy who is the non-reader to try to find what works for him and make him a reader this coming year.” She worked to meet her student’s need.

While teaching at a low socioeconomic school in an urban setting where 98% of the students receive free or reduced lunch, Linda recalled, “Over 60% of my class was determined to be struggling students. Therefore, most of my activities have always been done in small groups and by individualized instruction, even before it became the ‘in’ thing, because I had to determine a way to tailor my instruction to the individual needs of my students. I have always used many different means to teach skills so I could make sure that all of my students would ‘get it.’”

The teachers interviewed for this paper were confident about the ways they meet student needs. Nancy said, “I know that I have to teach students rather than standards.” She said, “I provide many avenues of projects and activities along with working with parents. I also work to bring a variety of people and ideas for the school community so that motivation and stimulation can happen.”

Nancy described how students in her rural community rarely venture outside of the county. She explained her role in the classroom. “But for most I am the link. I help them bridge what they know and what the world thinks they ought to know or have experienced.” Nancy expressed confidence in meeting student needs.

Tammy said, “I thoroughly enjoy the one-on-one time with struggling children. Seeing

them come to believe in themselves is very rewarding.” She described compacting learning for them. She explained,

As a first grade teacher, I’ve been able to use second grade materials and skills, and as a second grade teacher, I’m able to use third grade materials. I use trade books, not basals with all my students and although I have textbooks and workbooks, I do not rely on these. I do use the math workbook for reinforcement of skills.

She too, like many of the other participants, felt confident in her ability to raise achievement by meeting student needs.

Effects of mandates

Ensuring that students learn is the art of teaching. Teachers felt pressure to ensure all students’ success. They described their frustration over the emphasis of recent legislation that targets the learning needs of specifically lower achieving students. They also described how programs and mandates have caused them to work closely with their struggling students. For example, Melinda said,

My focus has been, and from the administration and not just my principal, from the high administration in my system, the focus has been to get those low children up to par and there is just so much of me. So I do feel like they [the higher achieving students] have been left neglected.

Grace said,

ARI is always pulling them into groups and working on small groups and I would do my best to pull them. If I couldn’t pull them, I’d go to them and say, “Let’s look at what your problem is. Why can you not figure this out? Let me help you. Let me show you a shortcut. Let’s come up with a way to remember these math facts or ways to remember sounds.” Just kind of meet them where they are and try to push them in the other direction.

Barbara shared her concerns about students at or above grade level. She said,

They’re not really worried as much about those kids that are above grade level and they’re more concerned with the ones that are struggling and I just think what is really going to end up happening it seems like more like your average kids and above average

ones that are being left behind. Because it is like so much emphasis is being put on your children with special needs and your ESL and it is putting too much focus on that and not on your other students in the classroom.

Whether it's related to high achievers or strugglers, these teachers have felt the effects of curriculum mandates.

Standardized Testing

Each April in Alabama schools go into "test mode" for two weeks. Every adult in the building is pulled into a classroom to proctor; the art teacher, librarian, gym teacher, every certified teacher or staff member in the school helps with testing. In some schools parents substitute as the secretary so she is free to proctor the test. This forces a rearrangement of schedules. The kindergarten through grade two kids are held hostage in their classrooms, fearing the noise they will cause by even sneaking out of their rooms to use the restroom. The whole school is unnaturally silent, waiting for the "all clear" call when the last class finishes the testing period.

Some schools take this to even greater extremes. Before the test, they offer candy with encouraging slogans to their testing students, such as Dum Dums stating, "Don't be a Dum Dum, score high on the SAT." Some schools even have parents serve as cheerleaders lining the carpool and bus drop off lines, cheering on their testing students. Many schools have a pep rally to kick off the testing weeks as if an enjoyable game were about to commence. Instead the rally being celebrated is two weeks of unnatural, insurmountable pressure and tension.

It was impossible to speak with teachers about their classroom practices during this research, without discussing standardized testing. In fact now it affects even kindergarten aged children since the introduction of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test.

This section will describe the teachers' thoughts on standardized testing. The topics include: teacher beliefs, testing stress, and testing's influence on curriculum decisions.

Beliefs

The NBCTs in this study all had a strong opinion about standardized testing. While some felt it was one measurement of student achievement, others felt it has no place in elementary education. Most viewed testing as an unnecessary stressor for both teachers and students. All participants spoke about the effect of testing on their teaching experience. This section will document the participants' beliefs about standardized testing in the following ways: (a) general thoughts on testing, (b) opinions on DIBELS, (c) stress caused by testing, and (d) influence of testing on curriculum decisions.

General thoughts on testing. Three teachers, Barbara, Linda, and Karen all expressed a desire to use tests to measure a child's personal growth. Each teacher felt, however, that the individual's growth could not be compared against a national average. The child should rather be compared to himself alone. This, each pointed out, is a testing flaw. Karen said,

I believe that students and teachers need to be accountable in some way. I am for testing that compares the growth of a student to his own work over time. We should let students show us what they know, not try to trick them into guessing which answer may or may not be correct.

Linda agreed. She said,

I don't think that standardized tests are bad in and of themselves. They are a means to help us gauge what our students know. I think they become a problem when we use them to penalize students, teachers, and parents because of how the students perform on them. I think they should be one of many forms and types of assessments to help us understand the whole child.

Linda went on to describe how her thinking has evolved after her attainment of National Board certification. She added,

I think that most teachers that have gone through the process hate testing even more because the process is linked so closely with doing what is best for your students at the particular time you have them. Testing does not allow for individual differences. It assesses all students the exact same way.

Barbara too pointed out flaws in the current standardized tests. She said,

My teaching philosophy says that we should measure a child on his own growth and accomplishments. Let the child show you what he knows. Most standardized tests reflect what the children do not know yet....I think there are some people that put way too much emphasis on it [testing]. I think it is one measurement of progress and one way to evaluate and there are many other ways to evaluate a child other than just standardized testing. And I think that one test doesn't tell you everything. And I think that everybody can have good days and bad days and there may be a child may have a horrible experience at home and have to take that test that day and of course not do well.

Barbara works in a Title I school which places an emphasis on testing and has a pep rally to encourage students' best performance. Her beliefs about testing, she explained, are influenced by this pressure for her students to perform.

Opinions on DIBELS. Presently, the state of Alabama has instituted a fluency test called DIBELS. Its administration is required in grades kindergarten through two and its results are reported in the newspaper as well as in the federally required school report cards. The test asks students in kindergarten through second grades to identify nonsense words. Students in third grade and above are tested on their reading speed. At present, the older grades' scores are not mandated or reported.

Pat spoke about the DIBELS testing and explained how over his 10 years of teaching his student expectations have changed.

I used to think it was so important to make sure they [students] got every single thing I wanted them to get. And now I think I'm a little more laid back and I realized it's developmental. Just like this whole DIBELS thing. I mean, we are going to be a school that scores 100% DIBELS? Well then you are taking away the whole development out of it. Don't you realize that kids develop differently and that we can't expect all of them to be on the same page at the same time? I feel like DIBELS makes us do that.

At best describes Karen, “DIBELS is just one of those things you have to ‘get through’.” At my school, we teach children, not the test.” In some schools, however, DIBELS has become a source of remediation for students who do not reach the benchmarks set. Grace told of her reading coach targeting DIBELS strugglers. The coach, she recalled,

Would pull from each classroom the lowest kids that we had and then once she worked us in for about nine weeks, she swapped them and went to the middle group that were right on the edge of hitting the benchmark goal that we needed for the DIBELS test. She swapped and she pulled those hoping to try to push them up higher.

Students are getting attention to help them meet testing goals.

Tammy said, “I don’t feel standardized testing is appropriate for young children.” Since her school serves kindergarten through grade two children, she is affected only by DIBELS, not by the SAT or the Alabama Reading and Math Tests. Her statement, “We feel very fortunate to not have to waste valuable instructional time on test preparation and testing,” sums up the feelings of many of the participants.

Stress caused by testing. Along with the tests, these teachers reported acute stress about ensuring students scored well. Nancy said, “The tests are more often impositions than indicators and that places pressure on teachers and students that should not be part of real teaching and learning experiences.” She added, “Testing is imposed and unfair and distracts teachers and students from the really important educational standards.” Nancy, who teaches in a rural, poverty stricken area described the ineffectiveness of testing in her school community. She said,

The issue has become accountability of teachers not an assessment of student learning. The dependence on the singular test is especially demeaning. What can possibly be learned from the SAT 10 that will help any teacher meet student needs? I have been on school wide teams for years and I have had to repeatedly look at test results to see what they say about our students. The answer is mostly not much. We can’t build from them very effectively in truly important ways. What generally happens in our school is that every student becomes a remediation student.

She believes in her knowledge though. “I have enough experience to reach the talents and interests of students and reach the expected benchmarks.”

Students too feel the stress of tests. Grace described how standardized testing feels artificial. “You’re giving a child a test in a situation that is not normal. You know normally I would say, ‘OK. Look, number 11 is messed up. Let me explain to you what I meant.’ And I help them with that question and prod them to think beyond that question.” She added that the school climate changes. “They feel that tension coming off the entire school, which just throws them off. Those were not fun days,” she said of the testing days.

Administrators feel the effects of testing as well, said Grace. She described the decline of her school’s test scores as the population has become more transient and socio-economically depressed. She said of her principal, “With this school and test scores being the way they are, he is under a lot of pressure.”

Even when student scores are high said Alex, his administration still places an emphasis on tests. He described a faculty meeting where goals and scores were discussed. He said,

They [administration] were sharing the fact that according to this legislation [Adequate Yearly Progress due to NCLB (2001)], according to these goals, we are monitored by the State because of one sub-group. I have a breakdown [of scores] that was given to us and the reason it was shared at the faculty meeting was to be able to talk with parents....And when you look at each goal you have plus or a minus. And we had straight pluses and then we were told that the school system did not. The system did not overall and we really needed to work to get these scores up because we play a real big part in that. But it was presented in such a negative light that I found myself looking at the data and of course they white out another school just to show how another school compares and they had our school and we had all these pluses. And I was looking at it and the message I heard was very negative. Like, “We’ve got to work hard. We’ve got to pull through. We’ve got to do this. We’ve got to whatever.” And then I raised my hand and finally I said, “I realize that all children in our district are our responsibility and I’m not saying that we’re not responsible for those kids but looking at our data, it looks like we did everything that our school could do.” And the response was, “Well, we did. But we need to not be comfortable with that. We need to realize that the higher our scores are, the more that will benefit other schools in our school system.”

He continued,

But I just thought it was interesting because I realized it was a perfect opportunity to actually celebrate our success as a school....I just thought it was odd that we had all pluses and yet we couldn't celebrate that....Even before it was shared, the very first words were, "We didn't want to share this first in the faculty meeting because this is so depressing." And then as it was shared, the message was very depressing but the data was really good for our school and I pointed it out....I just got the sense, "Why did you do that because we don't want teachers to be comfortable." I'm not saying I got that from any one person or my administration, but it was a strange thing. And it just makes me think, "This is really a weird experience to be in a place where we have folks who can't be happy." The data will never yield what is going to be satisfactory and of course that is the argument with No Child Left Behind is that there is never going to be all schools above the median because you've got to have somebody at the middle. You've got to have somebody below to have a middle....And so it is a bizarre, bizarre thing.

Influence of testing on curriculum decisions. The influence of testing on curriculum decisions was noted by five of the participants. They each had a different view of its role. This section will document the various ways the participants said testing impacts their curriculum decision making.

While teachers in the last section reflected on the stress induced by testing, Pat felt the opposite about testing. He said,

I think I know what my students need. And I don't stress out about the curriculum because I'm giving them lifelong learning. The jobs they are going to have in the future aren't in the curriculum today. I mean that's improvement. The jobs that we are preparing these kids for don't exist now. So how can I prepare them for them? I need to prepare them to be thinkers and lifelong learners. And you know, I still teach enough so they do well on the SAT and they do well on the writing assessment and things like that.

He felt confident that his teaching ensured his students' testing success.

While Pat felt confident that his curriculum was sufficient to prepare his students for testing, two other teachers referred to the state's course of study in relation to tests. Testing, Julie decried as her "soapbox" topic. She raised issues about the material on such tests.

The Alabama Course of Study in many subject areas is not compatible with the SAT compendium. I'm required to teach the Alabama Course of Study, but I'm judged by how well my students do on the SAT. Something is wrong there.

Grace too reflected on her hopes that following the state course of study would guarantee that students performed well on standardized tests. She said, “I just follow what the course of study says and as long as I know that those kids have mastered that skill, then hopefully they will be able to turn around and use it in a different situation.” Pat taught in a school using the IB curriculum. Perhaps following what he described as an inquiry based curriculum better served students’ needs on standardized tests when compared to following the state course of study.

Nancy described how National Board certification has helped her become more aware of her students needs and how the importance of their learning takes precedence over testing.

I think I have always felt that learning had to be based on development rather than on outlines prescribed by assessment standards. The pressure for some students is extreme. I became a real advocate for students as I worked my way through the National Board process. The focus on what I was teaching became very important and I really found it important to examine my philosophy in a specific, serious manner. Holistic assessments have become far more important to me than in the past. I really know that I have to teach students rather than standards and I have to know what it is they truly understand and what it is that they are vaguely aware of. I teach really young students and I teach them the most important part of their school lives – how to read. I have to be more attuned to their understanding than I do to the latest testing mandate coming our way.

Melinda put testing at her school in perspective. She said, “Everything, everything that is coming down to us from our system, which trickles down to the principal, which trickles down to us, everything is about test scores. I think it is too much.” Her day is controlled by the district’s curriculum maps. She added, “We are supposed to work through our snack time, make it a work time. There is no, absolutely no time that is not driven by test scores.” She also feels that the responsibility for test scores should be shared with the home. “We cannot make those parents read to those children when they are young. The home environment has a lot to do with those test scores. If they never work on anything at home, if they never talk about books, if they never do anything school related once they leave, then it is going to affect the outcome.”

Testing is presently a classroom staple. It affects each of the participants.

Federal Mandates

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) is now a commonly recognized term. Its effects are nationwide. While the participants had many opinions on NCLB (2001), their knowledge of the law, however, was negligible. There was a general sense that if the government's plan to certify that all teachers were highly qualified was successful, then the teaching profession would be more highly regarded, more respected. On the other hand, there was also a disbelief and frustration that the federal government could rewrite the definition of teaching requirements. This forced some teachers, particularly veteran teachers, to pass a test or complete additional coursework to meet the new requirements. The participants were frustrated by their lack of knowledge of the law, their confusion over the way differing states are interpreting the law and the frighteningly punitive nature of the law. They especially expressed concern about standardized testing being used as the sole indicator of achievement. This section will highlight the teachers' reactions to the present major federal mandate, NCLB (2001). The subthemes include the following: (a) knowledge of NCLB (2001), (b) highly qualified teaching, and (c) testing and NCLB (2001).

Knowledge of NCLB (2001)

The participants reported a limited knowledge of the NCLB (2001) act. Most, however, had thoughts about the law and were eager to share their understanding of it. For instance, when asked what she knows about the law, Grace said,

Not much. A lot of what we have gotten has been through different letters saying that because of NCLB (2001) we are doing this. People have thrown it [NCLB (2001)] around so much that it kind of doesn't carry any weight anymore with people. We're doing this because of NCLB (2001) and there is no hard proof. I don't see anybody going to pull up the whole huge document online and try to read it or try to get their hands on all the

minute details of what it actually says to go back and say, “No, you’re misreading this,” or “I don’t think this is what they meant.”

She thought it is an overused term with limited meaning. Alex supported her thoughts when he said, “The NCLB (2001) legislation, from what I understand, is just tons of pages with lots of details and every state is interpreting it differently.” He added, “Sometimes I think the states gripe and complain about NCLB (2001) and yet it is the state that is making it really difficult.”

As for his knowledge of the law Alex said,

Little. Little. From the school system standpoint or a school standpoint, there is very little information and I’ve even said to my administration, “Is there someone out there who can speak on this?” Because, not to put fear in the school, but to actually just reveal it for what it is because in my classes I’ve learned or heard lots of different opinions about NCLB (2001). This summer I sat with a group of very intelligent educators and the topic came up, was NCLB (2001) meant to fail? In other words, was it designed to end public education as we know it? And I like to consider myself an intelligent person but I had not heard that.... Alabama I think for the average teacher or maybe even the majority of teachers, we don’t really have any idea what is going on outside our own little world. But outside our own little world, I think legislation meant to end public education is being enacted because clearly public education is not going to be able to solve all the problems.

Alex added, “It is definitely something to think about because my professor firmly believes that public education as we know it will not exist in 10 years.” For a law that educators know little about, it holds a great deal of power.

Others thought the law sounds positive but is a failure at implementation. Grace for instance, said,

It’s one of those things that sounds good across the board, but you can’t do it across the board because not every school is the same, not every situation is the same, and not every child is the same. There are only so many hours in the day with 23 or 24 in a classroom that I can’t divide myself out that much and still expect them to succeed.

Barbara agreed with her. She complained that educators were not more involved in writing the law. She commented,

The idea behind it [NCLB (2001)] sounds great, but I think the logistics of it are not going to work. I just don’t see it being realistic. I just think they needed more educators

involved than the politicians when they wanted to come up with a plan like that. And I think it is more of a political thing to me and when somebody that's not in education hears what they are trying to do, it sounds great and wonderful, but you know from the educator's standpoint.

Linda found flaws in the implementation of the law. She said,

I think it is a good idea in theory, but its implementation was not thoroughly or clearly thought out before it was released to the education world. I think there may have been a rush on the education department's or president's part to set new tough standards and this seemed like a good idea to require states and school districts to reach these goals, but not all aspects of the law were considered such as funding, personnel, logistics, etc.

From the name of the law it sounds like a wonderful goal, but student achievement, these participants have found is beyond mandates.

Pat explained his lack of knowledge of the law. He thought only schools not meeting the government's requirements have learned about the law, through punishments doled out by the state. When asked what he knows about the law he said, "Not much." Melinda also knew of the punitive nature of NCLB (2001). She said,

I've heard the punitive side of NCLB (2001) and how we could be held accountable for the tutoring for students that don't make it, for the transportation if they go to another school. I think that is too much. I just think they are putting a great burden on schools, unnecessary burdens that financially are going to hurt. I disagree totally with that side of it. I do believe that there needs to be accountability, but I don't think that punishing the schools financially is the way to get there.

Alex also mentioned the pressure teachers feel about meeting the standards.

...No Child Left Behind, if it is designed to hold schools accountable and to raise standards and to benefit students, well if we are educators and we're in school, then we're feeling that pressure, is it getting better? And I don't know what the answer is to that but I've heard that schools that are taken over by the State, it is the most miserable, terrible place to work. And I find it hard to believe that, I mean I already know that whenever I have things imposed on me as an educator, it starts to feel like maybe the instruction isn't as good.

Alex has considered serious implications of the law and the issues involving state versus national control of school decisions. The participants shared reasons why the law was not

feasible or how it was unfair. As for the end of NCLB (2001), Melinda thought, “It will continue for quite a while until it is challenged in the courts. I think it will be challenged in the courts eventually. I don’t know how long it will take.” Time will tell if Melinda was correct in her prediction. For now, NCLB (2001) continues to be a law whose punitive nature makes the participants uncomfortable, makes them question states’ rights, and makes them wonder if the requirements are achievable. Alex summarized the teachers’ knowledge of NCLB (2001) when he stated, “NCLB is still somewhat nebulous to me. It seems to be becoming more and more of an issue with every passing year.”

Highly Qualified Teaching

The majority of the participants thought, to be able to ensure that every student in the country be served by a highly qualified teacher was a positive goal. They also thought that the highly qualified definition would bring a heightened prestige to the profession and ensure that teachers hold at least this required minimum level of knowledge. Some, however, were concerned about how to define a highly qualified teacher. They argued that it was unfair to change the definition after a teacher has been certified to teach and that coursework does not equal a skilled professional. The following section contains the teachers’ thoughts on this topic.

The teachers in favor of the highly qualified mandates were numerous. Each began with enthusiasm for the sense of increased professionalism due to the law’s requirements, but each also had a qualifying statement. For example, Alex said,

I do believe some form of accountability should be in place and I like the idea that teachers will be viewed as professionals, but I’d really question whether or not the system is A, clear and B, whether or not it is fair.

While Alex was pleased that the state recognizes NBCTs as highly qualified, he still had thoughts on the matter.

I have seen some teachers with lots of experience that I would consider outstanding teachers; that I would consider highly qualified. I don't think that you have to have National Board Certified to be considered a highly qualified teacher by any means. I think many teachers who are highly qualified decide to go through that process. So having said that, there are lots of highly qualified teachers out there, teachers with lots of experience, teachers who are dedicated, who are in education for the right reasons, but maybe they haven't met some hour's requirement.... And to be honest with you, I don't know enough....And I'm not sure that that is even the State's fault because the NCLB (2001) legislation, from what I understand, is just tons of pages with lots of details and every state is interpreting that differently. That concerns me too, so teachers may be highly qualified in one state and not in another and it is the exact same legislation with states determining that.

Alex concluded, "I definitely appreciate the fact that our state has decided to agree that teachers who have gone through the National Board process would be considered highly qualified."

Tammy felt that the highly qualified requirement is good for schools. She said,

I am glad to see some accountability and high standards. It has been hard to watch a few teachers in our school have to go back and take an additional class or take the PRAXIS. They are good teachers but there should be some way of showing this other than tests or additional classes. Classroom observation should be an option. On the other hand, I know of some very knowledgeable teachers that are considered highly qualified, that lack the caring and understanding and love that needs to be in the classroom. I was thankful I met the criteria two ways, through my master's degree and through National Board certification.

Each of the participants, through their National Board certification, automatically met the state's definition of highly qualified teacher.

Pat too supported the idea of a highly qualified teaching force. He said,

I think it is a good idea, but I don't know how you can prove someone is a highly qualified teacher. He [George Bush] is trying to do it through books alone, but you and I know very well there are people who coast along in the classroom but do a great job on tests...But at least he is trying. I mean if he gets rid of 10 ineffective teachers, then I'm all for it....Don't let people pick education because they didn't get into nursing. Don't let people pick education because they are not an engineer. Don't let people use education as

a Mrs. degree in college. They need to pick people who truly want to teach and are achievers and the only way to do that is to raise the income. That is one good thing about National Boards, that it is the form of merit pay that allows high achievers to think, “Okay, I can go into education to make a little more money.”

Pat had definite opinions about what it would take to make a highly qualified teaching force.

NCLB (2001) does not increase the income of highly qualified teachers, however, the way National Board incentives do.

While it affects teachers in the state, Nancy did not disapprove of the government’s requirement for highly qualified teachers. She said,

The highly qualified status is the most basic level of achievement for a teacher. It assures standard courses have been passed. There is little attention to the need of specialized knowledge. Our pre-kindergarten teachers have the same math requirements for teaching as do the sixth grade teachers.

When asked if these mandates have affected teachers she knows, Nancy replied,

Teachers have gone back to school. Several have gone back to get master’s degrees. Unfortunately, most of the teachers who have gone back to school view the process as a chore rather than as a chance to tackle new ideas or to become more accomplished in what they do with students. Efforts to improve our educational system need to be promoted but not through government standardization and threats of withdrawing federal funds for transgressions. Educators are not failing students on purpose and many initiatives based on local needs of teachers of ‘non-standard’ students are diminishing. The focus and the money are going to NCLB (2001) requirements.

Nancy too supported the idea of a highly qualified teacher but has found in her teaching situation that NCLB (2001) has not helped her leave no child behind.

Grace described a highly qualified teacher as, “Someone who knows the teacher matters. That they are teaching and can effectively get it across to kids.” Of the law, however, she explained,

I think on some levels it undermines teachers because there are teachers who are highly qualified in certain areas but may not necessarily have the college classes to back it up. But then it also pushes teachers to get those classes and get those things to make them better but it also doesn’t give them the money or the funds to go and do it.

Grace explained that several of her school's teachers had to take math courses to be highly qualified. Several, she said, used this impetus to get their master's degree. The teachers, however, did not feel the extra course work was beneficial for their current teaching positions. "A lot of it [the course work] was algebra classes and they teach fourth and fifth grade, so the most they got out of it was a refresher on how to do decimals or percents, if they were lucky."

Barbara too said she believed that coursework does not make a teacher. She replied,

Well, with the law, they are requiring a lot more course work to be considered qualified. But I feel like there are teachers that didn't take those extra math or science courses in undergraduate are just as qualified as a teacher that has taught 15 or 20 years, especially one that has tried to improve every year and has done a great deal of professional development. I think that there should be more of an emphasis really on the professional development side of it, versus these classes that you know elementary teachers aren't necessarily going to use that they are requiring. But I think as far as highly qualified, I think of it being someone that does improve upon their practices and does job embedded professional development and those kinds of things I think lead to a highly qualified teacher.

Melinda agreed with Barbara. She cited the unfair nature of the law. She strongly stated,

I think it is so unfair. I mean, at some point if our state has said that you are certified, you have a teaching certificate, how can they come back later and say, "We'll I'm sorry you're not qualified anymore." I disagree with that part of it.

While the consensus among the participants was the law is unclear, the participants each had an individual opinion on the notion of a highly qualified teacher. For some, the title, "highly qualified" represents an opportunity for greater teacher professionalism. For others, it is unnecessary, unfair legislation.

Testing and NCLB (2001)

By the year 2014 the government expects all U.S. students to score at the 95th percentile (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). "I think that is a dream that won't be met," said Melinda. "If you look

at the Bell Curve, we're not ever going to have 95% proficiency because that is just not possible." She added

Well, I think the reasoning behind it is good, that we don't need to leave any child behind that we need to make every effort to reach every child to their abilities. I do agree with that. I disagree with the accountability being on just standardized testing. I think we have individuals here that have great needs that standardized testing does not reflect. I disagree with that. I agree with the philosophy of it but with the accountability measures that they are using to try to get people there, I don't think that is it.

Barbara described a "special needs" student that she had in her fourth grade class. "Well that little girl in the fourth grade was on a kindergarten level. But yet she had to go and take the fourth grade SAT test. I mean what kind of data can you really get that is valid from that and then putting that poor girl through it. I just think the whole thing...is not thinking about the kids either, what's best for the kids." From the NBCTs interviewed here, standardized testing is not about what's best for administrators, teachers or students.

At team meetings Melinda said,

We look at test scores, definitely. We plan who needs what and what teacher is going to work with that particular group because we did some intervention across the grade. We meet with the principal during this time every nine weeks and she is tracking where our students are. Not all the students but just the really low ones.

Pat said, "I like the way you disaggregate the data. I like the way that you try to close the achievement gap. I don't like the increased paperwork and increased pressure of testing. High stakes testing is not the answer to everything. But what is the answer? I don't know."

Grace said,

It really on some levels doesn't fit because I know that kids know some of this information but given the wording and given the circumstances around it, they can't do it. They just get so flustered that they can't do it. But a lot of the standardized testing and testing coming from NCLB (2001) does not take into account that child itself. It is on some points a number on a page. Did they hit the number? Well, they may not have hit it that day on that test, but I know they can do it. And there is not that looking at what is their ability and what did they actually do. If they do it that day. Was it the day? Was it the test? Was it their mood? And that doesn't come into account. It is either you do or

you don't which goes against everything I picked up from National Boards, was it is all about that child. That child, how well does that child succeed individually and not collectively as a class. So it kind of conflicts with that which, especially last year, just really got on my nerves because we did the ARMT for the first time and knowing that those kids were completely lost because it was just over their heads. It wasn't what they were led to believe it was and it frustrated them. And knowing that, it made me very upset. It made me sad for those kids knowing that they feel like failures because they couldn't do it. Even though if I give it to them on a worksheet or let them go to the board or do something with it, they can do it. So that was just frustrating for me and for them.

Melinda said,

I think adequate yearly progress should be third grade scores as compared to third grade scores last year. It should be tracked with my third graders last year. They should be comparing that with the fourth grade scores. You need to track the same group of students because you are going to have different abilities. According to what I looked at [test scores] the other day, we're going to be lower than we were last year. But we have a different group of students. My principal was explaining that our system won't look at that. They will look at what third grade did last year and what third grade did this year and you're comparing apples and oranges. I think adequate yearly progress would be good if they are tracing correctly....If they [scores] go down with a certain grade level, then certainly look at methods. Look at what you did to bring those students down and change that. But don't compare one group to a different group to try to track adequate yearly progress.

Testing as the sole measurement of accountability for NCLB (2001) was frustrating for these teachers.

Summary

Chapter four highlighted the themes of this study. Using the teachers' words, their opinions of their teaching experiences, the NBPTS process and implications, curriculum requirements, student needs, standardized testing, and federal mandates was expressed. These participants, coming from diverse backgrounds throughout the state of Alabama were affected by both National Board certification and the mandates affecting teachers and schools in a variety of ways. While their enthusiasm for NBPTS varied, their dedication to students and learning was universal. Interviewing and reporting the participant's comments revealed themes that are

currently major topics in education, topics where the teachers' voice needs to be heard. This study's purpose was to provide an outlet for that voice.

CHAPTER 5

Implications

Summary

With ever increasing government and political influence over the curriculum and testing in schools, it is important that the voices of teachers, the practitioners who work with students, are heard. This is a sector often overlooked when decisions about schools are being made. From school boards composed of business leaders to state governors, to national leaders, school decisions are being made by non-educators at unprecedented levels today.

This study sought the perspective of 10 National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) on issues influencing teaching at the present time. NBCTs were selected for this study because they have completed a rigorous year-long study and reflection process to improve upon and validate their teaching practices (NBPTS, 1998). These teachers have distinguished themselves from their peers through this reflective process. A qualitative, phenomenological methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Meloy, 1994; Moustakas, 1994) was used in this study. Each teacher participated in a three-interview process (Seidman, 1998). The data were continuously analyzed for emerging themes and subthemes.

Findings

Six major themes were identified from the interviews with the participants: (a) teaching experiences, (b) National Board for Professional Teaching Standards process and implications, (c) curriculum requirements, (d) student needs, (e) standardized testing, and (f) federal mandates. The interviews provided insight into the classrooms, teaching beliefs and styles, and knowledge

of outside factors on the field of education of these NBCTs. A detailed description of these topics was provided in chapter 4. A summary of each theme follows.

Teaching experiences

The teachers shared their background by providing information about their schools, their induction into teaching, and their number of years both in the field and Nationally Board certified. The participants in this study ranged in years of experience from 7 to 26 years. They had been National Board certified from 1 to 6 years. Six of the participants taught in suburban schools, three taught in rural schools, and one taught in an urban school. The participant from the urban school reported in the interview portion of the study that her school was suburban. When she completed the National Board certification process, however, she taught in an urban school.

NBPTS process and implications

When asked to describe their motivation to undertake the challenge of National Board certification, the participants' answers were complex. Eight of the 10 participants had multiple reasons for going through the process. Six of the participants cited the state's financial incentives for National Board as a motivation for seeking the certification. Five said it was a personal challenge. Two were encouraged to seek National Board certification by instructional leaders, while one was discouraged by her principal; the principal said this participant was already too committed to school. One chose to go through National Board certification to partially fulfill requirements for a master's degree. Three cited collegiality as motivation. The motivations were varied among the group.

The process of National Board Certification. Six of the participants discussed the stress involved in the process. Seven said they went through National Board certification to learn and become a better teacher. Three said it was a time of great reflection. One said it was not especially beneficial because of the hurried completion time. This participant taped lessons and then completed all the writing requirements in 1 week, over spring break. This participant reported that others who went through the process with this participant took time to reflect and let it impact their teaching, and they found more benefit in the certification process than this person did.

Effects of NBPTS on teaching. Reflection was the key in the interviews with these NBCTs. Seven of the teachers mentioned how NBPTS caused them to reflect on their practices and reflection became a habit that continues in their planning for instruction. One participant mentioned being more outspoken because of the NBPTS process, but six spoke of NBPTS validating their teaching, which gives them more confidence. Perhaps this confidence carries over into their curriculum meetings and planning with other teachers, making their influence greater than they imagine. One participant, who is seeking an administrative position, spoke of looking at the effects from an evaluative stance. This participant was interested in effective teaching and whether NBPTS could be used as an indicator. In this way, NBPTS has affected this participant's outlook. While three teachers mentioned questioning their decisions more now after going through the National Board certification process, all said it has positively affected their practice. This questioning has not weakened their confidence in their abilities; in fact, it has moved them toward a more student-centered frame of mind.

Professionalism credited to NBPTS. These participants were busy. When they began listing the committees on which they served, the teams they led, and the workshops they taught,

their professional activities were overwhelming. While two teachers credited NBPTS with their increase in leadership roles, three shared that they had been professionally involved before they completed National Board certification, and it did not cause an increase.

The two participants who have changed schools since having National Board certification said that it was a factor in their selection for hiring. Both found that their new principals bragged to their co-workers about gaining a NBCT. This caused animosity on their teams, something no transferring teacher desires. A positive effect was National Board certification could potentially make a teacher more marketable when seeking a job in a competitive school district.

Responsibility resulting from NBPTS. Again I was wondering if there is an increased performance burden after securing National Board certification. Only one participant mentioned performance anxiety, although others described the stress involved in testing their students. I was pleasantly surprised that the participants' feelings of responsibility centered around their students' needs rather than on testing anxiety. I was also encouraged by the desire of two of the participants to speak up about curriculum decisions. If National Board certification means professional, knowledgeable teacher, then it is exciting that they would voice their concerns about teaching methods they find ineffective.

Five of the 10 participants did not clearly mention any increased responsibility related to National Board certification. Perhaps this was partly due to the uncelebrated nature of the status. My school district's superintendent sends an e-mail every year congratulating the new NBCTs. Their photos are taken and included in one of our district's monthly news magazines. This magazine is given to every student and teacher in the district. Through these public notices, teachers are recognized and identified for their efforts. With this recognition may come a greater responsibility for student achievement. This recognition is not typical, however. Only two of the

participants mentioned receiving any recognition when they became NBCTs. Perhaps this is a factor in a teacher's sense of pressure or responsibility as well.

Curriculum Requirements

Professional development. This section was not as grand as I had anticipated. Each year, our district requires 19 hours of professional development. The state requires 90 hours over a 5-year time period. My teammate and I calculated our hours for the 2005-2006 school year, and each of us had around 300 hours. We calculated that was over seven 40-hour weeks. Neither of us have our National Board certification, but we love to learn and seek out ways to improve our practice. With this mindset, I anticipated an outpouring of professional development discussion. The discussions did not lead to much conversation about professional development, however. When I asked teachers what literature guides their practice, with the exception of one participant, everyone had to think for a moment before responding. For many, the book that came to mind was *Best Practice* (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005), the book that is almost required reading by NBPTS. In my daily planning, I rely on the work on Debbie Miller, Sharon Tabersky, Carl Anderson, Katie Wood Ray, Regie Routman, Ralph Fletcher, Max Brand, and Karen Siberson, just to name my recent favorites. Without these professionals I would not know how to challenge my students. In fact, these experts lend ideas for materials and topics to teach. Yes, I frame this guidance within the course of study, but I make sure I teach children and not just curriculum. I was disappointed that professional development was not more excitedly discussed. It is my passion and one that I anticipated was necessary for anyone who sought National Board certification.

Planning and reflection. The participants who discussed this subtheme shared that National Board certification helped them to become more student focused. They explained that they used the Alabama Course of Study as minimum requirements. They also mentioned the importance of utilizing class time efficiently.

Curriculum control. The amount of curriculum decision making freedom of these NBCTs depended on the district in which they taught. Two of the rural teachers were particularly controlled by district decision makers. Two of the teachers were given exact time frames for minute details of their curriculum, including which basal story to teach during each week, and how many grades were needed for each subject. These two teachers also worked with students broken into ability groups for instruction. They were expected to be consistent in their teaching with their teammates, and the National Board had little influence on the way they taught. Their professional decision making was usurped by district leaders.

The remaining teachers shared a sense of professional freedom. These teachers expressed confidence in their ability to make decisions for their learners and felt they met academic challenges such as teaching their students to read or to perform well on achievement tests.

Teaching strategies. All the participants expressed an interest in meeting students' needs and helping students achieve their best from any given students' vantage point. No participant provided specific strategies, although one in particular mentioned the types of writing and math instruction they provided. Another spoke of the school's curriculum, and another mentioned the use of field trips to provide students with background knowledge. The limited information provided may be due to my not asking a probing question, or it may be the personal nature of teaching style. Sharing how teachers reach students may take more rapport with an interviewer and time to observe and question, a limitation of this study.

Student Needs

Effects of mandates. Teachers felt pressured to ensure all students' success. Participants were concerned that such an emphasis is placed on raising the achievement of students performing below average that the rest of the students are neglected because of the limited amount of time teachers have with students. One participant explained that officials were pushing students at the threshold of benchmarking on a required test so those students would progress above the required mark. This raised a question of ethics. Has testing and No Child Left Behind (NCLB (2001)) caused schools to neglect students to raise test scores?

Standardized Testing

Beliefs. Surprisingly, most of the participants were not wholly against standardized testing. They saw it as one measurement of student achievement. The effects of the high stakes of testing, however, were of concern. Teachers mentioned that the tests were more of an accountability tool to check teachers than a true measurement of student achievement. Others discussed the artificiality of the tests and the uniformity of their administration. This is a departure from normal classroom practice, when schools change their schedules to accommodate the many hours of testing required by the state as a result of the NCLB (2001) law. A recurring theme was that testing caused incredible stress for students, teachers, and school administration.

Influence on curriculum decisions. Five participants mentioned how testing has influenced their curriculum. They questioned how the state requires teachers to cover the curriculum standards, yet the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) compendium does not match the state's standards. How, they wondered, were they to be judged then on their students' achievement on the SAT? One participant in particular spoke out about how her entire

curriculum revolved around raising test scores. She expressed outrage at the way scores are used, as well. Her students change each year, but her grade-level's goal is always to outperform the class before. How, she wondered, can you compare two different groups of students?

Federal Mandates

Knowledge of NCLB (2001). In general, the participants' knowledge of NCLB (2001) was negligible. This was a source of frustration because they felt they were affected by a very nebulous law. One source of frustration was that the states are given freedom to interpret and implement the law. There was a sense that Alabama was trying to make the requirements stringent to impress the national government. While their knowledge of NCLB (2001) was negligible, the participants knew about the punitive nature of the law.

Highly qualified teaching. There was overwhelming agreement that the idea of every teacher being considered highly qualified was positive for the teaching profession. One participant even suggested that if the highly qualified definition removed ineffective teachers from the occupation, then it would be a success. A concern, however, was that extra course work, particularly mathematics course work, was not a solution. The participants expressed this course-work requirement seemed more like a hoop the government expected teachers to jump through rather than a true qualitative improvement to the field. They shared frustration over the expectation that teachers might need to take additional courses but that no funds were provided for teachers to meet this requirement. All of the participants shared relief that National Board certification provided them with the highly qualified title.

Testing and NCLB (2001). Only four of the participants spoke out about testing related to NCLB (2001), but they had much to say. One participant discussed the unlikelihood of meeting

the government's goal of 95% proficiency by year 2014. This participant was frustrated by the way test scores were used, how each year the grade level is evaluated based on improvement or decline in scores, but the test takers are a different group of students. Another participant expressed frustration over the requirement that students with special needs have to take the test. This concern was similar to that of another participant who discussed the wording and format of standardized tests and how they do not match the typical classroom environment. Of the four who mentioned testing, one shared an appreciation for the disaggregated data. This participant also expressed dislike of the pressure involved in testing but felt tests were necessary for purposes of accountability. As these participants show, the issues involved in testing are numerous and varied.

Summary of Findings

This study sought to provide a glimpse into the thoughts of the participating Alabama NBCTs practicing in today's classrooms. This study described the teaching experience and opinions on the state of education of these teachers. In his book *Choice Words*, Johnston (2004) pointed out "Just like children, we [teachers] have to exercise some control over that intellectual environment so that we continue to develop" (p. 75). Findings in this study suggest that the control over the intellectual environment were greatly determined by higher administration. The philosophy of the district and the district's interpretation of present laws and requirements affected the curriculum decisions, planning, and self-efficacy of the teachers. NCLB (2001) had affected all of the teachers, although the teachers each expressed varying degrees of knowledge of the law, indicating neither the state nor the federal governments have clearly defined the full role or implications of NCLB (2001) for the education community. Standardized testing and its

pressures had increased since the inception of the law and affected the attitudes and teaching practices of these teachers.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study offer insight into the need for further research.

Recommendations for future research related NBPTS include the following:

1. A longitudinal study of the outcomes of students taught by Nationally Board certified teachers could be designed and conducted. This study could focus on student outcomes other than the narrow information provided by standardized tests.
2. Research could be conducted to determine if there are certain qualities teachers who seek National Board certification possess. For example, are teachers who seek National Board certification more likely to participate in other forms of professional development? Do these teachers participate in school and district leadership roles at a higher rate than teachers who do not choose to seek National Board certification?
3. One finding of this study was that teachers did not readily or openly share how they plan for instruction. Further research could examine the curriculum planning and implementation process of NBCTs.
4. This study was limited to teachers who succeeded in National Board certification. Researching teachers who did not successfully complete the process would be of interest.
5. A research study on teacher effectiveness before becoming National Board certified compared with after gaining certification could help determine the effectiveness of NBPTS.

6. Rural participants of this study reported a greater imposition of curriculum mandates than those in suburban settings. A study on the effects of the school's setting and student population on teachers' curriculum freedom could be conducted.
7. Literature suggests that many colleges of education are using the NBPTS (2006c) core propositions as the basis for teacher certification, expressing what teachers should know and be able to do. Research could be done to compare the effects of this academic preparation with traditional teacher education programs on the effectiveness of new teachers.
8. National Board certification lasts for 10 years before a teacher can choose to seek recertification. Research could be conducted to determine the impact of the recertification process. This research could be qualitative in nature to allow for open-ended exploration of the possible outcomes.

Much research remains to be done. With increasing numbers of teachers seeking National Board certification, some understanding of the result of that process on practice is necessary.

Recommendations for Professional Practice

Discussing the National Board certification process and the current state of education with the participants of this study provided the following insights into recommendations for professional practice:

1. This study showed that NBPTS increases teacher reflection on their teaching practices. This provides a model for effective professional development.
2. Collegiality led many of the participants in this study to successful completion of National Board certification. Many NBCTs went on to help others going through the

process through mentorships provided by their districts. This work with peers should be continued throughout a teachers' career, not just in the National Board certification process. NBPTS served to make teachers less isolated.

3. NBCTs are touted as accomplished, highly qualified teachers (NBPTS, 2002). Their knowledge, expertise, and opinions should be valued in educational decision making. Politicians should consult with NBCTs when making decisions regarding schools.
4. The participants of this study were not opposed to standardized testing. They were, however, opposed to its use as a high-stakes measure, as well as its limited scope and the emphasis placed on raising scores. Lawmakers need to consider the negative effects of standardized testing on student learning and look for other accountability measures.
5. Participants in this study shared the stressfulness of completing the National Board certification requirements. One participant contrasted the benefits of certification with the negative impact of the certification year on student learning. The stressfulness and time-consuming nature of the certification detracted from this participants' effectiveness as a teacher during the certification year. NBPTS needs to consider the nature of the process and its effects on the students affected by the teacher pursuing certification.

Final Discussion

National Board certification is being promoted in schools around the nation. Each year, greater numbers of teachers are becoming certified. With so many teachers seeking this professional development opportunity, more needs to be discovered about the outcome of the process. I personally have wondered if teachers are frustrated by the state of education when they reach this level of teaching achievement. On the other hand, I have wondered if having a

National Board certification makes a teacher immune to pressure from the outside. This is why I sought out this population to research. Professional development is the key to being a good teacher; I am convinced. Hopefully, more research will be done to test this hypothesis and lead others to become the best possible teacher themselves.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WEB-BASED SURVEY



Department of Curriculum and Instruction

April 11, 2005

«AddressBlock»

«GreetingLine»

Let me be among the many to congratulate you on becoming Nationally Board Certified. Completing such a process is a testimony of your commitment to professional development and dedication to teaching. I am writing to request your participation in my dissertation research. I am a third grade teacher at South Shades Crest Elementary in Hoover, Alabama, and also a doctoral student at The University of Alabama at Birmingham. For my doctoral research, I am interested in learning about how curriculum mandates affect professional teachers, those with National Board Certification.

I realize your time is valuable, but I am asking for you to take a moment to access my on-line survey and supply your input. The survey will be available from April 15 through May 6. If you are willing to participate, please see the instructions below. With your help, I will be able to achieve my professional goals. Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Lesley Sheek
3rd Grade Teacher

Dr. Jerry Aldridge
Professor of Early Childhood Education, UAB
Doctoral Committee Chairperson

Survey Instructions

Log into www.hostedsurveylite.com. Enter the survey code listed below in the purple box, located in the bottom left-hand corner of the homepage.

Survey Code: NBCTS1

Dates Available: April 15-May 6

If you have any questions, you may contact me at lsheek@hoover.k12.al.us or (205) 560-0518.

119 Education Building
901 13th Street South
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APPENDIX B

WEB-BASED SURVEY QUESTIONS



Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Web-Based Survey Questions

Demographic Section

1. How long have you been board certified?
2. What grade do you teach?
3. Do you teach in a self-contained or departmentalized class?
4. In what school district do you teach?
5. Please indicate your gender.
6. How long have you been teaching?

Open-ended Section

1. Describe the impact the National Board certification process has had on your teaching practices.
2. Describe any perceived impact your National Board certified status has had on your students' achievement?
3. Describe how outside pressures (such as the No Child Left Behind Act, standardized tests, administration, and parents) affect your teaching practices.

_____ Please check here if you would be willing to discuss this topic with me. Please also furnish me with your name and e-mail address or phone number to be able to contact you.

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APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

First Interview

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Where have you taught and what grades?
3. Describe the schools where you have taught.
4. What made you decide to become a teacher?
5. Describe your work with the struggling students you have taught.
6. Describe your work with regular education and gifted students in the years you have taught.
7. How long have you been Nationally Board certified?
8. Did you complete your National Board certification at this school? If not, will you describe what brought you to this school (where you are currently teaching)?

Second Interview

1. What made you decide to become Nationally Board certified?
2. Describe your teaching experience before becoming Nationally Board certified.
3. Describe the year you spent going through the National Board certification process.
4. Describe your teaching experience after becoming Nationally Board certified.
5. What leadership roles do you hold in your school and/or in your district?
6. Describe your attitude toward standardized testing.

Third Interview

1. What is your opinion of a “highly qualified teacher” as defined by No Child Left Behind?
2. Describe your thoughts on No Child Left Behind.
3. How have state curriculum requirements affected your teaching practices?

4. Describe how the teaching and testing mandates correspond with your teaching practices after attaining Nationally Board certified status?
5. Describe the attitude of your colleagues and principal toward standardized testing.
6. Do you feel there is a difference in attitudes toward testing based on National Board certification status?
7. What role do you feel you have in making curriculum decisions for your students?
8. What role do you feel you have in making curriculum decisions at your local school and district level? Do you feel your National Board certification affects your role?

APPENDIX D
IRB APPROVAL FORMS



Institutional Review Board for Human Use

Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP Guidelines. The Assurance became effective on November 24, 2003 and expires on February 14, 2009. The Assurance number is FWA00005960.

Principal Investigator: SHEEK, LESLEY

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: **X050126006**

Protocol Title: *National Board Certification: Perceptions of Teachers on Its Impact on Their Professional Practice*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 05-05-06. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 5-5-06

Date IRB Approval Issued: 05-09-06

Marilyn Doss, M.A.

Vice Chair of the Institutional Review
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

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Institutional Review Board for Human Use

Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP). The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP Guidelines. The Assurance became effective on November 24, 2003 and the approval period is for three years. The Assurance number is FWA00005960.

Principal Investigator: SHEEK, LESLEY

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: **X050126006**

Protocol Title: *National Board Certification: Perceptions of Teachers on Its Impact on Their Professional Practice*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 3-03-05. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 3-3-05

Date IRB Approval Issued: 03-03-05

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

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APPENDIX E
CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

TITLE: NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON ITS
IMPACT ON THEIR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Investigator: Lesley Ewing Sheek

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jerry Aldridge, Professor, Education Curriculum and Instruction

Explanation of Procedures

Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in the interview phase of this research. If you choose to participate, you will undergo a series of three, one-hour interviews conducted by the investigator. You will be asked to discuss the National Board Certification process and the effect of curriculum mandates on your teaching practices. These recorded interviews will be transcribed and you will be given an opportunity to review and edit the transcripts prior to publication of this study. This research is the investigator's dissertation project to complete a doctoral degree in Early Childhood Education from The University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Risks and Discomforts

The risks associated with your participation in this study are no greater than those of daily living.

New Findings

While this category does not directly apply to this study, any significant new findings developed during this research will be provided to you by the investigator.

Benefits

You will derive no direct benefit from this study. Your participation, however, may provide valuable information and useful insight regarding National Board Certified Teachers' perceptions of curriculum mandates.

Confidentiality

The data from your interview will be used for a report, which if you agree, may include extensive use of quotations. Reporting of data will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your name will be changed in the transcription and reporting of data. If you agree below to have your words used, it is possible that people reading the results of this research may be able to guess your identity. You will be given the opportunity to review and edit a transcript of each of your interviews. For auditing purposes, the Office of the UAB's Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB) has the right to access the data.

Do you give permission for direct quotations to be used? Please initial:

Yes _____ No _____

Page 1 of 2
Revised 2/28/05

Participant's Initials _____

UAB – IRB
Consent Form Approval 03-03-05
Expiration Date 03-03-06

Withdrawal without Prejudice

You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice. You may withdraw from this project by informing the investigator in person, by telephone, or in writing.

Cost for Participating in Research

There is no monetary cost for your participation in this project.

Payment for Participating in Research

There will be no monetary payment for your participation in this project.

Questions

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact the investigator, Lesley Sheek at (205) 560-0518 or at lsheek@hooover.k12.al.us. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Ms. Shelia Moore, Director of the Office of the UAB Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB). Ms. Moore may be reached at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816.

Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this consent form.

Signature

You will receive a copy of this signed informed consent. Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Signature of Witness

Date