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Perceived Indicators of Support Leading to the Successful Attainment of the
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

by

Richard W. Bales

December 2004

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Keywords: Administrators, Certification, Educators, Highly qualified, Opinions, Standards,
Support

ABSTRACT

Perceived Indicators of Support Leading to the Successful Attainment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification

by

Richard W. Bales

There has been limited research completed to identify supports or supporting behaviors that assisted candidates while they were completing the national board certification process. Identifying support factors that assisted national board certified teachers to the successful completion of the process was the primary focus of this study.

A qualitative research method was used to interview national board certified teachers, their teaching colleagues, and their administrators. Questions were posed from the interview guides developed for each of the three targeted groups. Information derived from the interviews focused on the perceived supports that lead to the successful attainment of the national board certification. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim and then systematically coded and analyzed. The thick and rich descriptions provided an opportunity for professionals to identify with the study's participants and therefore established the applicability of the study. The specific findings were organized and clustered around the research questions. Subtopics that emerged from the data analysis process were also addressed as they related to the five researched topics. The information that accumulated prompted the formation of specific recommendations.

This study should be of interest to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) as it continues to revisit its set of rigorous standards and the certification process. It should also be of interest to prospective teachers seeking the certification along with their administrators as supporters. The study could also be of interest to school system administrators who seek to promote staff development experiences for their teachers or to those individuals who desire to assist teachers in becoming highly qualified. Prompted by the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, our nation began to focus on the effects of teacher quality on students' achievement. The national board certification provided by the NBPTS is one means of meeting the criteria set forth to be deemed highly qualified.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated:

To my wife, Buffy, for her enduring love and support in allowing me to follow my heart and my dreams. Because of her, I am a better man.

To my three children, Eli, Chloe, and Ira, for sacrificing crucial time with their dad so I could work on this study. They are my true life's masterpiece.

To my mother and father, Betty and Buddy Bales, for teaching me about passion and commitment. Their strong belief in hard work has made me a stronger individual. Their love of life was surpassed only by their love for one another.

To my sister, Mary Ann Kinser, for always believing in me. She took me under her wing and became a second mother to me. Her love and understanding is unforgettable.

Finally, to all the teachers who have touched my life. You can indeed learn something from everyone. The impact of teachers should never be underestimated.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

With the signing of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, teacher quality has taken on new meaning and has certainly thrust the topic of qualifications of all teachers into the public eye (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). There are hundreds of governmental and private groups studying teacher quality and making recommendations for improving teacher quality. Many different reports, edicts, and standards are contained within the legislation. Interpreting the contents of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation can be quite confusing not only to teachers and to higher education institutions whose role it is to train the nation's teachers but also to laypersons or parents showing concern for their children's education (Evans, Stewart, Mangin, & Bagley, 2001).

In addition to the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the current attention to teacher quality and the highly-qualified teacher stems from a landmark report made in the mid-1990s. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future published a report in 1996 stating that well-qualified teachers represented one of the most important factors in determining the achievement of students. Recognizing the trait of quality teaching, however, has proven to be a complex issue. The teaching profession, unlike medicine, architecture, or accounting, has never codified the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that account for accomplished practice (Shapiro, 1995). Over the past few years, several educational agencies and organizations have attempted to address the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (2003) became a primary organization to examine this issue through its practices. The NBPTS promised to provide a definitive set of high and rigorous standards stating what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do as well as a way to measure who meets those standards.

The NBPTS (2003) was created in 1987 after the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) released *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* on May 16, 1986. The Carnegie task force report proposed solutions. The report stated that the key to success lay in creating a profession equal to the task: a profession of well-educated teachers prepared to assume new powers and responsibilities to redesign schools for the future. The task force urged the teaching profession to set the standards and to certify teachers who met those standards and called for the formation of the NBPTS (Carnegie Forum). Under the leadership of North Carolina's Governor, Jim Hunt, the members of the task force outlined a plan designed to retain, reward, and advance accomplished teachers through a system of advanced certification. The NBPTS was created from the framework of these ideas. Many of the task force members remain involved in the continuing evolution of the national board.

The national certification offered to teachers on a voluntary basis signifies highly accomplished teaching based on a specific set of professional criteria. The uniform standards were set for all candidates across the country and were developed by educators. The NBPTS (2003) awards its certificate only to those who pass a series of performance-based assessments on-site and at the assessment center. According to the NBPTS's website, the first set of teachers to attain the certification in 1995 totaled 86. As of November 2002, the number of teachers holding the certification was nearly 24,000 with Tennessee having only 63 certificate holders.

National board certified teachers who are teaching at the middle and secondary level and within the subject field where they earned their national board certification, meet the federal definition of a "highly-qualified" teacher as described in the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Because of flexibility and governance provisions afforded to individual states in the Act, national board certified teachers teaching at the elementary level also meet the definition of a highly-qualified teacher so long as the state has indicated within its High, Objective, and Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE)

regulations that national board certification meets subject matter competency requirements. The national board is working with states to ensure this provision is included in HOUSSSE regulations nationwide (NBPTS, 2003). The state of Tennessee makes provisions to include national board certified Teachers in its state plan for defining highly qualified (Tennessee Department of Education, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

With the national movement toward improving teacher quality and student learning through the *No Child Left Behind Act*, many states are now deeming teachers highly qualified if they have achieved certification through the NBPTS (2003). With a limited number of teachers holding this certification in Northeast Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina, there has been limited research completed to identify supports or supporting behaviors that could assist candidates while they are completing the national certification process. The purpose of this study is to identify supporting factors that assist national board certified teachers in the successful completion of the process as perceived by the these teachers, their colleagues, and their administrators.

Research Questions

The following research questions served as the focal point of the study:

1. What are the national board certified teachers' ranges of opinions overall of the national board certification process?
2. What are the ranges of opinions of the perceived supports identified by the candidates who hold national board certification?
3. What are the ranges of opinions of the colleagues and administrators regarding their perceptions of support of national board certified teachers?

4. What are the ranges of opinions regarding the national board certified teachers' feelings about national certification fulfilling the highly qualified component of *No Child Left Behind*?
5. Do the national board certified teachers and their administrators consider the process a worthwhile staff development or professional growth opportunity in terms of time? If so, why?

Significance of the Study

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002 reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and gave states and school districts powerful tools and significant funding to improve teacher quality. This law also gave states an unprecedented level of freedom in deciding which teacher quality strategies to choose (Poliakoff, 2002). The state of Tennessee has chosen to allow national board certification as one measure appropriate for deeming a teacher as highly qualified. Determining what supports are necessary for the successful attainment of the certificate should make this study significant. Districts must use 5% of their Title I part A funds to help teachers become highly qualified (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). If the certification process conducted through the NBPTS (2003) is perceived as a quality professional growth experience by the candidates and their administrators, then the federal dollars will be spent wisely. Findings from this research study could assist in the numbers of successful candidates and could encourage additional teachers to seek the route of national board certification to their determination of being highly qualified.

Delimitations

1. This study will be limited by the degree that the teachers, their colleagues, and administrators express their opinions candidly.

2. Qualitative inquiry is naturally limited by the results of the study being generalized to other settings and populations. However, theory and data generated from the study were presented in such a way as to enable the reader to determine their transferability to other settings and their contribution to the existing body of knowledge concerning the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. The research and the researcher were influenced by the value of the participants and the research regarding the topic of study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
3. Those participating in the interviews were representatives of Northeast Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, Western North Carolina, and Northern Georgia. This delimitation was established to include a variety of school systems in multiple cities to include the named four states. This delimitation allowed me to avoid the burden of excessive financial cost.

Assumptions

There are identifiable supports or supportive behaviors to national board certification that are perceived by the certified teachers, their colleagues, and their administrators.

Definitions of Terms

The following are definitions of terms used in this study:

1. *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)*--An independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization governed by a 56 member board of directors, the majority of whom are classroom teachers. Other members include school administrators, school board leaders, governors and state legislators, higher education officials, teachers' union leaders and business and community leaders (NBPTS, 2003).

2. *National Board Certification*--An achievement awarded to an eligible teacher that identifies the teacher as having met set standards of accomplishment. A national board certificate will attest that a teacher was judged by his or her peers as one who is accomplished, makes sound professional judgments about students' best interests, and acts effectively on those judgments. Offered on a voluntary basis, national board certification complements, but does not replace, state licensing. While state licensing systems set entry-level standards for novice teachers, national board certification establishes advanced standards for experienced teachers. (NBPTS).
3. *Perceived Supports*--To promote the interests or cause of (Mish, 1986).
4. *Highly Qualified*--The requirement that teachers be highly qualified applies to all public elementary or secondary school teachers employed by a local educational agency and who teach a core academic subject. Highly qualified means that the teacher:
 - a. has obtained full state licensure as a teacher or passed the state teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the state and does not have licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis;
 - b. holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree; and
 - c. has demonstrated subject matter competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches in a manner determined by the state (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).

Overview of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction; statement of the problem; research questions; significance of the study; assumptions, limitations, and definitions; and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of selected literature and research relevant to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, effects of national

board certified teachers, teacher quality, and career stages of teachers. Chapter 3 details the specific methods and procedures used in the study. The data collected from the study are identified in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 reveals the results of the information collected including the summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to the NBPTS certification and is divided into five sections: (a) Teacher quality and highly-qualified teachers, (b) career stages of teachers, (c) National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, (d) effects of national board certified teachers, and (e) a summary.

Teacher Quality and Highly-Qualified Teachers

Staffing a school with highly-qualified teachers has never been so prominent a goal and as important to America's schools as it is today. The passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* on January 8, 2002, created national political and financial ramifications for educators in securing the educational services of teachers deemed highly qualified. The definition of "highly-qualified teachers" as defined in the Act was the vehicle needed to promote a solution to finding and keeping quality teachers (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).

The timely issue of securing and maintaining highly-qualified teachers was thrust into the spotlight. This new law represented President George W. Bush's education reform plan; it contained the most sweeping changes to the ESEA since it was enacted in 1965. The signing of the new law publicized the need for quality teacher training for several reasons. First, the widespread and impending shortage of teachers, particularly in the areas of mathematics, science, foreign language, and special education, meant that all schools needed to work harder to find and hire teachers in these areas. Schools will also need to pay closer attention to keeping the teachers they have. Second, the evidence pointing to a direct connection between quality teachers and higher achievement by students is so compelling that schools should be placing more effort into making sure they find and keep the highest quality teachers (Clement, 2003).

President Bush recognized the problem many districts and states had in obtaining teachers who were properly trained. According to the information on the official No Child Left Behind's Web-site, only 41% of eighth-grade math teachers majored in math in college. That is 30 percentage points lower than the international average. In English, one fifth of all public school students in grades 7 through 12 were taught by teachers who did not have at least a college minor in the areas of English literature, communications, or journalism. In history and physical science, more than half of America's students were being taught by teachers who had never studied the subject in any concentrated way. More than four million students in physics, chemistry, and history classes had been taught by teachers who lacked preparation for teaching their subjects (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).

The problem associated with the term highly-qualified teachers revolves around three different but related issues. The first identifiable problem was locating and hiring new highly-qualified teachers. Second was being able to keep new teachers who were highly qualified. Third was ensuring that veteran teachers were highly qualified and keeping them employed and teaching in America's schools (Clement, 2003).

Even though Northeast Tennessee and surrounding areas have not experienced a severe problem of finding new highly-qualified teachers, most administrators have watched the applicants' pool shrink over the last few years. Because the desire to provide the best for all children is uniform, the act of "stealing" the best teacher from a nearby school system rarely occurs. It takes high quality teachers to ensure that students receive a solid education. A survey of Americans in 1998 and again in 2000 ranked the quality of teachers as having the greatest influence on learning. The percentage ranking increased from 55% to 60% over the two-year period. In 2000, 89% of those responding rated "ensuring a well-qualified teacher in every classroom" as very important, with an additional 10% saying it was somewhat important (Haselkorn & Harris, 2001).

It is a certainty that Americans want the most qualified teachers for their children; however, finding those deemed highly-qualified teachers has been and will continue to be a struggle. The number who applied for open teaching positions evidences one major concern. Fifty-three percent of those who responded to a 2001 national survey of high school principals said that not enough qualified teachers apply for positions in their schools. Of the principals surveyed, 49% said that the best applicants often had better offers from outside the field of education (Kaplan & Owing, 2001). A recent analysis by Ingersoll (2001) of teacher turnover rates and teacher shortages supported this finding. Ingersoll determined that job dissatisfaction was the major reason provided for giving up the profession and stated factors such as low salaries, problems with student discipline, and lack of support from school administrators (Ingersoll).

In order to secure highly-qualified candidates, Clement (2003) suggested the need for school systems to review their hiring processes. She emphatically stated that a candidate's first impression of a school or a school district was critical. According to Clement, a school that helps ensure the hiring rather than the hindering of a qualified candidate is an essential entity. Smith and Knab (1996) outlined the best hiring practices for teacher selection. They called for the identification of those attitudes, behaviors, and skills that characterize the kind of teachers most wanted in classrooms. They firmly acknowledged the value of screening for these characteristics at every stage of data collection and in the candidates' evaluations to validate the selection process and to ensure that it predicts excellence in classroom and professional performance. To provide further ease with efficiency in hiring, Smith and Knab detailed the importance of complying with federal, state, and local laws. This should eliminate unproductive paperwork so that the best candidates have confidence in the speed and efficiency of the system that is recruiting them. Automating the process whenever possible should reduce staff time spent on clerical tasks and reserve labor-intensive personal evaluative techniques for only the most promising candidates. Prompt, accessible, and accurate information should be provided to

candidates at all stages of the hiring process. Decision makers should gain accurate and timely information about the overall process and its results; this could help finalize their thought processes about appropriate measures to use to increase the efficiency of the hiring process (Smith & Knab).

By providing school administrators with extensive research on effective teaching, school leaders should be able to better recognize best practices from those candidates who might indeed be highly qualified. In addition, Kaplan and Owing (2001) suggested that school districts consider equity, achievement, and accountability when making teaching assignments. At-risk students require the most effective teachers. Administrators must use their most persuasive leadership skills to challenge traditional school practices that assign the “best” teachers only to the highest achievers. It becomes vital to work with faculty members and communities to increase the esteem and status of instructors who can successfully teach weaker students (Kaplan & Owing).

The retention of new teachers has been a growing concern in the highly-qualified teacher realm. It is imperative that special support and development efforts be focused on the beginning teacher both to quickly increase his or her effectiveness in the classroom and to increase the likelihood for long-term retention. Clement (2003) suggested that a discussion of these supports during job interviews might encourage candidates to sign on with the district. Clement also stressed that schools must “follow up on the promises” made (p. 7).

Clement (2003) then followed with specific suggestions. While it is generally considered a fact that new teachers will struggle somewhat, school leaders can do their part to minimize the time and energy they spend struggling. Teachers who participated in effective induction, support, and mentoring programs noted less stress and alienation in the initial phases of their jobs. Installing a solid induction program that enables new teachers to ride out the rough times has several benefits. New teachers become more effective at a faster pace and veteran teachers spend less time “hand-holding and supporting new teachers” (p.7). By reducing the potential for

early burnout of new teachers, fewer teachers have to be hired each spring. Induction can include orientation, support groups, seminars, and mentoring. Each district needs to evaluate its current practices for inducting and supporting new teachers and then customize a program to ensure that newly-hired teachers are supported during the critical first years in the district (Clement).

While the suggestions made by Clement (2003) have merit, a broader view is also needed. First-hand knowledge of a high turnover rate may not fully explain the hard questions that must be posed and answered. Districts should start by routinely asking a key question: Why do teachers leave the district or specific schools within the district? While some reasons might exist beyond the immediate control of the district (for example higher salaries found outside the field of education), others can certainly be addressed. For example, teachers' satisfaction has been shown to be higher in schools where teachers work together and learn to solve problems together. The sense of being a part of a professional learning community is a powerful motivator and a great source of job satisfaction (Eubanks, 2002).

Ensuring that the veteran teachers are highly qualified is likely the most political component of the *No Child Left Behind* law's attempt to redefine teacher quality. While ESEA created a number of national efforts to improve teacher quality including the creation of a National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse and a National Panel on Teacher Mobility, the bulk of the work was left up to the individual states. State plans required a multitude of constituency groups to be engaged in the plan's development. States had the opportunity to continue building on current reforms or to be bold and create new reforms in teacher education and professional development. Reform efforts could include paying national board certified teachers to mentor others, implementing signing bonuses, or simply paying the fee for existing teachers to become qualified by taking the nationally standardized exam. States recognized the opportunity and constructed plans for dynamic and long-lasting professional growth for teachers. President Bush

was correct in stating that America must leave no child behind. However, in order to do so, no teacher must be left unqualified (Berry, 2004).

According to the letter of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, local school districts must use 5% of their Title I part A funds to help teachers become highly qualified (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Teachers must be fully state licensed with no emergency licensures, hold a high level of education attainment, and demonstrate competency in the subject area(s) to be taught. As of the 2002-03 school year, any teachers hired with Title I funds must have met the requirements of a “highly-qualified teacher.” Districts have yet to do this in a comprehensive way and many details will be decided by each state’s rulings (American Association of School Administrators, 2003).

A 2000 study by Darling-Hammond entitled *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence*, reported on state-level case studies and quantitative analyses of state-level achievement data to examine whether and how states' policies influence teachers' capabilities and students' learning. Notably, the study examined the ways in which teacher qualifications and other school inputs such as class size were related to students' achievement across the United States while taking students' characteristics into account (Darling-Hammond).

Some recent multivariate studies of students' achievements at the school and district level have found significant relationships between teachers' qualifications and what students learn, especially when scores on licensing examinations are included. In an analysis of nearly 900 Texas school districts that evaluated the effects of many school input variables and controlled for students' backgrounds and districts' characteristics, Ferguson (1991) found that combined measures of teachers' expertise including scores on a licensing examination, master's degrees, and experience accounted for more of the interdistrict variation in students' reading and mathematics achievements (and achievement gains) in grades 1 through 11 than did students' socioeconomic status. Lower pupil-teacher ratios and smaller schools made an additional yet significantly smaller contribution to students' achievements in the elementary grades (Darling-

Hammond, 2000). Interestingly, the Ferguson study was conducted in President George Bush's home state of Texas.

Darling-Hammond (2000) found that of the teacher qualification variables, the strongest relationship was found for scores on the state's licensing examination, a test that measures both basic skills and teaching knowledge. The effects were so strong and the variations in teacher's expertise were so great that after controlling for socioeconomic status, the large disparities in achievement between Black and White students were almost entirely accounted for by differences in the qualifications of their teachers. Ferguson (1991) found that every additional dollar spent on more highly-qualified teachers netted greater increases in students' achievement than did less instructionally focused uses of school resources.

As reported by Darling-Hammond (2000), states differed greatly in the extent to which they invested in teachers' learning as a key policy lever despite logical presumptions and research evidence that student learning depends substantially on what teachers know and can do. At the front end of a teacher's career was a wide variation in the standards to which entering teachers and teacher-education institutions are held. Licensing standards were noticeably different from state to state as were state commitments to enforcing these standards. Later access to professional development also varied widely. Wisconsin and Minnesota were two states with high standards. In these states, a prospective high school teacher must complete a bachelor's degree that includes a full major in the subject area to be taught. In addition, coursework covering learning theory, child and adolescent development, subject matter teaching methods, curriculum, effective teaching strategies, uses of technology, classroom management, behavior and motivation, human relations, and the education of students with special needs must be successfully completed. By contrast, in Louisiana, prospective high school teachers could be licensed without even a minor in the field they would be teaching. The state of Louisiana did not require them to have studied curriculum, teaching strategies, classroom management, uses of technology, or the needs of special education students and they could receive a license with only

6 weeks of student teaching as opposed to the 18 week requirement in Wisconsin (Darling-Hammond).

Teacher shortages are expected to continue to increase and will be exacerbated by the new requirements of *No Child Left Behind* because only appropriately certified teachers may be hired and assigned to work in schools receiving this funding. Low-performing schools and districts are often the ones to routinely hire substitutes, out-of-area teachers, and others with emergency certification to fill their vacancies. High-performing schools and districts, on the other hand, routinely have qualified applicants for open positions. *No Child Left Behind's* insistence on appropriately certified staff, while sensible, might prove difficult to achieve and could place additional burdens on already struggling schools (Donlevy, 2002). Using effective school-based instructional practices has been and continues to be the cornerstone of the educational system in America. Educators have attempted to remain grounded in research-based practices as they were financially and willingly able to do so; however, only recently has this issue received attention pertaining to schools as a whole throughout the United States.

Receiving current and effective training through scientifically sound practices in the field of education is the essence of today's world of accountability. Acquiring quality professional training and subject matter knowledge is crucial for preservice teachers and just as importantly so to those already employed and working with America's children. *No Child Left Behind* represents a strong attempt toward ensuring equitable outcomes for all children through high quality staffing. The law makes reasonable demands on teacher quality that will cause administrators to make mindful decisions about staffing and program development (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).

Career Stages of Classroom Teachers

Addressing research involving the career stages of classroom teachers has been critical for numerous reasons. The stage of a teacher's career is especially relevant when looking at

teachers who make the decision to become involved in the process of national board certification. This process can be personally rewarding for the individual teacher should he or she become successful. Rewards in teaching are intangible and often delayed; much of the time they are intrinsic rewards. As noted by researchers, it is those intrinsic rewards that are actually motivational (Herzberg, 1966) and that often matter most (Lortie, 1975). Accountability has ushered in a demand for sharper and more detailed evaluation methods in teaching. The Madeline Hunter (Steffy, 1989) model of teaching, despite protests by the originator, has been slavishly encapsulated into bureaucratic checklists and applied to all teachers. As stated by Steffy, this application occurred with new as well as experienced teachers regardless of their place in the development of classroom expertise. The stage of a teacher's career more often than not had a direct effect on his or her teaching performance; administrators must be made aware of this critical element as they plan for increased learning. The approach and skills used in providing direct assistance, staff development, curriculum development, group development, and action research differed according to the level of motivation and level of thought of teachers. As noted by Glickman (1985), each administrator has to select the skills and techniques that will enable teachers to develop individually and collectively to create a cause beyond themselves. A commitment to that cause is essential for a school's success (Glickman).

Changes in life are identifiable and expected. An adult's thinking, attitudes towards work, and social relationships change in subtle ways; differences become apparent only after many years. However, keeping gradual change in mind, the principles of development uncovered for children appeared to apply equally to adults. According to Glickman (1995), all humans pass through common stages of growth. The stages are orderly in that one stage precedes the next and the rate of passage from one stage to the next varies from individual to individual. Changes within a teacher's life have also been expected and identified. According to Steffy (1989), a teacher's career-stage model is centered on the individual's internal state of being and competence. Steffy suggested that any model that did not take into account a person's state of

mind and motivation to use professional skills over time was bound to be irrelevant to children and to what they learn. Steffy documented five career stages of a teacher: (a) anticipatory, (b) expert/master, (c) renewal, (d) withdrawal, and (d) exit. The first and the last stage deal with the entry and exit from the organization respectively. The other three encompass the attitude and competence of the teacher during those many years in between. These three stages are strongly addressed, as they are more relevant to teachers involved in the national board certification process.

As noted by Steffy (1989), teachers who entered the field as new graduates or as new to the teaching profession entered at the anticipatory career stage. These teachers began their career full of idealism and energy that was exemplified to every other professional in the building. They were anxious to learn and were completely open to almost all new ideas. Their creativity was often apparent to others as they performed their duties vigorously. At this stage, cynicism was absent from their actions.

Berliner (1986) classified teachers as novice, good, or expert. Steffy (1989) would take Berliner's expert status teacher and place him or her into the career stage of expert/master in a classroom that was very much controlled and smooth-functioning with a true sense of order and little off task behavior by the students. Steffy noted that during the expert/master stage, the teacher was actually self-actualized through the job. His or her feelings of self worth and value were usually attributed to professional performance. Maslow (1954) defined self-actualization as the need to fulfill one's potential and he placed it at the top of the hierarchy of needs above the need for self-esteem. According to Steffy, a feeling of "with-it-ness" could be found in teachers at this stage (p. 41). Steffy reported that expert teachers quickly performed environmental scans to detect all happenings and noted that teachers at this stage in their career have been considered to have a sixth-sense or eyes in the back of their heads. The expert/master teachers were forever changing and growing professionally. They were usually the success-makers in the schools and

were often acknowledged by their peers as the best. Typically, they provided their own renewal and growth, which, according to Steffy, was probably how they arrived at this stage.

Steffy (1989) stated that the withdrawal career stage was subdivided into three parts: (a) initial withdrawal, (b) persistent withdrawal, and (c) deep withdrawal. At the initial stage of withdrawal, the teacher usually had an adequate job performance but was much quieter, more reserved, and more of a follower in terms of group dynamics. However, at this stage, the teacher was still receptive to encouragement. At the persistent stage, the teacher often became critical of the board of education and administrators. Often, teachers at this stage were critical of other teachers, especially those at the expert/master or anticipatory stages. They often resisted change and were disruptive to the system by becoming obstructionists. A person who was no longer growing in his or her job would be considered to be in the deep withdrawal stage of the career. Steffy found very few teachers in this stage. Those in this stage were visibly incompetent in many areas. These teachers were the most difficult to deal with and were often defensive as they could not admit any of their own deficiencies (Steffy).

According to Steffy (1989), teachers entering the renewal stage were getting better not worse. Those at this stage were involved in some professional growth activity designed to lead them to the expert/master stage. They had been reactivated either intrinsically or by others' actions. Renewal teachers were excited about acquiring new skills but were also highly dependant during this stage of their careers. Blanchard and Tager (1986) identified five PERKS that helped people who were entering the renewal stage: **P**articipation, **E**nvironment, **R**ecognition, **K**nowledge, and **S**yle. Because it is the role of the administration to create a climate where attention is paid to each of these PERKS, the climate for renewal within the school or organization is often directly related to the competency of the administration. Steffy explained that the best reward for the teacher at this stage was the administrator's personal time and attention. By its very nature, renewal was collegial and participative because bystanders and observers are not committed to the hard work of change. To change, to take the chance of

failure, a support system must be present. As noted by Steffy, only in a positive school climate where the professional and personal risks are minimized, can renewal become a reality.

Classroom teachers could enter the exit stage of their careers at any point. According to Steffy (1989), teachers at this stage were sometimes the brightest and the best. They could have decided to leave the profession for financial reasons. Possibly they decided there was just too much accountability and testing and not enough focus or time for student's overall needs. In any case, they were no longer committed to the school or school district at this stage of their careers. Sadly, they often felt the most need for recognition at this stage (Steffy).

According to Steffy (1989), teachers may move from one stage to another or remain fixed at any stage especially if they were reinforced at a particular stage. A teacher's internal orientation to teaching is not stable; rather, it is fragile, permeable, regenerative, and expandable. Because teachers are human, their orientation to work is renewable. Teachers often chose whether consciously or unconsciously to move or remain at a specific career stage or they may have received influence from others that prompted their decision to move to another stage. The stages presented by Steffy were fluid; they were not intended to be fixed and isolated; often, there were overlaps among the stages. Many teachers, as reported by Steffy, found excitement in their work, varied their environment, and learned to seek out new challenges during their careers. On the other hand, many left the profession at various stages and never sought or showed improvement (Steffy). These extremities point out the complexities of human behavior. Too often the general course of teaching is followed by a leveling off into a monotony of procedures by those who choose to remain in the profession or by abandonment by those who seek more varied work (Glickman, 1985). Administrators should be mindful of each teacher and his or her career stage.

Steffy (1989) suggested the formation of a National Academy of Teaching in her work concerning career stages of teachers. Ironically, her suggestion was aligned time-wise with the formation of the NBPTS (2003). She suggested that the academy would be neither all theory nor

all practice; rather it should be a balanced combination of the two and not focused on licensure.

Steffy suggested that the National Academy of Teaching should perform the following functions:

1. Perform and gather case studies of great teachers, creating a significant data base grounded in outstanding practice;
2. offer scholarships to classroom teachers for sabbaticals to improve their knowledge of the subject matter and its transmission to classroom practice, thus reducing the lag time involved in the current textbook development and adoption process or within collegiate preservice programs;
3. promote the creation and development of alternative schooling environments that are based on the learner rather than being dominated by bureaucracy;
4. foster a spirit among teachers that would focus on how teachers within schools can negotiate and re-negotiate the social reality they confront on a day-to-day basis; and
5. hold regional conferences to promote critical thinking and outstanding practices. (p. 148)

It was with the deep understanding of teachers and their career stages that Steffy made this recommendation about teachers and for teachers. Her stated intention was not to address licensure, rather, to focus on teachers' needs and professional growth.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2003) was created in 1987 after the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy Task Force on Teaching (1986) as a Profession released *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* on May 16, 1986. This report followed the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* released in 1983 (Carnegie Forum). The recommendations called for after the Carnegie Forum were for an advanced certification process for accomplished teachers. The National Board is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan, and nongovernmental organization governed by a 56 member board of directors, a majority of whom are classroom teachers. The other directors include school administrators, school board leaders, governors and state legislators, higher education officials, and business and community leaders (NBPTS, 2003).

The NBPTS (2003) continues to advance the quality of teaching and learning by:

1. maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do;
2. providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards; and
3. advocating related educational reforms to integrate national board certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of national board certified teachers. (n. p.).

An essential element in the mission statement is the word “voluntary.” As pointed out by Shapiro (1995), national board certification is strictly designed to complement, not replace, existing state licensure requirements. While states continued to set licensure requirements to teach in each state, the NBPTS established the high and rigorous advanced standards for experienced teachers to demonstrate accomplishments. The certification is available to all teachers who hold a baccalaureate degree, have taught for a minimum of five years in either a public or private school, and have held a valid state teaching license for those three years (NBPTS, 2003). The national board certificate is valid for 10 years. It is currently available in 24 areas. The standards are based on the goals and the five core propositions as outlined by the national board:

The NBPTS seeks to identify and recognize teachers who effectively enhance student learning and demonstrate the high level of knowledge, skills, abilities and commitments reflected in the following five core propositions:

1. teachers are committed to students and their learning,
2. teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students,
3. teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning,
4. teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience, and
5. teachers are members of learning communities. (NBPTS, 2003, n. p.)

The names of the first group of teachers achieving certification were announced in 1995 with the first 86 national board certified teachers named in January. In the first five years of the assessment, 4,217 teachers nationwide applied for the national board certification with a success rate of 44% (Rotberg, Futrell, & Holmes, 2000). As of December 2003, the numbers have climbed to exceed more than 32,000 successful national board certified teachers. During the 2002-2003 year alone, more than 8,000 teachers attained the certification. Florida and North

Carolina topped the list with nearly 1,500 successful teachers each in 2002-2003. Tennessee currently has 92 national board certified teachers. Twenty-eight of those were certified during the 2002-03 year. The number of candidates seeking the certification has grown dramatically each year since the system became available. As of March 2004, more than 14,000 candidates were seeking certification in 2003-2004. In addition, the 24 certificates available to nearly 95% of the teaching population are available to the majority of those certificate areas for those who deliver instruction in both English and Spanish (NBPTS, 2003).

The first phase of research conducted by the NBPTS regarding candidate demographics revealed interesting information about the applicants. Applicant differences included: women are 75% more likely to apply than men, African-American teachers are 30% more likely to apply than white teachers, teachers who earn higher salaries are more likely to apply, teachers who perform better on standardized tests are more likely to apply, and teachers who have advanced degrees and permanent teaching licenses are more likely to apply. According to the NBPTS (2003), the data also clearly revealed trends in the types of teachers who were awarded the advanced certification:

1. Female applicants are about 30% more likely to be certified than males.
2. White applicants are about 65-70% more likely to be certified than their African-American applicants are.
3. Applicants with higher standardized test scores are more likely to be certified.
4. Applicants employed by schools that are more affluent are increasingly likely to be certified.
5. Both applicants and certificate holders tend to be employed in schools with:
 - a. fewer children in poverty;
 - b. fewer minority children;
 - c. higher performance according to state accountability standards;
 - d. more college-educated residents; and
 - e. higher median housing values. (n. p.)

The work required of teachers seeking national board certification typically takes place over most of a school year. Teachers estimated they spent about 120 to 200 hours on the two-part process (Moore, 2002). The certification process required the candidates to develop an individual portfolio reflecting various aspects of teaching. Candidates showed evidence of teaching practice through students' work artifacts, videotapes of classroom interaction, and written reflections. A few common characteristics such as group work in class, family involvement in the classroom, and participation in educational activities beyond the classroom, were shown by candidates in all certification areas. Candidates also passed a written examination on age-appropriate and content-appropriate teaching strategies (Pershey, 2001).

In recognition of the strong demands for completing the national board certification process, many state and local agencies initiated programs of instruction, mentoring, and support for candidates. Some state and/or local systems have offered financial incentives for the successful completion of the certification process. Incentives for national board certification have been provided at the local level in more than 400 school districts or through statewide programs funded by other sources. Currently, 48 of the states offer regulatory or legislative support for the national board certification. Following the leadership of North Carolina's former governor, Jim Hunt, and Ohio's former governor, George Voinovich, several states offer multiple incentives that provide financial support and use the national board certification to permit greater interstate mobility for those accomplished teachers (NBPTS, 2003).

To exemplify the differences in four southeastern states, the financial incentives and supports from Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina were examined in this study. In Tennessee, 28 certificates were awarded in 2002-03 for a total of 91 current certificate holders statewide. Tennessee candidates are supported by the Tennessee Department of Education through a partial funding of the certification fee. The funds were used to support 106 candidates at a 50% pay rate toward the application process. There are seven local school systems in

Tennessee that offer support such as local financial incentives, release time to complete the certification process, and additional support of the application fee (NBPTS, 2003).

In Virginia, 135 certificates were awarded in 2002-03 for a total of 552 current certificate holders statewide. Virginia offered its national certified board teachers a one-time bonus not to exceed \$5,000 when the certificate is attained. Each Virginia national board candidate then receives \$2,500 annually for the life of the certificate. Virginia's candidates are selected randomly for financial support of the application fees (NBPTS, 2003).

In Georgia, 515 certificates were awarded in 2002-03 producing a total of 1,327 certificate holders statewide (NBPTS, 2003). The A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000 in Georgia established that their national board certified teachers would receive a 10% increase in salary annually. There has been some litigation regarding the interpretation of Georgia's supplement plan. Because of its costly nature, disagreement has arisen over whether the 10% is based on the salary year in which the certificate is achieved or whether it is 10% of the candidate's salary calculated each year (Jacobson, 2001). The Georgia State Department of Education estimated that their policy would cost \$15.6 million in fiscal year 2005, up from \$4.7 million in 2004. The state spent only \$100,000 on the program in the year 2000 (Sack, 2003).

In North Carolina, 1,525 certificates were awarded in 2002-03 bringing the state's total to 6,640 certificate holders. North Carolina's candidates' application fees are supported entirely by the state department of education. North Carolina's teachers who are successful in the certification process receive an annual salary increase of 12% on their state-paid salary (NBPTS, 2003). Southern states are leading the nation in certifying candidates through the national board process. More than two thirds of the 32,000 teachers came from the southern states as of December 2003. About one third came from the states of Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Richard, 2004).

Incentives for national board certification are provided at the local level in more than 500 school districts or through statewide programs funded by other sources. Currently, 50 states

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Several national figures endorsed the work of the national board including former Presidents Bush and Clinton along with former United States Education Secretaries Lamar Alexander and Richard Riley. Additional support for the NBPTS was also provided from an array of associations including the American Federation of Teachers, Council for American Private Education, Council for Great City Schools, National Alliance of Black School Educators, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Education Association, and the National School Boards Association (NBPTS, 2003). This cross-section of support from the national community has ensured tremendous growth and development of the national board. The national board certification has been funded in part with grants from the United States Department of Education and the National Science Foundation. Through September 2002, the national board has been appropriated federal funds of \$129.3 million that reflects approximately 41% of the entire project. More than \$186.2 million (59%) of the project's cost will be financed from non-governmental sources (NBPTS).

In 2001, the NBPTS commissioned a comprehensive research survey concerning the impact of the assessment process on teachers who successfully completed the national board certification process (NBPTS Research Report, 2001). A key finding from the NBPTS survey was that the national board certification process was an excellent professional development experience for the teachers. Of those surveyed, 80% said the certification process was better than other professional development experiences and 61% stated that the process had a greater impact on them than actually receiving the certification itself (NBPTS Research Report).

Bassett (2002) wrote of her experience with the national board certification process in the *School Library Journal*:

When I sat down and started to look at the materials they had sent me, I became a huge fan of the certification process. In my opinion, it is without a doubt the best professional

development tool that I have ever seen. I do not believe that anyone can go through this process and not come out of it a better teacher, whether they certify or do not certify. You cannot do this and not improve your teaching practice. (p. 56)

The Charlotte-Collaborative Project originated in 1998 as a partnership between public schools and local universities with a primary goal of providing quality professional development experiences for practicing teachers based on the standards set forth by the NBPTS (Anderson, Hancock, & Jaus, 2001). The collaborative model, consisting mostly of a support group strategy, not only assisted in candidates it also garnered national recognition as being one of the top professional development models for acquiring national board certification in the United States (Anderson et al.).

Effects of National Board Certified Teachers

In 2002, the NBPTS announced that 22 new research studies would take place to address the impact of national board certified teachers on the quality of teaching and student learning in America's schools (NBPTS, 2003). This came on the heels of a wave of accountability efforts sweeping the educational system throughout the United States. In today's society, any program remotely related to education or educational reform must be tied to students' results. The NBPTS is no exception. Their action of commissioning the studies showed a good faith effort to link the national board certificate to students' achievement results.

According to researchers at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Bond, Jaeger, Smith, & Hattie, 2000), teachers who were certified by the NBPTS significantly outperformed their peers who were not board certified on 11 of 13 key dimensions of teaching expertise. The study examined 65 teachers from North Carolina, Ohio, and Washington DC who went through the certification process in the two NBPTS certificate areas of Early Adolescence/English Language Arts and Middle Childhood Generalists. The 13 dimensions were based on the body of research concerning effective teaching as reported over the last two decades. Each of the 65 teachers involved had a casebook that was developed individually on

them by the researchers. This casebook included: (a) teachers' instructional objectives and lesson plans for a particular unit of study, (b) classroom observations on all 65 teachers, and (c) scripted interviews of the teachers and their students. The assessors were not given the status of any teacher's certification. The study revealed that those achieving national board certification scored higher on all 13 dimensions than did their counterparts who did not achieve the certification. The differences were significantly different on 11 of the 13 dimensions (Bond et al.).

Another supportive research study originated in the western part of the United States (Belden, Russonelo, & Stuart, 2002). In a survey of California teachers holding the national board certificate, more than 9 out of every 10 teachers reported that achieving the certification was a source of excellent or good professional development; they also stated that students in their classes benefited from their participation in the process. In addition, they reported it enabled them to better engage students and assess students' performances and needs (Belden et al.).

A recent study of Indiana's national board certified teachers revealed several positive aspects of the process as they related to student achievement (Rinne, 2002). National board certified teachers responding considered they were more effective teachers than they would have been without going through the rigorous process. Of the candidates responding, 25% said that national board certified teachers like challenges while 22% reported being life-long learners. When questioned concerning the aspect of principals' support, 25% revealed their principals provided no support, whereas 41% said they felt strongly supported by their principals. Notably, the biggest benefit appeared to be the opening of doors for additional opportunities to impact students' achievement through their leadership activities. Sixty-two and one half percent of the national board certified teachers in Indiana had been offered leadership roles in their districts and schools and 19% had been invited speakers (Rinne).

In this age of accountability, public and legislative bodies question the wisdom of dollars spent for education. Funding earmarked to assist teachers with the national board certification process and also paying teachers a bonus is certainly not an exception to that rule. A controversial study released by Stone in 2002 examined the annual test-score gains of Tennessee students in various subjects over three years to gauge the effectiveness of 16 teachers who received the national board certificate. Stone's research revealed that the students' gains were no greater on average than those made by students of other teachers who did not hold the national board certificate. The release of this small-scale study prompted quick public criticism that may have further prompted additional research concerning the advanced certificate holders and their effects on students' achievement. The national board offered a sharp response to the release of Stone's research in a statement saying the study was hardly independent research because Stone was an opponent of the national board (Keller, 2002). Betty Castor (NBPTS, 2003) the executive director of the national board at the time, cited Stone's miniscule sample size and the inconsistent use of test scores as technical problems.

Recent research in North Carolina established that end-of-the-year test scores improved an average of 7% more for those students whose teachers had earned the seal of approval from the NBPTS when compared with students whose teachers who did not earn it (Goldhaber, Perry, & Anthony, 2004). Their study examined more than 610,000 state test scores for third, fourth, and fifth graders over a three-school-year span. The researchers found results that were even more significant for younger students and for children from low-income families confirming that teacher quality matters more for disadvantaged students. This key finding regarding the students of North Carolina is critical because of the significant number of 6,640 national board certified teachers in that state and the investment of an added salary of 12% to the state's salary scale (NBPTS Research Report, 2001).

Summary

According to the United States Department of Education, the number of public and private school elementary and secondary teachers exceeded three million in 1999-2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). This presents a daunting task to our educational systems. Providing quality training, professional growth, or staff development to a large body of professionally trained teachers is of national concern. Meeting individual teachers' needs is challenging. Developmental-stage researchers such as Steffy (1989) and Glickman (1985) have presented strong evidence that traditional staff development had failed because it was not based on career stages and not compatible with how adult learners developed in their lives and evolved throughout their careers. Schools were at the same time no better or worse than their least able teachers (Steffy).

The process outlined by the NBPTS (2003) evolved to promote quality teachers and their expertise. The process may also be a quality outlet for professionals seeking individual professional growth experiences and who may typically fall into the teacher career stage of renewal or expert/master. The national board certification process is an extensive year long assessment of actual teaching practice. The uniqueness of the national board certification is that it assesses not only the knowledge teachers possess, but the actual use of their skills and professional judgment in the classroom as they work to improve students' achievement (NBPTS).

Given the national thrust for improvements in the area of teacher quality through the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, it is crucial for schools and school systems to review and evaluate their training programs already in place. The NBPTS (2003) has been working diligently with all states to ensure that national certification meets state qualifications for teachers to be deemed highly qualified.

Teacher training is and will continue to be at the forefront of our educational system in the United States. Teachers are powerful human beings; they are adult learners directly affecting the lives of our nation's young learners. A critical focus on quality professional growth

experiences for individual teachers is needed. More than anyone else, teachers have to keep believing that humanity is worthy of education. One noted author went so far as to say, “A teacher’s own humanity is the cornerstone of that faith. Without that faith, tomorrow arrives without hope” (Steffy, 1989).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Chapter 3 provides a description of the design and methods used to conduct the investigation into the perceptions of national board certified teachers, their colleagues, and their administrators. Qualitative studies attempt to describe more than just the way things are. The true intent of qualitative research is to describe how things evolved into what they are today and how individuals perceive that development. Qualitative research has primarily been a method to give meaning to the experiences in which individuals have participated (Gay, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1991).

To date, no studies were located which focused on the supports perceived by the national board candidates in completing this rigorous certification process. This research study focused specifically on the means of support or supportive behaviors the national board candidates recalled during the process of attaining their certifications. The study evaluated perceptions of teachers and administrators involved with the process outlined through the NBPTS (2003). The purpose of this chapter is to identify the subjects, define the data gathering instruments, explain the process by which the interviews were administered, and delineate the procedures for analysis of data obtained through this research.

Design of the Study

The design of the study was based upon a descriptive-case approach. This type of qualitative research involves making careful descriptions of educational phenomena. Attitudes and beliefs concerning the process of attaining national board certification were explored by interviewing subjects who served in various educational roles in schools in Northeast Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, Northern Georgia, and Western North Carolina. Two qualitative sampling methodologies were used in this study. The first sampling methodology, homogenous sampling,

was used to determine which school systems in the area had candidates who held national board certifications. Homogeneous sampling encompasses a group that shares similar characteristics (Patton, 1990). The second sampling methodology was chain or snowball sampling (Patton). Chain sampling involves selecting each subject based on the recommendation of a well-situated or knowledgeable person. Participants were selected serially as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and the interviews continued until a redundancy of data was achieved.

The primary method of data collection was through semistructured interviews. Creswell (1998) suggested the initial use of open-ended questions while remaining flexible during the research process to “reflect an increased understanding of the problem” (p. 19). This study employed only limited direct observations of the interviewees in their natural settings.

The Role of the Researcher

In the beginning of a qualitative study, the researcher assumes the role of learner (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). By not assuming a critical viewpoint or a stern evaluative position, Stainback and Stainback noted that participants could become more open and thus share deeper levels of their experiences. As the research interviews progress, questions may be altered or changed in an effort to have a deeper understanding of the issues that were readily apparent to the study (Pryzwansky & Noblit, 1990).

Middleman and Goldberg-Wood (1995) noted there is “. . . no reality apart from one’s construction of it in dialogue with others, and there are as many constructions of reality as there are experiencing people” (p. 8). Becvar, Canfield, and Becvar (1997) further detailed that the interactions between the researcher and the participants that include, but are not limited to, initial questions, follow-up questions, prompts and paraphrasing, “cannot help but influence the nature of the story” of each of the those involved in this type of research (p. 104). During this merge of interpretations, an understanding of the issue being studied will be created (Middleman &

Goldberg-Wood). The narrative of a qualitative study relies heavily on the researcher to tell this story.

Qualitative inquiry usually generates stories that are emotion laden, close to the people, and practical (Creswell, 1998). Thus, the researcher can not help but assume the role of a passionate participant in the research (Lincoln, 1991). The researcher must attempt, however, to distinguish between being emic (open to the unique views of the participants) and being etic (recognizing one's own interpretation of the stories being told) (Creswell). The researcher took great care to remain emic in this research study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Readers of qualitative research studies specifically look for the validity and reliability of the study in order to determine if the results are trustworthy or merit attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research uses four main terms in order to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These terms have quantitative correlates that are based on specific constructs. The methods by which the researcher addresses these constructs ensure the reader that the study is actually trustworthy.

The qualitative researcher in this study was an involved participant. Despite this active involvement, trustworthiness was established. The mere acknowledgement of a bias by the researcher does not diminish trustworthiness; it actually enhances it. Because I was open and aware of my possible bias, I worked diligently to ensure that it did not directly affect or influence the study (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997).

Researchers refer to the term credibility concerning the construct of truth-value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility in this study was ensured by using three strategies: (a) a significant amount of time in the field was spent gathering data; (b) a variety of school-level stakeholders in the national board certification process were interviewed as sources (national board certified teachers, colleagues, on-site administrators); and (c) participants were able to review their

responses to ensure that bias did not misrepresent their intent (Lincoln & Guba). These strategies were used until a thick and rich description of the topic being studied was obtained. According to Mertens (1998), researchers should continue the study until they have “confidence that themes and examples are repeating instead of extending” (p. 181).

Transferability is the construct of whether or not the study is applicable to other locations or situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability in this study was ensured by thick and rich description about the perceived supports that assisted in the teacher candidates attaining national board certification. The reader can evaluate the significance of the study by understanding the context of the participants’ answers. The reader must also determine if the benefits of the study extend to others or if they are exclusive to only similar groups.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability answers the construct of consistency. Dependability was ensured in this research study through the completion of an audit (see Appendix G). The auditor was familiar with the research process yet not directly involved in the study. All transcripts of the interviews and other documentation were examined periodically throughout the course of the study as a way to ensure that the inquiry was dependable.

The auditor also supported the construct of neutrality. This qualitative research construct is referred to as confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was ensured by the complete and accurate accumulation of all necessary information.

Research Participants

The individuals interviewed in this study consisted of an array of professional educators. The interviews were conducted as a triad at each school site. Three separate interviews were conducted at each school site that I visited. The triad included the national board certified teacher, a colleague of the national board certified teacher, and an administrator under whom the

national board certified teacher served when completing the certification process. Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated:

A realistic site is where (a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present; (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; and (d) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. (p. 69)

Access to teachers and administrators in the Northeast Tennessee region, as well as those in Southwest Virginia, Northern Georgia, and Western North Carolina, was available because of the strong network of colleagues established by my job placement as a building-level principal. This element also assisted in building trust and rapport with those being interviewed.

Initial contact was made with each person being interviewed. A letter of explanation of the study was given to each individual who agreed to participate (see Appendix E). A personal interview with each of the interviewees agreeing to participate in the study was scheduled. Each interview took place at the designated date and time determined by the interviewee. All of the interviews were completed by June 12, 2004. Each participant received and signed a copy of the Informed Consent form prior to any data being gathering by the researcher (see Appendix A).

Instrumentation

During the initial planning stages of the study, general interview guides were developed to outline a list of topics to be explored during the interview (Patton, 1990). The guides were based on the literature reviewed and upon the researcher's personal experience involving candidates' support for national board certification. Three separate interview guides were used to target each interviewee: the national board certified teacher, the colleague of the national board certified teacher, and the administrator of the national board certified teacher. The interview guides shown as Appendix B, C, and D included core questions that targeted research questions identified in Chapter 1 of this study. By structuring the interviews, it was expected that the responses provided would be more comparable among the participants (Stainback & Stainback, 1998). Prior to the beginning of the study, mock interviews were conducted with a team of three

teachers and one administrator. Feedback from those individuals helped refine the interview guides and my approach by allowing me to practice skills such as listening for information and clarification and using open-ended questions to encourage respondents to elaborate.

School system superintendents or their designees were contacted initially to obtain permission to conduct possible research at one or more of their schools. If the superintendent was receptive, then permission was obtained to visit each school campus to interview the three members targeted for the interviews at each school site and to review any relevant documentation. Permission to transcribe each interview was requested and obtained from each interviewee. Anonymity was guaranteed to each interviewee. It is understood in qualitative interviewing that the interviewee will take the questions where they lead and the interviewer will refine the interview guide as subsequent questions arise or need to be deleted (Creswell). All interviews were audio taped for later transcription. A field journal was also kept by the researcher to record any notes immediately following the interviews. The audio tapes, transcriptions, and field notes will be kept in a secure location of the office of the researcher for a period of ten years after the completion of this study.

Data Collection

The purpose of the interviews was to gather perceptions and beliefs regarding the process of attaining national board certification concentrating on any means or methods of support or supportive behaviors as perceived by the interviewees. The primary method of data collection in this study was the personal interview.

The interviews were structured to allow each interviewee the opportunity to think about and verbalize his or her perceptions and role in the certification process as presented by the NBPTS. As the interviews progressed, the questions often became even more open-ended in order to allow the respondents to express their opinions freely.

The researcher attempted to be neutral and nonjudgmental throughout this study. Reflective reading techniques were employed throughout the entire interview process to check the accuracy in categorizing perceptions recorded in the transcripts.

Data Analysis

The data collected during the interviewing process were analyzed throughout the research process. Glesne (1999) reported that analysis does not refer to a stage in the research process; rather, it is a continuous process that should begin as soon as the research begins. Furthermore, it is also a time to consider relationships, salience, meanings, and explanations that lead the researcher to consider further questions (Glesne).

In data analysis, the first process is data reduction. A field journal was kept to make any entry notes or jottings immediately following the interviews. All of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed following each interview. Each interview transcription was used in the process of analysis. The data were coded into units described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “single pieces of information that stand by themselves” (p. 203) and were necessary in the process of inductive analysis. After the data were coded in units, they were organized into categories with similar characteristics. Response patterns to form initial categories of information were identified. Further analysis occurred in order to deeper access the passages of the interviews that supported these common threads and united the themes of the responses. At this stage of data analysis, the formation of a theory to answer the research questions began.

An inquiry audit on the raw data was conducted by an unbiased and outside auditor not involved in the research. Member checking was also used to reflect accuracy. Assistance with peer debriefing was also provided to enhance the accuracy of the study and to protect against areas of bias (see Appendix F). While it is acknowledged that the scope of this study holds limitations, varied means and levels of support for candidates seeking national board certifications do exist. The roles of the candidates, peer teachers, and their administrators were

analyzed. The values placed on the supports during the process are presented in a manner that enables the reader to determine whether it is transferable to other settings.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

With the smell of springtime honeysuckle in the air, I drifted into my own little world as I drove down the rural mountain road. I felt anxious to finally reach my first destination involving a discussion with a quality teacher. This newly deemed high-quality teacher had most recently endured the rigorous process of acquiring national board certification. Headed toward a school in the rural setting of Western North Carolina, I anxiously awaited my day of adventure in this intriguing Appalachian setting as my four-wheel drive SUV spiraled down the hillside. Marking off my freshly printed directions from MapQuest one turn at a time, I wondered if a school could really be located in this secluded and isolated region. My hour-and-a-half trek ended abruptly as the winding, narrow, gravel-paved road dissolved and the school sign appeared standing proud among the pines. This would be the home of that quality teacher, who, on her first attempt at the national board certificate, successfully improved her own learning after 21 years of service to children. Stepping up the stone walkway to the office, I was greeted with the warm smile of this teacher of adolescents. She quickly escorted me to her room where we would begin our interview.

Compare that adventure with my short jaunt of only one exit in length during the busy mid-day lunch hour. Traveling the crowded Northeastern Tennessee interstate to a state-of-the-art facility would be my goal for the afternoon. This school would house a pioneer in our region who became one of the first Tennessee teachers to achieve the national board certification after three grueling attempts. Having rescheduled this meeting on three other occasions, I was grateful to this seasoned and respected teacher for giving of her time. As I entered the unruffled building with its pristine surroundings and scenic two-story view, the freshly applied wax made the hallways glisten reminding me of my past home in the elementary principalship. Making my

way down the long, quiet, and shiny corridor, I became content noticing the size of these primary-aged students. Twenty sets of brightly colored eyes looked up at me when I entered their teacher's domain. Filled with a bevy of movement and texture, there was no doubt this room belonged to the students and was led by a teacher of quality. According to her beliefs, she was a high-quality teacher before, during, and after she achieved the national board certificate four years ago. She quickly silenced each of the three-foot tall little folks with just a quick chant and marched them collectively to music class. During her brief departure, I quickly caught my breath and readied my tape recorder hoping to capture the thoughts and ideas from this miracle worker of six-year olds.

After interviewing 24 educators ranging in experience from 8 years to 34 years, it is time to unravel the mystery behind the ability to accomplish the task of achieving national board certification. Each participant in the study has added to the collection of research by sharing specific responses to guided interview questions concerning the support systems related to this advanced certification. While the participants played various roles (direct or indirect) in the process of national board certification, they each played a role regardless of its significance. Each participant held a unique view that collectively provided data-supported themes to guide this qualitative research study.

Selection of Participants

The participants chosen for this study fell into three categories: the national board certified teachers, the teaching colleagues of those national board certified teachers, and the administrator of those national board certified teachers. Their experiences in the educational field ranged from 8 years to 34 years. They were all actively employed and working in public schools in Northeast Tennessee, Southwestern Virginia, Western North Carolina, and Northern Georgia. An emergent sampling design was used to include the 24 educators selected serially.

The focus of the interviews was continuously adjusted to include as many atypical data sources as possible.

Nine national board certified teachers were interviewed concerning their perspectives. Their acquisition of the certificate ranged from the years of 1998 until 2003. In addition, their certification endorsement areas from the national board varied. Three were endorsed as Early Childhood Generalists, one as Early Adolescent Generalist, one as Early Adolescent English/Language Arts, one as Middle Childhood Generalist, one as Exceptional Needs Specialist, one as Adolescent and Young Adult Mathematics, and finally, one as Adolescent and Young Adult Science. Seven of the national board certified teachers were successful on their first attempts. The remaining two were successful on their third attempts. Two of the certificate holders were male and seven were female. Eight certificate holders were Caucasian and one was African American. The national board certified teachers' educational experience ranged from 8 years to 33 years. Seven teacher colleagues were interviewed concerning their involvement with a peer going through the advanced certification process. Five of those teachers did not have national board certification. Two of those colleagues held a national board certificate. Their certificates were in Early Adolescent English/Language Arts and Middle Childhood Generalist. The teacher colleagues represented elementary, middle, and high schools as did each of the national board certified teachers. One was male and six were female. Each teacher colleague was Caucasian. Their educational experience ranged from 10 years to 34 years. Eight administrators were interviewed concerning their knowledge of and involvement with the national board certificate holders. Their experience ranged from 8 years to 29 years. Three were male and five were female. Each administrator served in the role of principal or assistant principal. Each administrator was Caucasian.

The interviewing process continued until a point of redundancy and sufficiency of data was achieved in the collection of the information. Each participant was guaranteed anonymity and was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and accuracy of the information collected.

Each of the statements shared by research participants were personal commentaries and were used with their permission. Interview appointments were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and 22 of the 24 interviews were conducted at the school sites. Two were conducted in an alternative setting preferred by the individuals. Seven sets of the interviews were completed in triads at the school sites. For each school site, separate interviews were conducted for the national board certified teacher, a colleague of that teacher, and the administrator of that teacher. Because of the redundancy and sufficiency of data, the remaining two sites did not require the full use of the triad approach. At the eighth site, only the national board certified teachers and their administrator were interviewed. At the ninth site, only the national board certified teacher was interviewed. This completed a set of 24 interviews. The interviews began with a debriefing of the study and an explanation of the informed consent form. Upon completion of the signature of consent, an introduction to the use of the tape recorder was made along with a brief discussion of the data collection process. A reassurance of confidentiality during the interview was reaffirmed by the researcher. The participant was also informed that he or she would receive a copy of the transcription and have an opportunity to respond to its validity. The interviewees were encouraged to react to any ideas or share any concerns openly. Each interview session concluded with a quick debriefing and a show of gratitude by the researcher. During the interview process, notes were collected to capture any critical elements or ideas that might not be reflected in the transcriptions later. This process assisted with the identification of early patterns and themes and helped to prompt for additional questioning during further interviews. Each taped interview was heard again before being sent to a professional transcriptionist who typed the interview verbatim. On occasion, there would be some static or distant noise that required numerous plays for troubled areas. The tapes were played until the accuracy of the information was achieved in a manner comfortable to the interviewee through member checking.

Each of the 24 interview transcriptions was initially read as soon as it was typed. Markings and notes were made to determine initial impressions and emerging trends. A constant review of the interview guide was conducted. During the reading of each transcription, the specific research questions were revisited to narrow the data collection. This process focused the study and ensured enough data were collected at a level of sufficiency. The transcribed and verified interviews were then coded and categorized to encompass the major themes of the research study. The themes provided rich, descriptive, inferential information that was then applied to the research questions for the primary purpose of the study:

1. What are the national board certified teachers' ranges of opinions overall of the national board certification process?
2. What are the ranges of opinions of the perceived supports identified by the candidates who hold national board certification?
3. What are the ranges of opinions of the colleagues and administrators regarding their perceptions of support of national board teachers?
4. What are the ranges of opinions regarding the national board certified teacher's feelings about national certification fulfilling the highly qualified component of *No Child Left Behind*?
5. Do the national board certified teachers and their administrators consider the process a worthwhile staff development or professional growth opportunity in terms of time? If so, why?

Six overall themes emerged from the data analysis:

1. the national board certification process,
2. the perceived supports from the national board certified teachers' perspective,
3. the perceived supports from the teachers' colleagues' perspective,
4. the perceived supports from the administrator's perspective,

5. the feelings of being deemed highly qualified based on the national board certification, and
6. the national board certification process as a professional growth experience.

The themes grew from the analysis of the transcriptions of the interviews that focused on the research questions.

National Board Certification Process

Only a modest amount of information has been written in narrative regarding the feelings of national board certified teachers focused on their endeavors of seeking the advanced certification. The thoughts and feelings regarding this rigorous process about what teachers should know and be able to do were quite dramatic and varied. The individual responses were often completely different; yet, many shared common elements linking their chosen profession. They often spoke openly and passionately about the overall process. Five subthemes became apparent through the rich dialogue focused on the national board certification process:

1. the reason the candidates entered and endured the process,
2. the ambiguous feelings,
3. becoming a reflective practitioner,
4. increasing ability to individualize instruction, and
5. emerging leadership opportunities.

Making the Decision

Colleagues in the field may wonder what prompted any one to embark on such a rigorous process with so many unknowns attached to it when the national board certification process was in its infancy only a few years ago. This question was especially true in the case of the veteran teacher at the exit stage of her career. Miss Y related her thoughts with her quiet demeanor:

The reason I did it was, it was a time in my life that I could with my children raised and I really felt I wanted validation and because I had worked on my master's up to 21 hours

and didn't finish. So, I think that was behind it plus over the years the criticism--it seems as if teachers have to prove themselves. I'm an organized person so I had deadlines set for myself and everything had to be organized but I became unbelievably exhausted towards the end of it. . . It was very hard to keep my head up. I think I was wanting to be successful so I could do this and what if I wasn't then would I still be a good teacher? And even then, after evaluating myself, well just what if the scores were really bad? You wanted feedback in a way, you know, how you can improve. I am constantly wondering and that's what I've always done: try to improve, look at what I've done, how do I need to do it differently? How do I need to approach it differently? Maybe I didn't do as well in some areas as I thought I would, not should, but would. It bothered me that I hadn't done as well as someone thought I would. I mean, really bothered me because I'm so conscientious about it.

Another teaching veteran, who had recently completed the national board certification process, related her willingness to tackle the charge in order to get an advanced degree of an Educational Specialist along with the certification. Miss J added:

I joined a group at the local university for the specialist and teacher leadership degree. And part of the cohort group was to assist teachers in or mentor teachers in getting that national board certification. So some of the courses were national board directed, some were other curriculum courses--like assessment for example. I took a math course and technology in the classroom, that kind of thing. So, it was a kind of mix between teacher leader courses and national board courses. The cohort group stayed together the whole year and a half. And out of that group, probably about 10 of us, 6 or 7 went through the national boards, and 2 of us received it on the first go-around. In this building, three went national board and one made it.

Failing was not an option for Miss C. This mid-career teacher banked her scores over three attempts before finally becoming successful. She related emphatically how she was "going to achieve this certification or else." She was equally verbal in her frustration with the process but adamant about being a successful role model as an African American teacher:

I took it many times. I built every year but I didn't understand the process. When I first went in, nobody had passed it yet. Then some of them started to get through it, they would look at my papers, and I would still not be quite sure about what to do. I just didn't know what they were looking for. In other words, you've heard the pioneers skipped the owls? The settlers get the land. I was on the end of pioneers.

Being selected by school administration was also proclaimed as a reason for attempting the daunting task. Miss R described the feeling she had when she first learned about national board certification from her school principal:

The process began by my principal coming through the building and handing out application forms to select teachers, which peaked my interest of course. She was just randomly choosing some that she hoped would go through the process. We then applied that particular year the state was to pay some of my expenses. The registration fee was paid. I was honestly telling you when I looked at it, my first reaction was wow! The standard grabbed me that was my hook. Something, first of all I was feeling quite good because I felt I was comfortable with the standards. But I also would have to say that this is not a qualifying process, but you do learn a great deal as you go through.

Mister W concisely revealed his personal preference for going through the process was about not only instructional leadership for his classroom but for his leadership in what he had hoped would be a career in administration. He shared that his goal was never about the money because he was promoted to administration prior to his scores being released. He would have qualified for an additional state-salary increase had he chosen to remain in the classroom. He further detailed his feelings regarding effective administrators who were successful teachers. He stated passionately:

I realized I might not get an administrative position, but I'll always realize for the most part, for me, this wasn't for the money. I like to think I got my \$5,000 when I was given a promotion. For me it was just simple and I knew that. It was never about the money for me. Because I knew I wouldn't get the money, well I didn't know I wouldn't but I hoped to get an administrative position. In fact, I think it makes me much more marketable. Plus, administration has become much more of an instructional leadership role versus a manager's. I think it's the fact that I can go into that classroom and say to that teacher, "I've been there, I've done this," and be able to lead by example. Part for me, no matter if I'm superintendent of the state schools, I will always be a teacher first. That will always be at the top of my resume as a teacher. It is very important to have that, to say, "I was a successful teacher." I think that is important as far as educational leadership because that's not always the case. We don't always have the best administrators. I should say the administrators we have today in many schools were not successful teachers.

Ambiguous Process

To many of the national board certified teachers, the process was one of ambiguity. Teachers are accustomed to finding security in the rules and regulations in which they work each day. For many of those interviewed, the process outlined by the NBPTS was very unclear. This perception was especially true for those involved in the process early on during the later 1990s. Their confused feelings were not told in a negative manner but as fact. Upon completing the requirements for the certification, most stated they felt good about their knowledge. It was

difficult, however, for them to surpass the undefined challenges and confusion they garnered in attempting to define what the expectations were to successfully complete the requirements. In addition, the lengthy directions and mass of materials fostered additional apprehension.

The lack of direct feedback for those who had to reapply for the certification was a key point of frustration. Their concern for providing prompt and appropriate feedback to students was clearly necessary for them to be an effective teacher in today's classroom. Miss B elaborated:

I just wonder why I didn't learn from it. I just never did. I just never could get past the fact that I never knew what I was doing wrong so I could improve. Why didn't I glean from it? How can you make improvements in your teaching and your learning if you are given a raw score and that's it? It is a mystery to me how they can see that as being appropriate for learning. What would it be like if we did that to our kids? It makes you wonder doesn't it?

Miss C told in her mild and curious tone of similar issues regarding feedback. She stated:

It took me three times. It kept going up (my scores), but it just wouldn't push up enough. In addition, it was the professional area and I couldn't figure out why it was in the professional. Of course, they really don't provide you back any feedback, so you can know what or how to improve. No, but they look at the teacher as providing feedback to the students as essential by contrast.

Mister T, who was one of the first candidates in his state to achieve the advanced certification, expressed his concern openly:

I felt like the instructions and directions were completely unclear and confusing. The documents they send have to be deciphered. It's a lot of material to wade through for sure. The process is nice in that you can inject your own personal style into it, like your own personal writing style. I just wanted them to tell me what they wanted. Sometimes I wonder if we do that to our students. We just want to be told what to do. You know most people want to learn, but that failure in front of your peers is stressful. Most people have a lot of anxiety because of the unclear directions and expectations. I know that's what I had. I was the first one in our county to do it. I think I was only the seventh one to do it in our whole state.

Mister W, who recently completed the process successfully, agreed that there were some serious concerns about the process, especially when considering he had been the only candidate from his region to attempt the certification. He stated:

I am sure you're familiar with all the people you talked with as a component of the portfolio and the assessment center. Oh the process, I found the process for myself to be very ambiguous having not known anyone who had ever been through the process. I had never looked at a completed portfolio and probably should have and I didn't have that opportunity. I felt very unsure about the whole process; I really had no idea what the national board has or what it looks for; it appears to have a lot of information online but actually, I didn't find anything. For me, the first time I was able to see what I had, I hate to say this--what I got myself into, was when I received my portfolio.

Mister W went on to detail the bulk of the material that must be read in order to begin:

. . . because the portfolio comes in a big box and they send a CD Rom with all the instructions and they ask you to print that out and I'm thinking--okay, 10, 15, maybe 20 pages. The instructions alone were probably 250 pages. So, I'm sitting there at 5:30 after school and it is still popping out printing, and I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh." I got that in September and I was kind of just shocked. I just put it over to the corner and said, "I can't work on that right now." When they send you the book, it has 70 or 80 pages of what they deem as those characteristics or those standards of what a national board certified teacher should be. I was doing the workshops--and probably the first of December you might ought to start looking at this. I probably spent the whole month of December doing nothing but reading the instructions. They are very precise and very adamant that if you don't do this way, then you won't be certified. So it's almost as if I spent too much time on it; I may have read the directions two or three times. Because I would read them front to back and make notes and then go back and read them front to back again. I spent the whole month of December just kind of doing that with the idea that I was really going to hop on this the first of January.

Two of the national board certified teachers expressed their grave concerns over the recent change to abolish the option of being able to hand write answers at the assessment center. Their feelings were voiced from different perspectives: one from a seasoned veteran who was uncomfortable with typing and word processing and the other from a teacher closer to the beginning stage of his career and who simply mistrusted the dependability of technology. Miss Y softly shared this tale:

When I went through school, a girl was either going to be a secretary or a cosmetologist. And in the system I was in you didn't take typing unless you were going into a secretarial position. So, I never had typing. If you figure from the early sixties what technology was then to what it is now--if I had to go into taking that test and type, I would have never made it. I was allowed to hand write my answers. And now, I think they said you can't take anything in with you--I don't know if that came about from people who cheated. I think that they took my portfolio that I took in, but I thought about it afterwards and I thought I would like to explain and share with them how I did it. I studied for six weeks for the test with the material they sent. And, I went through the guide and made the

assumption of what they would probably ask me. So I approached each section, wrote up what I thought they would want and how I was going to respond to it. Then I typed it up, which took me forever, because I'm a hunt and peck. I didn't have the background and computers scared me. I thought, what if I made a mistake on it and lost it, so I typed it like that at home for practice. Then I realized I was only this far and so I went back to my typed piece and thought I could take this and that out. Then I set the timer again and I wrote for 90 minutes to see if I could get through it. That's how I prepared myself because I was so freaked out that I wouldn't have finished. When I found out I had to get my questions off the computer for the test I was shaking so badly. But, the tester came over and asked if I was okay. And of course I'm deaf in this ear and she is whispering in that ear, and I'm asking what? And I just took a deep breath and thought, "Okay, it's just like anything your anxious about." And the lady was so nice at the testing center and said "I hope we don't see you again." And I said, "I hope so too." I was so nervous and so concerned with the set up and what I wanted to write about. Then when I did get my blue book I said, "Oh my God, I need more pages than this." I was planning to skip lines and afraid to speak up I was afraid they would not give me another blue book. This was a tremendous amount of anxiety.

In summation, Miss Y finally poured her heart into her words through held back tears as she relayed the following:

So it's sad to me that there's somebody in my age group who wanted to do it but held back because of the test and having to type it on the computer and they couldn't handle it with not being able to take anything in with them. It was kind of my security blanket because I guess I had written something for everything. Three of them [questions] weren't what I had focused on, but I was able to get my wits about me. I just said to myself, I'm just going to go with this, but then I was concerned about punctuation. I knew it was a rough draft but still, I still remember being so tense. Then the guide tapped me on the shoulder and said my time was up, and I just screamed, "I have more words to write." I forgot there were others in there taking the test.

Speaking of his confidence in his portfolio entries, Mister W confided that he felt like his material was of quality. He then went on to discuss the overall process overall and his decision to handwrite at the assessment center. He described:

Of course, you don't know--that's the whole thing, it's very ambiguous. But, I turned it in and got it into the mail two or three days before, overnight, and that was the portfolio part of it. I didn't take the assessment tool until June. In fact, it was on one of the last few days that they were going to allow us to take it. I took it at one of the testing centers and one of the things I did that was probably a little different than other people--I chose not to do it on the computer. The reason I wrote mine out was because of this simple reason: I had taken the GRE at that same location and the computer was a mess. So, I didn't feel comfortable doing that. In fact, the guy who was monitoring it there, the person who does their testing, was so unfamiliar with the written process he had to look

up the directions because everyone does it on-line. I chose not to. Of course, now, that's not an option.

With any new endeavor or program, there is always a level of uncertainty and insecurity. As humans, we find comfort in those things that are familiar to us. The process set forth by the NBPTS is no different. True knowledge comes from immersing yourself in the learning. The process and its limitations foster that continued growth.

Reflective Practitioners and Individualized Instruction

Each interviewee expressed an increase in his or her ability to put reflective teaching techniques into practice because of going through the process of national board certification. In fact, it was the only item in which they all voiced extreme passion. The interviewees boasted with great pride about their abilities to reflect not only during the process but in addition to continue that reflective practice in their daily lives as classroom teachers. They also highlighted their increased awareness of the importance of individualizing instruction for students. This awareness, according to them, was the vehicle for putting strategies into place that ultimately helped them individualize instruction for all students.

During one interview, a teacher verbalized how the "light bulb" of reflective techniques made her a more effective teacher. Miss M made the connection between reflection and individualized learning when she said:

So you know I am much more reflective now as a teacher when I do things. I journal daily and you get the habit. Once you do that, you write about the day: How did that lesson go? What could I do differently the next time? And another important thing before I went through it--you know how we kind of teach to the middle? It really had me working on how I could meet all children's needs and looking at those exceptional children as well as those children who have those exceptional needs. When I was going through, you had to select students from those three areas and talk about how you brought them into teaching the same unit, how you accommodated for their differences. It really helped me. I taught to the middle for sure and just kind of hoped those others were coming right along. I probably worked more with my lower students than I did with those children who need that enrichment—those kids that are above--you just kind of think they'll get it. You think they are coming along, they are bright, and you know they're moving. It helped me to do that as well as to really work on putting together

good enrichment activities, not just extra work, but really letting them do extensions of what we were doing in the classroom. And, for those who couldn't work on those modifications it allows them still to meet that standard that you set, but helps them to get to that point.

Miss M discussed how this reflective practice really helped her streamline her teaching in order to be more effective by working smarter and not harder. She stated:

What it taught me is that you can do this but you had better have something behind what you're doing. You had better have objectives about where you're leading children to a particular point. And if you can't say that, then you better be changing what you're doing. You just better start doing something else. So, it really helped me to clean up my teaching. I guess that's the best way to put it. Clean it up, get rid of the fluff stuff, and really get down to business. You can do creative things, but just make sure there's some substance behind it. That's really where I had to clean up.

Miss KB actually stopped abruptly during one interview question because she had a burning thought that she wanted to add. She taught adolescents in a departmentalized setting. Typically, teachers of one specific content area only have students for a brief amount of time. This restricted schedule can make it challenging to get to know each student's complete needs. Miss KB explained:

There is something I would like to add. During the boards process you have to give evidence of knowing your children well--and the input with the family. Because we work as a team and because I only have the kids for a small amount of time, this can be an issue. I was able to go to my colleagues and say, "Tell me about this child; tell me more than I can see in the classroom. What are you seeing with the academic progress? How about their home life?" Particularly, in the English/language arts section, the reading section, or with one of the special needs children. That resource individual was very helpful in providing more detailed information about their testing and what their needs were.

Becoming a reflective practitioner also has advantages not exclusive to students. Miss C conceded she was grateful for becoming more reflective because it enabled her to explain her rationale for changes to parents of her students. Through her facial expressions during the interview, it was obvious that she was proud to now have the confidence and ability to hold this type of crucial conversation with the stakeholders at her school. Miss C shared her frustration with the process but then described the realization of this key benefit:

Again, it doesn't feel like that when you're going through it but it is when I look at what I have gained just in knowing why I do what I do at every turn. I found that for parents--when I can explain things to parents like why do you change your chairs around every nine weeks? I tell them because every student has something to gain from one another whether its restraint, or academic help, or whatever, then they are okay with it. The parents often say, "Well I wanted them to be with their friends." Well, I want them to grow from everybody so they can get a deeper education. It's just been a good thing for me to be able to do that and feel comfortable in saying what I need to say.

Sometimes becoming reflective in their daily teaching lives did not come without some awkward discomforts. For instance, just having to be videotaped on the job was a new undertaking for most classroom teachers. At best, beginning teachers may have been required to participate in that experience in their college years. For the most part, however, videotaping and analyzing every movement and every word uttered was new territory not explored in the educational profession. Mister W stated eloquently:

I think the most important thing is that after this process--during and after--it forces you to become very reflective. For me it was the very first time I had ever looked at a video tape of myself teaching. That's hard. Even at family reunions, you don't want to see yourself on video tapes. Again the reflective part of it, just being able to see and actually watch the way you teach. I think when you're up there you just hear yourself. Actually looking at it through the eye of a camera and going back and listening to what you say. It's not so much the video--the visual part is very important--but audio and hearing what you say to children--I noticed that sometimes I would cut a child off. The lead time aspect all that, it just made me much more reflective about the way I teach. I have always been a real big planner. I think that the most important part of teaching is going in with a good plan--an effective well-thought out plan and executing it. And then afterwards going back, looking at it, and seeing what you actually did. As in, did it work and what were the outcomes? There is some old saying about doing the same thing over and over and expecting a change or something else to happen. If you expect the same thing over and over and for me, this was able to show me that every day I should be looking back and saying okay, it's not just about the answer they're going to put on the test on Friday. But what worked today and what didn't work? So when I do this a year from now, should I change something? Also, it made me more aware of the whole individual nature of what teaching should be. It's not a group, it's not a group activity. Learning is individual. I think sometimes as teachers and administrators we think that it's a learning group. It's one big engine of learning and every child will be on board at the same time. It's not. It's individualized and what you really have is these individual connections with every child in that room, or at least you should. This whole process made me much more aware of the fact that so many times I want to change those children and make them fit the way I teach. When in fact, I should be the one who is changing the way I teach to fit the way they learn. That's huge for me and that's like one of those light-bulb moments.

Actually national board just made me much more aware of the process of how to be truly effective and how to individualize. It has to become a personal thing between you and maybe a room of 20 children but it has to be between you and that child.

The statement provided by Mister T supported the benefits of reflective techniques in the workplace. He simply stated, "The board process was a very thorough process. The reflective process is excellent for anyone and I think for anyone in any job. It's a big lesson that would be good for anyone."

Only after the national board certification process was completed and some time had elapsed did these particular teachers embrace the benefits of the process. Because the process is so time consuming and all-encompassing, teachers often did not make the connection and actually enjoy using their newly developed reflective techniques until the following year. Miss R told:

Only when we received the status did we go in and say here is the most amazing process. I went through a reflection of my own teaching--of what I already know and what I need to learn to be able to do.

She then went on to describe her thoughts in dealing with one of the portfolio sections and the meaningfulness of reflection.

Let me take a specific section. We had a section on communication and community involvement. In that section, you had to ask yourself, what do you think of communications? What do I do with communications in my class? Yet, as I went through the process, I was able to see the missing pieces. I had to think where I needed to learn more. It is a reflection on "What can I do better?" process. When I did my writing entries and this was writing prompts with children, you go through the writing process and give feedback to the children. I had been through that, but when they made me reflect on specifically, child growth, it probably lead me to the job I'm in today. I'm into coaching teachers to take students' work and plan the day tomorrow. I have said if we look deep inside, we'll bring it there. A connection happens in that process.

According to Miss H, good teachers always have a backup plan. She was adamant about the positive influence of the national board process and how it led her to develop her reteaching skills to a new, higher level. She continued by stating:

The process itself was probably the best personal development thing I've ever done. It was a big thing with me because it also allowed me to learn how to budget my time as well as learning more about my classroom. Prior to this, I had always, for instance--

everybody has a back up plan, a plan B for when something doesn't work. You just automatically go to plan B. If a child doesn't learn something one way, you just go to plan B. I have never questioned why plan A didn't work. This was a good eye opening experience because you had to actually look at what you had done during the instruction you had given and find out why it didn't work. What was wrong with what you did and what would make plan B better? Yes, that was probably the best thing I've learned. If a child doesn't learn how to add, for instance, in a traditional way, then you just go to another way of teaching. And now if they're not learning that way, I'm saying, "Okay, why are they not able to get it this way?" and then thinking about what comes next . . . how can I break this down into smaller chunks, how can I make this easier for them . . . for the student to learn.

Emerging Leadership

Through life's experience comes growth. The national board certified teachers' experience of completing the rigorous process was meaningful and enriching. Through their efforts and stamina to secure this advanced certification, came an increased respect from their communities and colleagues. Therefore, they were often designated for their leadership skills. Their adventures outside of the classroom in the educational field have been wide-ranging. The national board certified teachers have led classes, served on discussion panels and advisory groups, and have been promoted to administrative support positions in their school systems. Their leadership efforts continue to be beneficial to the field of education.

Miss Y spoke of her experience in leading an effort to publish a school-wide book at the site where she currently teaches. She shared her experience of working with a reading professor at a neighboring university in preparing a presentation. This project led to an invitation to present at an international conference where she shared her experiences of this school-wide effort as a success story. Miss Y explained:

I did a couple of big projects and after that, we published a school-wide book. We had it all around with all of the families. We had categories for contributions and things. I got a grant to publish that. I get all these ideas but I am not going to slack off in my career. I am kind of tired of that particular project. Sometimes you do get tired. Because I did that in the summers with Dr. [Name] and I presented my book. Then I worked with [Name] on the covers, so forth, pulling it all together, and publishing. It was a tremendous amount of work. So, I presented that and then shared that. Then Dr. [Name] and I were invited by the International Reading Association to present at the reading conference.

One of the teachers talked openly about the need for her school to grow professionally. She talked extensively about the amount of professional reading she completed during the time she went through the certification process. She discussed how she and another colleague set up a professional library at the school. She said the library was very informal and that sometimes they would just leave copies of good research out in the designated area. Miss C showed great pride as she told the story of her leadership in this endeavor. She elaborated:

Oh, another thing we did were the professional readings. Another colleague and I set up a place for professional readings in our school. We felt that as a school we needed to be more up to date. When I went through the national boards, I read constantly. It was books, books, and more books. We had a place here in the workroom where if someone read something that was pertinent to teaching and it was good, we kept it in a folder and I could go in and [name] at the time was going through classes working on her doctorate. I would go through the process of national boards, so I could read things. We were finding that there was some good stuff and that led me to lead others to resources even on the web.

Another teacher, while working in the public school classroom, was also teaching as an adjunct professor at a local college. She talked about her use of the process in this role. Miss B went on to say:

One of the things I've done is continue to teach at [Name] College in the area of early childhood. You know I can at least go and enjoy that job and get paid for it. With national boards in Tennessee, we are not making any additional money at all. I do think the experience I went through with the process made me stronger in terms of working with adults at the college level. I try to promote those reflective techniques with them. I also try my best to model that with them when I am teaching. So, working with adults probably has happened because of me going through that process.

National board teacher Mister W went through the national board process last year. He received his scores in November of 2003. He had already worked directly for the NBPTS through the regional consortium in his state. He was promoted to an administrative position within his school system in the fall just prior to receiving his scores last November. Mister W now currently serves as a supervisor. He spoke of his belief in being a strong teacher and its relationship to being a strong administrator. Another national board certified teacher, Miss R, moved into a supervisory role in her system. She was very adamant about her grounding as a

classroom teacher. She continued to see herself in the role of teacher as a teacher leader. Miss R revealed:

I really don't know if you put it out there and there was no money for it, if I would still go through it. I am disjointed from time to time and am realizing that I did something to be a teacher leader and stepped out of the classroom. But I do consider myself not an administrator. I am not a supervisor today, I am a teacher leader. I work with helping teachers to do better. So, I have actually stayed in it, but I do not have children assigned to me.

Miss R's discussion was quite revealing. Through her facial expressions and dialogue, it was apparent that she would almost be offended if anyone considered she was now in administration and not in the classroom. She justifiably felt she was a leader of teachers in terms of instruction.

Perceived Supports From the National Board Certified Teachers' Perspectives

The national board certified teachers stated that the supports they received and felt were tangible and identifiable. They voiced many of the same support systems in harmony regardless of their certification areas, career stages, or success rates. Many of the supports they identified throughout the interviews were of an informal nature. Indeed, those informal supports were perhaps the most meaningful to them both personally and professionally. The backbone of their support came from: crucial associates who went through the national board certification process with them at the same time, teaching colleagues who became their sounding boards, national board mentors who gave clear directions, family members who made sacrifices to ease the endurance of the rigorous process, structured support networks of colleagues, and administrative support through encouragement and understanding. Perhaps most critical to each candidate were those that came from one or more of the various noted groups just named: the proofreader. The proofreader became the stitch that held these supports together to form a tremendous fabric of success for this group of teachers. As noted in their descriptions, proofreaders played a crucial role and came from many of the outlined groups based on each individual's perspective. The

teachers resoundingly pronounced the significance of having proofreaders who reviewed their writing on their entries and provided direct feedback.

Crucial Associates

Things always seem to be less painful if you have a friend to endure the ache along side you. “I could not have done it without my partner going through it with me” was a phrase often heard vibrantly from most of those interviewed. Even those who did not have direct peers attend to the certification with them expressed that as regret and cited that it would have strengthened the process for them personally. Throughout the interview process, the national board certified teachers spoke of having that crucial associate or friend who went through the process of achieving the advanced certification with them. They were most descriptive in their discussions of the importance of having that one person to whom they could bounce off their ideas, thoughts, and concerns. Throughout their responses that focused on this issue, the researcher became aware of the magnificent bonding process that evolved out of this experience for the national board certified teacher. Miss K linked the process to one of enjoyment connected with her peer. She stated:

I personally enjoyed the whole process. But I think that I enjoyed it because I am a very people person. I like to work with people on projects, I went through the cohort group, and did the National Board project working very closely with a teacher who was also doing the process. I wish there had been a way to track our hours, which we started to do originally. It finally got to be a joke with our husbands, there goes [Name] and [Name] again. We would spend almost every weekend--one night until two, three o'clock in the morning working here at school. I rearranged my room and put computers side by side so we could work. I think it was interesting because our scores were very, very, close. And the projects we did were totally different but our scores were very close. We also read for each other and that was so beneficial.

Miss R related her crucial associate as being significant but with a different slant in terms of being a proofreader. She spoke of it being almost impossible to proofread for one another as it made their writing process too complicated. She stated:

Significant support in one very close person, going through it with that person is great. That person is [Name]. We were teaching side by side. I would like to note something

for future candidates: We found very quickly that we could mentor each other, we could talk through things with each other, but we could never read each other's entries. Once we began to read each other's entries we couldn't get that person's thinking out of our minds so we did it only one time and learned that was not a good thing to do. We began to sound like each other. We have had the opportunity to mentor a few other people and [Name] even teaches a course. But we advise them: Mentor each other but do not read each other's work while you're going through this process. He was my colleague at that time, we taught third, fourth, and fifth grade. You do have to exchange ideas. Sometimes you have to verbalize it before you can write it. So if you don't have someone who is going through it with you, you do need to have a colleague close by who is talking to you about what the interpretation of the standard is and what it is that is happening in your classroom. We worked on it separately. We worked very separately. We were not even working on the same area. We had six entries that year. We were never on the same entry. I listened to every word that was said to me. I took to heart every word that was written back to me by a proofreader. As I stumbled on to something I learned from him, I shared it. When I read it, we would share it. If we learned something, we shared it.

Clearly, each person's experience was very individualized. Miss B denounced the process as it related to her personally and her friend of the time but noted the importance of a crucial associate along with her frustration. She said:

The one colleague I had to go through it with was the best. If it hadn't been for her, I simply could not have made it at all--even though neither of us made it the first time. I mean she left the profession completely after that. She and another colleague up in [City] who was a fantastic teacher both left teaching. They left the educational profession. I mean that says something about the process at that time and what it can do to you. It was sad to think that two teachers left because an outside agency didn't validate what they were able to do as teachers. We were given no direction, no supports . . . just that box of stuff. What would it be like if we did that to our kids?

Miss M spoke of a crucial associate who actually worked in a neighboring system. The two found one another through mutual friends. They were both going through the process in the same certification area and quickly became friends and have since remained friends in and outside of the profession. Miss M said:

There was another teacher from [Name] Schools here near our town. We just happened to find out we were going into the same area for our national boards and we became friends. Well we're best buddies now and we see each other often and share ideas and everything. That I know someone else who was going through it really meant a lot.

National board teachers who did not have a crucial associate were descriptive in their desire to have one. Many knew of other candidates who had a peer directly in their schools.

They often desired the same relationship with a colleague to gain some freedom from their feelings of isolation. Miss C spoke wistfully:

I wish that there had been another teacher in the same building going through it at the same time. As you know you were at [Name] where I think three teachers were going through it. And you know they can bounce ideas off each other and I just felt... I felt isolated. Even though they were not exclusive to me but it's just. . . And those teachers I think actually could watch each other teach and say, "Hey have you thought about. . . ?" That just wasn't available to me because I was the only person. It was just the circumstances, no one's fault.

Mister W relayed his feelings of isolation in being the only candidate in his regional area along with his understanding of being a pioneer in attempting something new. When asked what would have been most influential or beneficial had it been present at the time of going through the certification process, Mr. W elaborated:

. . . having other candidates who have gone through the process successfully before or another candidate to go through it with. It was hard you know. It was a drive of an hour and a half either way to the nearest person or anyone familiar with the process. Whether I was going to [name] to take a workshop it was an hour and half if I was going to see [name] it was an hour and half. So, for me, a lot times I was just sitting alone at the house just typing occasionally here or there. There's a chat room set up on Yahoo for early childhood candidates and oh my goodness, there were probably 300 or 400 postings a day. There were, like, 44,000 posts by March of the year I was doing it. I couldn't spend the time just reading the questions, much less the postings . . . much less the answers. They just got way out of hand and I just quit looking at it. I would just go to it and it would mess me up more than it would help me. So, I think having a candidate having someone, being the first one, to do anything. . . I'm sure Neil Armstrong felt the same way when he stepped foot on the moon. Being the first person to do it in [name] or [name] I just think I was going in there blind. I had no idea. Fortunately, it worked out.

Teaching Colleagues

Teaching colleagues proved to be priceless to those endearing the lengthy process of writing, videotaping, studying, and reflecting on their teaching techniques. The colleagues who taught with the national board certified teachers worked diligently as well. Their input was appreciated and respected. From the national board certified teachers' perspective, the teaching colleagues were vital. Miss KB described:

My middle school team here, the seventh and eighth grades teachers, were wonderful. If I was videotaping they were there to make sure it was quiet in the surrounding areas. They supplied students to help me if necessary. The emotional support was there as well, “You can do this. We believe in you!” kind of thing. The students were helpful. Most of the time when we were working on it, they were as involved in the process as I was. I also had a friend here who was going through the process and we were emotionally supportive and talked to each other intellectually.

Having a colleague who was candid and straightforward made a difference as well. Setting deadlines was vital to the work habits of Miss K as she noted:

She knew I tended to procrastinate, so she would set deadlines. You know I want this by so and so or else I’m not going to read and get it back to you. So, she was really a help to keep me on track. I would say, you know it’s the top of the list, very, very high in terms of significance.

Encouragement was essential and often found its way into the process through the teaching colleagues of the national board candidate. Miss B stated:

I had a teaching colleague who was an encourager. She would just say jump the hoop and keep on trying. I mean after the third attempt you just don’t care. You turn it in and that’s it. She helped each time because she knew the process I would go through each time. She didn’t attempt it at all, but she knew what all I did to get through it and how I taught kids. She helped in any way she could. A teacher assistant was crucial to me too. She was great. She was the most supportive I would say. She helped me with video taping and class-set ups etc. She would work with the other kids when I worked with small groups and stuff too. Yes, she was the best.

Words of encouragement were also fondly recalled by Miss Y as she went through the process as first in her building. When the question of the significance of the support of a colleague was posed, Miss Y quickly replied:

Tremendous! It’s recognizing what you’re going through. I remember one saying to me, “Remember, just because somebody else doesn’t agree with what you’re doing, doesn’t mean you’re wrong.” I thought that was a good point. I know we’re held to certain standards, but I feel like if I reach a goal and felt so good about the success of a child, perhaps I just didn’t express it well through my writing in the portfolio, but it still was a success. Now I can say that. However, it still bothers me that when I felt something really went over well, I possibly could have expressed it better.

Support from colleagues also came in the form of manpower. Simple things such as assistance with videotaping or assisting with some students could not be understated by the candidates as they completed the course of action needed to submit to the National Board for

Processional Teaching Standards. Mr. W explained the simplicity, but great importance, of having an extra pair of hands as he shared this scene:

My guidance counselor here did the videotaping for me. It was such a help to have her do that. I will tell you I video taped one time. Good or bad, I was going to do it one time and I really spent a lot of time in planning, making sure the first time was going to be the time. And as far as the math/science I had something come up and a little girl grabbed a chair and it happened to be the chair that the power cord plugged into and it was taped to the chair and of course she turned it off and that was the end of videotaping. Fortunately what I had 15 minutes prior to that must have been enough. But I was not going to get into a process where I was videotaping and spinning my wheels. I know people who basically did that. They spent days and days looking and editing and some people dictated their entire video. Word for word on paper and went in there. I'm sorry; I just wasn't going to do that.

Mister W went on to tell of the specific supports his team of teachers provided. He recalled:

The teachers that I worked with in our pod in third grade were very supportive of me. They didn't know a lot about the process. We talked about it and I would try to familiarize them with what I was doing, but the whole concept of national board was just not well known in this area. The last week when I was trying to get everything together, I realized, and they realized, that it is a huge process. It was starting to come down to the nitty-gritty; they took my kids for the day and my kids stayed with their kids. I was able to stay in my room and work and there was a lot of support going out and meeting all that documentation--all these things have to be verified. So especially on documented accomplishment entries--everything you say has to be verified by someone. So that means you have to go out into the school community and find people who can say, "Yes, [name] did this and I was there and this is why it was significant." Just saying he or she did this was not sufficient on that entry. Those people have to be able to explain in their words, not in your words, that what you did was so wonderful it should be considered as an accomplishment in that area. They were encouraging. I don't think they understood what I was really doing, but I think they were encouraging in the way they would encourage everyone.

Mister T reaffirmed the importance of time given from a teaching colleague. He initially stated that he had received no support at all from his colleagues just because he was one of the first in his state to go through the certification. He later added:

I also had some extra preparation time at school that year through the assistance of a teaching colleague so that was helpful for sure. We did some team teaching together with some technology things and were able to work that out.

Reaffirming the importance of a proofreader who originated from a close faculty came from

Miss H. She said:

There was one English teacher at the high school that I trusted implicitly for grammar and I would go to her and say, "[Name], would you please read this and please check the grammar, because my grammar is lousy." And she would. She would read through the whole thing even though she wasn't going through the process. Everybody, as far as faculty members and members like that, anybody you ask will help out. They would assist you and we were lucky in that.

National Board Certified Teacher Mentors

There were occasions when the national board certified teachers had other national board certified teachers to mentor them as they went through the year-long process. They said they felt fortunate and blessed at times to have mentors' assistance in any capacity. There were instances where the candidate actually never met face to face with his or her mentor; they communicated online only. Others, however, relied on meeting in person. Miss K explained:

I think of the mentoring relationship of [Name] and of [Name] who were also going through it at the same time. [Name] who had already been through it, those were two of the most important things but it's the person-to-person relationship. . . . I don't think I could have been as successful emailing someone and sending my stuff off. It was the fact that [Name] would come and sit down in the classroom and work for a couple of hours and spread stuff out with me and that person-to-person contact was vital.

Miss H also told about her strong connections with other teachers who had previously completed the certification:

There was one teacher who had actually moved out of the county who was the first person I think in the county to get her national board certification and she had moved to [Name] County. But we had two teachers at the high school who had already received national board certification and I was at the high school at the time and there were, one, two, three, four, four high school teachers and one elementary teacher going through the process at the same time. And they would meet with us; they read our work and made suggestions. [Name] had gotten hers and she was here to also help. She read through my work even though I was at one school and she was at another. They would meet with us; they made suggestions on how we could streamline things to make it easier on us to be organized and keep up. The other teachers were probably the best support that we had.

One of the teachers interviewed shared her great experience of support from teacher colleagues at her school. She went on to tell of the impact of having someone who had actually gone through the process to be a support. Miss KB stated:

The cream of all it was a friend who had already secured her national board certification. She would travel from [Name] County and read my materials and she would say, "Have you thought about this? Why don't you try this? Do you do these things in your room?" She helped me grow through that process as well.

Providing assistance with videotaping and direct feedback was not out of the realm of possibilities for national board mentors in their roles either: Miss J noted:

In our cohort, there were two teachers who had already gotten their national boards and so they were excellent mentors to those of us in the group. They did a lot of reading for us and viewing videos and analyzing our videos. That was very good to have that direct feedback from someone who had been successful.

Meeting up with other national board certified teachers did not only take place in face-to-face meetings. Some of the interviewees shared their positive experiences with other national board certified teachers whom they never met in person. They communicated via the internet and usually through email. These mentors played the role of a proofreader in most cases. Having mentors who were supportive proofreaders with defined roles was certainly crucial to one national board teacher. Miss R's specific recall of her proofreaders' task was quite remarkable. Proofreaders obviously made a huge impact on her new learning experience without making a person-to-person connection. Miss R shared this aspect openly:

My most influential support at that time would have to be what we called then our readers. I was assigned to three people; I never did meet them face to face. They were somewhere in the state of Tennessee and had gone through the process in other states. Tennessee was so new at this process, they contracted that year with people who had gone through the process elsewhere. I would finish a section and send it to them for feedback and I was fortunate in having three very different types of feedback given to me. I had one that I would have to say was nothing but an editor. I had one that probed and asked me what more can you tell me, and, you didn't let me know enough here; and then I had one that took colored highlighters and highlighted every time she found information touching a standard and let me know what colors were absent from my entry. So, I felt very fortunate. I would have to put that as an extremely wonderful experience just getting there and learning from three other people.

Miss M, another national board certified teacher, shared a similar story about having proofreaders that were assigned to her from the state department. She echoed Miss R when she added:

Actually, Richard, when I went through it there wasn't anyone else who wanted it at that time. There had been few people in the state of Tennessee, so I kind of had to go outside of the state of Tennessee. I had mentors over the internet who gave me feedback; that was part of my support. I had two ladies who did a lot of reading for me that way. We basically have never met in person, we just know each other over the internet. They were quite supportive.

Family

The family as a support mechanism was clearly stated in the interviews of the national board certified teachers. They gave details of constant encouragement and of family members' taking on responsibilities; this provided much of the dialogue during the interviews. For many, it was of utmost importance. Without the encouragement of family members, it is doubtful if the candidates would have even initially started the process much less completed it. The process was a good thing for Miss H, but she recognized the much needed support of her husband when she stated:

This was my first attempt and it was a very doable process. It takes a lot of time and you have to have a spouse who is willing to cook and clean, wash clothes, and give up Saturdays. Big, big, big support from the spouse! I think it takes the whole family to get you through it. Now we don't have any children, but one of the girls going through it at the same time did have a younger daughter. And she just had to say that it was important for mommy to set this time aside to work. My husband, would say when I would get home, "Now I need you to go in there and get to work on your boards". He set me up an office, bought a computer, made me a sign that said, "Quiet: Board Work In Progress." He even had a little fellow sitting there at the computer who did all kinds of neat things. He literally would point the way towards the office. He was probably the best support I had. I think it would be difficult to do it without a supportive spouse.

Miss J reported the importance of a spouse and church family as well when she stated:

Certainly, my husband was a huge support for me. He has been an excellent proofreader. He helped me proof read and he took over many house duties, so I could focus. He was the support. Church friends were a support, probably more encouraging even than this particular school family.

Just having a family that recognized the time element involved was critical to Mister T. He relayed a story about how his family just gave him some "get away" time to complete the writing details involved. Mr. T detailed:

They gave me the free time to work on the papers and stuff. They even let me go up to a mountain house so I wouldn't be bothered at all. They were great and supported me totally. Doing this thing while teaching and having a home life is tough.

Miss B's response mirrored the importance of release time provided by family members. She announced:

My mother was extremely supportive, and my family. I mean I just had to say, "See Ya" to them after I got into it. It was consuming. I lived at my colleague's house. Nights and weekends, I was there. Side by side we worked. My mother took care of the house and stuff. My husband just said, "Go do it and get it done." They had to be supportive or I couldn't work on it.

Miss C told of her family's encouragement to help her make it through the process successfully. She affirmed how meaningful their support was when she said:

The biggest support was—well, number one was my family. They allowed me to just go off in a corner and work independently. Giving me time, especially, is number one because you have to have time to write. And my family would help with supper and all those chores that I normally did when it got down to the wire. They were helping with that because they just wanted me to pass for Pete's sake . . . after all of those years of putting them through it. The first year I didn't put them through it because I didn't understand the process. I mean I just did not. My house was being remolded and there was banging and power going off and losing things on the computer and it was frustrating.

Administrative Support

Another support identified by the national board teachers interviewed was the support of their administrators. Overall, they said they felt that their administrators supported them through verbal encouragement. In some incidents, the administrator played a role as a proofreader. In all cases, the candidate received some release time to work on his or her portfolio entries. This time ranged from two to five days. Usually, this time was sanctioned at the system level and not provided directly by the principal. In addition, the registration fee was covered through some administrative capacity from the state department or local school system. Occasionally, the administrator was completely absent from the picture usually because of his or her lack of knowledge about the process. This observation was particularly true of the regions where the

candidate was one of the first to achieve the advanced certification. Miss B noted the lack of direct involvement; yet, she stressed its importance to her personally when she said:

She wasn't directly involved except she did read some of my entries. Now she was encouraging for sure. Each time that I didn't make it, she let me know that she believed in me; that made such a difference. I wouldn't have attempted it again if it weren't for her and the other teachers here at [Name]. They wanted me to make it. They really did.

Miss Y talked openly about this being an emotional time for her. Specifically, she was concerned with disappointing her faculty and her principal if she did not become certified on the first attempt:

Support from your faculty, the emotional awareness of what you're doing, notes from other teachers. Mr. [Name] believing in me. I was so worried about letting him down. And my family's not understanding. It was several months there of isolation. And when my older children were home, and I was in tears, was to just stop and rest. It was a stabilizing moment because each time you took something on, it felt so frustrating. They wanted clarification and concise wording . . . or, maybe I had just been out of the circle. But Mr. [Name] was so encouraging to me. I just didn't want to disappoint him ever.

Keeping the additional work responsibilities to a minimum during that year was of the essence to Mister T even though his administration lacked direct involvement. He said:

They weren't involved at all really. They were encouraging, yes. But, as far as personal involvement? No, it wasn't there. They really gave me no extra time off at all. They did help in keeping me off some committees that year and not giving me lots of extra stuff to do at school. Now that was a help.

You could easily sense the disappointment in Miss J's voice as she recalled her principal's unenthusiastic response to finding out she had received the certification. Miss J said:

Well I have to say in all honesty that [Name]'s reaction to it was no big deal. There was no positive feedback. It seems like she said, "Oh you got that." I was very disappointed in her. It was real different because our school didn't even put it in the newspaper. In fact, even for the newsletter, I had to say, "Wouldn't it be nice if the parents of the students who really helped me through this would know?" Then I had to write up my own letter. I thought that is not how to promote the success of your teachers.

Principals would also sometimes do validations for the teacher candidates. There were occasions where system-level administrators gave support as Miss H shared:

Well my administrator at the high school was familiar with the process. He did some validations for me concerning some of the things I did in the community and with parents and things like that. But as far as support to the people going through the process, he was

not a great support system. Dr. [name], our superintendent, encouraged us anytime he would see us. He would say, "How's the board process going?" However, I don't remember our assistant principal saying anything actually.

In the case of Miss KB, her principal prompted her to attend to the board's process and register because of the pay increase. She stated the following:

Probably the greatest support I had from my administrator was just the simple statement that I would be paid more on national board salary than for my doctorate—and, if I was going to do it, that this was the time to do it. As it turned out, he was quite right about that and the early adolescent generalist is going to be one that they don't authorize in time. So, it has become a low requested one and his encouragement to go ahead and get it done was certainly one of the emphases that got me going. Otherwise, he was doing his thing and I was up here doing mine.

Rejoicing and support from an administrator was also found in the case of Miss M; she smiled when she revealed:

[Name] was extremely supportive with me being a very brand new teacher in her building and I couldn't have asked for a better support person or administrative support. Yes, she was wonderful. And you know [name] as well they offered copies, anything you needed like that. Like I said, I was fortunate to be here when I decided to bite the bullet and go for it. The support from [name] was more of a blanket of support, whatever you need just let us know. You know you have your three days. She told me whenever I needed to take those was fine. I can't say that she actually did anything particular for the process, but just encouraged. She was very excited for me when I did finally achieve. She's that type of person that encourages you to be the best that you can be. She is just that way and let me put it this way: I've always had great support from her in anything. And, not just one time, I have never heard her turn a teacher down who was trying to do something to better his or herself. I think that's a huge positive.

In a response shared by Mister W, his most critical support came through a proofreader from outside his school system in the form of an administrator from a neighboring school system. He had been a student in a graduate class and realized that she had read for several successful candidates. He capitalized on her skill, expertise, and cooperation. Mister W said:

Of course [Name] from [Name] was doing my proofing for me, which was wonderful because she had been a reader. I guess that's what they refer to it as. She had read some entries for some candidates in East Tennessee, so I felt that was probably the best decision that I had made because she had read before. She knew. She had read for successful candidates and I'm sure she has read for candidates who might not have been successful on the first attempt. So, she kind of knew what was out there. The last two weeks in February I was trying to get those entries to her so she could proof them and read them and she would hand them back to me and fortunately, for me, most of it was

just editing kinds of things. As far as content and the meat of it, she really didn't have anything to say about it. I felt it was pretty good stuff. No one had gone through that process, so I wasn't able to go to someone and say, "What did you do then, or how?" It just wasn't available. So for her to be the person to read my entries, I think she had a general idea of what was successful or an entry that would meet the criteria of the process. I just felt she knew what she was looking at. So, for me, that built a lot of confidence to know that if she sent me back with a comment, it meant something.

Mr. M went on to discuss the lack of involvement from his principal. He noted:

The only thing that my principal did at the time was sign the sheet allowing me to do it. He had little other involvement other than knowing. I'm sure that he had heard the phrase national board certification go through principal meetings and then being encouraged by the superintendent to go back and encourage teachers to do it. He understood the . . . he recognized the term . . . the phrase. Did he know what it entailed? Absolutely not. In fact, I can remember several occasions at faculty meetings him saying "Now for those of you who would like to go out and teach all over the country, this would be a good thing to get; because I think it makes certified all across the country. So, if you're thinking on leaving, this might be the thing for you." No more than just a few words mentioned. He signed off on it for me. Of course, I told him about the videotaping, the student consent forms, and the parent consent forms.

Probing for additional information concerning his principal's lack of involvement brought this response from Mister M:

Part of it was not his nature. He was the kind of an administrator with a laid-back kind of nature. Fortunately for him, he has a very good faculty. As with anything, whether it is testing or curriculum, he left that to his teachers who he had for the most part chosen to be here. He trusted them to make the right decisions and so that was a luxury that he had. Fortunately, for him, it worked out well. Also I think he just didn't know about the process, wasn't aware of it or what it entailed, what it involved, so it's kind of a combination, just being aware that that's his style. However, had I gone to him and needed something, he would have found any way he could to see that I got it. However, he wasn't coming to me asking me, "How's it going?" "Are you doing alright?" That's just not his nature and then of course that could be just his not being familiar with it.

Another supporter came from the central office for Miss KB. In addition to being a proofreader, she assisted Miss KB with packing and mailing her documentation. The packing of the box was a huge ordeal occurring just before all of the candidate's materials were mailed. Miss KB reported:

There was a lady in the Central Office that would proof read for me and she would make suggestions about my wording. She helped me pack my box. She stayed with me that night. It is very important to follow instructions. It is! She came and stayed with me and

we were up until 5:00 a.m. that morning packing the box, then got an hour and half of sleep, and then came to school. That was a rough night. What a relief was once it was completed. It was! It snowed the afternoon that I was to take it to the UPS and I didn't think I was going to get there before they closed because of all the snow. It was a rough afternoon. Very trying!

Structured Support Networks

Some of the national board candidates said they felt supported through various regional and/or state groups as they went through the process. Others stated they felt like the groups were more confusing than helpful. Completing the portfolio portion was a very personal experience for these individuals. Trying to provide direction can be challenging, but taking direction was at times more of a challenge. The support groups also came in the form of online support. Some candidates did discuss the use of chat groups and discussion boards. Miss Y talked about her hindsight in not attending very many meetings held by support groups. She said:

We have a support group here and I did go to one region support group, but I didn't want to go to many because I didn't want to get so confused because everybody had a way. I didn't have time. I had to do it how I knew best to approach it, but I did pick up from other teachers who have done it. Some techniques would have helped keep me on track and addressing the questions. You're just so confused. But you know kids if I would teach a handout to students the way that they gave it out, then children would definitely be frustrated. I was the child here and worrying about what they wanted and I have never seen a portfolio. I've been out of school too long to have seen a portfolio.

In addition to her internet mentors that she mentioned earlier, Miss M spoke of an online forum she had explored during the process. Miss M elaborated:

On the National Board's web site, they had a teachers' forum. Basically I went in when I received--well actually before I even received the boxes. I'm sure you're aware of the boxes. I just typed on that I was a teacher in Tennessee; there weren't very many people in the area and especially early adolescent's English language arts, what I was interested in doing. And I just curious if there were any folks out there who would be interested in mentoring me through the process. I received tons of offers; it was amazing. Some were a little more like, here's my email address; if you need anything, let me know. But the two ladies that I ended going with, really wrote out a nice welcoming type letter and gave their email, and fax. They gave me everything necessary to get started and that's the way I picked the two of them. That made me comfortable.

To encourage additional people in his region to make the attempt at national board certification, Mister W went several times to a regional consortium charged with assisting candidates in a supportive manner. Their workshops were scheduled and planned. He explained:

I was also doing some workshops through the state department of education. We would meet in [name] at the [name], and it was sponsored by kind of a dual sponsorship by the [Name] department of education and the U.S. Department of Education. What they were trying to do was to promote national board certification in region [Name] of [Name], which is the mountain region here in [Name]. The actually they call it the [name] Program, or the [name] Project and what they were trying to do was encourage more people in this area to seek national board certification. So, even though I wasn't looking at my portfolio, I was still attending the workshops that were once every six weeks and they would talk about the portfolios that I hadn't even looked at. They talked about the standards. I think that was the biggest misconception for me. We have dealt so much with students' standards that actually looking at defining teachers' standards at a national level, for me, was different.

He went on to detail some of the content involved in the workshops and even his feelings regarding the use of support groups to prepare others, saying:

About six weeks, eight weeks, or every two months we had a workshop. We did one on how to write, how to do the entries, what is a reflective entry versus a descriptive entry. There are three kinds of writing. I can't recall but there are three kinds of writing in your portfolio; it's reflective, descriptive, and something else. Just making you understand that there's a difference there. The way you write and going over it with a fine toothed comb--the whole portfolio, directions, and the session on videotaping; just some helpful hints. Then the last one, of course, was on the assessment. You have to keep in mind also that all of these workshops were very ambiguous. And it's meant to be-- that whole process is meant to be that way because they want it to be. That's one of the things I wanted to get onto later--but I'll talk a little about it now. One of the things with national board, I think, it is turning into almost training people to do national board certified versus rather than an evaluation of whether they already are. Because I know there are college courses, I mean in [name] and [name] I think there area masters programs that incorporate National Board into it. So, it's almost as if this whole process is turning from an evaluation into a training thing. We're going to train people to national board. I kind of have issues with that and that's part of the reason I think I was at a disadvantage because I didn't have those people here to assist.

Mister W further detailed how this regional group originated and for what purpose.

The [name] Project is both individuals at the state department of education and individuals involved with national board and the department of education. They came to realize that [name] didn't have any candidates and it's not just really [name], it's the whole mountainous region of [name], [name], [name], [name], [name] and then the entire Appalachia. What they were seeing in data is that not a lot of those teachers were seeking

national board certification from those areas. So, in [name] they started the [name] Project, which was a way to encourage teachers in region [name], which encompasses [name] to seek national board certification through funding, workshops, and education.

Mister W seemed to find the regional meeting of some assistance; however, Miss B did not. She simply stated, "Well those state meetings they had were more confusing than helpful. It just muddied the waters for me to go to those." Miss C noted the assistance of her state education association that was representative of the teacher's union in her state. She said, "Another great support was [name] education association. They did workshop kinds of things. They sure did. They would read your papers. You could fax them and they would read them."

Structured teacher support also came in the form of online support. Miss H descriptively detailed her involvement with the group when she elaborated:

Now in [name], they offer some training for folks going through certification and they also have it at [name]. They have week-long sessions where folks are there and you have to sign up and be accepted into it. It's where folks who are working on board certification can come in, take the time away, and work on their own their entries and they have someone there in their areas to read them.

This led into her discussion of key support that came from an online source. She was enthusiastic when she talked of her online friends and colleagues. She had found a colleague who had a student with the same learning difficulties as one of hers and they offered helpful information for one another. Miss H explained:

The other thing we had--I have an internet group that meets every Friday night on line in the discussion room, for a discussion board. It was all exceptional needs people who were going through in the mild-moderate certificate. We really learned a lot from each other. I found there was a girl out in Utah, who had a child who was a selective mute. I had a child who was a selective mute and it was just, I have never met anybody--I've never even read about it. We went back and forth, actually setting our kids up to be pen pals to each other. They typed letters to each other on the internet and were internet pen pals. Those folks were very supportive and that included people who had already received certification. They came in on Friday nights and answered questions. We said things like, "On number one, when it's says so and so what does it exactly mean?" And they would come back and say, "Well, I think so and so and so." And someone else would say, "I thought it meant so and so." And then we would get into a discussion that way. That was a really big help and that was Friday night. Every Friday night at 9 p. m. I wouldn't miss it. I mean it was that important to be in communication with those people. There were the people saying, "I finished number one!" And everybody would yell

“YEA!” You know, just the support for each other. We had a guy there--the first year he had tried it, he missed it by five points. But, he had back surgery during that year. So he banked his good scores and went the next year. The next year when I was certified, he said he didn't make it; he missed it by six tenths of a point or something like that. Everybody was still supporting this person and he finally made it last year.

Perceived Supports From the Teaching Colleagues' Perspectives

Teachers who were colleagues of the national board certified teachers during the time they underwent the process of certification were interviewed. Their responses mostly contained instances of encouragement during that critical time; sometimes, they helped by proofreading and assisting with students. They unanimously said they felt that the generous support of a colleague was essential to anyone during that challenging time. Only two of the teachers' colleagues held the national board certification. The remaining colleagues did not have the advanced certificate, nor did they want it. Three subthemes were defined from these interviews: moral encouragement, video assistance and helping with students, and being proofreaders.

Moral Encouragement

One of those colleagues holding the certification, Colleague 7, shared her realization of the importance of having a buddy only after she saw some other teachers later on at her school preparing to begin the process. Colleague 7 stated:

Well I think that one thing was I realized how much support I had going through the process with another teacher who was going through the process at the same time. But when other teachers here started to go through the process after I received my certification, I realized how much support they were going to need because they didn't have anyone to go through the process with them at the same level. We had three people who were going through the process here at [name] but one was elementary, one was middle, and one was high school. I knew that without that support or somebody to empathize, sympathize and almost bond with, they were going to need some additional support. I felt like it was very important for those of us in the elementary level who had certification to really support that person. To volunteer to read, view video tapes, to go out and get tea when she was working late, and provide chocolates, those types of things. Let's see. When I was going through the process it was so important to have other people

to reach out to and say, "I don't understand this part of process. I'm a little confused. What's your perspective on it and how are you doing it?"

Teacher Colleague 6 echoed her realization about the true nature of a support system from other teachers when she stated:

First of all, I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had any support from the teachers--because I'm always second guessing myself. I would have been absolutely devastated without it, but I think that with all the work I put in, I would have made a plan to achieve it.

Teacher Colleague 1 discussed the stress he saw his colleague go through and his reaction to her as a supporter. He noted:

The biggest thing I felt I was, was a shoulder for her to cry on a lot of times. It's a very, I mean, hard process, it was a very difficult for her. I would do a lot of stuff. The stress of getting her time in was huge. I feel that what I mostly did for her was to be a support when she needed it. Just somebody she could come to and scream when a video went wrong, when she had spent all weekend on paper work, and she was all to pieces. I would try to coin a joke to just try to get her back into the real world so that she wouldn't be just focused on that all the time.

Not only did Colleague 5 recognize her own support of her teaching partner as she went through the lengthy process, she also saw the amount of encouragement her school principal provided.

She said:

She needed moral support. I mean [name of principal] was always there for her. [Name] was our biggest cheerleader here. [Name] is always there cheering her on and she got, especially when she got back the first time. She missed it by one point. She was so discouraged and really debated whether to resubmit. She went ahead and resubmitted, that was with a lot of encouragement, and everybody saying, "You know you can do it, you can do it, you can do it!" I was probably just moral support. Trying to run interference for something she had going on and helping her out she had--it all happens at the end of the year when you're the busiest and she was doing preschool, so I was doing her preschool certificates for her and things like that--trying to take some of the load off, busy paper work things we have to do at the end of the year so she could focus more.

Teacher Colleague 2 mentioned the time element. She said it was just too difficult for the seeker of the certification to do in one year. She had been in several schools and had been privy to view other teachers as they went through this challenge. She stated:

Candidate needed more time off. I know [name] had to take a lot of time off to do this. I think more time is needed and it could even be a two-year process. I have always been supportive of anyone who is going through the national board certification. I taught in,

I've only been here for two years. But before that, my experience was in [name]. In addition, I had several friends who went for board certification and I was always very supportive of them. I was always there as a shoulder to cry on when they didn't get it.

Video Assistance and Help With Students

The teachers' colleagues also provided technical assistance and help in videotaping for the national board certified candidates. They also assisted with classroom responsibilities in order to provide extra time for the candidates. This support included working with students as a class or in small groups. Teacher Colleague 2 said, "I was very supportive. Many times, I have watched classes when the teachers needed to go write papers or many times, I provided data for them. I have always been supportive of the process." Teacher Colleague 4 also provided help with students especially when the mail-in deadline was approaching. She also served as a sounding board for the national board candidate. Teacher Colleague 4 stated proudly:

Well [name] always bounced things off us. He would say, "Okay, what do you think about this? Do you think this is going to work? This is what I'm doing." So we kind of kept abreast of his research and the projects that he was involved in and then we at times really had to lend a helping hand as far as there being something he needed to do even with a smaller group or an individual child. Then, we would kind of cover the other kids and we told him, "[Name], we support you in this and anything we can do to help you." He utilized us especially there towards the end when it was getting crunch time.

Teacher Colleague 1 told of his help in preparing the video. He also chose to discuss the fact that he questioned the validity of many of the submitted videos by other candidates. He explained:

I would try to help her out with some of the technical things; she did a lot of her own video and that kind of stuff. She got her video stuff set up and I would give her some pointers when I would think that things needed to be fixed while she was having problems. I mean, that alone and just the paperwork having the students bring in the stuff that they had to do. I just think that collecting the students' work and the videos--I just question the validity of the videos. I feel like I could set up a video camera with even this group I have this year and stage a pretty darn good class that could look good. Is that really a true reflection of that class? Yes, or I could pick any teacher of any ability and say, "Lets make a video that makes you look good." I bet I could bring my wife in and she is not even a certified science teacher, but I could teach her enough that she could come in and do some really bang-up lessons on video and somebody would think, "Wow, that's really just great." I don't know how valid the video could be.

Proofreaders

Proofreading the material for possible submission by the teacher candidate was recalled by this group of individuals. They provided support for the national board certified teachers in the all-important capacity of being proofreaders. Teacher Colleague 3 spoke of her ability to continue to question for details. She had been through a merit pay evaluation system in her state many years ago and cited similarities in the process. She explained her level of help:

I just know that when she was going through it she was trying and she was asking us about how detailed she needed to be because I went through the [name]. She just wanted to know about how detailed things were going to be and when she didn't make it, she would come back over and say, "Oh I wasn't specific enough." We would tell her, "You got to have it in writing; you don't take anything for granted. Be sure you are very specific about everything that you do."

Teacher Colleague 6 told of her recent help in proofreading reading several candidates' work.

She stated:

Well now, I have since had people call me from other schools for support, direction, or opinion. I give them, everybody is different, but perhaps some techniques to facilitate the process for them. I have gone to the schools and I've had two people call me just this year and ask if I would read over their stuff or just sit down with them for a few minutes.

Teacher Colleague 5 discussed the ease of supporting a candidate when she was actually team-teaching with that person at the time. Teacher Colleague 5 noted:

It is a lot easier if you're team-teaching with somebody. That way you can shift the load of what you're doing and somebody can pick up and help you out of spots. Getting your things ready--plus it's easier to have a sounding board, somebody to sound off on. Somebody to look through your portfolio and say, "You should put this in or you should leave this out. Should I put this in and is it worded right?" It was just things like that. Especially now, since we're doing so much on computers--it helps to pull the stuff up on the computers.

As an encourager and a proofreader for a national board candidate, Teacher Colleague 4 voiced the importance of team work when she stated:

We proofed things for him and things like that . . . I don't see how someone can do it by themselves and try to teach at the same time. Because I feel that you have to have someone to bounce those ideas off of and somebody that supports you. You know that's one reason [name] was so successful, he had three of us at that time who just kept urging him on and encouraging him. Family can do that to an extent. But not if you're not an

educator. You don't know what all is involved and we saw what was involved. We really tried to support him and I think it's essential. I don't see how you can do it yourself.

Perceived Supports From the Administrators' Perspectives

Of the administrators interviewed, all served in the role of principal except one. She served in the role of assistant principal. The administrators showed a great deal of pride in discussing the national board certified teachers in their buildings. They were open and honest about their lack of direct knowledge with the process. They were unified in their feelings of support for the candidates during the time they were working on the process. Most of their involvement revolved around encouragement. They also spoke of release time provided through professional development days that ranged from two to five days. The administrators said they considered that being proofreaders for their candidates was good support. The data from this theme provided from the administrators' perspective was organized into two broad categories: involvement and supports.

Involvement

The administrators spoke openly about their involvement and in what capacity. Administrator B had recently moved from another state to his current state where the national board certificate was more valued in terms of dollars. The administrators' involvement was sometimes simply on the level of exposure to the process as they viewed their teachers making the attempt. Administrator B detailed:

Well, the national board certification process... I didn't really know much coming out of the state of Tennessee. I really didn't know a lot about it--if anything about it at all. Not really recognizing it as highly as the State of North Carolina. North Carolina really puts a lot of stock into it. In as much as 12% increase in their salary, plus they will pay for them to go through the process and give a few days off, which I think is great. It encourages many people to jump into that before they decide they can not afford to do it. My first was at the high school. There were a couple of teachers who had just gone through the process and succeeded; but in both cases, it was the second time they had

gone through it. One teacher, additionally, had gone through her first time and passed it-- which I learned was kind of a rare situation. The thing I got out of it was what they did. It took them through reflection and really sort of helped them with their self-evaluations. I saw that it made a difference in how they approached their classroom. They really became the practitioners. I came here last year and no national board certified teachers were here. One had moved from the [name] area and had passed everything but one part of hers. This was my first exposure as I said, in the elementary school--especially in the primary area. She was successful this year and when I have talked to her about the process she said, "It's hard, its awful, if I knew the work that was in it, I probably wouldn't have done it again, but on the other hand it was a great process to have to go through and learn that organization and learn the areas that I was weak. And it really forces you to look at the areas your weak in or look at the area you need to work on." Sometimes I think the process feels like an 800 pound gorilla and most teachers sort of settle in on that or find out that they can get past that or as their peer group grows larger and there's more encouragement within the ranks here in the building, then I think more people are going to be encouraged to do the process. Then this year we have three who got it. I have a second grade teacher, [name] seventh & eight grade teacher, and then I have a music teacher. I think she was the first music teacher in the county to be certified.

Administrator A briefly stated her lack of knowledge when she said, "Well, I don't know very much about it. I do know that we gave them time off to work and they did and I read some of the articles. Things like that."

Involvement was also given during the crucial period of time when the deadlines approached for the national board candidate. Administrator G recalled:

Well my main involvement has been with our two teachers here at [name] who recently went through. One language arts teacher received her certification two years ago. An exceptional children's teacher who filled her requirements last year is here too. And I was able to kind of work with them through their process, see the work that they were doing, and also try to work with them to free up some time for them to get their work done, especially during the crunch time of the NBC.

Targeting teachers for the process was also discussed Administrator D actually brought the national board material to her teachers to see if they were interested. She hand picked a few teachers that she considered might qualify and be interested. She recalled:

I received information about it. I thought of teachers that I knew and the fact that this might be something they might want to consider. I had read some information about it and I felt like it was certainly something that these teachers could easily achieve. In addition, that year I had. I believe three teachers that went into the process and two did

get their certification. One had to go back and she kind of got a little bit rushed right there at the end on handing everything in she just felt overwhelmed. It was about the first time that anyone in our system had gone through the process and there was debate about should there be some allowances for professional leave and that sort of thing. The system did allow some time at that time. They needed that to be able to work.

The most passionate response about encouraging national board candidates came from Administrator H. She said several teachers made the achievement in her building. She elaborated:

We have six NBC teachers currently and two pending that we don't foresee any problem with and watching those teachers go through that process they are already great teachers or they wouldn't even consider it. Because once you get the information and understand the criteria, you know it's an extremely intimidating process. I've noticed I've been here with everyone of those teachers except for one who came here national board certified. The rest have done it here. It's very important for their colleagues, for the administration, and for other teachers to be supportive of what they are doing. They are not putting on a show for anybody. They're critically looking at their own teaching, student learning teaching styles, classroom environment. It's as if I have watched these teachers. I have viewed it as one of the most demanding processes that I have ever seen a teacher go through. However, they always emerge even stronger. I do think it is very, very, very important that national board certified teachers who are wanting to achieve that status be supported by their colleagues and administration.

Supports

Support systems were offered up and recalled in a variety of ways according to the administrators. The administrators usually provided the candidate with at least one essential element in the preparation experience. The supports were not comprehensive however.

Administrator B recalled:

Well as I said, North Carolina does a pretty good job supporting financial assistance that they offer. In addition, our county will give them a couple of days or three days to work on their product. I try not to be very restrictive on the days that they use; of course, you want them to give you plenty of notice. And I try to work with them on a good time that I feel will be spaced out where they won't worry or feel any more behind I guess in missing time. One of things I've noticed that they have recently started doing is taking current national board teachers and hooking them up with prospective national board teachers and they'll have meetings. For example, they'll have a regional meeting, say at [name] County High School that is down in [name] about 30 minutes away. They'll do two to three days a year, which I thought was super idea. As far as support here, building

level, I think we've done a good job; county level, I think they have done even a better job since they contribute more. At the state level, the commitment has been varying. They are saying it is going to stabilize, but you know in doing that they have to explore some different areas.

Administrator F was more personally involved in supporting her candidate as a proofreader and otherwise. She recalled vividly:

I remember she was in the first initial group that the school system funded for the initiative. I was excited that [name] chose to go through the process. I did work with her providing her with release time and reviewed many of the documents that she wanted me to review for information. I worked with her on her major case study. I provided her with additional supports in terms of personnel to videotape and so forth and so I worked very closely with her as she went through the process. I remember most of what she wanted was my assistance with her case study. That, I remember, she and I spent a great deal of time talking about, discussing. I did some editing for her with that more than anything. In terms of release time, I think that maybe they received three or five days. We were able to get substitutes while they finished up. Most of that was really to finish their case studies or their portfolio entries.

Administrator F went on to detail help from her staff for the candidate by stating:

Well I do know that she had tremendous amounts of support from the staff. She is a very, very well-liked teacher here and very popular among the staff. They were certainly in her corner cheering her on as she went through the process. I'm sure she relied on them to help her perhaps with maybe videotaping, reviewing her entries, and other things.

Strong encouragement was discussed by Administrator C. His consideration for his teachers was evident throughout his thoughtful discussion. He said:

The biggest the thing in my involvement was that I was a support system through the whole thing. It made its challenges along the way. Just as all teachers do, she felt overwhelmed. And trying to do the daily routine of teaching and on top of that completing all the requirements of national board certification. The writing was astronomical! I truly believe that if I had any support to it, it was a support of encouragement. To keep saying, "Hang in there, it will be okay." She even got to the point where she was ready to back out a couple of times, but she kept in there. Persistence. I started the enrollment money process and anything that she needed I tried to provide for her; both, I guess you could say, emotionally and professionally.

Administrator E's contact with the national board candidate was limited. He was the first teacher in her system to attempt the certification. She assisted in terms of release time and did some documentation for him. She noted:

[name] is to my knowledge about the only person in [county] school system that showed any interest. They have over the years given us bits and pieces of information about national board certification. He had really had a lot on him at one point in time. Just from things he would tell and I had to write a letter or two and do a couple of things for him. I think he was overwhelmed with his responsibilities with that. [Name] is working on his graduate degree too. He had a lot of things to do and he would sometimes have to leave for class early. We just had to work with his time needs. We did that and when he came in and said he was interested in the national board certification. I said "okay" and we worked with his time needs on that too.

The critical elements of peer interaction in their cohort group along with time were mentioned by Administrator A when she stated:

I think the extra time as well as having their fees paid so they can participate was a big support. Then, actually, on things that they needed, they worked with one another. It was important that they had that cohort group--that they could work together. And, they did. I think that helped them a lot. It was nice for them because they got to be friends.

Administrator G echoed Administrator A as he stated:

I think that the key to my working with them was around the time element. Because of course, I'm the one who can free time up for them that type of thing. They also had some training sessions at the Central Office and I think they had some large group meetings where they got to question and get answers from some teachers who already had NBC certifications. That was helpful too, from what I understand.

Assisting with materials for units of study was one of the things Administrator H did as she related:

I saw our teachers go through it and the administrators were supportive in such a way that while it never impacted their committees and things they were on... we all tried to shelter them a little bit and not make them chairpersons or stuff because it was so comprehensive of a process. I think that when they were preparing special units and things like that, that I tried to make sure that they had the best of what I had to offer them.

Administrator H also fondly recalled seeing her teachers interact with one another especially as proofreaders of the other's materials. She stated:

Oh yes, I just remembered something that the other national board teachers here spent hours and hours reading the portfolios, criticizing, suggesting revisions, and I really saw it as a dissertation type of procedure. I remember that the teachers would go to another teacher and say "How does this look?" They would be so proud and it would come back with, "Well I think you need to do this and you should do this, and try this." It was just as much of a procedure as what I went through with my own dissertation. I think that our teachers here had a real neat experience because they are their own little club.

Highly Qualified Via the National Board Certificate

The passing of the *No Child Left Behind Legislation* federally mandated that teachers in core academic content areas be highly-qualified teachers. The national board certification meets that requirement. The national board certificate is only one possible way to meet that requirement. With the many avenues available to teachers to determine their highly-qualified status, the lengthy process required for national boards came into question. The teachers holding this advanced certification were asked if they felt justified in being deemed highly qualified based on the acquisition of the certificate. Most of the candidates interviewed said they felt that the certification was a justifiable recognition of the highly-qualified status.

Miss H said she felt highly qualified based on her national board certificate. She related that the process was a good one even for a teacher at the beginning career stage. She pointed out that the activities were a true reflection of teaching ability. Miss H added:

I think it is and I think I would like to see--I know North Carolina has a thing where they take beginning teachers where they have the portfolio that the teacher had, and they had the product of learning or whatever for that second year of teaching. That may be a little early, but I think that idea of expecting teachers to be qualified in the areas that they're teaching and to prove that they're qualified in the areas that they're teaching is a good thing. I don't think that you can do that with the NTE, the Praxis, or those sorts of things. With the Praxis, I don't believe that proves that you're a good teacher. I think that the proof of your ability to teach is in how you teach and how you're able to show your parents, your faculty, and your administration proof of that teaching. It's not all test scores either.

Miss R responded positively in her reflection. When asked if she felt highly qualified, she said:

Absolutely! There are two pieces, if you ask me, that make you a highly-qualified teacher candidate. My master's degree program in reading where I truly learned to teach reading and the second was the process that I went through with national board certification where I had to take something I had done and reflect.

Miss M responded in a humble manner. She felt highly qualified but was guarded and did not want to come across as being a "better" teacher. She continued by saying:

Ok, I do feel highly qualified for that reason. I really do think that. If you go through that process and if you don't achieve it, you still grow--you just can't not grow going through it. I think even teachers who have gone through and still haven't achieved it--you talk to them and if they say to you that they didn't get something out of it, I would be

shocked! You almost have to. It forces you to look at yourself. Sometimes it's tough. And I think for teachers who have maybe been teaching longer, it's harder and the reason I say that is because sometimes it's hard to change your mind set; you've been doing it for so long that you think sometimes it's hard to switch gears. It's hard to switch gears, change is hard. I also think you have to have those years of experience before you even attempt to go through it. I wouldn't even start looking at it before five or six years under your belt, even though they say you can do it after four years. There is no way I would have made it, no way! I think you do have to have those years of experience. You'd asked me do I feel highly qualified. You know, it's just their little title for it. But yes, I feel that you can put me up against any other language arts teacher and I could pull my weight.

Fear also played a part in the national board certification process and in the status of being highly qualified. Miss J proclaimed her feelings of uncertainty after a number of years feeling confident. She said:

Yes, I do feel it was justified. It was actually very petrifying because I considered myself as a master teacher and I had been considered a master teacher leader for years. I was terrified that they would say no you are not a master teacher and not certifiable as an instructor. I would have thought, "Oh my Gosh, I've been on the wrong page all these years." And I know that was a haunting thought for some of the others.

Miss KB said she felt as if she were highly qualified based on the certificate but only in a limited perspective. Miss KB said:

In one way, I do feel it makes me highly qualified. Yes, because you have gone through a process that strengthens you and creates an opportunity for you to be a better professional. But in another way, it makes me question everything I do and makes me strive harder to keep that label. For me it has both sides of the coin. Highly qualified is such a broad term. People look at you; you're highly qualified, am I really? It's a scary thought. Keep that humble attitude.

Three candidates said they felt as if the advanced certification did not make them highly qualified. Mister T pointed out it was because of a very separate issue that he voluntarily chose to go through the process. He stated, "It was just a sampling of my best effort. It was a goal of mine only to be certified. It should not mean I am highly qualified." Miss B mirrored the feelings of Mister T. She stated she did not feel that the certificate made her any different at all. She pointed out that it certainly did not make her a more qualified teacher. Miss B quickly explained:

No, it is a horrible feeling. That slip of paper did not make me any better. I don't know if I will renew it or not when it's time. I am just not sure yet. Who knows? I don't know what I will do then. I wish it had been a good experience, but it wasn't and I won't lie to you about it.

Mister W considered that the national board process was becoming more of a training process than an evaluative measure. His perspective of highly-qualified status was realized through this context. He said he did not feel deemed highly qualified based on the national board certificate.

Mister W detailed:

Well I think there are probably national board certified teachers who had a little bit more help in the process and are they truly . . . Do they truly exhibit those characteristics that national board deemed to be highly-qualified teachers? Do they do that in the classroom or did they just change themselves that one week or two weeks in order to fit the criteria? I think that's what bothers me with national board right now. I think there are people who are starting the process and change their evolving and maybe that's a good thing too. If this makes you more aware of what you should be doing, then I guess that's a good thing too. For me, I didn't change the two or so weeks that I was videotaping and doing all of this. I didn't act any different on camera that I did the other 30 weeks that I was teaching. I guess what I'm saying is I think there are people who are meant to teach and people who are not meant to teach. Being able to relate to children is the most important thing. Highly qualified? I don't think the national board made me highly qualified. I think I was just lucky and that I love to read to children and I can relate to children. I'm child-like myself. I have a good time with children. I think you have to. I think it is a combination of things. Do I think I'm a highly-qualified teacher? Yes, I do. I think this process, for me, was simply an evaluation. I think it was my years in teaching, my training, working on my masters, and my doctoral program--all of those things coming together and the experiences I've had in classrooms. What works? What doesn't work? All those things combined together made me highly qualified. I'm not sure this process made me highly qualified. It just evaluated me and said that I was.

Professional Growth Experience

Overall, the national board teachers agreed that they experienced quality professional growth from their successful path to the advanced certification. Their experiences continued to help them grow in the classrooms each day as their reflective techniques assisted with their planning and delivery of instruction. The few teachers who did not consider it positive in terms of professional growth acknowledged they felt they were already reflective practitioners in their teaching for the most part.

For the respondents who considered the process made an impact on their professional growth, their opinions were very strong. Miss KB talked about it as being a soul-searching process. She stated:

The word has to be phenomenal. There's something about going through the process, as I said earlier, that stretches you but it makes you question your practices, what you're doing and why. It makes you pinpoint the direction better. It's a soul-searching process. Lots of time is involved. It was harder than anything we have done in any program of study at [name]. Maybe because it was so concentrated, but it was much more difficult than anything we have done. The internal growth in achieving the certification has the reassurance that I'm doing something well. It has also made me strive to do it better every day and I, for some strange reason, I care more than I did before and I cared a lot before. I honestly don't know if that's because I have the label now, or because I've been through the process, but it really is just better and I truly enjoy my teaching more now.

Miss H had never critically looked at her teaching skills before this endeavor. She said:

That was one of the reasons because prior to this it had been . . . I had really and truly had never set down and said what am I doing well and what am I not? Well, it brought home to me some of my, I have strengths; I have strengths in the area but I also had some weaknesses. This process points out the weaknesses in your teaching and allows you to work on those. Not concentrate on them, but work on them so that you improve your teaching overall.

Mister W said he thought the use of videotaping was the vehicle for his reflective practices and ultimately his professional growth experience. He added:

I think the most important thing is that after this process, during and after, it forces you to become very reflective. For me, it was the very first time I had every looked at the video tape of me teaching. You know that's hard. I mean even at family reunions, you don't want to see yourself on video tapes. Just being able to see--to actually watch the way you teach--I think when you're up there, you just hear yourself; it's when you're actually looking at it through the eye of a camera and going back and listening to what you said. It's not so much the video, although the visual part is very important, but it's actually hearing what you say to children.

Exceeding the professional growth from her degree programs was how Miss M described the national board certification process for her personally. She added:

You know I had my B.S., M.Ed., and my--well I hadn't got my Ed.S. yet, but through all three of those you learn a lot of course information and stuff for practically looking at yourself as a teacher and reflecting on what you do and saying, "Why do I do what I do?" For me, personally, it was a kind of challenge. I wanted to see: Did I meet those high standards? You know it was just kind of a personal challenge--to know; you think you're

a good teacher, but you want some type of validation sometimes. That's just me, I suppose.

Seeking validation as an effective teacher was critical for Miss Y. She invested a great deal of emotion into the process and it appeared that she made a habit of total commitment to any project. Miss Y said:

I was just consumed with it; it took me two years to really come out of it afterwards. I'm just that type of person, overachiever probably most of my life and I just needed that validation. I don't look at it as that's it. I still want to maintain that work ethic of doing my best and seeing where I need to change, revise, knowing my kids and what I can do with this class.

The school administrators interviewed supported the national board teachers' consideration that the certification was a quality professional development experience.

Administrator D said he felt that anytime you engaged in professional reflection, the experience was worthwhile. Administrator D added:

I do feel like it was a significant growth time. I think that anytime that you have any opportunity to be that reflective about your teaching that in itself leads to professional growth. You really have to examine why you are doing what you are doing.

Administrator H agreed when she said, "Absolutely I think it was a great professional growth experience! I think the teachers would vouch for that. They become immersed more than ever in educational research. It's action research and they are just immersed into it." Administrator G concurred when he stated, "I'll be very honest with you. I have seen [name] and [name] both as entry level and veteran teachers and they have both grown as professionals through the whole process."

Reaffirming the positive outcomes of reflection were Administrators A and E.

Administrator A noted, "I think they have to reflect on their own practices and see about the questioning. Some of the questions they ask are very good. It made them rethink what they were actually doing in the classroom." Administrator C noted the growth experience he witnessed from his teacher when she finally triumphed and achieved the certification after numerous attempts. He expounded, "No doubt about it. I really do think she grew

professionally. I think if nothing else, it taught her perseverance. There is no doubt or question about it. She is now a better teacher. The importance of being child-centered in addressing needs was an outcome noted by Administrator F. She explained:

Well I think its back to action research. I think the case study is something that really opened my teacher's eyes to the depth that she went into to look at a student. That's something that classroom teachers or teachers at large just do not do. Our focused assessment model is probably the closest thing we have in our school system that really hones in on that.

Focusing on teachers' growth may also have a significant impact on students' growth, as

Administrator B said:

I would have to say yes, their professional growth was tremendous. Just as I know the reflection is important by being an active participant in your own evaluations or your own lessons and trying to . . . a great example is one teacher here who has made significant growth in classroom management. After going through the middle school piece and adolescent piece and kind of understanding the students a little better and dealing with that and having to reflect on what that weakness is they have in the classroom as far as management. I would have say it's just not academic or how they deliver a lesson, it's just overall setting up the classroom. To maximize your management and being able to say, "Hey, that didn't work. And that's okay, but I need to go to something does."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Introduction

I commend these 137 Virginians for earning their prestigious national board certification. They should be extremely proud of their distinguished achievement. A quality system of education is the cornerstone of continued economic growth and prosperity for our Commonwealth and nation. Virginia's education system and school children will benefit greatly from these dedicated teachers who are committed to the highest standards of educational and professional excellence. I, along with the rest of our nation, am thankful to these teachers for their commitment to educating our children. (US Senator George Allen, December 5, 2003)

Through a review of related literature, interviews with 24 professional educators, and 16 years of experience as a classroom teacher, school principal, and central office administrator, conclusions and recommendations concerning the support systems available to national board candidates were made. The information garnered from field interviews of indepth questioning of the professional educators involved in the rigorous process of national board certification was collected and organized in an effort to promote the awareness of the strenuous and intensely personal process involved for those teachers seeking the advanced certification. The sacrifices made in the name of achieving the advanced certification were also detailed in hopes of providing encouragement to future candidates that the national board certification is achievable with the support of others.

Demonstration of what teachers know and are able to do was extremely varied. Attempting the national board certification process was immensely personal and individualized for each candidate. Teachers in isolated geographic regions such as those in this study often found it difficult to locate an ally to whom they could confide and glean further information regarding the process and the expectations outlined by the NBPTS. There were inherent difficulties contained in the identified process. The support systems in place also varied. The

supportive behaviors the national board teachers felt were similar across the board. The administrators and teachers' colleagues' perceptions of support were also similar and often overlapped even though they were in different schools and systems.

Each teacher approached the process of attempting the advanced certification differently. Their involvement and perceptions of support were unique as were the perceptions of support identified by their colleagues and administrators. The financial supports varied mostly by state.

Conclusions From the Study

The general conclusions from the study focused on the perceptions of support as named by the national board certified teachers, their teaching colleagues, and their administrators. The conclusions were made from a combination of the transcribed interviews and field notes from each personal interview, the review of related literature, and the completed analysis of data. The specific findings were organized and clustered around the focal points of the study:

1. The national board certified teachers' overall opinions of the process,
2. the national board teachers' perceptions of support,
3. teaching colleague's and administrator's perceptions of support,
4. national board certified teachers' feelings about the advanced certification as meeting the requirements for highly qualified, and
5. national board teachers' and administrators' feelings concerning the certification process as professional development.

Subtopics that emerged from the data analysis process were also addressed as they related to the five researched topics. This perceived information that accumulated prompted the formation of specific recommendations. For each of the five researched areas, specific findings were noted, pertinent and related professional literature was identified, and recommendations were made.

National Board Certified Teachers' Overall Opinions of the Process

Findings

The teachers who went through the process presented by the NBPTS were at the forefront of their profession. They had a strong desire for self-improvement; they were seekers of validation. The national board certified teachers wanted to know if they were performing the task of teaching to the best of their abilities. They desired positive feedback. The pioneer teachers who went through the process in almost total isolation reported that the course of action related to the process was often ambiguous. This feeling was generally supported by teachers attending to the process in later years also. The teacher candidates acknowledged they sometimes felt confused and needed clarification concerning expectations. The candidates desired direct feedback from the NBPTS concerning their performance. The year-long work toward the certification prompted true reflections from each teacher. In addition, this process forced each teacher to look at individual students and plan for increasing their levels of achievement.

Professional Literature Connection

The national board certified teachers were all motivated intrinsically. The certification process is strictly voluntary for any teacher in the United States. As noted by researchers, it is those intrinsic rewards that are actually motivational (Herzberg, 1966) and often matter most (Lortie, 1975). Berliner (1986) classified teachers as novice, good, or expert. Berliner would likely place all of these successful candidates at the expert or master teachers' level. Steffy (1989) might place Berliner's expert status teachers into the career stage of expert/master. At this stage, the classroom is very much controlled and smooth-functioning. At the expert/master stage, the teacher is self-actualized through his or her job; feelings of self-worth and value usually come through professional performance. Maslow (1954) defined self-actualization as the

need to fulfill one's potential and he placed it at the top of the hierarchy of needs above the need for self-esteem.

Recommendations

It is recommended that potential national board candidates begin the information gathering process early on when they become interested. They may even take an entire year to read the directions and investigate the process while reviewing the standards for their particular certificate area. This investigation would assist with time management in developing the necessary materials for submission during the actual year they attempt the advanced certification. The result would be a two-year process with the first year being a time for information gathering and becoming familiar with the process. Administrators should continue to promote the NBPTS to those teachers at the expert- or master-level stage in their careers. This process often provided an outlet or focus for those desiring self-improvement or validation of their teaching abilities. National board certification could assist those teacher leaders in the building with opportunities to model appropriate reflective teaching techniques for their colleagues. It is strongly suggested that potential candidates go through the certification process with a peer at each school site. The data analysis revealed a strong conviction in a positive outcome of the process if at least two people in the building were going through it simultaneously. The NBPTS should create a vehicle for providing direct narrative feedback of the candidate's performance.

National Board Certified Teachers' Perceptions of Support

Findings

The national board candidates found support in the form of encouragement. They had others who encouraged them. This encouragement originated from their teaching colleagues, administrators, other national board certified teachers, and certainly their individual families. They often had assistance with videotaping and working with students during the certification

process. In addition to encouragement, many national board certified teachers found a credible support was having someone to read their portfolio entries. A proofreader may have been a colleague, administrator, or family member. There were incidents where the candidate never met his or her proofreader face-to-face; rather, they chose to communicate electronically via email. The national board certified teacher founds the support of additional time beneficial as they attended to the process. This benefit was evidenced through additional support personnel assigned to them from their administrators. Their administrators sometimes provided additional release time and fewer school responsibilities during their working time on the certification process. Often, family members took over responsibilities at home in order for them to work productively on their entries. All of the teachers interviewed had their registration fees to the NBPTS paid in full. Days allotted for professional development or release time for preparing documentations were also noted by all participants involved in the research study. An evolution of structured support networks was also found. Networks of individuals who provided assistance were named by the national board teachers. Levels of support varied with the individual teacher.

Professional Literature Connection

Teachers who immerse themselves in new learning experiences have typically reached the master-level stage of their careers. The national board certified teachers in many ways became their own support systems as they were driven to accomplish the standards set forth describing what teachers should know and be able to do. The expert/master teachers were forever changing and growing professionally. They were usually the success makers in the schools. They were acknowledged by their peers as the best. Typically, they provided their own renewal and growth; this was probably how they arrived at this stage (Steffy, 1989).

The anxiety expressed by the candidates, their peers, and their administrators was phenomenal. In recognizing the strong demands of completing the national board certification process, many state and local agencies initiated programs of instruction, mentoring, and support

for candidates. Some state and/or local systems have offered financial incentives for the successful completion of the certification process. Incentives for national board certification have been provided at the local level in more than 400 school districts or through statewide programs funded by other sources. Currently, 48 states offer regulatory or legislative support for the national board certification. Following the leadership of former North Carolina Governor, Jim Hunt, and Ohio's former Governor, George Voinovich, several states offer multiple incentives that provide financial support and use the national board certification to permit greater inner-state mobility for these accomplished teachers (NBPTS, 2003). Three out of the four states hosting the candidates in this research study provided a financial incentive based on the successful completion of the certificate.

Recommendations

All states should move toward the financial recognition of quality teaching. Specifically, Tennessee should join the other states identified in this research study (North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia) in rewarding quality teaching monetarily upon successful completion of the national board certification. The financial incentive could promote additional candidates to seek the certification resulting in improvements of reflective teaching practices and strengthening teaching in the content areas. The continued payment of the registration fee for candidates is suggested. Building level administrators need to become more directly involved. Principals may provide valuable information by becoming proofreaders for the national board candidates. In addition, reading entries for the candidate should prove to be insightful for the administrator as an instructional leader. The portfolio entries could be incorporated into the teachers' local evaluation model. Local school systems should continue to provide professional development days or release time to the candidates during the year they go through the certification process. The days might be scheduled in partnership by the school principal and national board candidate.

Scheduled days would assist in developing a timeline for completion of tasks if the days are scheduled throughout the year appropriately.

Teaching Colleagues and Administrators' Perceptions of Support

Findings

The teachers' colleagues recognized their own contributions of support to the national board certified teachers. They confirmed the statements made by the national board teachers of their ability to assist in the classroom with videotaping and with direct student supervision during small group work. The teacher colleagues were also encouragers and proofreaders. They also told of times when they needed to be a cheerleader in order to keep the candidate focused. Working together was exemplified throughout the interviews. Teachers found strength from one another. The administrators found their faculty and staff to be most helpful to the candidate. The administrators readily admitted their involvement was indirect. They told of being supportive and providing moral support in addition to supplying whatever it took to give the candidate as much time to work on their documentation as possible.

Professional Literature Connection

Teachers learn from one another. The teacher colleagues spoke of their new learning from just being around the national board candidates. Working together to problem-solve was noted from the candidates who made multiple attempts before achieving the advanced certification. Teachers' satisfaction has been shown to be higher in schools where teachers work together and learn to problem solve. The sense of being a part of a professional learning community was found to be a powerful motivator and a great source of job satisfaction (Eubanks, 2002). In order to retain teachers of high quality, administrators should support their teachers. Indirect support is useful; however, additional direct support will help keep quality teachers in our schools. A recent analysis of teacher turnover rates and teacher shortages by

Ingersoll (2001) supported this finding as well. Job dissatisfaction has been a major reason provided for giving up the profession and educators cited factors such as low salaries, problems with student discipline, and lack of support from school administrators (Ingersoll).

Recommendations

Continued support for national board candidates should be given by their teaching colleagues and school administrators. Encouragement should be of the essence. Administrators should provide relief of additional school responsibilities to the candidate. This reduction in extra activities should especially include any committee work or supervision of students outside the school day for the year the candidate goes through the rigorous process. Administrators should take a more direct role in the certification process. Proofreading portfolio entries and videotaping the teacher delivering instruction would assist all parties involved in becoming more knowledgeable about the advanced certification process. Reading would also promote the acquisition of knowledge about teaching and learning for both the teacher and the administrator.

Highly Qualified Via the National Board Certificate

Findings

The majority of national board certified teachers said they believed that their advanced certification was a justifiable means to being deemed highly qualified according to state and federal guidelines. Using the national board certificate is only one possible way to garner this required qualification. The candidates agreed that the national board certification was, in most cases, a true reflection of their teaching abilities. The teachers said the process strengthened their teaching abilities especially in terms of increasing achievement results for students. They looked critically at their teaching and the learning of their students.

Miss M, a national board certified teacher, responded in a humble manner when asked if she felt like the certification made her highly qualified. Although she said she felt highly

qualified, she was guarded and seemed to not want to come across as being a “better” teacher. She added:

Okay, I do feel highly qualified for that reason. I really do think that if you go through that process and if you don’t achieve it, you still grow; you just can’t not grow going through it. I think even teachers who have gone through and still haven’t achieved it—if you talk to them and they say to you that they didn’t get something out of it I would be shocked! You almost have to. It forces you to look at yourself.

Professional Literature Connection

The problem associated with the term “highly-qualified teachers” revolves around three different but related issues. As stated by Clement (2003), the first identifiable problem is locating and hiring new highly-qualified teachers. Second is being able to keep new teachers who are highly qualified. Third is ensuring that veteran teachers are highly qualified and keeping them employed and teaching in America’s schools.

Recent research on North Carolina’s schools determined that end of the year test scores improved an average of 7% more for those students whose teachers had earned the seal of approval from the NBPTS when compared with students whose teachers failed to earn the certificate (Goldhaber et al., 2004). The Goldhaber et al. study examined more than 610,000 state test scores for third, fourth, and fifth graders over a period of three school years. The researchers found results that were even more significant for younger students and for children from low-income families confirming that teacher quality matters more for disadvantaged students. This key finding from the students of North Carolina is critical because of the significant number of 6,640 national board certified teachers in that state and the investment of an added salary of 12% to the state’s salary scale (NBPTS, 2003).

According to the United States Department of Education, the number of public and private school elementary and secondary teachers exceeded three million in 1999-2000 (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2003). This presents a daunting task to our educational systems. Providing quality training, professional growth, or staff development to a large body of professionally trained teachers is of national concern. Meeting an individual teacher's needs is certainly challenging. Developmental stage researchers such as Steffy (1989) and Glickman (1985) presented valid arguments that traditional staff development fails because it is stage-less and not compatible with how adult learners develop in their lives and evolve throughout their careers. Schools are no better or worse than their least able teacher (Steffy).

Recommendations

Using the pathway of the national board certification to become highly qualified would be an excellent choice for veteran teachers or self-motivated teachers at any career stage. By promoting excellence through their teaching standards, the NBPTS is an avenue of renewal for the quality teacher who wants his or teaching validated by an outside source. Administrators should carefully guide teachers who fit this niche toward the national board certification. Certification can potentially add financial gain as well as intrinsic rewards for the consummate professional who engages students daily.

Professional Growth Experience

Findings

A tremendous time of professional growth was experienced by most of the national board certified teachers who were interviewed. According to their comments, their experiences were meaningful and appeared to be long-lasting. A new awareness of an individual student's needs was a positive outcome for the teachers. When they took a strong look at themselves and their teaching, it forced them to look at what students need. National board certified teacher Miss KB recalled when asked of the impact of certification on her professional growth:

The word has to be phenomenal. There's something about going through the process, as I said earlier that stretches you but it makes you question your practices, what you're

doing and why. It makes you pinpoint the direction better. It's a soul-searching process. Maybe because it was so concentrated, it was much more difficult than anything we have done. The internal growth in achieving the certification gives the reassurance that I'm doing something well. It has also made me strive to do it better every day and I, for some strange reason, I care more than I did before and I cared a lot before. I honestly don't know if that's because I have the label now or because I've been through the process. It really is just better and I truly enjoy my teaching more now.

Professional Literature Connection

In 2001, the NBPTS commissioned a comprehensive research survey concerning the impact of the assessment process on teachers who successfully completed the national board certification process. A key finding from the 600 random sampling was that the national board certification process was an excellent professional development experience. Of those surveyed, 80% said the certification process was better than other professional development experiences and 61% of those surveyed said the process itself had a greater impact on them than actually receiving the certification (NBPTS Research Report, 2001).

The stage of a teacher's career more often than not had a direct effect on his or her teaching performance. An awareness of this critical element is essential for administrators as they plan for increased learning. The approach and skills used in providing direct assistance, staff development, curriculum development, group development, and action research differed according to the level of motivation and level of thought of teachers. The administrator has to select the skills and techniques that will enable teachers to develop individually and collectively to create a cause beyond themselves. A commitment to that cause is essential for school success (Glickman, 1985).

Recommendations

School systems should closely examine the use of their federal funds that are allocated toward professional development. A thorough examination of each teacher and his or her career stage could be completed at each school site. Funding could be directed toward improving the

teacher's learning through the process set forth by the NBPTS. The funding could pay for the registration fee and the release time through professional development.

Recommendations for Practice

1. The promotion of the national board certification should be continued. Teachers desiring self-improvement, renewal, or validation of their teaching should be targeted to go through the process. With the widespread impending shortage of teachers, schools need to pay closer attention to keeping the teachers they have. Also, the evidence pointing to a direct connection between quality teachers and high student achievement was so compelling that schools should be placing more effort into making sure they find and keep the highest quality teachers (Clement, 2003).
2. Formal partnerships and support groups should continue to be formed and used in an effort to provide strong networks to assist candidates as they attempt the advanced certification. Partnerships between school systems, higher education institutions, regional state department offices, and national board certified teachers who are already certified should be included. The Charlotte-Collaborative Project originated in 1998 as partnership between public schools and local universities with a primary goal of providing quality professional development experiences for practicing teachers based on the standards set forth by the NBPTS. The collaborative model, consisting mostly of a support group strategy, not only assisted with candidates, it garnered national recognition as being one of the top professional development models for acquiring national board certification in the United States (Anderson et al., 2001).
3. Teachers should have a colleague in the same building attempt the certification process at the same time if possible. Simply having a peer to assist with the interpretation of the standards would be beneficial. Direct support from a peer completing the same

requirements was a benefit as shown in the data analysis phase of the study. The demanding process seemed less so when a partner was experiencing the same demands.

4. National board certified teachers should continue to be supporters for other candidates. They must become involved in improving teaching and learning and the educational profession.

Summary

I think of national boards as seeing a loaf of bread when it is finished and then trying to explain its cooking process. If I could have seen the manual on how it was done, then it would be easy. Teaching is like baking in a way. Everyone has their own recipe and their own way. You just hope the bread is good when it is done just as you hope that a child learns when the teaching is done. (National Board Teacher Miss Y)

The NBPTS certification is not a piping hot product just fresh from the oven. In fact, the first set of teachers achieving the certification was announced in 1995. The advanced certification is, however, a process still in its infancy for the United States educational system. The process is still warming on top of the stove and brewing up potential improvements in the area of teaching and learning through its direct link to teachers' professional growth. During the 2002-03 school year, more than 8,000 teachers attained the advanced certification. National board certification is an excellent opportunity afforded to the teaching profession to make an impact on how teachers teach and students learn. National board certified teacher Miss KB said it profoundly when she stated:

The first thing I discovered is it is something you really need to plan for and allow enough preparation time before you actually begin. I didn't have enough time for me to do that to the way I would have like to have done it, but it came together in about three and half months. It was a hard push. The process, however, was one that literally makes you want to scream the words "I don't want to stretch any more!" It's one of the best professional experiences I have ever had. It was hard; it required the kind of reflection that is deeper than what you do daily sometimes. However, it was well worth it and made a difference in how I approach everything I do now.

The supports experienced by the national board certified teachers were influential during the rigorous process. The most influential supports were help in proofreading entries for

submission, assistance with videotaping, direct help with students in their classrooms, and additional time to prepare their documentation. They were supported by their teaching colleagues, other national board certified teachers, their administrators, and their families.

The national board certified teachers expressed needs that they felt at the time they went through the process. They often desired additional administrative support and encouragement, additional time to prepare, support of a structured network of those knowledgeable about the process, and a peer directly involved in the attempt at the certification at their school site.

The national board certified teachers provided rich discussion about their role as supporters for new candidates as they seek this advanced certification from the NBPTS. Each one declared his or her brief yet fulfilling history in assisting others attempting the certification. The incredible impact that strong and effective teachers can have on their profession became readily apparent. Teachers teaching teachers and leading others to information were documented throughout the study giving validity to their shared concept that lifelong learning is essential.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Page 1 of 3

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affairs Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Richard W. Bales

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Perceived Indicators of Support Leading to the Successful Attainment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification*

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read the material carefully and decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

THE PURPOSES OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY ARE AS FOLLOWS: I intend to examine the supports or supportive behaviors that are given to national board certified teachers during the process of attempting the certification.

DURATION: The research project will begin in April and conclude in June. I anticipate that each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

PROCEDURES: Participants will be interviewed personally by the researcher using the interview guide. Participants will be first identified from the list of national board certified Teachers posted on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards national website. Participants from the Northeast Tennessee region/area will be identified by school and school system. Possible participants will be contacted initially via telephone or email to determine their interest. Provided the candidate is interested, then a determination to see if one of their teaching colleagues and their administrator is also interested. If all three are willing to participate, appropriate signatures from their superintendent/or designee will be obtained along with written permission from each participant involved directly in the interview. Participants will be free to stop the interview at any time for whatever reason they choose.

Version Updated 4/19/04

Subject's Initials (_____)

AUDIOTAPING: With your permission I would like to audiotape this interview. Only I will have access to the tape that I will personally transcribe, removing any identifiers during transcription. The tape will then be erased. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law and your identity will not be revealed in the final manuscript.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There is a risk that the nature of the questions asked might cause the interviewee to feel some discomfort. You are free to decline to answer questions of that nature.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS and/or COMPENSATION: There are some potential benefits that may accrue to society

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Richard W. Bales at (XXX) XXX-xxxx, or Dr. Russ West at (XXX) XXX-xxxx. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at (XXX) xxx-xxxx for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the researcher's personal work office in a locked cabinet for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the East Tennessee State University/V.A. Medical Center Institutional Review Board, the Food and Drug Administration, and the ETSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis will have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT: East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury that may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims, call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at (XXX) XXX-xxxx.

Version Updated 4/19/04

Subject's Initials (_____)

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: The nature demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. Your study records will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER/ DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR /DATE

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (If applicable)/DATE

Version Updated 4/19/04

Subject's Initials (_____)

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for National Board Certified Teachers

1. Would you please share with me your current teaching assignment and how long you have taught at that grade level? How many total years of experience do you have in the field of education?
2. When did you receive your National Board Certification? In what area?
3. Could you talk a little bit about the process and how that process worked for you? Were you successful on the first attempt? Can you please elaborate?
4. What would you say was the most significant or influential support you experienced during the process of working toward the certification?
5. Were there other supports you felt? Can you explain/describe those for me?
6. What about your administrator/s? Were they involved in the process with you at all or familiar with it? If so, how? If not, why do think they weren't?
7. Were there other colleagues or teachers who provided a means of support for you? If so, what were they and how did they support you? If not, why do you think not?
8. Do you think you could be a means of support for candidates going through the process now? If so, how? If not, why not?
9. Does your local school system provide support to you at all in any form? Is so, what?
10. Does your state provide any mechanism of support?
11. If you could identify one aspect of support which could influenced you the most had it been present, what do you think that would be?
12. Describe your experience in terms of professional growth and how significant it was.
13. Do you feel justified as being deemed a "highly-qualified teacher because of your National Board Certificate? Why or why not?
14. Are there any other aspects of the process for achieving National Board Certification that you feel particularly interested in sharing?

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide for Teaching Colleagues of the National Board Certified Teachers

1. Would you please share with me your current teaching assignment and years of experience in the field of education? Do you have National Board Certification? If so, in what area? When achieved?
2. Could you share about your experience in working with or viewing a colleague as they went through the process for National Board Certification? (include successful candidates and those who may not have been successful)
3. What do you feel like the candidate needed more than anything to endure the process to the end?
4. What role do you feel you played in this process? Please describe.
5. How significant do you feel the support of a colleague is to a teacher seeking this certification?
6. What are your feelings about the National Board Certification process overall? Can you describe those for me?
7. If you could recommend a mechanism of support for teacher candidates in the process, what would that consist of? Describe.
8. If you are not national board certified, do you think you will seek this certification? Why or why not?
9. Are there any other items or issues involving the process you would like to share?

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide for the Administrators of the National Board Certified Teachers

1. What is your current position in the school system and how long have you been in that position?
2. How long were you a teacher? What did you teach?
3. Would you mind sharing your involvement with any teachers who have been involved with the National Board Certification process? (Include any successful candidates and those who were not successful)
4. Do you feel the National Board Certified teacher was supported during the process? If so, please describe. If not, why not?
5. If you could assist another candidate in going through this process, what suggestions would you make?
6. Are there any future plans to provide any supports to candidates seeking the certification?
7. Do you feel the teacher with the National Board Certification experienced any significant professional growth? If so, please describe.
8. What means of support do you believe most influenced the candidate?

APPENDIX E

Permission Letter

Dear Teacher/Administrator:

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance in a research project that I am conducting as part of my doctoral work at East Tennessee State University. For my dissertation, I will be examining the experiences of national board certified teachers as they experienced the process of attaining the certification. I will also be discussing the certification experience with a one of their peers and one of their administrators to obtain their perspective. My study will be of a qualitative nature and will involve in-depth interviews about those experiences. These interviews will be face-to-face, and I anticipate will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

I am currently an instructional supervisor and recently left the elementary school principalship. Therefore, I realize that your time is valuable and that you already have far too many things to do. However, I am convinced that these in-depth interviews will provide data that ultimately can benefit all educators.

If you are willing to become part of this research effort, please read the informed consent form carefully and sign if you agree. Your responses during the interview will be completely confidential. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at 423-434-5221 or 423-791-0221. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Bales

APPENDIX F

Peer Debriefers' Letter

Johnson City Schools
100 East Maple
Johnson City, TN 37601
423-434-5200

July 1, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

I served as a peer reviewer for Richard Bales during his work on his dissertation "Perceived Indicators of Support Leading to the Successful Attainment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification. Throughout his research, we discussed the work he was doing from the prospectus through research and data analysis.

During the process, he would explain to me his work and I provided feedback and reaction to his methodologies. He has shared with me his process for the collection of data. I provided direction from a perspective of a qualitative researcher and a teacher of qualitative research at the local university.

I am confident that his treatment of the data is satisfactory as he now nears the completion of his research study. His conclusions and recommendations are based upon the data and can be traced back to the data. I am happy to have been able to participate in Richard's research process. It is my hope that my encouragement and insight were helpful in making this a worthwhile project.

Sincerely,

Robbie Anderson, Ed.D.
Curriculum Director, Johnson City Schools

APPENDIX G

Auditor's Letter

Rick Spurling, Principal
Bowman Middle School
PO Box 46
Bakersville, NC 28705

June 28, 2004

Richard W. Bales, Secondary Supervisor
Johnson City School System
100 East Maple Ave.
Johnson City, TN 37601

Dear Mr. Bales:

It is my pleasure to write this letter on your behalf. I would like to take this opportunity to commend you on your work you have completed in your research project, "Perceived Indicators of Support Leading to the Successful Attainment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification". Upon examination of your materials, and meeting you for a complete and comprehensive guided tour of your experience with this research study, I conclude that your work is complete, valid, verifiable, and reliable. I am convinced this study was conducted in an ethical and thorough manner. Your topic was of interest to me as I have had several teachers participate in the National Board process.

As an auditor, I investigated your adherence to the standards required of qualitative research methods. I traced your interviews you conducted with each participant through a review of your transcriptions and audio tapes. Your review of literature was thorough and pertinent to your research topic.

Your research questions were clear and provided focal points to the study. Your findings were organized and were organized by categories that followed the natural progression of a qualitative research study. Your research design employed the constant comparative method of data analysis that allowed you the flexibility to alter your research direction as needed. Your field notes on each participant's interview also assisted in following the course of your research.

Your perspective as a former principal viewing teachers who achieved the National Board Certificate gave you a deeper insight into your selected topic. You correctly balanced that perspective with peer debriefing and member checking to ensure triangulation to lessen the chance of bias. The time and care you enlisted to help ensure trustworthiness was evident while paying attention to truth-value, consistency, and neutrality.

It has been my privilege to have had the opportunity to be associated with your highly professional and organized research study. I commend you for your extensive efforts in completing this important and relevant project.

Sincerely,

Richard Spurling
Principal

VITA

RICHARD W. BALES

Personal Data: Date of Birth: January 9, 1965
 Place of Birth: Greeneville, Tennessee
 Marital Status: Married

Education: Public Schools, Greene County, Tennessee

 Tusculum College, Greeneville, TN;
 Elementary Education, B.S.;
 1988

 East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
 Educational Leadership, M.S.;
 1997

 East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
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 Greeneville, Tennessee;
 1988-1997

 Principal, Woodland Elementary School,
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 Supervisor of Secondary Instruction, Johnson City Schools,
 Johnson City, Tennessee;
 2003-Present