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ON BECOMING A NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHER

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As I was engaged in the process of becoming board certified during the 1994-95 school year, my colleagues were amazed by my portfolio preparations. At lunchtime they often heard about the tasks I was working on for the National Board, such as writing up a lesson that I was documenting; recalling I needed to talk to a colleague about videotaping me during a math lesson; and reminding myself to get permission slips from students. [Teachers must receive permission from parents in writing before they can videotape students.-Ed.]

One day my colleagues finally asked me, "Why in the world are you doing all this?" The question stopped me in my tracks and I began to think back. Even though I was then fully immersed in writing for my professional portfolio, I found it hard to trace the beginnings of my interest. My initial thought was that the reasons I chose to become a National Board candidate were not clear cut; they reflected a state of mind created by my teaching circumstance, school community and life experience. My colleagues' question was worth exploring and it is one many people have asked me since. I can today articulate the details in a way that back then I could not.

THINKING BACK

Let me explain. At the end of the 1993-94 school year, I felt satisfied with the passing of another academic year. Yet, I also felt a whispering emptiness. This feeling grew and I knew it was time to move on and grow professionally or risk burnout. I enjoyed working with staff developers, but, realizing that I needed a change, I began looking through pedagogical publications for a new focus of study. I asked myself, "What new direction would interest me? What would get my juices flowing?"

It wasn't long before I found my answer in the United Federation of Teachers' newspaper, *New York Teacher*. [See also "UFT Training Many for National Success," *The New York Teacher*, November 17, 1999. p. 9.-Ed.] There I spotted an article about national standards for teachers. "The National Board certification is a voluntary process of reflection about national standards of what accomplished teachers know and do," I read. My interest was piqued.

These teaching standards were primarily written for teachers and by teachers. My heart skipped a beat. I read on. Certificates would be issued to candidates who met these standards as evidence of their participation in a rigorous performance-based assessment. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was seeking educators to become members of the pilot group. All fees were waived!

I felt compelled to take a risk and investigate what the NBPTS certification process was all about as well as what participating in this process would mean to me. I also believed that through careful articulation of standards such as those of the National Board, teachers could be part of national reforms. Many issues I felt passionate about had been triggered when I read the article, but three were foremost.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

First, who knows better about teaching and students than classroom teachers? I am an enthusiastic proponent of our taking responsibility for making meaningful professional choices and decisions and accepting the commitment that comes with this leadership role. Here was an opportunity for me to stand up and be counted as part of a process that is authentic and meaningful because it enables us to systematically document what we do every day and to articulate our understanding of our identities as educators.

I believe that holding ourselves accountable and having high expectations can only improve our field and how we are viewed. One way we hold ourselves accountable through the NBPTS certification process is the submission of the portfolio. I submitted a videotape, photographs and, more importantly, students' work, all of which formed the basis of a dialogue I wrote for the portfolio, and a portrait of a child - looking at that child in depth and at our whole classroom community as a social unit. In addition I incorporated a unit on social studies and a thematic unit. Within each of these, I documented my professional contributions and accomplishments. There is no question for me that the teaching standards to which our portfolios are written help ensure quality teaching, validate our expertise and improve student learning.

TEACHING THAT REACHES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM WALLS

The second key issue that the idea of certification triggered for me was the desire to branch out beyond my classroom walls. This was an uncommon feeling for me. I had in the past been contented by my work with students, parents and school. Yet the isolation of the classroom began to feel confining. I needed to share ideas and become part of the broader educational community. The idea of aligning myself with dedicated, likeminded colleagues across the nation had a strong pull for me. NBPTS provided me with access to the larger vision that would be necessary for my personal growth as a professional. The work we submit illustrates our meeting the teaching standards and also gives voice to the excellence of the standards, thus allowing us to both understand and articulate the meaning of the concept *exemplary* as it applies to our work. We are, after this process and training, capable of sharing about these aspects of our work, not only among our peers, but also to interested members of the community.

TEACHING STANDARDS - WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO

While I was attracted by the idea of the standards as professional tools, and the effect working on them would bring to my work and the school I was working in, the third reason I undertook this enormous task, and the one that was most important to me, was the content of the teaching standards. When I read them, I literally got goose bumps! For the first time in my life I was reading a document that described the moment-by-moment life of a teacher. I felt so proud to be a teacher! I feel that the standards speak to the nature of great teaching, describing everything, from the littlest nuance to the larger philosophic underpinnings - about that teaching. They detail what a teacher should know and be able to do.

The NBPTS experience was a tremendously validating one because in the board's standards I saw all my years of study and teaching practice incorporated. It was if the collective wisdom of

all teachers were articulated and demystified. How could I not have tried to become National Board certified?

THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS FIVE CORE PROPOSITIONS

What Accomplished Teachers Should Know And Be Able To Do

1. Teachers Are Committed To Students And Their Learning

Accomplished teachers believe all students can learn and they act on that belief by recognizing differences among students and adjusting their practice accordingly. Accomplished teachers take into account how children develop when planning learning activities. In addition, accomplished teachers foster students' self-esteem, civic responsibility, and respect for one another.

2. Teachers Know The Subjects They Teach And How To Teach Those Subjects To Students

Accomplished teachers know how knowledge in their subjects is created, organized, linked to other disciplines and used in the real world. They use a repertoire of effective teaching methods to convey a subject to students. Accomplished teachers also help students learn by having them solve problems and make their own discourse.

3. Teachers Are Responsible For Managing And Monitoring Student Learning

Accomplished teachers modify their teaching methods and classroom setup to meet students' needs and they try new approaches when others fail. They know how and when to get students, colleagues, and classroom volunteers to help them. In addition, accomplished teachers use varied assessment methods to evaluate individual students as well as the entire class. And they can clearly explain student performance to parents.

4. Teachers Think Systematically About Their Practice and Learn From Experience

Accomplished teachers are lifelong learners who regularly seek advice from colleagues and others to strengthen their practice. They also draw on education research-as well as their own classroom experience-to improve their teaching. Their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, continued learning provides a compelling model for their students.

5. Teachers Are Members of Learning Communities

Accomplished teachers reach beyond the classroom to work creatively and collaboratively with colleagues, parents, and the community. With colleagues, they strive to improve school-wide curriculum and instruction and to bolster the teaching of the entire faculty. With parents, they work to promote student growth. And in the community, accomplished teachers take advantage of resources to enrich and supplement student learning.

Excerpted from The five Propositions of Accomplished Teaching, 2 pages on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards web page: www.nbpts.org.