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# Discourse and Disconnect: Black Teachers and the Quest for National Board Certification

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Discourse and Disconnect:  
Black Teachers and the Quest for National Board Certification

by

Paula J. Leftwich

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Childhood Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

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Discourse and Disconnect:

Black Teachers and the Quest for National Board Certification

Paula J. Leftwich

ABSTRACT

Black teachers have been under-represented proportionate to their presence in the teaching population in both the application for and achievement of certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. This study sought to explore the possibility of a disconnect between the discourses of Black teachers and the discourses of the National Board Certification process. Further, it was designed to investigate the effectiveness of targeted mentoring strategies to increase the participation rate and achievement rate of Black teachers in this complex and lengthy process.

Using procedures for the definition and analysis of discourse outlined by Gee, the author dissected document-based and process-embedded data to define the discourse of accomplished teaching embodied in the National Board and its disseminated philosophy and process for identifying and awarding credentials to National Board Certified Teachers. Participant data was gathered using a qualitative research design and a heuristic phenomenological approach. Discourse information gleaned from participant-produced process documents and interview transcripts were analyzed using Gee's methods. Field notes and recordings from direct observations were analyzed using Hycner's approach for the interpretation of phenomenological data.

Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic analysis was applied to the overlaid, separate discourses. Specific areas of both congruence and disconnect were clearly identified. Participant checks and inter-rater reviews of data and confirmed the findings and validated the conclusions.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for the findings for the National Board, potential candidates, and advocates for each.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Rationale and Context for Study

As a former Manager of Teacher Training for a large public school district in the southeastern United States, I frequently had the pleasure of facilitating celebrations of teachers' professional accomplishments. One of the highlights occurred each January when I presented to the School Board, in formal session, the teachers who had most recently earned certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. For those teachers, receipt of National Board Certification was the culmination of a long and arduous process.

Black teachers have been under-represented proportionate to their presence in the teaching population in their rates of application for and achievement of National Board Certification. As a result of my experience in coaching certification candidates, many of whom have exhibited difficulty, I understand that many benefit from mentorship to overcome their struggles with the writing demands of the certification process. After studying the work of critical pedagogists, including Freire and Finn, and reading the work of critical discourse analysts such as Fairclough and Gee, I have come to suspect that there may be, at least for some candidates, problems in aligning their own discourses to those inherent to the National Board and the certification process. This study explored the possibility of a disconnect between the discourses of NBPTS and a group of Black

teachers, and explored the notion that mentoring may mitigate the effect of the disconnect.

### *Background*

In this section of the chapter, I will provide information about several factors that define the parameters of the proposed study: Teacher Qualifications Terminology, National Board Certification, Florida State Incentive Programs, District-Level Support Programs, and School District Demographics.

#### *Teacher Qualifications Terminology*

It is important at the outset to examine the language used to articulate various levels of meaning when we speak or write about the topic of teacher credentials. Three terms come to mind almost immediately when this subject is raised: credentialing, licensure, and certification. Although these terms are used almost synonymously in general, there are important distinctions between the terms. As *No Child Left Behind* (Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], 2001)—the Bush administration championed reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—gains implementation across the country, with its specific requirements for a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom, the specific language employed in reference to teacher qualifications will carry new weight.

Credential is a term used to describe, in general, the broad category of meaning that includes both licensure and certification. An analogy would be the use of the term *car*, which encompasses such subcategories as *coupe* and *sedan*. In general usage, the terms are almost nearly synonymous (Roth, 1996), but to a person seeking to acquire an automobile, the differences are significant. So it is with teachers seeking “written

evidence of status or qualifications” (Morris, 1971, p.311).

A further distinction deserves exploration, that being the one between *certification* and *licensure*. In the report that gave birth to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession recommended that licensure be a function of the state, while certification become a function of the profession (Carnegie Forum, 1986). In such a system, licensure would indicate a teacher meets statutory requirements for practice in a particular state, often based on minimal competence determinations (Chinn & Hertz, 2002), while certification would be “reserved to the Board as professional recognition that a person meets certain standards beyond those required to be licensed” (Earley, 1987, pp 105-106). Similar structures exist for the certification of professionals in the medical and legal fields by relevant boards, such as the American Board of Medical Specialties, which maintains oversight for certification of physicians in 24 fields of medical practice (ABMS, 2003).

It is against this backdrop that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was established and teachers now seek to become National Board Certified Teachers. In a time marked by a renewed emphasis on education standards and accountability, and with increasing calls for improved teacher compensation across the country, teachers may opt for advanced credentials as one path to enhancing both status and salary. North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida are three among the many states whose education systems have provided support and incentives for teachers to move beyond basic licensure and seek a national-level professional certification.

#### *National Board Certification*

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was

established in 1987. Headquartered in Southfield, Michigan, NBPTS is governed by a Board of Directors led by an appointed President. The NBPTS Board has 63 members, the majority of whom are currently practicing classroom teachers. The central roles of NBPTS are to establish standards for National Board Certification in the various areas of teacher practice covered by NBPTS, to establish and oversee processes to assess and evaluate individual teachers' demonstration and achievement of those standards, to award National Board Certification to those who succeed in doing so, and to provide advocacy for related educational reforms. The independent, non-profit organization is privately funded through foundation grants and publicly funded through federal legislative appropriations and government grants. Fees collected from applicants account for a negligible portion of the funding. ([http://new.nbpts.org/press/quick\\_facts.pdf](http://new.nbpts.org/press/quick_facts.pdf)). For the 2005-2006 cycle, the application fee is \$2300.

*Incentive programs for Florida teachers.*

In 1998, the Florida Legislature approved a measure creating the Florida Excellent Teaching Program (Excellent Teaching Program, 1998). The effect of this measure was to provide financial assistance for Florida teachers qualified to seek National Board Certification (NBC). Further provisions of the program provide for subsequent payment of incentives to National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) who continue to teach in Florida public schools and provide mentoring services to their professional peers. The overall intent was to provide incentives that would increase the rate of retention of highly effective teachers in classroom instructional positions.

The Excellent Teaching Program is now housed in the Florida Department of Education Bureau of Teacher Recruitment. Prior to July 2002, it was part of the Bureau

of Teacher Certification. The Excellent Teaching Program is overseen by one fulltime person and 2-3 part-time employees in response to cyclical workflow fluctuations. Each of the 67 county school districts in Florida and the 4 Special/Developmental Research school districts has a designated Excellent Teaching Program contact person. The role this person plays varies greatly from district to district. In some cases, the contact's role may be simply to serve as a conduit for information that is delivered and interpreted by someone else: a principal, certification staff member, or other designated person. At the other end of the spectrum, as was the case in the district where I was formerly employed, this responsibility has been formalized into a major component of a district-level job description for a person who has a measure of control of a designated budget to support National Board Certification candidates.

Teachers meeting statutory eligibility criteria (as detailed in Chapter Two) who participate in the Excellent Teaching Program (ETP) pay ten percent of the NBPTS application fee, while the state pays the remaining ninety percent from budgeted funds set aside in the ETP trust fund. The 2002-2003 application fee was \$2,300, meaning that teachers paid \$230 to apply and state funds supplemented the remaining \$2,070. Each Florida teacher certified by the National Board (National Board Certified Teacher/NBCT) receives a salary bonus equal to ten percent of the average Florida public school teacher salary. In December 2001, this bonus payment was paid in the amount of \$3,813 per NBCT. A mentor bonus is paid each spring to NBCTs who have delivered the equivalent of twelve days of service *outside of student contact time* to fellow teachers who are not NBCTs. The mentor bonus is paid at the same rate as the salary bonus (FDOE, 2003a). Florida teachers who are NBCTs can, therefore, qualify for ETP bonuses that last year

totaled \$7,626 per teacher. In the 2001-2002 fiscal year, one-time legislative additions of \$500 to these bonuses boosted total possible payments per NBCT to \$8,626.

In addition to the financial impact of this program, it is important to note that a National Board Certificate is valid for ten years, after which it may be re-validated through an abbreviated recertification process. At current salary rates, this could result in a NBCT earning an additional \$76,260 over a ten-year certificate validity period, and potentially more in the following ten-year cycle if the certificate is revalidated and funding continues.

Another benefit for Florida NBCTs is the Florida Department of Education recognition of National Board Certification as satisfaction of the five-year recertification requirements for the primary coverage area of a Florida Professional Educator Certificate. National Board Certification is recognized as an advanced credential by all fifty states and generally affords holders greater portability for practice in the primary certification area.

*District-level candidate support programs.*

In Florida, although each district has a designated Excellent Teaching Program (ETP) contact person, levels of support vary widely on the basis of several qualitative variables. In my former district role, responsibility for coordination of details related to the ETP rested on me. This was due partly to my position in the Human Resource Development Department, but was due more to the fact that I was interested in the process and committed to helping teachers have the greatest possible access to the benefits accruing to NBCTs in Florida. As a recent classroom teacher and active member of a state Commission who enjoyed a good reputation and solid professional relationships

with influential decision makers in the school district and the state Department of Education, I was well-suited to accomplish this goal, and I worked vigorously in its pursuit. The timing was also right, in that the ETP was entering its second year as I assumed the management role.

During the first year of the program, my supervisor had taken proactive steps to encourage and support the cadre of applicants. The support component included several large group meetings where information had been shared about such topics as professional writing, time management, and videotaping. With the support of my immediate supervisor, the Superintendent, and the School Board, we set about the work of organizing and formalizing support processes, utilizing resources made available by state and national groups such as the Florida Education Association and State Farm Insurance. A small budget was set aside in district Human Resource Development funds to provide material resources for portfolio preparation and professional development time.

During this first year, we also applied for a *Goals 2000* grant to establish a formal local teacher professional development network. This network was anchored by six of the first district NBCTs. The goals of the network were to encourage and support NB candidates, encourage and support beginning teachers, and provide opportunities for renewal and growth for veteran teachers. Funds from the grant allowed for additional candidate support opportunities such as a series of overnight retreats for work on portfolio entries and collegial interaction. Additionally, as the network matured, NBCTs re-constituted the core of the district teacher training cadre. This facilitated the reallocation of monies previously allotted for trainer stipends to more pressing needs

(Polk County School Board [PCSB] 2002), while allowing structured opportunities for NBCTs to earn the necessary hours for the state Mentor Bonus. This resulted in a significant net financial gain for the school district (PSCB, 2002) and the program and participating teachers became valuable district assets for staff development.

Over the first two years of program implementation, the program became financially self sustaining, and the network took on a life of its own under the direction of the teacher-leaders, including many NBCTs, who worked closely with me and other district personnel to coordinate network activities. The composition of the central core began to trouble me as I realized that there were no Black teachers involved as core trainers. The only Black teacher trainers in the network were two school administrators. I noted the momentum developing in the network, and I wondered what the implications were of such a skewed ethnic representation within the ranks of the network.

#### *District Demographics*

The study is situated in a central Florida county that is one of the geographically largest in the state, comprising an area somewhat larger than the state of Rhode Island. The economy is primarily agricultural, industrial, and service-related. The population, which hovers around a half-million people, is distributed in two small urban areas, several smaller incorporated towns, and a wide rural and semi-rural area. The population and economy are in a state of flux from low-skilled rural to high skilled “urbal” characterizations (Polk Workforce Development Board, December 2002).

The public school district in October 2001 had 81,163 students enrolled, 23% of whom were Black, 61% White, and 9% Hispanic. Approximately 52% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (FDOE, 2003b).

### *The Research Problem*

In my district training role, and as ETP program contact, I was happy to promote a process by which excellent teachers could document their effectiveness, advance their professional credentials, and gain access to significantly higher compensation. This is especially important in light of research by Odden (2000) and Stinebrickner (2001) that links concerns about lagging compensation and increased accountability with teacher flight from the profession. Further, both studies documented a high percentage of teachers leaving the field before hitting their professional stride at 3-5 years, exacerbating growing teacher shortages by forcing a continual dilution of the teacher talent pool with less experienced beginners. Although financial compensation is but one consideration in charting job satisfaction, it is a useful tool to help promote retention of experienced, well-qualified teachers.

From 1998-2001, 164 teachers in the school district had applied for NBPTS certification. Of this number, 72 had successfully obtained the certification. It had been gratifying to introduce each of the three groups to the School Board. I had enjoyed putting together a packet of photographs for a corporate sponsor to include in a laudatory newspaper advertisement (The Ledger, 2001). The school district and the teachers' union had collaborated to place plaques with photographs of each NBCT cadre in the main hallway of the school district offices. Groups of local NBCTs worked together to create presentations for state and national conferences. Perhaps most significantly, NBCTs formed the nucleus of a growing district training and mentoring corps. As training manager, I interacted with and, to varying degrees, supervised the activities of these groups. I knew each of the 72 NBCTs personally and could call their names and faces to

mind with little effort. This familiarity enabled me to note with increasing discomfort, as one year melted into three, one particularly disturbing aspect of the cadre's composition. The cadre was all white.

It was also troubling that relatively few of the NBCTs were male or Hispanic, but the political and demographic conditions of both teachers and students in the school district cast an especially harsh light on the lack of representation of Black teachers among this highly celebrated and richly compensated group of local teachers. Under a Federal Court-supervised desegregation order since 1992 (Mills & US v. School Board of Polk County, Florida, 1992), the school district has been responsible to maintain specific ratios of balance (from fourteen to twenty-one percent) between Black and White students. The district is also required to monitor the number of Black teaching and administrative staff members and to maintain consistent efforts to recruit and retain Black teachers and administrators. The court supervisor and representatives from local chapters of NAACP and the National Legal Defense Fund receive regular reports through the Federal District Court in Tampa regarding the numbers of Black teachers and administrators at each school, among other strands of data. The district has been charged to work toward a goal of fourteen to twenty-one percent Black representation in these groups to match the student population in each school. In May 2002, district personnel database records indicated that 443 of 4973, or 8.9% of local district teachers, were Black (non-Hispanic).

In the 2001-2002 NBPTS application cycle in this school district, 116 teachers initially applied. Of these, 7 were Black, comprising 6.03 percent of the total (Polk County School Board, 2002). A summary of prior years' totals is shown in Table 1.

Clearly, local Black teachers are under-represented in both the attempt for and the achievement of National Board Certification.

Table 1. Annual ETP Participation and NBC Achievement (Local District)

Year	Total Candidates	Black Candidates	% Black Candidates	Total New NBCTs	Black NBCTs	Achievement Rate-White	Achievement Rate-Black
1998-1999	32	2	6.25%	15	-0-	46.8%	-0-
1999-2000	65	3	4.61%	31	-0-	47.6%	-0-
2000-2001	67	5	5.1%	26	-0-	38.8%	-0-

*Unavoidable Questions for Research*

Several questions arise from even a brief contemplation of this data. Why are Black teachers not participating in the process at a representative rate? Is this a local phenomenon? Why have so few of the Black participants succeeded in achieving certification? Is this representative of wider state and national trends? Can intervention have a positive impact on this trend? Has such intervention been attempted elsewhere? If so, with what result? Is such intervention warranted and appropriate? If so, by whom and on whose behalf should intervention be undertaken? What form should it take? Can it help achieve the desired outcomes? What are those specific outcomes? These questions all relate to the broader discourses.

Gee (1999) describes one type of discourse as “language-in-use” to facilitate human activities and assert individual human identities. However, Discourse (capital D) is the amalgam of human activities, incorporating language and “other stuff” (Gee, 1999, p.17) that defines our shared or more general membership and participation in various elements of society. According to Gee (1999), discourse (with a lower-case d) is

language in use. Discourse (denoted by the upper-case D) comprises all of the varied contexts in which the use of language takes place.

Prolonged contemplation of these issues led me to ask myself the following questions:

- Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

#### *Next Steps*

In June 2002, I mentioned the gap in the National Board Certification rates between Black and White teachers during a School Board work session. A conversation ensued as part of a discussion about Performance-Based Compensation, a project to which I had recently devoted most of my work time. Since National Board Certification was one possible requirement teachers could meet in partial satisfaction of district-developed criteria for eligibility for the Performance-based bonus, I felt compelled to mention the possibility that the legitimacy of this criteria could be challenged on the basis of the heavily skewed current achievement rates. There was heavy comment on this topic by the one Black member of the local school board, since it provided her the opportunity to comment on the trend she and I had both noted. This meeting provided her the opportune moment for broaching the issue in the context of a broader discussion to which it directly applied.

Meanwhile, I had been offered a university-based position that would allow me the opportunity to pursue this research interest from outside the politically-charged realm

of the school district. The decision to change jobs was simplified by the reaction of members of the district staff (who had been so supportive and celebratory of the successes of the local NB effort to date) when I made moves to establish support opportunities specifically designed to recruit and assist Black teachers as candidates for National Board Certification. One exchange was particularly haunting. I was asked, “What are we going to do next, provide special help for men and Hispanics?” I responded that this was exactly what we should do if support opportunities proved to be of value in making this professional development opportunity more accessible to all of our local teachers. The end to this conversation was, “Well, it is meant to be something special, and if it doesn’t stay special, then that will be the end of it.”

Special? What precisely did that mean, I wondered? There was so much more to this than there had seemed to be at first. I felt compelled to learn everything I could in order to address this disparity. The idea for this dissertation was born at that moment. It was clear that I simply had to make a move to academic life to tackle this issue.

### *The Circle of (Professional) Life*

Where one phase of life ends, another begins. For me that has certainly been true. The end of each chapter of my career has felt like a little death, but the beginning of each new job in education has been a rebirth of sorts. This situation exemplified these characterizations. The conversation just related had “killed” my hope that effective advocacy for non-majority candidates would be possible from within the district structure. Life as a university faculty member gave me a fresh point from which to launch this effort.

### *A Preview*

This paper describes a qualitative research project designed to probe the questions raised in this introductory chapter. The study was designed from a post-structural stance that led me to choose phenomenology as both guiding philosophy and action research as the emergent research method. An explanation of these concepts and the route by which I arrived at key decisions will be undertaken in Chapter Two. By way of providing a hint of the structure to follow, I offer the following sketch of the study.

Black teachers from the local school district were invited to attend a meeting to receive information about National Board Certification. Those who decided to apply were invited to learn more about this study and to join the study as participants. From that focus group, a smaller group of candidates were purposefully chosen as subjects for in-depth case studies. Case study subjects were followed closely during the certification application process as they participated in large group, small group, and individual support activities.

A wide variety of participant data were collected through direct observation, participant-observation, interviews, journals, text-in-progress, and other formal and informal interactions. Additional data included publicly available statistics program participation data and local, state, and national documents relating to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the certification process. These documents were analyzed for comparison and contrast with respect to the various texts arising from the participant-driven side of the study. The data analysis focused on determining the level of congruence or incongruence between the two sets of text data in considering differences in participation.

Chapter Two includes literature on related topics: (a) National Board processes, (b) efforts to monitor and facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification, (c) adult writing behaviors, (d) various aspects of qualitative inquiry, (e) pertinent elements of language philosophy, and (f) cultural issues relevant to social justice in this context. Chapter Three provides a detailed account of each element of the proposed study method. Chapter Four reports study data, and Chapter Five discusses conclusions drawn from the data and possible implications for the findings.

#### *About the Researcher*

Black culture was something I had glimpsed only vaguely and through social dividing curtains that parted fleetingly and infrequently. Granted, I had interacted in some fairly significant ways with Black people throughout my adult life. When I managed my husband's construction field office, I had daily contact with Black craftsmen. Once, in Tennessee, I challenged an apartment manager who had no units available when a Black foreman inquired, yet hours later, rented an apartment to a white foreman. When I suggested that we involve the EEOC and Federal Housing Authority to clear up any confusion about what was available, a vacancy opened.

When we moved to Florida, I became involved in a local effort to restructure the public schools as the school district struggled to settle a decades-long federal desegregation case. This was probably the first time that I realized how separate my life had been and the extent to which I had lived apart from other races. After the attendance zones were reconfigured and our neighborhood schools incorporated representative numbers of Black children, I worked to establish a tutoring program for children whose

reading levels were impeding their success in school. I was horrified by the fact that nearly all of the students referred for tutoring were Black.

When I went to work as a paraprofessional while I worked to earn a teaching degree, I wrote a grant to provide computers and tutors for Black girls in their neighborhoods to help them build projects for the Science Fair. My college supervisor warned me to “be careful” working in the housing projects. To my surprise, I have rarely felt more welcome anywhere in my life. On Saturday mornings, when my car pulled up to the community center, a flock of young people met me to help unload the computers, hook them up, rearrange the room, and distribute the supplies for the session. A group of women, noting the activity, offered to provide hot biscuits with ham or sausage for me and the girls who were participating. When we finished the projects, we had people waiting in line outside our room to view the girls’ work. There were too many to fit inside at once! I never had that happen during open house in the years I taught elementary school! Why had I been warned to be careful? Why had I felt nervous?

During my years as an elementary school employee, I peripherally observed the work of Black teachers, paraprofessionals, lunchroom workers, and custodians. There were only two Black teachers among the 30 or so at the school where I worked. There was one Black paraprofessional among a group of 7 or 8. Of three custodians, the lead position was occupied by a Black man. Two of the 6 lunchroom workers were Black. Both of the Black teachers had joined the faculty during desegregation, when the schools where they had previously worked had been restructured as magnet programs and the existing, largely minority, staffs had been displaced and redistributed. There were murmurs of resentment among the longer-term faculty members when vacancies at our

well-regarded school that would have previously gone to teachers who had waited their turn to come to the school were filled instead with these Black teachers. It was muttered that if they had been any good, they would have worked someplace besides the schools where they had been. Criticism and disregard characterized the vast majority of the conversation about these two teachers. The language had been couched in professional, non-racial words, but the message was clear: Black teachers were different, and they were lesser.

In graduate school, I observed the same attitude to a certain extent. There were very few Black students in the classes I took: often none, and rarely more than one or two. Those who were there were rumored to have been admitted under academic waivers to promote diversity. In two cases with which I gained more familiarity later, the students were, like me, working fulltime as teachers during the day and going to school at night. Did they meet the same disapproval and lack of regard at their schools as did the teachers with whom I worked? Did they know what their fellow students and faculty members said about them? How did they carry on in the face of that adversity? These questions had not occurred to me then.

I had a three-year stint as a school district teacher training manager. It was during this time that I had my first unmediated interactions with Black educators. My previous interactions had been few, and always in the context of situations controlled by others and where exchanges were largely tangential. Now, because I was acting with a degree of managerial autonomy, I experienced direct exchanges with Black administrators in the course of carrying out my various assignments. I met Black teachers who were serving as peer mentors to first year teachers. I oversaw an orientation program for new Black

teachers and identified placements for Black student teachers. I saw in them the same characteristics I observed in other professionals in our field. I was often taken aback by the lack of regard some of my white peers had for these people and the work they did. One of the worst moments was when a white principal returned two internship contracts to me for students from a historically Black college, with a written note advising me that these interns were “incompatible with the mission and vision of the school” (Leftwich, 2000). The contracts had been accompanied by photographs, a customary practice at the time. When the contracts were resubmitted on different colored copy paper without the photographs, they were signed and the interns accepted for placement. Having proved the point to myself, I reassigned the interns to a different school on the basis of providing more efficient travel for the college supervisor. From that point forward, intern contracts sent to schools in our district did not include photographs. To my discredit, I never challenged the principal (now retired) about this issue.

This proposed study is an intensely personal one. This is not surprising, when I consider that my career in education has been marked by an intense interest in issues and efforts that impact people individually, one at a time—even if the approach is through groups, be they large or small. Practically speaking, I would venture that this is the first level of potential significance for this work—to make a difference for individual teachers in their National Board candidacy efforts.

On that same individual level, however, the process of carrying out the study made a difference in me as a human being, I believe. I am a middle-aged White woman who has always inhabited the middle range of the socioeconomic scale. Growing up in the Midwest during the 1950s and 1960s, I led a life that was ostensibly “unprejudiced,”

but which was, in reality, almost completely segregated in terms of both race and socioeconomic status. Black and White were descriptors of racial differences that were as marked as those between male and female. As already described, I have wrestled with the vestiges of that upbringing in my personal and professional lives, but especially so as a teacher-educator who works with students and school systems on issues of justice, equity, fairness, and conscience. I have embraced a post-modern philosophy that challenges societal constructions of race (Allen, 1997). However, in order to explore the questions surrounding the differential participation and achievement rates in NBPTS, I was obliged to acknowledge the prevalent racial categories, false though I believe them to be (Ignatiev, 1996).

Facing these issues head-on in the effort to identify and set aside preconceptions at the outset of each episode of phenomenological data-gathering was a transformative experience of great personal significance. Autoethnography and heuristics (as described more completely in Chapter Three) were the broad methodological frames for accomplishing this difficult but necessary task, through which I was able to use the experiences of the study participants as a springboard (Bochner & Ellis, 1996) to establish my own past history, objectively inventory my current orientation, and purposefully shape my future direction as an educator-researcher. The shorter term, but perhaps more significant benefit of this approach is gaining a more informed perspective on self-thought as a tool to provide enough clarity about one's own biases in order to objectify to a greater extent the subjective slant that could otherwise be inadvertently imparted to qualitative data.

The pivotal point of significance, though, is this: the doctoral dissertation is the

culmination of years of work and sacrifice in pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and truth. For me, this journey was begun at a relatively late point in life, but with a clear purpose, that being to prepare myself to be an effective contributor to the profession for which I have such a depth of passion—teaching. One of the many joys of this journey has been the discovery of so many people who share that passion. I am saddened that some of them have had access to fewer resources through the years, and I am saddened by the inequity that is perpetuated by systems and processes that serve to distribute advantages and opportunities inequitably. It is my hope that this small study will generate and support findings and conclusions that will make the opportunities associated with National Board Certification more accessible to eligible Black teachers who are, at present, under-represented in the ranks of those who are reaping the benefits of those opportunities. The ultimate significance of attaining this goal will be most evident to individuals—the teachers who reap the professional benefits of this process and the boys and girls they teach. If that means helping even one teacher and his/her students set and meet their shared teaching and learning goals, I would consider that a satisfying contribution to society and the profession (Schensul & Schensul,1978).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

As noted in Chapter One, the research questions focus on issues of designated race related to local, state and national participation rates in the certification process and possible causes of under-representation of Black teachers in terms of both participation and success in program processes. The process to which teachers submit themselves upon entering candidacy for National Board Certification is well defined and constant across the various certification areas. Thus, that process itself provides a logical structure, as well as a set of social practices, that are useful for organizing a review of literature that provides a foundation for the purpose, philosophy, and methods for conducting proposed study and analyzing its results. Therefore, this chapter begins with a thorough explanation of those processes and a discussion of current rates of participation in and successful completion of National Board certification processes by Black teachers.

Against the central process NB certification process foundation will be laid discussions of research literature relating to the following key areas: studies of adult writing behavior and literature regarding the linkages between ethnicity and discourse; the impact of culture and associated barriers to the achievement of certification; mentoring and mentoring programs; and a survey of literature that informs and bolsters the philosophical stance and methodology for this proposed research study.

## *National Board Certification Processes*

### *Eligibility and Initial Application*

The process by which a teacher applies for and achieves National Board Certification can take as little as three months or as long as two years. It begins each spring when a new application cycle is opened by NBPTS. At the same time, a new ETP cycle is initiated in Florida. Through district contacts, ETP program information is made available for distribution to teachers. All teachers who meet the specified criteria are eligible to enter the process. Teachers are eligible to apply to NBPTS if they (a) have a bachelors degree, (b) hold a valid teaching certificate for the state where they are employed (unless a teaching certificate is not required for employment, as may be the case in some private or parochial schools), and (c) have completed three years of teaching prior to entering the NBPTS process.

An additional layer of qualifications exists for ETP program participants, however. To be eligible for the application fee supplement (and applicable bonuses), teachers (a) must be employed by a Florida public school district in a classroom instructional position and (b) must have received a satisfactory performance evaluation in the most recent prior year of employment. The signature of the local superintendent or designated representative must attest to these qualifications.

Once the application has been submitted to ETP and NBPTS, the teacher (now referred to as a certification candidate) has access to a 200-300 page packet of portfolio preparation instructions. These instructions are directly downloaded from the NBPTS candidate website.

### *Portfolio Entries*

The application process consists of ten separate entries. Candidates in the application year for this study (2002-2003) were required to prepare four practice-based portfolio entries and six Assessment Center entries. Each of these entries was designed to demonstrate one or more of the NBPTS Standards specifically applicable to the candidate's area of professional teaching practice. The standards are readily available for public review and download via the website or in hard copy for a fee from the NBPTS Material Center.

The four portfolio entries are prepared over a period of months during the middle of the school year. These entries focus on the candidate's processes of planning, delivering, assessing, and adjusting instruction to meet student needs and promote student achievement. Two of these entries require videotapes of instructional segments accompanied by 15-18 page written descriptions of activity shown on the tapes, as well as analysis of and reflection upon the effectiveness of the instruction. One of the entries requires inclusion of artifacts of student work, along with a detailed written description of the instruction that resulted in the production of the student work, an analysis of the learning demonstrated by the work, and reflection upon why the lesson worked well, as well as how it might be improved to facilitate even more optimal student achievement. Portfolio entries are due by specific mid-spring dates, dependent upon the original application date.

### *Assessment Center Entries*

The six Assessment Center exercises are completed at a contracted testing site. In West Central Florida, these sites are contracted through Sylvan Learning Centers and are

located in Winter Park and Tampa. Each exercise is a thirty-minute writing activity in response to a prompt. The prompt is delivered and the writing is done at a computer workstation. Like the portfolio entries, each of the prompts is designed to elicit a demonstration of one or more of the certification area standards. Stimulus materials, such as reading lists, classroom scenarios, or pictures of artifacts are delivered to candidates several weeks in advance of the Assessment Center date. Dates are scheduled by candidates within specific windows of time allotted for each certification area. Assessment Center activities are conducted from mid-spring through early summer, and are generally concluded by mid-July.

### *Scoring*

Scoring of all entries—portfolios and assessment center—occurs during the summer. For each entry, there is a rubric and scoring guide provided to candidates with the portfolio instructions. These rubrics provide specific criteria for the various proficiency levels. The rubrics help candidates answer such questions as: What constitutes quality? Do I understand the expectations? Will I know what I have learned when I complete the task? (Andrade, 2000 & Montgomery, 2002).

NBPTS employs NBCTs as entry assessors. Before scoring begins, each aspiring assessor must undergo five days of intensive training, beginning with sessions designed to help scorers recognize and neutralize existing biases. Assessors are trained to work with one specific entry, and they score only those entries. NBCTs are paid \$125 per day for scoring and are responsible for paying their own travel and living expenses during the process. Assessment work is considered by many to be service to the profession.

Possible scores for each entry range from 1 to 4, and each entry is assigned a

specific weighing factor from 6-12. The score for each entry is calculated after the assessor marks a rubric during the focused review of the submission. A holistic score is assigned to each entry, providing a single score to the entire entry rather than a more analytic system that would ascribe a score to each section of an exercise (Martin-Kniep, 2000). Each whole-number score may be scaled up or down by raters by .25 to denote work that is judged to be somewhat below or somewhat above the level indicated by the score (but not low or high enough to justify movement to the next higher or lower whole-number score), meaning that true scores may range from .75-4.25. Once the scoring is completed for all of a candidate's entries, an aggregate weighted score is calculated. An aggregate score at or above 275 results in the achievement of certification.

One nod to the validity of this system, relying as it does on scores generated from a variety of scored exercises for each candidate, comes from a study (Hayes, Hatch & Silk, 2000) in which it was found that it takes between five and ten separate assessments of writing to be able to accurately predict writing performance for any single student. This conclusion was gleaned from three separately contributing studies in which successive statistical tests were employed to test the accuracy of predictions for future writing performance on the basis of numbers of assessments ranging from one to ten. With one to four measures, accurate predictions were not found to be statistically probable. Depending on the statistical test applied, measures ranging in number from five to ten yielded results indicating that accurate predictions were more reliably probable. The ten measures provided for by NB processes falls at the high end of that range, lending credence to the assessment system.

All results for an application cycle are reported at the same time via mailed

reports to candidates, posting of results on a secure website that candidates can access with a password, and posting of new NBCT names by state on the NBPTS public website.

### *Current Achievement Rates*

Statistical reports from the agencies charged with oversight of the certification process are critical to the understanding and definition of the current status of minority (Black) candidate participation and success. As Guskey (1999) said, “The effective solution to any problem begins with a ruthless assessment of current reality.” Current reports from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the Florida Department of Education, and Polk County Schools have been cited throughout this document, updated as necessary during the course of the study. Where reports were not currently and/or readily available, data were requested and/or gathered via formal and informal means. Further, the data were read and analyzed to search for “between the lines” contexts and disconnects. For instance, one news report states the following:

Black teachers made up 13 percent of the applicant pool, but only four percent of them attained certification. In contrast, white teachers made up 85% of the applicant pool, but represent 94% of those who won approval (Education Week, May 7, 2003).

What exactly did this mean? Did 4% of the Black teachers achieve certification, or did Black teachers comprise 4% of the total who did? Why was the obscuring language and structure employed? Was it unintentional or otherwise? Why? Similar opportunities for critical analysis were abundant.

For instance, in the school district where this study was situated, 280 teachers had

applied for certification between 1998 and the start of the study in 2003, as indicated in Table 1. Of these, 17, or six percent, were Black. Two Black teachers had become NBCTs. Thus, 11.7% of the Black applicants achieved certification, while 106, or 40.3%, of the White applicants became NBCTs. Of the 108 teachers who achieved certification, 98% (106) were White and 2% (2) were Black. This example shows how a closer look at numerical data can tell a more complete story than can “snapshots” which may prove confusing.

On average nationally, 11% of Black applicants and 45% of the total number of applicants achieve certification (Serafini, 2002), perhaps implying that White teachers achieve certification at a rate exceeding the 45% average. It is further important to note that in the current study’s school district in May 2002, as reported in Chapter One, Black teachers comprised 8.9% of district teaching staff while only 6% of NB candidates were Black. In Florida that year, 9.9% of National Board applicants were Black.

This figure closely mirrors the 1998 National Research Council account of the percentage of education doctoral recipients who were Black—582 of the 5817 for whom ethnicity was known (of the 5,866 total), or ten percent (Au & Raphael, 2000). This could foreshadow a situation where Colleges of Education could find themselves competing vigorously for Black students who may choose, as their White counterparts are increasingly doing, to opt for National Board Certification as a less expensive, quicker, and more financially rewarding professional development avenue than graduate studies (Johnson, 2001). National Board Certification, while it may take as long as three years if points are banked for the maximum period, can be accomplished in one school year. In Florida and other places where fee subsidy incentives are in place, the net cost of

National Board is minimal for teachers. By contrast, tuition costs associated with traditional degree programs are not widely covered for teachers by their employing districts. Perhaps most significant in this discussion is the fact that while National Board Certification may trigger eligibility for significant additional compensation, compensation for additional and higher degrees for Florida teachers tends to be at a much lower level (Leftwich, Minton, Moser, & Parker, 1998). Put simply, the return on investment (time and money), is both quicker and higher for National Board Certification than for advanced degrees.

### *The Problem of Under-Representation*

Queries to the major academic databases yielded few published studies of the phenomena of minority under-representation in National Board Certification processes. Presumably this is due to the fact that the phenomenon is nascent. A private, personal conversation with a researcher under contract to NBPTS for another project revealed that emergent participation and achievement data, when disaggregated demographically, is creating some concern at NBPTS and at Educational Testing Service, the assessment instrument contractor for NBPTS. Although this party prefers to remain unidentified while sponsored research is underway, the substance of the conversation was confirmed in June 2002 by viewing the NBPTS website describing new research initiatives, including requests for proposals for studies on the adverse impact of NBPTS certification processes (NBPTS, 2002c). The concern for equity appears to echo the commitment articulated in NBPTS publications to assure equitable access and to eliminate bias and discrimination in the standards development and certification assessment processes (NBPTS 1999; 1999a; 1999b; 2000; 2002; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c.)

More recently, the US Department of Education funded a study by researchers at the University of California-Los Angeles to investigate and disseminate methods by which African American teachers can be effectively supported in the effort to obtain National Board Certification. Slated for completion in August 2005, results of the study are not yet available. It is hopeful that, when released, the results will inform the effort to promote greater parity in minority success rates in the National Board Certification process ([http://www.nbpts.org/research/currentres\\_item.cfm?id=16](http://www.nbpts.org/research/currentres_item.cfm?id=16)).

Data from another study (Wayne, Chang-Ross, Daniels, Knowles, Mitchell & Price, 2004) suggested several areas of possible disparity in minority achievement rates. Survey results that minority teachers may be more influenced than majority peers by financial incentives to apply. They may also feel a stronger drive to prove that they and their students are highly capable in spite of negative labels often applied to schools where minority teachers are more likely to be assigned. This report concludes with a recommendation for wider implementation of race-matched mentoring programs to increase the rate at which minority teachers achieve National Board Certification.

#### *Certification as Consumer Commodity*

Since National Board Certification is, in effect, a consumer product dependent on positive public perception, at least among its education constituency, for sustained market viability, NBPTS has every reason to protect a positive image of proactive orientation toward the continued development of standards and processes for certification in new areas as well as protecting the integrity of the image of existing certifications. Marketing research has shown that consumer perceptions about the ability of a company to produce a quality product impact responses to new corporate products (Brown & Dacin, 1997.)

Furthermore, gap analysis of service organizations has shown that companies with identified gaps between customer expectations (as formed through pre-service communication with the company) and actual delivered service (as perceived by the customer) must take steps to close the gap in order to remain competitively viable (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988). According to this model, if one views the various certifications awarded by NBPTS as consumer products (an appropriate analogy given that the process carries a fee, as do the many workshops and products available from NBPTS), and given that various other organizations are working on prototypes for certifications as alternatives, NBPTS must remain vigilant about the status of its corporate image to retain the value and credibility of present certifications and successfully market certifications in areas now under development (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985).

Further motivation for sustaining this positive image of commitment to equitable access to the benefits of National Board Certification is the NBPTS reliance on private foundations and the United States Department of Education for both significant financial and fundamental philosophical support. Through September 1998, federal funds accounted for approximately 48% of project funding, while 52% came from non-governmental sources (NBPTS, 1999). In a national political environment marked increasingly by a focus on education issues, and at a time when significant federal legislation is being implemented with a focus on teacher quality, the NBPTS has much to lose should its primary product, National Board Certification, come to be perceived as biased, discriminatory, inequitable, or otherwise fundamentally—and perhaps fatally—flawed. As with consumer perceptions of corporate ability to deliver, customer views of

corporate social responsibility also shape responses to corporate products. Corporate social responsibility can be defined as the company's position and actions with regard to important social issues (Brown & Dacin, 1997). As America continues to deal with perceived racial inequities and achievement gaps in education, particularly in response to the requirements of *No Child Left Behind* (ESEA, 2001), these will be issues that merit attention from any organization dealing in education-related products or services.

For all of these reasons, it is reasonable to expect a spike in the number of research reports on this topic in the near future. In July, 2002, NBPTS awarded 22 research grants, three of which are to specifically study minority teacher participation and achievement rates over the next three years (NBPTS, 2002c).

#### *Current Research Findings on Adverse Impact*

From an in-depth study of minority candidate achievement rates in North Carolina, (Goldhaber, Perry & Anthony, 2003) come reports that Black teachers in that state have tended to apply for National Board Certification at rates that surpass their representation rate in the general teaching ranks, but then achieve at a rate that is lower than that of their White peers. Achievement of National Board Certification was positively correlated with other factors, such as standardized test scores, employment in schools with comparatively higher student achievement and socioeconomic status, and advanced degrees. In responding to this study's findings, Ann Harmon, the director of Research and Information for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards said,

If we knew what was *causing the adverse impact*, we'd be able to *end it*, but I don't think there is anything in our system [that accounts for the disparity]. It is a

reflection of some long-standing inequities in our society in general. (quoted in Education Week, May 7, 2003 [*italics mine*]).

Since Black teachers in this area of Florida are not yet even applying at the same rate as they fill teaching positions, the social justice “inequities” to which the NBPTS official referred become even more compelling when considering how to positively influence the participation and achievement rate for Black teachers. This study was designed to provide some insight into what is *causing* the adverse impact and help discover some ways to *end* it.

Five broad factor areas were been identified by Bond (Bond, et. al., 1998) as possible contributors to the disparity in certification rates between African-American and white candidates: demographic differences, recruitment differences, differences in teaching contexts, biases or deficiencies in the assessment process, and differences in teaching performance rooted in discrimination and historic societal inequities in educational opportunity. The examination for bias in the assessment process yielded, through statistical analysis, a significant effect for race in the writing tasks. This underscores my intention to focus on the writing and language processes employed by the participants in the proposed study.

There is another broad question being asked about National Board Certification: Are National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) more effective than teachers who do not hold this title? Although few studies have been published on this topic, one of the first to do so found a correlation between teacher demonstration of fifteen specific dimensions of teaching excellence and NBCT status among the teachers (NBCT and non-NBCT) whose practices were observed and documented (Bond, 2000). An independent study by

Cavalluzo (2004) found strong correlations between mathematics gains among ninth and tenth grade students, National Board Certification of their teachers, and various other factors associated with teacher quality. Additional studies by Vandevort, Amrein-Beardsley and Berliner (2004) and Goldhaber and Anthony (2004) also documented statistically significant positive differences between the academic achievement of students whose teachers are NBCTs and those whose teachers are not.

Conversely, a case study of six recently certified NBCTs found that two of them demonstrated exemplary practice, two were judged to be average performers, and two were considered to be ineffective according to the study criteria (Pool, Ellett, Schiavone, & Carey-Lewis, 2001). These findings challenge the validity affirmed by Bond, et al, (2000) and suggest that it may be possible to succeed in the National Board Certification process without consistent demonstration of high quality teaching performance.

Additional in-depth studies based on a wider variety of randomly selected subjects would be necessary to confirm these early findings. Over time, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches will yield a more complete understanding of the impact of National Board Certification on teacher practice and student achievement.

In the meantime, it is provocative to consider the relationship between student/teacher race and student achievement. In a study of student achievement and teacher assignment data in Tennessee, Dee (2001) found that both Black and White students experienced, on average, a three to four percentile point increase in reading and math scores when taught by a same-race teacher. Further, when factoring in additional criteria, Dee (2001) found that observable elements of teacher quality (experience, graduate education, and merit pay status) also correlated with increased achievement.

The implications of this study are clear for the context of the proposed study. According to Dee, Black students may fare better under the instruction of Black teachers, especially if the teacher possesses elements of quality that parallel those of NBCTs (as related to experience and merit pay status.) This seems to be compelling evidence for the proposed study's premise that there is ethical justification for actively recruiting and supporting Black teachers to seek and gain National Board Certification.

### *Barriers to Achievement*

#### *Where Writing and Culture Intersect*

Preparation of portfolio and Assessment Center entries for the National Board process requires facility with three distinct modes of writing: descriptive, analytical, and reflective. Descriptive passages set the stage for the assessor/reader to be able to envision the instructional occurrence(s) on which the candidate has chosen to be judged. This writing provides the only opportunity for the candidate to help the assessor form a clear mental picture of the instructional sequences and settings in which the assessed practice is situated, which is particularly important for the entries that do not rely on videotaped teaching/learning sessions. Analytical sections provide insight into the candidate's thoughts about the effectiveness of the submitted instruction. Ideally, this mode affords the candidate an opportunity to "think out loud" (albeit in written form) about the flow and results of the described period of sample instruction. Reflective text provides a window into the personalization of the analysis. It is in these passages that the candidate speaks to the way in which the results of instruction inform the revisitation and/or extension of instruction to optimize present or future student learning outcomes. These are outgrowths of a reflective approach to teaching in which a practitioner

considers the results of an instructional sequence and reteaches or extends instruction on the basis of the perceived success of the lesson. It provides an opportunity to think critically about what to change and what to retain in the teaching practice. (Swain, 1998). Each entry has strict page limits within which the candidate must fulfill all of the descriptive, analytical and reflective tasks to demonstrate “clear, consistent, and convincing evidence” (NBPTS, 1999b) that the candidate’s teaching practice meets the specific certification area standards assigned to that particular entry for performance.

The high-stakes context of National Board candidacy includes the demand for production of convincing written and visual textual evidence that individual teaching practice meets the established threshold standards. This creates a rhetorical problem based in argument and evidence (Burroughs, 2001). Such writing is seldom called for in the teacher’s routine professional practice. Further, difficulties associated with writing apprehension, knowledge representation, standards negotiation, sampling logic acknowledgment, and evidence usage contributed to the intimidating nature of the rhetorical tasks called for in NB processes (Burroughs, 2001).

Confidence in writing ability has been found to correlate positively with the achievement of certification in at least two studies (Burroughs, Schwartz & Hendricks-Lee, 1998; Moore, 1999). Earl-Novell (2001) found that women’s writing was frequently characterized as less bold, less confident, less risk-taking than that of male peers, with the male writing characteristics being those most valued in the awarding of highest undergraduate degree status in argument-based subjects—whose writing tasks are routinely most aligned with the expectations of the type of writing demanded by the NB process.

A study by Palmquist and Young (1992) found that many writers believe that writing ability is relatively static and little improvement can be expected if one does not write well. In the context of National Board, this could have a negative impact on teachers who do not earn sufficient points for certification on the first attempt. Since the initial achievement rate for Black teachers is relatively low, this argument could be extrapolated to hypothesize a magnified negative effect on their overall achievement rate if writing confidence is an issue (Hayes, Hatch, & Silk, 2000). The additional layers of personal background, teaching situation, culture, etc. all contribute to the resulting rich intertext (Witte, 1992) that, when systematically documented and analyzed in this study, could lead to some interesting and enlightening conclusions about how successful candidates approach and accomplish their quest for National Board Certification and about how others can be supported as they empower themselves to do the same. A thoughtful consideration of the interaction between culture and writing practices might provide insight.

### *Exploring Discourse*

Au (1993) studied the written and oral discourse style of native Hawaiian children and found that these children tended to receive lower grades in school and that their written and oral communication was frequently regarded by their teachers as needing remediation. She found that writing produced by these children tended to follow a rather winding narrative path, reflective of the analogy-based oral style that dominated the oral language in the children's home and neighborhood environments. Brice-Heath (1983) made similar observations when conducting research in the Carolina Piedmont. There,

the oral language of minority students and that of students from minority and low socio-economic backgrounds tended to be more narrative, even in situations calling for an expository approach, than did that of white and upper socio-economic children. Again, this tended to be reflective of the language styles generally employed in the children's homes and neighborhoods and frequently had the effect of branding them as less competent users of language than their peers from higher socio-economic strata.

Gee (1999) describes discourse in two ways: discourse and Discourse. Discourse is the context with in which day-to-day language use (discourse) occurs. A family conversing at dinner in their home would be exchanging words and an array of non-verbal signals in the course of that conversation. The actual verbal and non-verbal signals compose the dinnertime discourse. For example, a teenage son might ask his mother if she had a good day, while laying his hand on her arm. The words and gesture are discourse. The family's history (short and long term), its customs and culture, the presence of people other than immediate family members, the time of day, the menu, the location of the conversation, and myriad other factors of Discourse all influence the coding and interpretation of discourse. If the mother and son had exchanged harsh words earlier in the day, there would be distinct shades of meaning in both the inquiry and the touch, and the nuance would be perceived differently by participants and witnesses to the exchange of discourse, dependent on their relative position in the Discourse at each point. Although it is an oversimplification, it may be helpful to think of discourse as the content of communication, while Discourse is the context in which the communication takes place. Language exchanges—the observed communications—are reported as discourse,

while they are situated and interpreted within the broader boundaries of Discourse. Each shapes the other in a cycle of mutual interdependence.

For this study, one discourse was the day-to-day communication and texts that serve as bricks with which the Discourse of the quest for National Board Certification is built. Similarly, another relevant discourse was the texts of enacted teaching and learning in the typical, situated sense, while the culture of teaching and the education profession formed a more overarching Discourse. For example, there are descriptions of routine, day-to-day teaching (to put it in terms of Gee, “teaching in use”) that typify discourse in this sense. This contrasts with broader descriptions of teaching theory, social organizations and systemic constructs that comprise the more amalgamated experience of Education as a Discourse. In many cases, they overlap and seem to morph during observation and analysis, and therefore may be most accurately termed d/Discourses.

It is perhaps reasonable to theorize that many of the Black teachers applying for National Board Certification in this southern state developed language skills in the environments described by Au (1993) and Brice-Heath (1983) as those privileging narrative-reliant oral and written language styles. Given the relatively low rate at which Black NB candidates achieve NBCT status, and given the specifications for the written elements of all NB entries, one might postulate that there is an inherent disconnect between the day-to-day discourse of individual Black teachers and the Discourse which is rewarded in the NB process—and of which the NB process is a defining element.

Indeed, this disconnect is one experienced by most people as they navigate the boundaries between private and public discourse. We often speak differently at home, with family and friends, than we do in public or professional situations. Thus, this sense

of disequilibrium is frequently experienced by teachers endeavoring to craft written portfolio entries, as I have observed while working with previous groups of candidates. Because this study is focused on the broad discourses, and specifically because this type of code-switching is inherent to the pragmatics of socially situated language use, I choose not to dwell here on the Ebonics debate or other examinations of dialect associated with Black communication. Purcell-Gates (2002), for example, documented the assumptions made by teachers about students upon hearing the dialect of their southern Appalachian parents. The challenge for some National Board candidates—White and Black—and those who would make efforts to assist them, is to successfully bridge the gap between the discourses—mend the disconnect—in order to engage in the discourse most likely to be rewarded by completion of the language task at hand.

In other words, in following a style highly valued in the Black culture (Smithermann, 1977), Black teachers may write in a way that may frustrate non-minority readers (Smithermann, 1977). This is borne out by Michaels and Cazden's finding (1986) that Black graduate students more accurately interpreted messages composed in a culturally-familiar narrative style than did non-minority peers to whom the composition style was less familiar. Conversely, we should be informed by Terrebonne (1977) that the use of Black English Vernacular (BEV), although stigmatized, is not correlated with SES, standardized test scores, or motivation to write in Edited American English. However, more recent research by Bond (1998) implies that Black cultural markers may impact how assessors score candidate entries. Since I am to serve as a facilitator and mentor for Black candidates who will be producing large amounts of written text as evidence that their teaching meets standards for National Board Certification, I will need

to learn to identify these markers and devise strategies to help writers make informed decisions about the extent to which they include these elements in their edited, submitted entries.

In addition, teaching style may be a biasing factor, with the National Board process perhaps favoring student-centered approaches (Bond, 1998) over the culturally specific style of pedagogy termed “warm demander” (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1994) labeled teachers who assume high degrees of responsibility for student learning and who seek excellence and improvement as conductors and tutors. These teachers, by retaining rather than sharing responsibility for instruction, run classrooms that are more teacher-centered than student-centered. This is a hallmark of culturally relevant instruction according to Ladson-Billings, however, and warrants consideration by a researcher seeking to enter into mutual professional relationships with Black teachers seeking an advanced credential.

There is some concern that the writing demands of the NB process, specifically the inherent demand for persuasive power in the writing, may be in conflict with the demands for content accountability (Burroughs, Swartz & Hendricks-Lee, 2000.) This need to juggle the persuasive pursuit with the more linear descriptive expository format could create “double jeopardy” for Black candidates, especially at the secondary level. Candidates will need to simultaneously describe students with sensitivity and objectivity; describe teaching situation and practices with precision; provide evidence of standards persuasively, and portray academic content (especially in subject-specific secondary certificate areas) with accuracy. The “double jeopardy” may occur for candidates, Black or otherwise, who attempt this daunting task with an unpracticed capacity for these types

of writing and who employ the use of vernacular markers (regional, racial, ethnic, or cultural).

Another lens through which to view the various text demands of NB comes from Kinneavy (1971), who described four modes of discourse. These modes are based on the kinds of answers to two fundamental questions about a text: What is it and what is it about? The modes are labeled according to the key word in the response: narration (It's a story about...); classification (It tell the kinds of...); description (It describes...); and evaluation (It's a critique of...). In terms of the specific texts called for in the production of NB portfolio entries, Kinneavy's modes could certainly be applied. Descriptive tasks fall into Kinneavy's description category, but may also include elements of classification. In some cases it may even have narrative characteristics, especially when retelling a classroom instructional sequence, which would certainly have elements of a good story. Analytic writing would usually be generated by employing the modes of classification and evaluation, but might rely on descriptive and narrative bolstering. Reflective writing could also depend on all four modes, based initially on the classification and evaluation forms, but verging into description and narration when outlining responsive potential next steps.

Since National Board Certified Teachers form the bulk of the assessor corps for NBPTS, and since Black teachers are currently under-represented among NBCTs, it follows that the vast majority of the assessors are likely to be non-minority raters. Since the recently cited authors have clearly correlated race-oriented perceptions and text-production styles with complications in the interpretation of text perceived to be divergent, it also follows that Black candidates are perhaps more likely to produce written

texts that diverge from the certification-level expectations of the assessors and the NB scoring process. This hypothesis is currently under study by NBPTS, focused on such previously noted biases that may impact the validity of scoring processes. Those studies will likely yield important information about the effectiveness bias-recognition training currently received by all NB scorers. The goal, of course, is a truly unbiased scoring process that will render reliable scores for all candidates, regardless of demographic classifications of either the candidates or the scorers and without impact of any overt or subtle cultural identifiers or markers.

### *The Production of Text*

Fundamental elements of writing competence and the various background experiences and expectations candidates bring to the process bear examination to gain a fuller understanding of how and why their portfolio texts evolve. Emig (1971) described a variety of elements in the writing process employed by high school seniors. She identified two key types of text production: reflexive and extensive. Reflexive writing is that usually produced in the course of daily private life and by choice (self-sponsored), such as grocery lists, personal letters, journals and diaries, notes and the like. Extensive writing, however, was more closely defined as that produced in the course of accomplishing school tasks (school sponsored): reports, papers, essays, and formal written answers to questions. The specific skills, organizational structures and cognitive processes demanded in composing reflexive and extensive writing are different. Although there was some “overlap” between the self-sponsored motivation and the school-sponsored task specifications of the portfolio writing work, some disconnect between the skills required for successful navigation of the various simultaneous

d/Discourses inhabited by candidates was revealed as this work was observed.

Hayes and Flower (1983) studied the cognitive processes adult students used as they produced expository text. They observed that skilled and novice writers tend to use distinctly different approaches to their work. The strategies employed by more efficient, skillful writers can be specified and taught. Thus, systematic observation of National Board candidates in writing situations and systematic review of the resulting texts revealed opportunities to suggest and activate interventions that helped the writers gain confidence to meet the expository demands of the writing tasks required for completion of National Board portfolio and assessment center entries. The information gained through careful observation and analysis of writer's needs was vital to the task of implementing effective mentoring for the study participants.

### *Mentoring*

It proves fruitful to turn to literature on teacher mentoring. Much has been written in recent years about the effectiveness of pairing new teachers with more experienced peers to scaffold the predictable developmental processes commonly navigated by entry-level teachers. The premise of mentoring, named for the mythical Greek master teacher, is that a willing field initiate can be guided to successful and relevant learning by a more experienced and knowledgeable partner who is willing to take the less experienced mentee under the wing and provide readily accessible and on-point guidance *as it is needed*. This "point of need teaching" (Nelson, 1991) characterizes the activity undertaken when NBCTs share their experience with other teachers who are entering or considering the pursuit of National Board Certification (NBPTS, 1999). Experienced in an atmosphere of care (Noddings, 1992) designed to

meet mutual needs, this can be a most productive mentoring situation as mentioned in the Chapter One explanation of the teacher professional development network. An example of this would be the case of a candidate who seeks help to understand the link between a portfolio task and the standards to be documented in the completion of the task. In a mentoring relationship anchored in a climate of care, the mentor would feel a level of investment in meeting the needs of the mentee, and there would be a cooperative collaboration to seek the needed information right at the time it is required. This is in sharp contrast to a “support” system structured to provide scripted information in a predetermined sequence through group sessions delivered by detached trainers with little stake in the outcome.

A survey conducted by NBPTS in September, 2001 indicates that 80.8 % of Florida candidates participated in an organized support group during the certification process. In the local district previously referred to in this study, 89% of candidates accessed mentoring support at some point in the process during the 1999-2002 application cycle, but more significantly, 97% of those who achieved certification received mentoring support. An independent, unpublished study of the relationship between the use of mentoring services and the achievement of certification (Leftwich, 2000) established a correlation coefficient of .81 and an effect size of .67, suggesting a significant link between participation in mentoring activities and the achievement of certification. A future continuation of this study will examine whether the amount of mentoring (i.e., number of hours) and the mentoring mode (i.e., face-to face, telephone, group, individual, email, etc.) impact the achievement rate.

While the NBPTS process was designed to be accessible and achievable for

teachers working in any setting under any conditions, including extreme isolation (NBPTS, 2000), the social nature of constructivism seems to be at work in the process. This is supported by studies on the effectiveness of peer coaching (Emrick, 1989; Joyce & Showers, 1982), in which it was found that supportive interaction among partner teachers resulted in positive professional development outcomes. Effectively implemented mentoring programs (Shipper-Cordaro, 1995) were found to have an interactive effect with the social nature of teaching culture (Little, 1990). These findings seem to support the establishment of a supportive mentoring program as a first step in working to increase NB/ETP participation and achievement for any given group of teachers.

#### *A Model for Assistance*

In considering how to assist candidates in reaching their certification goal, I find it useful to consider an approach explained by Au and Raphael (2000) as the basis for planning how to deliver mentoring assistance to the National Board candidates in the proposed study. The model utilizes four components (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice) that align readily with the overall process employed by NBPTS. Situated practice occurs when learners interact with others in circumstances where they can assume various roles based on prior experience. This certainly is analogous to the situation in which a new candidate finds herself when first undertaking to comprehend NB tasks through participation in support group exercises such as those described in subsequent chapters. Next, overt instruction scaffolds attempts by the learner to navigate new experiences. This may be accomplished in a one-to-one mentoring session or in a large group support event. These two first stages of mentoring

were times when code-switching between the various social languages (Gee, 1999) were taught and practiced, because mentees were called upon repeatedly to explain their decisions and choices, increasingly in terms of the standards. Then, critical framing enabled learners to place their new knowledge and skills in the context of the larger world, or Discourse. This takes place in National Board processes when candidates analyze their practices against the certification standards. Finally, in the transformed practice stage, learners consistently apply new knowledge and skills while seeking new ways to confirm and improve the effectiveness of their practices. While the NBPTS application process may provide opportunities for engagement in each of these four stages of practice, mentoring based on this model and the application process diverged as the certification process itself moved toward conclusion/decision, while the reflective practice cycle repeats as transformed practice leads to newly situated practice.

Code-switching is an area that was specifically addressed during mentoring sessions. People employ a number of social languages, each appropriate for particular situations, audiences, and co-participants in the communication. I, for instance, speak differently when conversing with my children than I do with my husband, or my major professor, or with my elected governmental representatives. I write differently when composing an email to a coworker than when crafting a letter of recommendation for a student, a final grant report, or a thank you note to my mother-in-law. When, as noted in the previous section, vernacular language or other cultural markers may be a contributing element (as they may be when working with any specific group configured on the basis of any demographic factors), and when the stakes are high (as they certainly are in the case of National Board entries), a mentor seeking to assist candidates with writing must

be alert for the presence of those elements and employ strategies to help writers make careful, deliberate, and productive composition choices with the audience, situation, and goal for the writing exercise firmly in mind.

Care was taken in structuring activities, however, in light of the findings by Hartman and Everson (1996) revealing that Black college students are less likely to access tutoring due to feelings of self-reliance and the fact that they rarely studied with classmates. Hartman and Everson (1996) found a correlation between these practices and factors of self-concept rooted in a participant-stated cultural value of independence. Workshops designed with these factors in mind bypassed the resistance to interdependent support activities; however, by acknowledging and subtly accommodating independent self-reliance, resulted in improved academic performance and enhanced college program retention rates. Similarly well-designed support activities could increase both perseverance in certification processes and certification achievement rates. This means that I needed to be prepared to offer a variety of participation structures for candidates: large group, small group, and individual mentoring formats. I needed to be ready with structured, sequentially planned mentoring support activities for candidates who sought such assistance, while accommodating candidates who sought help, but who were more receptive to a candidate-driven agenda.

### *Philosophical Foundation*

#### *Constructs of Minority*

Ogbu studied minority-majority relationships in schools, particularly as those relationships shaped school achievement (Ogbu, 1991). He differentiated between immigrant minorities and involuntary minorities, and found that members of involuntary

minorities tended more than majority and immigrant minority group members to adopt oppositional attitudes and to resist assimilation as “acts of freedom and defiance” (Finn, 1999).

Ogbu used today’s Asian immigrants as an example of a voluntary minority group. Asian immigrants, upon arrival in the United States, often find themselves achieving a long-term goal. They want to be here, and they want to succeed here. They may not seek total cultural assimilation, but they generally accede to the adoption of English as a new language and mainstream cultural norms as defining parameters for day-to-day social interactions.

Conversely, he wrote of African-Americans as an example of an involuntary minority group, citing the slave trade as the route by which most of the first Black arrived on the North American continent as evidence of the unchosen nature of this group’s initial immigration pathway. Ogbu built upon this in explaining why, for instance, Black youths may be more generally resistant to the adoption of traditional literacy practices and social norms, noting that for group members with this motivating mindset that cooperation and assimilation are viewed as traitorous acts of collaboration with oppressors.

While it is inappropriate at best, and dangerous at worst, to generalize Ogbu’s ideas as a frame for predicting or interpreting the behaviors or motivations of individual members of any demographic group, his theory provided a stance from which to consider the possible point of view of participants in the study whose racial, ethnic, or cultural heritage and societal experience differs from his/her own. It can also provide a lens through which to view ecological factors that impact achievement, in this case, of the

goal of National Board Certification by teachers who Ogbu would classify as members of an involuntary minority.

In an effort to examine the school experiences of minority group members, Anyon conducted detailed observations of school experiences of students from all walks of life, and determined that the social class of students, teachers and the adjacent school community were key determiners of the quality and outcome of those experiences (Anyon, 1997). Students in lower socioeconomic level schools tended to have teachers, families, and neighbors who inhabited those social strata. Finn (1999) asserts this pattern (which tends to promote self-perpetuating poverty or wealth, depending upon location) can be broken by educators who are willing to empower students to recognize and serve their own best interests. Teachers who may be enmeshed in a demographic pattern of low participation and low achievement (Black NB candidates) within a process designed to serve their professional and economic self-interest (NB/ETP) can be equipped for empowerment to promote that self-interest (Finn, 1999; Freire, 1993).

### *Power and Authority*

Foucault viewed language in post-modern society as a tool in a pervasive power struggle between levels of society, between groups and individuals, and between competing interests within individuals (Faubion, 2000). Using power/knowledge as a structure, he took Saussure's notions of *langue* and *parole* to the next level. *Langue* is the language system itself, as enacted through the use of *parole*, observable in the act of oral or written communication (Spivey, 1997). Power and knowledge are similarly intertwined, inseparable from one another. Power cannot be gained or employed meaningfully in the absence of knowledge, which cannot be apprehended nor applied

without employing the tools of power, however peripherally. However, due to its polarized, binary nature, power/knowledge requires negative counterbalancing concepts against which it can continually be defined (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1999). While such contrived structures as these are antithetical to poststructural analysis, it may be useful to temporarily impose a binary-based structure to aid interpretation of the chaotically interwoven network of d/Discourses inherent to the complexities of the quest for NBPTS certification. A possible application for this line of poststructural thought is the provisional binary construction of accomplished/teaching, the foils for which all serve to give education advocates pause. An example of this type of provisional construction is the commonly accepted model of the atom, which is not intended to be an accurate rendering of atomic structure, but rather an apprehensible, concrete representation of an abstract concept.

Foucault described five characterizations for the analysis of power relations (Marshall, 1990): the differentiating systems that provide the frame for the enactment of power relations; the objectives pursued by those employing power; the means by which power comes into play; the form of the institution housing the enactment of power; the level of rationalization required to justify the use of power in any given situation. This may be a useful frame for analyzing the emerging power of the National Board for Professional Standards. Application of these characterizations to the structure of power as it relates to the subject at hand would place NBPTS, the Florida Governor's Office, and the Florida Legislature as the primary differentiating systems framing the enactment of power relations; the development and retention of a highly qualified and highly credentialed teaching force as the goals of those employing power; legislation and rule

development processes as the means by which the power comes into play; The Florida School Board and the Department of Education as the institutions housing the enactment of power; and the teacher shortage coupled with the demands of education accountability as the primary rationalizations for the use of power.

Freire identified literacy as a political and economic tool that was deliberately withheld from certain groups—and a tool that could be delivered by deliberately choosing to teach the oppressed to use it (Freire, 1993). Shannon has explored the relationships between literacy instructional practices and perceived social class to some depth, and has found that literacy is indeed a power tool withheld (overtly and otherwise) from lower social class inhabitants (Shannon, 1992.)

Members of lower social classes and of minority groups (e.g. races) are frequently viewed as “others” in the broad discourse. “Others” are those who are different, strangers, outsiders. From a critical perspective, “othering” is a necessary first step to the establishment of justification for inequity (van Dijk, 1997). This is often accomplished through a process of “doubling” (Fasching, 1993) whereby “others” are ascribed to “they” status in a we/they dualism. Examination of the extent to which Black teachers are viewed as “others” were critical in centering both the problem of under-representation by Blacks participating in the NB process and in formulating proposed approaches to dealing with it. The success of the effort rested, I believe, partly in my ability as a participant observer to identify “othering” within both myself and the larger context within which certification is sought, overcome it with respect to my own beliefs and behaviors, and articulate it clearly enough to warrant attention for redress within the broader context.

A society's willingness to meet "strangers" with a response of "hospitality" (Fasching & DeChant, 2001) is a hallmark of its ethical climate. It is appropriate to introduce the topic of Ethics, given the harsh, dismissive statement that sent me headlong into this study. In consideration of the disparity in certification rates for Black teachers, and recognition of the importance of writing skill as facilitative in the achievement of National Board Certification, this researcher felt an obligation to ground actions in ethical reasoning to bolster the likelihood that the results were significant enough to have a positive impact on the social justice factors inherent to this study.

*Demographic issues of power.*

Power is energy and authority is control (Price & Cutler, 2001). Authority is dependent upon power because authority alone has nothing to control. Likewise, power without authority is devalued, because ungoverned power is dangerous. Power and control balance issues are typified in three ideal situations: Adult-Adult, Adult-Child, and Child-Child. In the former, power and control are shared equally for mutual benefit. In the Adult-Child relationship, the adult actually abdicates power to the child, while retaining control during the process of maturation. In a Child-Child relationship, both parties struggle for power in a situation where there is no control. The implications for NB candidates are clear. Highly accomplished teachers would ideally interact with peers in mutually beneficial Adult-Adult relationships of equal, although shifting, power. They would be adept in maintaining Adult-Child relationships with students as they learn and grow. Teachers practicing at this level would be facilitators of students' transitions from Child-Child to Adult-Adult relations with peers over time.

According to Harris and Hill (1998), western women are expected to assume five

defining roles, albeit to varying degrees. The first is that of Wife. The second role, extending from the first, is Mother followed closely by the third, Nurturer. The fourth role, Career Woman, can foster identity if the demands of the role or expectations of others force a choice between roles. Finally, they are expected to be aesthetic qualities of feminine beauty in fulfillment of the role as Sex Object. For Black women, these roles exist, but with additional layers of stereotyped and potentially oppressive expectations. The role of wife carries an expectation that men will be supported at all costs (Harris & Hill, 1998). The roles of Mother and Nurturer do not necessarily derive from the role as Wife, and indeed, they carry community expectations that the woman will nurture not just her own family, but the community as a whole. As Career Woman, the Black woman is expected to assume responsibility for “race uplifting” through such avenues as education for the purpose of improving the whole race, both locally and globally. The part Black women play as Sex Objects is constructed differently than for White women, insofar as its primitive, savage image may also be rooted in stereotypes that were developed to justify slavery (Harris & Hill, 1998). These differences in social construction were important to consider when undertaking female-to-female interaction on an issue with as much intensity as the pursuit of NB Certification, as they manifest in the enactment of social language while navigating the d/Discourses of the process (Gee, 1999).

Maier (1999) builds on the description of these roles, noting that teachers, operate in the traditional role of Nurturer, wherein women are required to walk a tightrope between the invisible exercise of authority and the passive enactment of nurturing. Both are illusions, given that teachers must indeed exert some tangible authority while actively

rendering caring nurturance. Post-modern ideas of positional pedagogy place teachers in the position of sharing power with other members of the d/Discourse community along an ever-shifting continuum. In such an arrangement, the teacher no longer inhabits a traditional hierarchy, but reflectively facilitates the development of evolving, contextualized knowledge for herself and her students. In this study, the challenge was to create a supportive environment through which the candidate-participants became empowered to intentionally enact a greater share of power.

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Language both shapes and articulates our perceptions of reality, regardless of how they are constructed or oriented (e.g., concepts of hierarchy, knowledge, certification, etc). Choices about language-in-use (discourse) derive from and contribute to the broader Discourses in which our discourses are situated. A careful analysis of language-in-use can reveal much about the broader Discourses, as a thoughtful examination of Discourse informs us about the meanings of our various discourses.

Critical discourse analysis was outlined by Fairclough (1995) as an approach to the study of specifically situated language. The language employed by candidates in building their cases for certification will inevitably rest on the shifting foundations of the language chosen to tell the story each teacher has to tell and the language of the National Board Discourse. The achievement decision is determined by whether these languages intersect or collide—whether the Discourses connect or disconnect. Language usage—specifically, the use of written language—is imbued with gatekeeping status with respect to the power and privilege associated with the National Board d/Discourse. The stakes are high. According to Riggins (1997), by attempting to describe, explain, and critique

the interacting d/Discourses, the researcher may act as advocate for those who “lack the institutional levers to produce counterdiscourses” and in the hope that the work will “contribute to social emancipation” (p. 3).

### *Tying it Together*

The central structure of National Board Certification processes provides a framework for a re-examination of the key elements of the literature by way of summary. The processes by which candidates enter into and complete application for National Board Certification were detailed. Evidence was provided to show that Black teachers are currently under-represented in the quest for and the attainment of National Board Certification. Barriers to achievement were explored and mentoring proposed as a possible solution, including a proposed model for the mentoring program. The philosophical foundation was outlined, ending with an overview of the concept of discourse and discourse analysis as for data and data analysis.

### *Refining the Questions*

As Chapter One ended, these questions had emerged: Why do so relatively few Black teachers enter the process for seeking National Board Certification? When they do apply, why do they succeed in attaining the certification at a rate lower than that of White teachers? How can these two trends be reversed?

In light of the information presented and discussed in the preceding review of literature, it seems appropriate now to revisit the questions to narrow them and refine the wording to more accurately reflect the focus of the inquiry as shaped by previous academic work and research findings.

As Chapter Two draws to a close, the central questions bear reconsideration in

light of the reviewed literature. Language and literacy issues discussed in this chapter can be framed by the constructs of d/Discourse. For the purposes of trying to gain an understanding of factors that inhibit participation and success for Black candidates, we can be guided by the literature to focus on the elements present in the broad general Discourses of National Board and Teaching that facilitate and/or block the achievement of certification. How are these Discourse elements enacted through the day-to-day deployments of discourse within those two realms as well as the others in which candidates routinely function? Where do these elements of d/Discourse mesh to facilitate success and/or collide to inhibit it? Can mentoring help? How?

The ideas conjured by the words “mesh” and “collide” evoke competing images of smooth functioning as contrasted with jammed gears. The machinery works or it doesn't. The pieces connect properly, functionally.....or not. Connect/Disconnect. Worlds that mesh or collide. Discourses that connect or disconnect. Processes that can help? The research questions raised at the outset can now be more specifically and clearly stated as follows:

- Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

Building on the information gained from a review of the literature, a discussion of methodology for conducting the inquiry follows in Chapter Three.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

The proposed study was qualitative, with special emphasis on the use of discourse analysis. The broad study formats will be action research utilizing participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989) and limited case study, undertaken within a phenomenological framework.

### *Central Questions*

The central questions in this study, derived from and supported by information outlined in the preceding sections and definitively stated on that basis at the end of Chapter Two, are as follows:

- Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

### *Epistemology*

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that allows the researcher to examine related occurrences—or phenomena—as connected sets. Phenomenologists use standard qualitative research techniques, such as interviews, observation, and document analysis to systematically record and analyze the observer's and the participants' *perceptions* of events, situations, and processes. Phenomenological researchers operating in the

traditions of holistic ethnography approach their subjects and topics not with the intent to discover hard and fast facts and truths (Jacobs, 1987), but rather with the goal of discerning and understanding the phenomena from the viewpoint of the participants who are involved to varying degrees in the enactment, the habitation, and the incorporation of the phenomena in day-to-day life (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In other words, phenomenology is a method by which researchers strive to accurately and fully apprehend the lived experiences of their subjects (Stone, 1979).

Phenomenology is rooted in a philosophy articulated by Husserl in its later form in a series of lectures between April 26 and May 2, 1907. These five lectures outlined the parameters of the reasoning system Husserl wanted to develop as a rigorous science of essences (Lauer, 1965), equal to other natural sciences (Kockelmans, 1967). This science was to establish an “essential” knowledge of things (Lauer, 1965). Through the practice of this discipline, Husserl intended to capture pure data about the perceptions and experiences of observed others (Husserl, 1964). This involves a multi-step process beginning with the practice of epoché, or the setting aside of all natural belief about the object of study and the world in which it is situated (Kockelmans, 1967; Lauer, 1965), or the adoption of a completely neutral attitude regarding the subject (McKenna, 1989). Previously held conceptions about the subject are bracketed, or suspended, while the essence is discerned (Stone, 1979). The resulting perceptions are then subjected to a series of analytic reductions (Stone, 1979), through which patterns and relationships from those related to one’s innermost private life-world, through inter-subjectivity and interpersonal experience, to the self-reflective realm of personal consciousness are observed and confirmed (Stone, 1979).

Wagner (1983) explains the process described by Schutz as a progression through a series of concentric lenses, through which the recorded experience is examined from the viewpoint of the situated social act, reciprocity, intersubjectivity, relevance, typification, scheme of interpretation, and province of meaning. In the case of National Board, Schutz's structures can be a useful framework for organizing the systematic deconstruction of a phenomenon, or specific manifested experience as it relates to the broader structure. For instance, an analysis of a candidate's perception of her relationship to the National Board process might proceed as follows (Wagner, 1983):

- Province of Meaning: The whole, broad schema of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.
- Scheme of Interpretation: The more specific, situated experience of National Board Certification.
- Typification: This narrows the focus, but still comprises very general response classes. This might include such categories as certification area or related school level (e.g., Early Childhood Generalist).
- Relevance: The current status relative to a given standard. In this case, likely to be current status relative to the scheme of interpretation (e.g., banking candidate).
- Intersubjectivity: Knowledge, beliefs or understandings requisite to participation in a social interaction (e.g., ability to articulate standards pertinent to certification area).
- Reciprocity: Accepted flexibility of perspective. In this case, may facilitate composition of test with audience in mind (e.g., "If I write.....the scorer will think that ...").

- Paramount Reality: How one perceives personal reality as it relates every day life (e.g., lesson planning, student assessment, etc.
- Finite Reality: Related to linear time progression, involving a beginning, middle, and end (e.g., It is 6 weeks until my assessment center appointment).

Perceptions of reality may carry additional frames of reference, such as emic (self-description of perceptions) and etic (other's perceptions). This emic/etic binary relates not just to paramount and finite reality as described above, but also to the implied similar relationship between paramount reality and reciprocity of perspective. A dialogue that interrogates discrepancies between emic and etic can serve to clarify perceived elements of experience (Stone, 1979). A dialogue of this sort occurred within or during the composition of descriptive-analytical-reflective written text associated with a portfolio entry. Certainly such a dialogue was prompted internally every time the researcher invoked an attitude of epoché as described later in this chapter.

Heuristic inquiry is a phenomenological approach that incorporates the experiences and interpretations of the observer in addition to those of the study participants (Patton, 1990). This is an appropriate choice when the researcher is deeply enmeshed in the subject of the inquiry. While the personal feelings and experiences of the observer are considered to be "clouding" factors in pure phenomenological research, they serve the heuristic inquirer as tools for discerning and explaining the fundamental spirit of the observed phenomenon. Heuristics respects the personal connection between the observer and the observed, while pure phenomenology values the detachment of the observer from the observed. Also, the heuristic approach leads to a synthesis of the researcher's objective observations and subjective experience-based interpretations while

a purely phenomenological approach yields a refined view of the experience itself. (Patton, 1990).

Heuristic inquiry is an appropriate choice of method when the topic lends naturally to subjective interpretation (Lee, 1996). When researchers are intimately engaged with the subject or participants in an inquiry, frankly qualitative methods may, in fact, yield not only more data, but richer data (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998). Heuristic phenomenology provides a frame within which the researcher can fully explore the role of context and relationships from a personal point of view in order to develop more complete understandings of observed phenomena (Sumsion, 2001). The new understandings, based on reflection and intuition, can be validated through carefully conducted heuristic inquiry (Krippner, 1985).

Action research is practice-based inquiry focused on the improvement of ongoing processes (Johnson, 2005). It is often used to study and address specific problems in classrooms or programs (Johnson, 2005; Patton, 1990). Action research goals may be either political or practical in nature. Political action research seeks to improve policies and the programs they impact, while practitioner research seeks to improve the effectiveness of the practitioner (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Because it is focused on finding solutions for specific problems, generalization of findings is less important than for more traditional research approaches (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Action approaches are characterized by the commitment of researchers to the improvement of conditions for the participants in the current study (Shank, 2006). Action research tends to blur the lines between observers and participants, often resulting in the role of the participant-researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The validity of action research findings can be

increased through the use of systematic data collection procedures and rigorous attention to processes for data analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005).

The emergent method, which became clear as the study progressed, proved to be a hybrid approach. While the broad frame was phenomenological, and originally sought to express the participants' lived experiences, it became apparent that it would be impossible to completely disregard the perspectives of the researcher. Indeed, it would have been counterproductive to have done so, given the researcher's depth of previous experience with candidate mentoring. Additionally, the intensity of the researcher's involvement with the process and the participants in the study naturally narrowed the method to a heuristic phenomenological approach. Finally, the focus on improving the success rates of Black participants, with limited expectations of generalizable findings, made it necessary to consider the structures, constraints, and cautions for validity associated with action research.

### *Participants*

There are approximately 450 Black public school teachers in the local public school district who are eligible to apply for National Board Certification. Potential study subjects self-selected for participation after expressing interest in receiving information about the process, indicating interest in receiving advance preparation for the process, or upon actually applying to enter the process. Teachers who elected not to seek certification were included in broad focus groups, while those seeking certification were the subjects of small group observation and case study. Details regarding these steps are found in the following section.

A focus group of approximately 30 teachers were interested in participating at

varying levels of involvement and with varying expectations regarding the immediacy of benefit from such participation. From a group of this size, two subjects were purposefully selected for more in-depth case study.

The issue of random vs. non-random selection as it related to validity for this study was important to consider. While random selection is highly prized in most experimental research traditions, it is not a factor in studies guided by a phenomenological perspective. Studies of this type, as has already been noted, seek to understand specific phenomena from the participant's perspective, not to create generalizable conclusions (Hycner, 1985). Therefore, randomness is not only inconsequential; it is highly unlikely to occur, since participants will have the experience of the examined events or experiences in common from the outset. Further, randomness was not a productive selection criterion, because it wasn't a facilitating study design element for the necessarily high level of sensitivity to participants' characteristics that are of particular interest in this study. Random selections could, for example, result in the choice of a candidate from the focus group who, although she was productively engaged in the focus group mentoring and NB certification processes, did not tend toward reflective interview conversation and did not wish to be a case study participant. Such an unfortunate random selection would have robbed the study of the vitality that could only have resulted from a more purposeful, non-random selection process.

Patton (1990) discusses circumstances when it is useful to employ purposeful selection strategies. Among other options, intensity sampling is especially appropriate for heuristic studies where participants and co-researchers provide particularly rich veins of data to be mined for the study. In such studies, participants who have self-selected on

the basis of certain criteria (in this case the desire to seek NB certification) tend to be concentrated sources of data.

### *Method*

The proposed study was planned to proceed according to the following sequence:

- Invitations were issued to area teachers who meet study group criteria. A letter was sent via school courier service to all teachers in the district personnel database whose records matched the primary search criteria. The two queried fields and criteria were “Race—Black” and “Experience—greater than or equal to 3.” A copy of the invitation memo is recorded in Appendix A.
- Initial focus group meeting. This meeting was held at a local school to administer the initial survey, share NB and ETP information and conduct an informal initial group conversation and observation. The initial survey form and meeting agenda are recorded in Appendices B and C.
- Facilitated assistance to potential candidates parallel to and collaboratively with existing district support mechanisms. This set of activities consisted of both formal and informal assistance to teachers as they considered applying to become candidates for National Board Certification. This involved personal and group conversations about the processes and rigors of seeking a National Board Certificate, answering questions on the application form, clarifying requirements of the state fee subsidy program, providing information about various support groups, and myriad other assistances as diverse as the individuals seeking them.
- Ascertained participants’ needs, desires, and expectations for scaffolding. Applicants were asked to complete a short survey indicating whether they prefer

to meet for support based on geography, on certification area, or both. This was necessary due to the large physical size of the school district and the fact that, in my experience, some teachers prefer to meet with others seeking the same area of certification, while others choose to meet near their work location or home. This was a good time to learn which candidates had interest in group support and which preferred to work alone or in a one-to-one mentoring situation. The Support Preference Survey is provided in Appendix D.

- Organized and conducted regular small group support meetings to facilitate delivery of indicated support and assistance. The school district Human Resource Development Department coordinates a program to organize and conduct regular small group meetings based on both geography and certification area. Potential applicants were informed of plans for these support efforts in addition to those planned as part of this research study. A schedule of study-related events, a sample of which is provided in Appendix E, was provided to school district program coordinators. Study participants were eligible to attend all district-sponsored support events, and non-participants were welcomed to attend study-related events. Data were collected from study participants at both types of meetings. No data was collected from non-participants, and if collected inadvertently or peripherally (such as when audio taping conversations) the data were not transcribed, the participants were not identified, and the data did not factor into any aspect of data analysis.

All of the steps listed above are ongoing and/or routine activities that occurred in conjunction with my former role in the school district, and are efforts in which I

remained integrally involved for nearly six years. The following steps in the planned research sequence were specific to the proposed study.

- Obtained IRB approval and successfully defended research proposal. These formal institutional approvals are designed to assure adherence to protocols that protect the integrity of the study and the rights of study participants. The Institutional Review Board Request for Review, Study Approval Form, and Continuing Education Certificate are recorded in Appendices F-H.
- Invited eligible candidates to be formal study participants. From among the initial focus group participants who elected to become candidates for National Board Certification, I obtained informed consent from those who expressed interest in being study participants after hearing a detailed description of the proposed study.
- Conducted regularly scheduled support group meetings for study participants. These meetings were held initially at local university facilities, although changes in location occurred at the will of the group members. Although the initial schedule was arranged for weekly meetings of 90-120 minutes, this plan remained fluid in order to flexibly accommodate participants' varying and evolving needs.

Meeting agendas generally included 45-60 minutes for structured presentation of material directly applicable to a portfolio preparation task. There was also 60-90 minutes allotted for sub-group interactions and informal whole group conversations related to general questions, current topics relative to National Board candidates, and regrouping for activities that met candidates' individual or group needs.

Structured activities involved such topics as videotaping equipment and techniques, clarification of specific general processes and timelines, aspects of writing (organizational schemes; writing modes or genre; explicit instruction in descriptive, analytical and reflective writing expectations; audience awareness; editing conventions), mentoring matters and manners; getting and giving feedback; interpreting and applying standards; time and stress management; priority and goal setting; interpreting and meeting task specifications; and understanding and using scoring rubrics.

Concurrently with meetings, observations were conducted of participant interactions, field notes were recorded, researcher journal was maintained, writing samples were obtained, and audiotape recorded as appropriate. While continuing to hold small group meetings, the group also melded with on-going general school district support meetings. I observed, recorded, and compared participants' interactions in the small group and large-group settings.

- Identified potential case study participants and intensified observation of these subjects. From among the study group, I identified two individuals whose experiences represented those of the group at large, but whose participation exemplified a commitment to both the study and the pursuit of certification. These attributes were demonstrated by consistent attendance and participation in support meetings, a willingness to communicate with other participants and the researcher, and assent to case study focus. The participants who met these broad criteria were polled individually and privately to ascertain whether or not they were willing to be case study subjects. Had more than four possible subjects

emerged from this initial screening, I would have endeavored to choose a sample that was as broadly representative of the group's geographic, certification area, gender, experience level and other identifiable demographic, professional, and personal characteristics as possible in order to generate a sample that would lend the greatest possible credibility to the study method and the resulting findings.

- Continued to meet until all portfolio and Assessment Center deadlines had passed.

These deadlines are established on a rolling basis according to certification area and application date. The key deadlines for the purposes of this study were those that pertained to the case study subjects' applications. A sample of the certification cycle deadlines is included in Appendix F.

- Conducted exit interviews. A final interview, conducted according to the guide recorded in Appendix G, was held with each study participant. This set of interviews sought to provide closure and an opportunity for participants to summarize their reactions to the study experience and suggestions for improving any subsequent, related candidate support and/or research activities.

- Completed compilation of data. Journals and field notes were finalized, interview and observation audiotape transcription completed, and individual candidate process completion status determined. Participant checking and inter-rater conferencing provided a cross-check on the accuracy of data recording, transcription, and analysis.

- Analyzed data. Details related to data analysis can be found in the following section and are reported in Chapter Four.

- Reported findings. Findings, conclusions, implications, and further questions are

discussed in Chapter Five.

*Epoché and the Role of the Researcher*

Examining my own biases was not easy. I was not sure what it would be like, or what I expected to learn about my biases and other preconceptions. I knew what I hoped to accomplish, though—to gain a data-based enlightenment that will better equip me to act as advocate for a group of teachers for whom I gained an ever-increasing respect as well as a growing affinity. I also harbored a deep curiosity about a culture that functions parallel to mine and about which I had little personal knowledge. Tillmann-Healy (2001) embarked on a similar journey when she entered the world of gay men in a similarly motivated long-term study. She employed friendship as a research method—something to which I also aspired, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree, considering the smaller size of the participant group and the narrower scope of the study.

Also like Tillmann-Healy, in striving to work as an “insider,” I hoped to strike a balance and navigate the tension between ethnography and autoethnography in order to observe closely, listen empathically, participate in the developing experience, and advance the welfare of the study participants (Tillmann-Healy, 2001). The goal was to write *about* them, but also write *for* them and *with* them (Fine, 1994), that is, on the participants’ behalf, as their friend and advocate (Schensul & Schensul, 1978), to tell our shared story: to supplement—not supplant—their own unique authorial roles. While this intention was not autoethnographic per se, I used autoethnographic stance to help me find a grounded personal perspective from which I could work to interpret the various phenomena I observed (Neuman, 1996).

To do this, it was necessary for me to record and examine every instance where

my action, my attitude, or (most particularly) my bias was a possible influence, as I encountered it, so that I could attempt to set it aside when observing or interacting with the subjects. This does not mean that the biases were disregarded or eliminated. Heuristic research honors and incorporates the perceptions of the observer. Bracketing them means identifying them and then setting them aside to make room for the participants' perceptions to gain space (Hycner, 1985). To do so, I maintained a private journal, and discussed specific elements from time to time with my coding partner (whose role is described in the Data Analysis section of this chapter) or even with my personal counselor (whose professional services I routinely employ for the purpose of maintaining a balanced perspective and a healthy emotional outlook). This necessitated engaging unexpected feelings regarding racial differences, teaching practices, motivations, writing processes and myriad things previously unimagined. What mattered is that I worked diligently and consistently to recognize, identify, and set aside to the greatest possible extent biases as they became evident to protect the integrity of the study. This was, to be sure, an uncomfortable—perhaps painful—process, but an invaluable journey of self-discovery and growth as a researcher.

### *Data Collection*

This study relied on the collection of a wide variety of data types, utilizing a wide variety of qualitative data collection techniques. The choice of tools was determined to a large extent by the phenomenological philosophy guiding the study. Because phenomenology rests on a determination to describe as accurately as possible study subjects' own perceptions of reality, tools for gathering these perceptions were of prime importance. For this study, participant data will be gathered by direct observation,

interview, audiotape, survey, and from artifacts of the portfolio entry preparation process.

Direct observation took place during focus group and support group meetings. These observations were collected in double-entry Cornell-style field notes (Pauk, 2001; Sanjek, 1990) recorded by the researcher. These notes were very detailed in order to record nuances of setting, participants, interactions, and subtle factors such as non-verbal cues, seating arrangements, groupings, etc. (Merriam, 1988). Audiotapes of oral interactions were recorded intermittently during interviews, mentoring sessions, support group meetings, and other conversations of particular interest to the researcher and/or participants. Written survey responses were collected using the forms in Appendices B and D. Artifacts of the portfolio preparation process included such items as drafts of written work in progress, notes, outlines, revisions, edits, and copies of submitted work.

Personally identifiable data, such as the aforementioned in-progress portfolio work artifacts, relating to each subject were dated and kept in separate, secure files. Surveys and other data not identifiable to particular participants are maintained in lockable file cabinets in my home office and/or in my college office. Audiotapes of groups, individual work sessions, and interviews were labeled by both date and participants, and filed by date. Transcriptions of taped group sessions were prepared by the researcher and filed in a binder by date. Transcriptions of taped individual conversations were filed in the binder by date and a copy maintained in the relevant subject's file.

Participant checks (Hycner, 1985) were conducted, whereby participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the recorded conversations or to provide amendatory input before any analysis was carried out. Members were provided copies of

transcriptions and invited to comment, confirm data, or suggest changes to enhance the accuracy of the record. Field notes of observations were recorded in log books, with each entry dated and marked to record other relevant contextual information. Filled logs were dated and filed sequentially. Participants were invited to read and comment upon field notes and the developing research report to help assure the accuracy of my interpretations and observations.

Phenomenology also requires the collection of data *by* the researcher *about* the researcher. This is important in documenting the process of epoché (Kockelmans, 1967; Lauer, 1965; McKenna, 1989; Stone, 1979) as the researcher attempts to identify and bracket personal preconceptions in order to prepare to be optimally sensitive to participant information. Autoethnography, a version of this approach, demands the collection of information about the researcher by the researcher in order to become more intimately acquainted with the personal world that shapes personal perceptions. In so doing, the researcher is equipped to challenge prior assumptions, see oneself through the eyes of study subjects, and become an observer of one's own acts of observing (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). These autoethnographic steps align with the layers of phenomenological reduction theorized by Schutz (Wagner, 1983), previously described in Chapter Two. These data were collected in a personal study journal by the researcher, using a two-column Cornell note format (Pauk, 2001). Journal entries were made intermittently as the observer reflected on project activities and routinely following group and individual mentoring sessions. The journal was maintained privately, and was not subject to member checking.

Documents related to the National Board Certification process were gathered for

analysis of construction and content. These documents came from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards website and publications; Florida Department of Education website, publications, reports and memos; and Polk County School Board memos, website, and staff development publications. Documents came from my personal collection of books, binders, and publications gathered during my years of work in this arena; from candidates as they received new information during the application process; from the Department of Education listserv to which I subscribe and through which a wide array of DOE communication is disseminated; and from the school district as we collaborated to assist candidates. The purpose for gathering these documents was to establish the textual context of the National Board d/Discourse. Documents were catalogued in a master spreadsheet, noting the type, format, source, key content and date. Storage varies by document type. Previously owned materials and those already in routine use are maintained on bookshelves and in files, in typical fashion. Documents collected for and in the course of the study were, if necessary, be printed, dated, and stored as appropriate to type and format.

Together, the various data types will form the basis for addressing the study's central questions:

1. Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
2. What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

The relevance of each data type is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Relevance of Data Types to Questions

Activity	Data Type	Question 1	Question 2
Focus Group Meeting	Interview	X	X
	Observation	X	X
	Survey		X
	Personal Journal	X	X
	National Board Documents	X	
Support Meetings	Observation	X	X
	Interview	X	X
	Survey		X
	Personal Journal	X	X
	National Board Documents	X	
Mentoring Session	Observation	X	X
	Conversation	X	X
	Artifacts	X	X
	Personal Journal	X	X
	National Board Documents	X	
National Board Documents	Websites, portfolio instructions, standards, brochures, process forms	X	X

### *Data Analysis*

Survey data were analyzed using qualitative strategies to identify patterns and themes among the responses. Although the survey used a numeric scale response format, the data were not quantitatively analyzed with the goal of generating statistical information. Rather, I looked for trends across the group's responses to try to gauge the range and predominance of attitudes with respect to each item. This early data helped guide my plans for initial support activities and helped me establish some first impressions of the overall receptiveness of potential study participants to the proposed project. I also gained some early indications of issues that might have helped and/or

hindered the study as initially conceived. Finally, I hoped to identify major components of general attitude toward National Board and National Board processes among this group of teachers. The key focus of each item was listed in an analysis table, and numeric responses tallied for each to gain the overall impression I intended as the goal for this activity.

Observation and interview data were coded using Hycner's guidelines for analyzing phenomenological data (Hycner, 1985). Data were analyzed by a fifteen-step process beginning with transcription of recorded interviews and observations, followed by bracketing of the specific instances and occurrences of bias or preconception identified during the epoché. The entire situation was then revisited as a whole, listening to the entire conversation or reviewing session field notes, before identifying discrete units of general meaning within the transcription. These initial meaning units comprised individual words, phrases, sentences, gestures, affect, or any element that expressed clear and coherent meaning (Hycner, 1985). Then, meanings were examined and coded to identify their relationships to the central research questions. This was accomplished by looking for clusters of related meaning within emerging patterns or themes (in this case, examples of expected patterns included such topics as concerns about writing, time management, videotaping, assessment center, expressions of stress, worry about perceptions of other teachers, etc.). At this point, verification of the units of meaning occurred with the assistance of an independent outside co-rater.

The record of each interaction was coded to identify recurring categories, strands, or themes in the communication. Initial impressions were cross-checked with a co-rater and after we negotiated rarely occurring differences (less than ten percent of coding

required negotiation), participants were asked if they agreed with the general course of the analysis. In a few instances, the data were further reviewed to identify tracings of Discourse against which mapped iterations of discourse could be compared, using the rhizomatic technique discussed in Chapter Three.

Member-checking, a vital part of phenomenological data analysis as detailed in Chapter Three, was undertaken with care. To achieve the primary goal of phenomenological research—to faithfully capture and relate the lived experience of the study participants—it is essential to check the observer’s perceptions against those of the members. Whenever data related to participants’ experiences was transcribed, coded and analyzed, I asked one or more of the members whose experiences were directly involved to read over the resulting notes to confirm or offer suggestions to improve the accuracy of the interpretations. Although the participants’ input was respectfully valued, care was taken not to impose undue time demands of this aspect of the study on top of the significant and high-priority demands of the certification tasks. To that end, the member-checking work was often accomplished via email, although it was occasionally done during mentoring sessions. For example, I sometimes read candidates’ portfolio entries while they read over study notes and then we would exchange feedback. The feedback was usually oral, but sometimes took the form of written commentary. Again, I tried to minimize the burden of the member-checking work on participants, so I accepted whatever mode was easiest for them.

A third party, a Black doctoral student from another institution, collaborated in the text coding to validate the inter-rater reliability of the results. Using a phenomenological approach to ethnography requires a departure from conventional

thinking about the reliability and validity of data, however. Phenomenological data can be best confirmed by the participants themselves, checking with them to ask if what has been perceived by the researcher is, in fact, what the participants experienced. Another way to provide this form of triangulation is to ask a third party to provide an observational perspective to confirm or shed new light on the observer's perceptions of participants' experience.

In this study, the choice of this particular third party was made for a number of reasons. The woman who assisted in this aspect of the study is an elected official in a Florida public school district who shares my concern for equity in professional development opportunities for all teachers. The fact that she is also Black (defined by her own public avowal and through verbal affirmation and acceptance by participants in the study) helped assure me that any of my inherent biases were perhaps more likely to be revealed and countered by the advantage of her perspective on the emerging data strands. Finally, she was also a late-stage doctoral student familiar with research protocols and sensitive to the interpretive demands associated with qualitative analysis.

All of these factors were considered as I strove to add a layer of credibility to the study through this selection of a co-rater. This reveals my sense that, because I am a White woman attempting to accurately record the lived experience of Black candidates, I realize my data may be considered by others to be more credible if co-rated by another Black woman. It assumes that there is something about being Black that she "got" simply because she is also Black. This implies that there is something about being Black that is inherently different from being White. This is, of course, an important piece of emic/etic information, and was included in my personal journal. This was less important to me,

given my own previously discussed philosophical disavowal of the validity of race as a human categorization factor. However, I acknowledge that the inclusion of a Black co-rater may lend additional credence to the analysis of certain study data for others who consider the results of this study. The possibility of bias is, in itself, important data, and perhaps the most important role this co-rater played was to help me stay alert to similar instances and remind me to capture them as data.

Another level of analysis was to closely examine the program literature (described earlier as documents from NBPTS, DOE and the school district.) A limited document analysis was conducted to identify patterns in vocabulary, themes, content presentation, tone, authorship, or schemes of interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Fairclough (1995) proposed critical discourse analysis as a tool for studying the use of situated language. In applying this method to the documents related to National Board processes, I sought to identify patterns of language that could reveal institutional attitudes or approaches that contribute to the present levels of participation and achievement in those processes. Texts generated by participants (portfolio drafts, etc.) were analyzed in similar fashion. Transcripts of participant interactions were analyzed by comparable processes. This critical analysis of discourse provided clues to perceptions of participants and process gatekeepers regarding mutual expectations of both the process and its outcomes.

Hycner (1985) recommends specific techniques for the analysis of phenomenological data that were very important for the purpose of critical discourse analysis. Just as interaction transcripts can be analyzed to determine fundamental meaning units, documents can be parsed to find the basic elements of their meaning.

This process involved taking an in-depth look at the text with an eye to various aspects of meaning construction. For example, vocabulary might be an important clue in identifying a specific meaning unit. Sentence structure, phrasing, and other elements of syntax can also affect the reader's perception of meaning. The repetition of key words, phrases, and structures give differential weights to meaning. The overall presentation format provides another layer of meaning. Instructions for preparing National Board portfolio entries are presented in several different formats: narrative paragraphs, bulleted lists, and tables, for instance. This is the essence of critical discourse analysis as it was utilized in this study.

Once this step was accomplished, redundancies were identified and evaluated to determine varying emphasis levels and the resulting weights of messages. Related meaning units were clustered together and the broader themes of the discourse were labeled. A summary was developed to regain a sense of the whole interaction or document. For this study, analyses of individual documents and interactions were compared to the aggregating body of data and to the specifically stated purposes and intentions of NBPTS in its core documents. It was important to discover how the meanings that are emphasized within specific candidate-generated texts relate to the meanings that are projected in messages purported to state the central goals and purposes of NBPTS.

Texts, in this case, are instantiated in a number of different ways. There are the foundational cultural texts of femininity, teaching, and race. These are embedded in the current study as systems of ideology in the participants, the program and the researcher. For the participants, interview data were analyzed for evidence of the influence of each of

these overarching ideological structures. Program documents were examined for clues that the text functions to activate one or more of the thought systems associated with those elements of culture. For the researcher, personal logs were interrogated to search for the influence of those Discourses on the creation or interpretation of study-related texts.

Additional layers of foundational text are those of family, personal background, and interactions with the various communities in which subjects act and interact. There is the emerging text of what it means to seek, gain, and hold a National Board certificate, i.e. a “National Board” culture into which applicants (consciously or unconsciously) seek admission—cultures that are developing at the local, state, and national levels. There are the printed and web-based texts inherent to the mechanics of applying to the process and directing the preparation of the portfolio. Centrally, there are the actual textual artifacts gathered and written by the individual candidates. Finally, peripheral, but not insignificant, are the texts of congratulations to successful candidates and the redirective texts oriented toward those eligible for resubmission of entries with scores below that required for the awarding of the certificate. Documents produced for and by each of these social event structures help define the resulting d/Discourses. These varying d/Discourses are described by Gee (1999) as cultural models for the purpose of organizing the inquiry.

Each of these texts will need to be considered and closely analyzed independently, interactively, and intertextually, using procedures detailed above, in order to yield a fully contextualized d/Discourse analysis. Content (vocabulary, concepts, analogy, presentation structure, etc.) were analyzed for evidence of overt, explicit themes

or patterns in the presentation and prioritization of information (Spivey, 1997). This work mirrored that performed in the analysis of program document texts. The texts previously analyzed (conversations, interviews, and written portfolio entry drafts) were re-examined through the extratextual lenses of family, background, community, and other personal experiences the participants communicate as relevant to the tasks at hand. A new layer of coding was applied to the texts to highlight where these contextual elements impact the constructed meaning. Critical discourse analysis, as described by Fairclough (1995) and reinterpreted for this study, revealed more subtle, implicit patterns of meaning. These identified “between the lines” meanings, made possible by embracing the action research method that emerged from the initial phenomenological approach, yielded a rich new understanding of the candidacy process, the resulting written products and, perhaps, the certification outcomes. An example of this type of discourse analysis is found in Chapter Four, beginning on page 104.

Through application of a rhizomatic analysis (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of the emerging texts, fundamental disconnects in the d/Discourses, became evident. In rhizomatic textual analysis, text-based personal understandings that have been previously rendered by the researcher are plotted as tracings—an initial starting place for exploration of meaning. These traces are the “common” meanings constructed by the “everyperson” reader, even while recognizing that such a reader does not exist. Then, the text is “mined” for meaning to be plotted as maps. These maps are the understandings that are constructed while reading and analyzing critically from a specific standpoint (e.g. feminism, race, etc.). Finally, the maps are compared to the original tracings to see where gaps and overlaps among and between meanings and intents (Deleuze and Guattari,

1987). It is much like laying a current, clear overlay map of a town on an old map to see what elements of the locale have changed over the years: to discover where new things exist where nothing existed before, and vice versa. In this case, the original map would be represented by NBPTS documents and their meanings from a generalized sense. The overlays represented candidate-produced texts or additional situated readings from a critical standpoint. Additional overlays were the previously discussed texts of femininity, race, teaching, family, background, and community. Each of these overlays, when placed over an emerging understanding of NBPTS text, yielded new interpretations of process expectations and process results. This functioned almost as a form of active Venn diagram, facilitating a dynamic comparison and contrast process. A sample analysis is provided in Appendix H. Rhizomatic analysis of these texts and intertexts illuminated where supplanting has taken place; where one idea or text has replaced or gained precedence over another; and where gaps and overlaps exist. Supplanting was of particular interest, since it may indicate the sublimation of one idea in favor of another or the replacement of one idea by another. Reasons for the occurrence of any detected instances of supplanting were important to interrogate in the course of the data analysis and during participant checking. In the case of the texts to be explored during this study, it was interesting and informative to discover not only where understandings were missing or incomplete, but to find where they were in conflict—to learn where the d/Discourses disconnect.

In this case, I placed deconstructed texts from various data sources in parallel charts to see where congruencies and disconnects emerge. For example, I had occasion to place dissected text from National Board publications about the standards alongside a

parsed transcription of a candidate conversation in which the standards are interpreted. Gaps and overlaps were readily apparent.

Gee (1999) distinguished between discourse as “language in use” and Discourse as “language plus other stuff” (Gee, 1999, p.17). Therefore, it is reasonable to conceive of teaching in terms of both discourse and Discourse. The notion of accomplishment was similarly considered. For instance, the day to day acts of teaching are situated in the more encompassing context of the Teaching profession and all of its various contributing factors. Day to day accomplishment is similarly situated within the broader realm of Accomplishment, in this case as defined and administered by NBPTS. There was a sense of fluctuation between discourse and Discourse when the texts of t/Teaching and a/Accomplishment intertwined in the midst of the NB process. When this occurred, it was appropriate and productive to step back from the effort to interpret or understand the text and/or process itself, and to endeavor instead to find where the examined text connected with other elements of the d/Discourse (Grosz, 1994).

A final, simple, yet critical element of analysis was to create a simple graphic representation of the number of participants and the number who persevered to completion of the process. Once this phase of the study was reached, it was time to wait to learn who among the group achieved certification....a decision that was months away.

### *Closing the Circle*

This study was designed to help answer two questions that are important to those who are interested in the range and impact of National Board Certification as first discussed in Chapter One:

- Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

There has been a systematic attempt in this chapter to spell out in detail the methodology proposed for this study. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two explored topics of writing behaviors, mentoring support, disparate impact, and issues of culture, power, and authority. The proposition of phenomenology was introduced as the philosophy to guide the action research based use of document analysis, ethnography, and discourse analysis in the search for answers to the central questions. Chapter Four reveals the data gathered in this quest.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Data and Analysis

Data related to three distinct areas were gathered in the effort to address the two research questions on which this study focused:

- Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

Information was gathered to comprehend and explain participant's perceptions of the process by which National Board Certification is pursued and achieved. The d/Discourses of Black certification candidates and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards were interrogated and compared, and the impact of a candidate mentoring program was evaluated. In this chapter, data for each of these three categories are presented.

Any attempt to analyze d/Discourses depends heavily on careful observation, recording, and interpretation from multiple perspectives. The role of the researcher as a participant observer becomes crucial in the d/Discourse cycle explained above. While it is the intent and purpose of a study rooted in phenomenology to apprehend and report the experiences of the subject participants, in this case those observed experience were heuristically filtered through the simultaneous and cumulative experience of the

observer/recorder/reporter. Therefore, in order to assure as fully as possible that it was the participants' experiences, and not those of the observer, that achieve prominence, it was necessary for the observer to continually examine her perspectives for evidence of bias, overt or otherwise. Through this self-examination, biases and personal perspectives were to be discerned, not for their own sake, but so they could be considered and set aside to the extent possible. The conscious and deliberate act of discerning and cleansing specks from the lens through which the observer observes the participants' experiences is the heuristic phenomenologist's essential tool of Epoché (Moustakas, 1994).

This data account seeks to be faithful to both the context and content of the participants' experience of National Board candidacy. The fundamental role of context in this study justifies the use of narrative reporting. Discourse (with a capital D) is, as explained previously, context. The narrative genre—one of several alternatives proposed as appropriate for ethnographic reporting by Bochner and Ellis (1996)—provides the most natural form for describing the context in this instance, and while it may be perceived by some readers as inappropriate,

What may be seen by strict methodologists as reportorial “gravy” (verbiage—self conscious, poetic, or otherwise) in fieldwork texts can be important for other reasons. One is establishing context, which, of course is practically everything for determining meaning. Another is opening the door for richer comparative studies by potentially increasing the range of ethnographic information available to us, about ourselves as well as the people we study (Brady, 1998, p.516)

Brodkey (1987) proposed that reports of observed experiences could be best rendered through the telling of stories, and that those stories could function analytically to

reveal discovery and interpretively to construct new understandings of that which had been observed and narrated.

There are two primary d/Discourses to be investigated for this study: those of the participants and those of National Board. The participants' d/Discourses were defined through observation, interview and review of candidate produced documents. The d/Discourses of National Board were defined through review of documents obtained from the NBPTS website and published NBPTS program materials. Each is discussed in turn in this section.

Although the d/Discourses of National Board could perhaps be construed as the more authoritative, this study seeks to describe the candidacy experience of the participants. Therefore, their perceptions and definitions of teaching and accomplishment (as recorded by the observer) are detailed first. The participants' descriptions of those d/Discourses form the basis for comparison against the same d/Discourses viewed from the perspective of National Board.

In order to accurately recount the assembled d/Discourse information, it is necessary to first establish the context in which the data collection occurred, beginning with the first meeting where the foundation for the study was laid and the tone for observer-participant relationships was established.

#### *Establishing the Dialogue*

I had arranged for space in a middle school where we could meet and eat. The administrator, a Black woman who was as eager as I was to be sure things went well, had juggled the custodial schedule to be sure the floors would be buffed before we arrived. This was no small feat, considering the array of tasks awaiting custodial attention during

these early days of the summer hiatus. Box lunches would be delivered by the caterer by late morning, along with plenty of iced tea and a couple of big lemon ice box pies. I had delivered easels, chart tablets, markers, and the few overhead transparencies the day before, when I had stopped by the school to be sure all was in readiness for this big event.

I was heading into a foreign situation. Yes, I had delivered this program, or some version of it, a few dozen times in venues ranging from grocery aisles, to classrooms, to auditoriums with audiences numbering from one to several hundred. I had sat in the governor's office lobbying for enhancements to the legislation that funded the program. I arrived at the school about 90 minutes before the meeting was scheduled to begin. I wanted to be sure to put my best foot forward, and I felt a strong need to be the first to arrive. This meeting was very important to me.

Finally, the first three teachers arrived, and they greeted one another warmly, asking about children and other family members. I was glad I'd listened to Annette. All three of the new arrivals were dressed up. It was one of the first days of summer break, but they had on dresses, stockings and heels. One of them wore a hat. We exchanged names, and I led them to the sign-in sheet. As they settled, others began to arrive in groups of one, two and three. Every single person was dressed up. As people gathered, I felt less nervous. At starting time, everyone was seated and it was time to proceed. No other expected participants entered after this time.

After introducing myself, I asked the attendees to share their names along with the school and grade level where they taught. I went through about 15 minutes of standard information about the process for applying to the Excellent Teaching Program and the National Board. I answered a few standard questions, as I would expect to do in a

meeting of this type. Then, at the side of the room, up came a hand. I nodded in that direction and said, “Yes?” Just then, the door opened, and in walked two middle-aged White women, wearing jeans and T-shirts. I invited them in and they sat tentatively at the edge of the room, looking around as if trying to figure out if they were in the wrong place. I nodded again toward the woman I had acknowledged just prior to this small interruption. She cleared her throat and looked at the newcomers before proceeding. She said, “The invitation to this meeting said we were going to talk about minority participation issues. Is that right?”

“Yes, absolutely,” I replied.

Again looking at the two new arrivals, she went on. “Well, I’m wondering why I haven’t ever heard the information you just shared with us. You said this is the third year for the program, and this is the first time I’ve heard this. Why is that?”

Another hand went up, this time from the older of the two women who had entered late. “Is this meeting about National Board Certification?”

“Yes, it is,” I answered.

“You missed the information part. We started about 15 minutes ago,” a nearby woman whispered sotto voce, leaning toward the inquirer, but looking at me. There was an almost undetectable stir in the room.

“Oh. I’m sorry. A teacher we work with told us there was a meeting about National Board today, and we wanted to hear about it.”

“You are certainly welcome to stay if you want. We’re going to be discussing some other issues, but if you want to join us, I’ll be glad to fill you in as time allows.”

Looking at the room, then back at me, she asked warily, “Is this just for Black teachers?”

“Not expressly,” I said, thinking quickly and somewhat defensively. “It is about issues that face Black teachers in this program, but the program and the meeting are for everyone who wants to be here.”

Again, “Oh.” She looked at her still-silent companion, shrugged, and said, “Maybe we’ll just take a sandwich and go then, since we missed the information so fast.”

“Unfortunately, the caterer has not delivered lunch yet,” I said, feeling ice threatening to creep into my voice. Forcing myself to smile, I went on, “It will be here in about half an hour. Why don’t you pull your chairs up to one of the tables with these other folks and join us for conversation and lunch, too?”

“Well, I guess we’ll just go and try to catch this later when there’s less other stuff going on.” She said, rising and motioning her friend to the door.

“Whatever you decide. Would you mind signing in before you go? That way, I can send you the handouts from the meeting and make sure we notify you when we’re going to be having a session near your school.”

“No, no. We’ve interrupted enough. Go on and we’ll come another time. Please excuse the interruption.” And they were gone.

“Well, where were we?” I started.

“Riff-raff. Makes us all look bad.” I heard, just barely, from the side. I made a conscious effort not to look at the speaker, but it was the same pitch and from the same direction as the previous sotto voce utterance. I felt a sense of alliance, and it felt good.

“Oh, yes...issues. If you’re ready, let’s talk about those. First, are there any more questions?” There were none, so we entered new territory.

I decided to be direct. This was due in large part to the signals I’d been getting from the whisperer. She’d drawn a fence around our proceedings by telling the two interlopers that they were late. She’d identified them as “riff-raff” so I could hear the opinion. The only other sound had been a vague shifting in the room. I took it as agreement. I felt as if a ball had been pitched into my area, and they were waiting for me to toss it back. Show time.

I told them I’d worried each year as teachers walked to the school board dais for recognition as new NBCTS, and thus far, there had been no Black faces among them. I looked to the Black school board member who had been gracious enough to lend her name as co-inviter on the memo these teachers had received. She was at the back of the room. She agreed that we had shared this concern. I went on to tell them that I worried about the fact that not only were Black teachers not getting the certification, not very many of them were applying, and I thought we needed to try to find out why. So here I was, asking, “Why are you not lining up to go after this certification and the money it brings?”

Silence. Not the scary kind where doom threatens. The kind, instead, that lets you know you need to do something to break it. I shifted from foot to foot wondering what to say or do. Finally, after what seemed to be ages, I grinned at the lady who whispered and said, loud enough for everyone to hear, “These shoes are killing me! I bought new shoes to wear for you today, but they are pinching like crazy. Would you be offended if I took them off?”

“Not unless you mind if I take off mine,” she said. And we both did, and so did others, while everyone laughed and relaxed. We were talking—beginning a dialogue—building the foundation on which all of our shared discourse during the study would be built (MacDonell, 1986).

### *Perceptions of the National Board Process*

There were 30 people in the room: 28 teachers, the school board member, and me. The teachers divided themselves into table groups of five or six, and I set an easel with chart paper and markers next to each table. I asked them in the next twenty minutes or so to list barriers to their participation in the NB process and any solutions they could propose to help eliminate those barriers. I posted a two column model for this at the front of the room. Sandra (the school board member) and I made ourselves available as a resource to any group who wanted or needed our input, but we did not inject ourselves into conversation at any table. I occupied much of the time in assisting the caterer with the delivery and set-up of lunch, which allowed me to circulate unobtrusively while remaining alert to table activity.

The only time I was approached for advice during this time period was when one group asked me if they had to record their names on their chart. When I told them they did not need to do so, one member turned to her tablemates and said, “Then write it down.”

### *Barriers and Solutions*

As groups began to wind down their discussions, I invited them to take a quick break and collect their box lunches. When everyone had returned to a seat with lunch and a glass of tea or lemonade, I suggested that we talk while we ate. I asked them to

think about any additional questions, concerns or suggestions they had. We all ate and just chatted for a few minutes, then I asked for each table to talk to the rest of us about what they had recorded. Results are summarized in Table 3. There was a brief reluctance for anyone to go first. Then, one lady pointed to another table's chart and said they should go first since they had written the most. Everyone laughed and the targeted table agreed to share. I sat and listened without writing anything in a deliberate effort to remain absolutely focused.

Table 3. Barriers and Solutions Identified by Participants.

Barriers (in listed order)	Solutions (in listed order/unmatched to barriers)
Uncertain funding	Support groups like this
Information not made public quickly to minorities	Help meeting deadlines
Too many family responsibilities	Help with planning and scheduling
Seeking other degrees	Make technology available to candidates
30% passing rate	Have <u>sincere</u> mentors
Too expensive, no financial help	Help in certain cert areas
Rusty writing skills	Get rid of the secret club
Penalty for not finishing if something comes up	School based support
Is program here to stay?	Minority contact letter
Have to recertify after 10 years	Paycheck flyers
No technology at home	More accessible meetings
No access to videotaping equip or help	More information on courses
Lots of negatives expressed	Tutoring
FEAR	Cover withdrawal fees for reasons besides death
Wrong information spread around	Mentor to help with writing, provide feedback before submitting final work
Personal issues	Ideas for utilizing time effectively
Change in grade level	Principal's support
Grapevine/Rumors	bonus
Intimidation	Knowledge is power
Too many other school obligations and deadlines	Increased local standards
No teamwork or support at school	
Too little time	

Barriers were discussed first, and I got an education right from the beginning. As can be seen from Table 3, the first two issues shared were fairly typical, with personal obligations and school changes such as grade level assignments mentioned. In my experience facilitating NB information sessions, personal issues almost always emerged

as primary concerns among teachers, followed closely by practical concerns about the demands of the application process. Next for this group, though, was “Grapevine.” When I asked what this meant, I was told that this meant that the grapevine rumbled that this was another in a long line of efforts from which Black teachers were excluded. I asked them to explain. Surely today’s meeting was a sign that this was not the case, at least not now and not during my term in the position I held—a position responsible for oversight of this process in our district. Teachers shared instances in which school administrators would place notices of NB meetings in White teacher’s boxes, but not make them available to Black teachers. One teacher recounted a time when an assistant principal had approached a grade level team and had specifically invited the White members individually by name to an organizational meeting while not acknowledging or inviting the Black teacher. Still another told of an incident where a district official had told her, when she indicated an interest in applying, that she should be careful not to get herself in over her head. It was, after all, a difficult process intended for only the best of teachers. Word of stories like this, transmitted over the district grapevine, had sent an unofficial message to these teachers that this was by invitation only, in spite of appearances or policies to the contrary. A specific incidence of active dissuasion is recounted in detail later in this chapter.

A group at another table mentioned that they had not received information about this opportunity. This was, in fact, the issue that had been raised just as the final two meeting participants had arrived (and interrupted) earlier. Since I had personal responsibility for the dissemination effort, I knew good and well that I had made diligent attempts to get the word to every teacher via multiple channels: email, written notices,

video announcements, etc. When I mentioned this, they said that when they get something from the district office on “that letterhead,” “...we just throw it away.” I laughed and said that this meant they’d thrown away a good bit of information from me about NB, and maybe that was why the school board was fussing about our department’s copy and stationery expenditures. Sandra joined in this banter. I ended by shaking my finger good-naturedly at the group and said, “If you are going to throw away district office memos, just check first to see if they are from me. Those are the good ones—read those!” We had a laugh, and we moved on, but I was learning.

Looking back, with guidance from a valued and trusted mentor, I now recognize this as a pivotal moment in the study. Just as the activity structure had been tested, so too were the boundaries in the interaction being explored....and stretched. Ever since I had taken off my shoes—and had adopted a direct approach to the dilemma we were discussing, the climate had changed. There had been a proverbial elephant in the room, and by acknowledging it, we had been able to begin moving toward each other in a series of feints and dodges. In the process, I had been able to move from a position literally at the front of the room, delivering didactic information (the sole White person in the room, who was, not inconsequentially, also in charge of the proceedings), to a spot at the side, from which I felt safe risking a good-humored jab at authority by wagging my finger at them. It was a risk, to be sure. If I was wrong about the strategy, they would cross their arms over their chests again, and the conversation would be over, perhaps forever. I had gambled that they would understand that I, too, had much at stake—much to risk—and that by being willing to risk failure, they would see that we were, in fact, all in this together—and that I believed in the possibility of our partnership enough to take the

chance. That finger wag had been a preamble to the whole process we were about to enter. But I had gauged correctly and the ploy had worked. They had laughed with me, and we had set another brick in a developing foundation of mutual trust which was to be so crucial to the success of our future work together.

When we talked about proposed solutions, I was in for more enlightenment. Although we had organized and deployed a sizeable contingent of NB mentors in our district, there was a feeling among the meeting participants that there was a lack of sincere interest among the existing mentor cadre for the candidacy of Black teachers. To date, all of the NBCTs were White, and the table group members felt the NBCTs had little connection with or regard for their Black counterparts. As evidence they mentioned the absence of personal invitations to candidate recruiting events. Not one teacher in the room related an instance of being offered encouragement by a NBCT or another candidate to enter the process. They reiterated the stories told earlier of the opportunity being offered to others in their presence without being included themselves. My personal observations lent credence to this grievance. I recall with shame the many strategy sessions during which efforts to encourage teacher participation had been discussed. I could not recall a single occasion when specific strategies to include Black teachers had been discussed, although I remembered more than one discussion regarding how we could increase the participation of other groups such as males, secondary teachers, and teachers in particular certification areas. The oversight was not deliberate, but exclusion resulted nevertheless. The groups proposed inviting a few Black NBCTs from other locales to visit the district—a productive suggestion which I agreed to pursue.

### *The Secret Club*

But the words from that day that resonate with me most solidly are these: Secret Club. “Get rid of the Secret Club!” one table’s spokeswoman said emphatically. “White teachers, especially those who are National Board, act like this is some kind of secret club that we can’t join, not now, not ever.” I had heard this criticism lobbed at NBCTs in our area before, so the words hit home.

Events were held each year to celebrate candidates’ achievement of certification. This was, of course, designed to reflect laudatory light on the growing group of district NBCTs. This generated some grumbling resentment each year among candidates who had not achieved certification as well as among other teachers who had elected for whatever reason not to seek certification. When ETP bonus checks were distributed, there was always a fresh round of negative remarks about the NBCTs who received the payments. This took the form of email messages, phone calls, personal conversations and even the occasional letter to the Department of Education complaining about the unfairness of the large bonus amounts in a climate where so many considered teachers in general to be underpaid. Of the 23 complaints I reviewed when writing this recollection, all of which had identified authorship (I discarded anonymous messages upon receipt), all were from white teachers. Several included remarks such as “What makes these teachers so special?” or “Why does this group deserve so much attention?” and “No group of teachers should be granted such elite status.” All of these responses carry a whiff of “Secret Club” resentment. Indeed, one group of NBCTs in another county proposed that they wear a distinctive blazer as part of their professional attire. This evoked a hue and cry among ETP stakeholders across the state, echoes of which can still be heard in the

occasional scornful reference to the “Blazer Bunch.” It is important to remember that National Board Certification means that NBCTs have been able to provide clear, consistent, and convincing evidence that their practice meets the standards. It is not a guarantee of exemplary performance, as documented by Pool, Ellett, Schiavone, and Carey-Lewis (2001).

This stigma of “Insider/Outsider” is unpleasant but very real. If White teachers feel that way, I could see how the impression could be magnified for Black teachers who perceive themselves not only as excluded from “The Club” but who also, as described above, perceive themselves as being excluded from opportunities to seek membership. It was becoming clear to me that in our district, at least, there was room for improvement that presented an opportunity to work on the demonstrated values of humility, respect, inclusion and service to the profession...the whole profession. And this extended across lines from fellow teachers to school-based administrators to district office personnel.

#### *Process participants*

The last item on the agenda that day was a survey (Appendix B). I explained that I was thinking of focusing my dissertation work on the problem we had discussed that day. I distributed the survey, asking the attendees to please complete it (while they enjoyed a piece of pie.) The survey results would help with planning for district support activities, to inform my study proposal, or both. I designated a location for it to be turned in as people left the meeting, and I left a sheet where people could record their names, phone numbers and email addresses if they were interested in more information or the formation of a support group. As people finished filling in the survey, they turned it in and signed the follow-up sheet, but most didn’t leave. They asked me, in groups of four

or five, if they could talk to me for a minute. We returned to our chairs and resumed our conversation.

Several teachers indicated that they would like to begin preparing to apply for National Boards, but they were not ready to do so during the current cycle. Could we maybe begin a group to wade into this one step at a time? A group of about the same size said they would like to apply if they could plan to work together, apart from the mainstream NB support group. The remaining few had interesting inputs. Two women—media specialists for whom there was no available certificate—offered to provide help with videotaping. Two others, both older teachers near retirement, indicated that they did not feel they would pursue this opportunity at the late stage of their careers, but they would be willing to help others in whatever ways might be found to be useful. One said she did not know if she would ever pursue the certificate, but she thought it would be a good thing to learn more about, so she would attend meetings if we kept her informed of them. A young pregnant woman said she could commit neither time nor energy for the next couple of years, but she'd try to keep up with the effort if the group would keep in touch with her in the meantime. The last person said she'd soon be qualified for entry into the administrative personnel pool, but she wanted to keep abreast of any group effort so she could encourage teachers under her leadership to pursue the National Board opportunity. The survey results (Table 4) mirror these stated intentions and preferences for involvement in the process.

Table 4 illustrates the high number of teachers in this group who valued the idea of being able to work with other Black teachers on this undertaking, and the lure of bonuses. I have observed the bonuses to be important inducements for all teachers, so

this did not surprise me, although I was interested to note the relatively low number who listed the opportunity as the top reason for seeking certification. Later findings explain this dichotomy. I was happily surprised, though, by the number of teachers who expressed interesting forming differentiated support groups, thereby validating the premise of my study questions, at least in part. Encouragement by peers and administrators received low marks, for reasons that are perhaps illuminated by the encounter detailed beginning on page 108.

The astonishing thing—the outcome I had not dared hope for—is that absolutely every person who had attended indicated an interest in continuation of the dialogue we’d begun that day. I thanked the group for their attendance and for the enthusiasm they had shown for the information I’d shared as well as for the study I was thinking of proposing. In turn, they thanked me and the school district for the lunch and the opportunity to talk this over in more depth. One woman, who hugged me as she left, told me that she had felt “the spirit” in me as the meeting had unfolded. With a big smile, she also reminded me to not forget my shoes.

### *Baselines and Beginnings*

When the day dawned, I had wondered if I should even be holding the planned meeting. As the sun set, I had confirmed that there was interest among a core group of district Black teachers in applying for National Board Certification. We had formulated a frank list of barriers to participation by Black teachers, along with some potential solutions—a list that would be helpful in demonstrating to district administrators the potential value of demographically specific support efforts. They had affirmed the notion that targeted support would be a welcome and potentially helpful intervention. I had

identified a base focus group (Table 5) which had indicated serious interest in pursuing certification and in becoming study participants. A few of these teachers had made personal connection overtures to me and seemed like they might be candidates for the in-depth case studies I was beginning to envision. We had a long, long way to go, but we'd taken a few starting steps.

Table 4. Initial Survey Results.

Survey Item	Response (5 high, 1 low)				
	5	4	3	2	1
Receiving a personal invitation	2	16	8	1	1
Being invited by a School Board member	1	12	4	6	5
Being invited to a meeting of Black teachers	9	8	10	0	1
Being invited by a Black school district official	3	4	7	13	1
Receiving information in a customized meeting	17	6	2	3	0
The location of the meeting	15	6	6	1	0
The time of the meeting	15	7	6	0	0
Knowing someone else who is applying	5	4	7	3	4
Being able to discuss barriers	8	9	6	4	1
Learning about available support opportunities	7	13	6	2	0
The opportunity to work with other Black teachers	18	7	2	1	0
The salary bonus for NBCTs	22	5	1	0	0
The mentoring bonus for NBCTs	22	5	1	0	0
The recognition NBCTs receive	10	8	8	1	1
The professional development opportunity	4	5	4	2	2
The opportunity to pioneer NB among local Black teachers	6	4	2	6	3
Being part of a national effort	5	5	9	5	4
The opportunity to examine my teaching practice	7	8	7	3	3
Being encouraged by peers to apply	0	1	2	19	6
Being encouraged by my Principal to apply	0	0	1	25	2

It was not until I was most of the way home, reflecting on how much I had learned that day, that I realized how comfortable I had ended up being as the only white person in the room. It had been a day worth dressing up for.....pinchy shoes and all.

#### *Defining the d/Discourses*

Description and analysis of data continues in this section, the second of three devoted to different aspects of this purpose. Here, the participants' perceptions of various elements of localized professional discourses regarding "teaching" and

“accomplishment” will be examined and compared to the encompassing Discourses defined and embodied by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Table 5. Continuing Interest Focus Group Participants

Name	School Level	Certificate Area
Monique	Elementary	Art
Felicia	Elementary	Middle Childhood
Mae	Middle	Language Arts
JoAnn	Elementary	Middle Childhood
Annie	Elementary	Middle Childhood
Dotty	Elementary	Exceptional Needs
Selena	Elementary	Early Childhood
Dee	High	Social Studies
Marilyn	High	Vocational
Roselle	Middle	Music
Mandy	Elementary	Exceptional Needs
Shonda	Middle	Social Studies

Our first formal work group meeting took place a few weeks after the first contact in June. We had kept in touch via email and phone in the meantime, and a couple of teachers had paid me a visit when they were at the district office on other business. I had received approval from my doctoral advisory committee for the study I intended to conduct. In the course of my job, I had processed, on average, a dozen or more applications each week. Six of the teachers I had met earlier in the summer had submitted applications and were beginning to make their way through the thicket of newly received portfolio materials. I had surveyed each new applicant to assess preferences regarding the structure of support group structure, schedule, activities and location. Things were humming right along.

Twenty-eight teachers had attended the first lunch meeting. Of that number, ten had decided not to seek certification at the present time. Eight others had decided to “wait and watch” while they prepared themselves to enter the process in a future cycle.

Six had applied and were chomping at the bit to get started. Six others—the remaining four, plus two friends they had persuaded to consider joining us—wanted both more information and some help with the initial application. Some of the twelve had attended various district-facilitated applicant and candidate information and support sessions during the summer and as the school year had begun, but they still wanted to meet and work as a separate small group. After our meeting in June, I had followed up with those who had indicated the intent to apply, and I had conducted a survey (Appendix D) to gain information about participants’ preferences for support. We had agreed to meet on a local college campus the second week of September. This was in a relatively central location with convenient parking where a comfortable work space had been made available to us at no charge.

*Why National Board? Why now?*

At 4:00 sharp, recalling the punctuality of the group that had met in June, I jumped right in. There were eleven of us in the room: ten tired teachers and me.

“Why do you want to go after National Board Certification?” There was a little bolt of electricity that went through the room. People looked at me, shuffled a few papers, and cleared their throats. One woman dropped her large, and apparently heavy, purse on the floor with a thump. Another, with a familiar face, leaned back, frowned and crossed her arms firmly across her chest. She narrowed her eyes and then, with a glimmer of humor in her voice, said, “If you don’t know that, then we’re in trouble.”

Whew—that was over. We all laughed, and then I turned to her and, with my arms also folded, went on to say that it wasn’t what I knew or thought that was important from here on out—it was what they knew and thought. It was more than that. It was

about what they wanted and what they believed. I began to record the things they said in response, as follows: Bonus; Bonuses; Respect; Chance to learn more; Be a better teacher; Way to connect with teachers in other places; Be a good example; Renew state certificate; State pays the fees; Alternative to graduate school (Field Notes 6-3-2002 ).

At this point, only two or three minutes after 4:00, two more teachers entered, effusively apologetic about their tardiness. One of them pointed to a woman, already seated, and warned her “Do not say it. I know you thinking it, but do NOT say it.”

“No lunch here, so if you thinkin’ to grab it and run, you got no luck.” They both looked at me, and then light dawned.

“You’re in the right place, and if sandwiches are what it takes to get you to stick around, I’ll get ‘em while you work this afternoon.” I picked up a small notepad and walked over to one as she seated herself. “What’ll it be?” I asked, mocking a diner waitress’s hand-on-hip posture.

“I’ll take one certificate, hold the grief.” Howls of laughter ensued. The ice was surely broken.

This brief encounter encapsulates a rich quantity of illuminating d/Discourse, apparent in a line-by-line analysis. This deconstruction of the exchange was determined by two raters each breaking the conversation into discrete units of meaning.

Then, we compared our dissections and agreed after one minor change involving Line 10.

In the following section, each unit of meaning is annotated in italics with our shared interpretation of its relationship to the unfolding d/Discourse of the work group.

- 1 ...only two or three minutes after four, two more teachers entered,  
*I had expected 12, and 11 had been present. Now there were 13. Who was the  
extra person? I had acted on the assumption that punctuality was an expectation  
of the group. The late arrival challenged this assumption, but not severely, given  
the fact that it is only two or three minutes.*
- 2 effusively apologetic about their tardiness.  
*The tardiness was something to apologize for. The apology was extended to  
everyone in the room via eye contact.*
- 3 One of them pointed to a woman, already seated, and warned her  
*This is intended for the peer participant, and was reinforced by the gesture and  
the speaker's jokingly stern tone of voice and facial expression.*
- 4 “Do not say it. I know you thinking it, but do NOT say it.” [hand up—palm out}  
*Implies unspoken communication linked to previously developed understandings  
between the speaker and audience. They had a history outside the current  
situation. Is the not-to-be-said message not intended for others to hear? Is the  
speaker signaling pre-acknowledgment of an unspoken rebuke?*
- 5 “No lunch here, so if you thinkin’ to grab it and run, you got no luck.”  
*Yes, a previous communication has taken place. Reference to episode at June  
meeting?*
- 6 They both looked at me,  
*I think the two speakers are including me by looking at me. Am I being invited to  
participate?*
- 7 and then light dawned.

*Oh. It is my turn to talk! It IS about the June latecomers.*

8 “You’re in the right place,

*The tardy attendees had questioned whether they were in the “right” meeting...*

9 and if sandwiches are what it takes to get you to stick around, I’ll get ‘em while  
you work this afternoon.”

*...and had asked to take lunch with them when they left. I signaled that I shared  
their recollection and the tone of their response to it. There was still “no free  
lunch.”*

10 I picked up a small notepad and walked over to one as she seated herself.

*However, we can” do” something else with this...*

11 “What’ll it be?” I asked, mocking a diner waitress’s hand-on-hip posture.

*I am comfortable with a servant role in this community, and am willing to take a  
risk in order to try to diffuse others’ discomfort with that through humor. I’ll  
play...*

12 “I’ll take one certificate,

*She’s telling me that she’s here for a purpose...*

13 hold the grief.”

*...but wants to minimize the aggravation, maybe? Let’s get on with it?*

14 Howls of laughter ensued.

*We’re on the same page. We can laugh with and at each other. A group reaction.*

15 The ice was surely broken.

*Relief at having read the signals right, I think. A private response.*

This exchange, even though it is a departure from the previously initiated discussion of reasons these teachers were moving ahead with their inquiries into the application process, merits attention for three reasons. First, it illuminates the process by which conversational discourse data was analyzed throughout the course of the study. Second, it provides an example of how language exchanges were mined for their connections with the broader Discourses in which they occurred. Third, it provides insight into the evidence that trust and rapport began to develop early in the study between the observer, the participants and the co-rater. This has implications for the mentoring explored later in this chapter.

Now that everyone was present, we took a minute to re-introduce ourselves. Present (besides me) were Monica, Felicia, Mae, JoAnn, Annie, Dotty, Selena, Dee, Marilyn, Roselle, Mandy, and Shonda.

Selena asked if we could continue the topic of why they were seeking the certificate. She had not been at the meeting in June, but had been invited by her friend Mandy to come with her today. She had not come in June because she did not know who else might be there from “downtown”—the district office. She was only here today because Mandy had told her it was okay to come. She did not want her principal or her fellow teachers to know she was at a National Board meeting. Squaring her shoulders, she said, “I know this is prideful, but I want to do this at least partly because so many people think I can’t do it.”

*An act of resistance.*

This created a bit of a stir. The other women nodded their heads in agreeable understanding. They felt there was a general consensus among their principals and their

fellow teachers, both White and Black, that they—these teachers—should not be seeking National Board certification. The White teachers and administrators emanated an attitude that these Black teachers were not qualified to seek that credential, and the Black teachers had told them that there were two big risks. One, that they would “fail and prove everyone right,” (Leftwich field notes, 9-13-02) making it harder than ever for “us [Black teachers] to get respect from other [white] teachers” (Leftwich, 9-13-02). Two, (and this surprised me), they would be “taking time away from teaching that I should be spending on boys and girls instead of on portfolio work” (Leftwich, 9-13-02) This became an element to consider in attempting to define “Teaching” from these teachers’ points of view.

Looking at this exchange analytically, rather than narratively, it becomes apparent that the decision to seek National Board, for these teachers at least, marked an act of resistance. In fact, for many of them it engages a battle on two fronts. First, they had pressed forward in spite of their perception of a pervasive attitude among their white peers that they were unequal to the task. Additionally, they faced opposition from the community as they were admonished not to steal time from their work as teachers to pursue NB certification, a goal perceived to be dubious among their Black peers and neighbors. Finally, for members such as Selena, there was an internal battle against the perceived threat of pridefulness. The NB certification is arduous in the most facilitative of circumstances. I had not expected to meet resistance fighters on this journey, but I had increasing admiration for these women who were willing to engage the quest in the face of opposition on multiple fronts.

*The power of the principal.*

The relationship between race and administrative support for teachers' candidacy is not a straight line. Although the situation for Dotty, mentioned earlier in the chapter, involved her estranged relationship with a White administrative structure, I encountered another that was more surprising to me. As I first conceived the study, I approached a Black principal at a school with a relatively high representation of Black teachers on the faculty. This school had been lauded for its results in elevating the academic performance of students who scored in lower quartiles on the state achievement test. She and I had talked about how this might be seen to imply that there was a wealth of teaching efficacy among her teachers and that they might benefit from the affordances of the Excellent Teaching Program. Together we planned a set of information sessions for her teachers. The first of these was held in the late spring before the first meeting of Black teachers in June. In fact, two of the June participants were teachers from that school who had been unable to attend the day of the school site meeting.

The second of our meetings at her school was scheduled for a preservice planning day in early August. Sadly, one of my longtime professional colleagues, a teacher in the school district, died unexpectedly and tragically, and her funeral was scheduled for the same time. Naturally, I asked for our meeting to be rescheduled for a time slot in one of the other four planning days. Rather than responding with compassion, the principal chose to interpret this as evidence that the district office considered this meeting as a second-tier priority, and she said so. She did agree to announce the meeting for the following day, however. When I arrived, she had her assistant accompany me to the

assigned room. On the way, I heard an announcement: “Mrs. Leftwich is here from the district office if anyone wants to talk with her about National Boards.”

Fifteen people had attended the meeting in May, and fourteen gathered this time; eleven from the May group, the two who had attended in June, and one additional teacher. Of these, nine were Black. I apologized for the change in schedule, but the group warmly and kindly told me that they understood, and that if one of their ranks had passed away, they would have attended the funeral with “scarce thought” of a certification meeting. One of them later mentioned to me that I should not take her principal’s tone personally: “She always tries to protect us from the district office. That’s just her way. I know she probably gave you a hard time about not coming yesterday, but just let it go. We’re glad you’re here.” At the conclusion of the meeting, I arranged for a NBCT and me to come back with application packets the following week when they were due to arrive from NBPTS.

That meeting took a surprising turn. I had invited a Black candidate who had not achieved certification on the first attempt, but who had banked a significant number of points and had resubmitted two entries during the previous cycle. She could relate the experience directly to the interested teachers, and could give them practical help in completing their applications. Her interchange with the teachers during our informal session was encouraging and frank. The principal joined us a few minutes after we had begun, sitting at the side of the front of the room, listening carefully.

When the questions subsided, we distributed application packets to the teachers who intended to apply—seven who wished to begin the paperwork then, and two who wanted to take packets with them and think about it. Two others indicated they wished to

engage in some preparatory work related to word processing before trying in a future year. Two teachers had confided to me at the end of the previous week's meeting that they did not believe they were ready to engage the National Board process yet, and one had indicated that he did not want to take on this level of work with retirement eligibility "just around the corner" for him.

As the on-the-spot applicants began opening their packets, the principal stepped up and said, "I need a minute of your time before you start this, please." She went on to say that she had been listening to what the guest teacher had said about the amount of work involved in certification. She reiterated that writing had been a problem for the candidate, and that she had needed to work with a mentor to overcome this obstacle. Even now, she did not know whether or not she had made it. This principal pointed out that she might have even more work ahead of her. "Are you ready to face that kind of load?" Then she urged the teachers to not be lured by the promise of "high-flying credentials" and "big money bonuses" to enter into "something they might not be ready for." She reminded them of their mission to "teach these little boys and girls that nobody believes in but us." She asked them to please take the packets home "and pray about them" before committing themselves or "the rest of us" to "something that might or might not pay off." Then she delivered the *coup de grace*: "Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ [speaking in third person about herself] don't want to see you set yourself up to disappoint yourself or anyone else." The meeting was over.

When I talked with her about this later, after she had herself received an award for leadership, she told me, "I have really good teachers here, but they need help if they have to convince someone else they are good. They can't write like they need to without help.

They don't have that help and I don't know how to get it for them. Even if I did, we don't have time. They have jobs to do. I should never have asked you to come out here with this."

Not one of these teachers applied.

### *t/Teaching*

Gee (1999) distinguished between discourse, meaning "language-in-use" (p.17) and "Discourse"—with a capital D—referring to what he calls "language plus 'other stuff'" (p.17) related to communication about any topic. An illustration of discourse, in this context, could be a group of teachers chatting about curriculum over lunch. In this instance, Discourse—the contributing contexts that impact nuances of intended meaning and resulting interpretations—might perhaps comprise the level of school where the teachers work, the community in which it is located, the conditions of their contract, and an almost infinite range of other possible factors influencing—and influenced by—the conversation.

Using this frame, I attempted to define the work of these educators along similar lines. I refer to their day-to-day "in use" practice as "teaching." The broader context and implications for their work—"all the other stuff"—is "Teaching." To illustrate, consider a person helping a group of second-graders learn to alphabetize lists of words. The actions, attitudes, and words employed during the lesson comprise the teaching. The pedagogy that guided the selection of materials and the approach—the philosophy that determined when, how and why to teach this skill—the contextual interactions that shape and are shaped by the developing understanding between and within student and instructor—all compose the broader realm of Teaching.

### *According to the Teachers*

It was important to draw these distinctions from the point of view of these teachers in order to be able to compare them to the view of teaching espoused by, disseminated by, and rewarded by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the National Board Certification process. The data analyzed to distill the teachers' views of their craft was gathered from the teachers themselves. It came from 28 teachers' survey responses; field notes from nine support group meetings, 19 small group sessions; several dozen one-on-one interactions; nearly 60 email exchange strands; and 7 audio-recorded entry development and/or portfolio feedback conversations. The opportunity to examine teaching practice, for example, was rated by teachers as an important factor as they considered the decision to seek certification. Field notes from work sessions frequently documented conversations focused on the dissection and evaluation of work in the classroom. Email messages focused less on instructional practice than on evidence decisions and entry construction, but taped conversations and feedback conferences tended to refocus on classroom practice. This is likely due to the nature of mentoring decisions to direct candidates' attention whenever possible to the questions in portfolio instructions, which center around instructional decisions, practices, and results. The central role of the portfolio expectations—the direction in which developing entries were aimed—was vital to consider when working to focus both mentoring efforts and candidate attention (Kinneavy, 1971; Searle, 1997; Walker, Joshi & Prince, 1998).

Several distinct themes—discernible strands—began to emerge from the very first meeting. During the June meeting, teachers had identified tangible and intangible

barriers to their participation. They had also completed a survey enumerating a collection of attitudes about and motivations for their interest in pursuing the certification process. The first fall meeting had included a conversation focused on participants' reasons for entering or considering candidacy. They had enumerated several reasons for considering candidacy, as noted earlier in this section.

I worked to find patterns within these first data streams. Compensation, Community, and Collegiality emerged as themes when the data were analyzed by two raters and subsequently confirmed with participants, as outlined in Table 6. I set these categories aside to wait and see what additional evidence emerged from future interactions.

At our second meeting, in October, the participants had made firm decisions about candidacy, since the deadline for applications had been late September. They had portfolio instructions and standards for their certification areas. In working with previous groups of candidates, I had observed that their attention became much more focused when they began working to learn the standards associated with their chosen certification areas. The goal of our work in the October session was to reinforce knowledge of the content of the National Board Standards relevant to the certification areas they were applying for or considering.

We undertook a deliberate process for studying the standards, delving into them one layer at a time. This strategy, which I learned while attending a National Board Facilitators Institute in 2000, begins with an activity in which candidates list characteristics of their own most memorable teachers. The lists are compared and combined to create one group list of characteristics the candidates already associate with

effective teaching. Finally, candidates work together to categorize and label those characteristics. This activity, taken as a whole with the resulting table talk, generated an expanded and revised set of strand labels: Community, Compassion, Character, Classroom and Curriculum. The alliteration of Cs was an initially unintended coincidence. As the participants worked to categorize the expanded list of elements in October, they started with the earlier agreed-upon labels. When additional labels were needed, Marilyn suggested continuing the use of C-words for the sake of alliteration. When the final list was decided, she remarked, “Look what we did—the Five Cs of Teaching. We ought to spread this around.” Compensation was gone from the list—it was not among the categories generated, since we were now discussing the broader scope of Teaching rather than just their reasons for seeking certification. I chose to use these labels, validated by the fact that they had been generated by the teachers themselves, to categorize data from ensuing conversations and observations. The co-rater and candidates agreed with this decision.

As the months passed, as meetings occurred, and as teachers generated portfolio entries, additional data were amassed. Field notes from meetings, conversation transcripts, emails, and teachers’ documents were sorted, sieved, and coded according to the “5C” categories. I charted the trends in these tallied occurrences. The first posting in September was for Compensation, Community and Collegiality. Compassion, Character, Classroom, and Curriculum were first mentioned during the October meeting described above. The only overlap between the first two meetings was Community. By December, the occurrences for Classroom and Curriculum had overtaken Community. Character and Compassion, while mentioned frequently, were lower priority than the other categories as

measured by number of iterations. By March, when the first portfolios were due, however, the graphs were nearly even, with character and compassion lagging almost imperceptibly behind the other three categories. (Table 7).

Table 6. Categories of Reasons for Seeking Certification/Effective Teacher Qualities

Reason for seeking NB (Sept)	Teacher Qualities (Oct)	Researcher (Sept)	Co-Rater (Sept)	Participants (Sept)	Participants/ (Oct)
Bonus (cert)		\$\$	Financial/self	Compensation	Not rated
Bonus (mentor)		\$\$	Financial/self	Compensation	Not rated
Respect		Community/ Profession	others	Community	Community
Connections		Community/ Profession	others	Collegial	Community
Better teacher		Profession	students	Classroom	Classroom
Good example		Community/ Profession	Students/others	Community/ Classroom	Character
Renew cert		Profession	self	Classroom	Classroom
Alt to grad school		Profession	Self/students	Community/ Classroom	Classroom
State pays fee		\$\$	Financial	Compensation	Not rated
Learn new skills		Community/ Profession	students	Classroom	Classroom
Trade ideas		Community/ Profession	others	Collegial	Community
Prove myself		Community?/ Personal	Self/others	Challenge/ Community	Community
Something new		Personal?	self	Challenge	Classroom
	Smart				Curriculum
	Kind				Compassion
	“Tuned in”				Community
	Organized				Curriculum
	Hardworking				Character
	Dedicated				Character
	Loving				Compassion
	Caring				Compassion
	Involved				Community
	Helpful				Character
	Firm				Character
	Role Model				Character
	Grounded				Curriculum
	Available				Classroom
	Selfless				Character
	Good lessons				Curriculum
	Interesting				Curriculum

*According to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*

One goal of this study was to explore whether or not there is a fundamental disconnect between the d/Discourses of t/Teaching as they were defined, practiced and valued by the study participants and the National Board. Having identified these essential components of Teaching with the agreement of the participants, I sought to do the same from another vantage point—that of the NBPTS.

Table 7. Candidates' Ranking of Essential Elements of Teaching

	Collegiality	Community	Compensation	Character	Classroom	Compassion	Curriculum
September	3	2	1				
October		2		1	3	5	4
November		1		2	3	5	4
December		1		4	2	5	3
January		4		3	1	5	2
February		3		4	1	5	2
March		2		4	1	5	3

This was more straightforward than had been the “up close and personal” work with teachers. The NBPTS website ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)) lists on its first page a link to its original founding manifesto, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*. This document is true to its title. In a nutshell, it reports that proficient teachers harbor individual blends of “human qualities, expert knowledge and skill, and professional commitment” that “together compose excellence in this craft” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1999, p.4). Since two aspects of the mission of NBPTS are to identify high standards for accomplished practice and to award certification to

teachers who exhibit accomplished practice, the NBPTS criteria for such practice will be detailed in the next section describing perceptions of what constitutes “accomplishment.”

*a/Accomplishment*

*According to the Teachers*

Our group effort to examine accomplishment, sometimes a touchy subject, continued over several meetings. I asked the teachers, at that first fall meeting when we’d discussed their reasons for attempting to run the NB gauntlet, what they believed constituted excellent teaching. JoAnn, moving her arm in a broad sweep to indicate all of the charted characteristics of their own memorable teachers, said simply, “All of this here.” One woman, Dotty, the arm folder, snorted and asked me what I meant by ‘excellent teaching’: “The kind that is really good or the kind that gets you famous?” I half-shrugged and waited for her to go on. She reiterated that she had been put on notice by her Black peer group that they’d be watching to see if she “stole” time from her kids to do NB work. In her community—her immediate neighborhood and her church—it was considered unseemly for girls or young women to seek attention for their hard work. “Beauty might be worth a few strokes, but hard work was what most folks did to get ahead, and by Jove, [she’d] better plan ahead and get to it and stop fooling around—and don’t be messing with that National-whatever-it-is!” (Leftwich, 9-13-02).

This was an enlightening conversation. We continued:

Me:                So how does this affect your thinking about whether or not to go after this certification?

Dotty:            It worries me a lot. It makes me question my reasons.

Shonda:          We all have different reasons, I think.

Marilyn: We do, but I hear what Dotty is sayin'. I say something about it at the [sorority] meeting the other night and WHAM—people was all over me about it.

Me: What do you mean?

Annie: Yeah, that's right. My sister teaches, and she 'bout went sky-high when I told her I was doing this.

Me: Why?

Shonda: Because of the reasons. The reasons bother me, and I guess I'm pretty much like everyone else, so they probably thinking the same kinda things.

Me: Like what?

Shonda: Well, it's a little prideful. I would like to be one of the first black folks to get this here [in this district].

Monique: MmmHmm—me, too. And some of you want that, too. And that's a whole lot prideful, not just a little. Pride goes before a fall, you know.

Annie: But that's not really it. Pride is about looking good. I am good, and this is a way I can prove it, not just to her [gestures toward me] and the rest of the county, but to myself.

Felicia: Yeah, that's it for me. I been at this for a while, and I do a good job year in and year out. I don't want to be a principal. I don't want to move up that way. But I want to move somehow. This seems like a way.

Me: Okay, I hear these reasons from lots of people. Lots of teachers want to grow, and prove to themselves that they are good at what they do. Why are other people giving you a hard time about it?

Dotty: Wanna hear my version? You asked us to come to that first meeting because Black teachers weren't involved in this, and that worried you. That's cool, and I appreciate what you meant, but in my circle, this kind of stuff don't count for much. This is not what teachers do.

Felicia: She's right. Especially for us older teachers—the younger girls feel different I think—we were given the chance to go to college and learn to be teachers so we could go back to the schools and just teach, not think about promotions and stuff. Sometimes we were sent out like missionaries almost. Good teachers—the kind we was supposed to be—go to school every day, go to church every Sunday, and set an example every waking minute. Nothing about this kind of prize. Ever hear of a Missionary of the Year or a National Board Certified Missionary?

Several important elements of Discourse emerged from this exchange. First, the teachers were experiencing active resistance among their close support groups: sisters, friends, churches and so forth. For anyone who is undertaking significant additional work, this can be a major hindrance—another big obstacle to be overcome on the way to a goal. Second, there was the sense of being in conflict with a paradigm. The group had mentioned missionary work as a model for how they perceived their work. They had

been selected and sent forth for training with the expectation that they would provide faithful service in the field. Seeking recognition for exemplary work was perceived as incompatible with this schema. And this leads to another important finding from this discussion: The candidates viewed National Board Certification as a ‘prize.’ This single insight would guide me perhaps more than any other in considering how to approach mentoring this group.

*Skimming and miming.*

This concern among the teachers for the perceived need to “steal time” for NB work is not without basis when I consider the work I have observed among candidates over the past few years.

Good teachers, according to these candidates, plan their lessons, procure and distribute supplies, manage behavior, act as role models, and keep orderly classrooms. Great teachers are too busy doing that to go after any recognition beyond the kind that occurs naturally: the grateful family’s esteem and good recommendation, the respectful student’s efforts to remain in touch long after graduation, acknowledgment in church, a community member’s call for assistance with a public effort, the satisfaction of watching children complete one step after the other on the educational path. Some wanted principal jobs, but many—most—were spending long careers in classrooms where they believed their work—their calling—to be. Reward and advancement associated with NBCT status were relatively inconsequential to these teachers. The only time I heard what I recognized as passion about that particular topic was one night when we were working on application packets. The following summary is the product of a process

detailed in the analyzing the conversation about the white visitors to the first group meeting.

A young teacher finished packing up her papers, saying, “Lord, I would like for one of us to be the first Black NBCT in this district.” Shonda had said something similar that day we had talked about what constituted great teaching, but now Monique had uttered this thought with some palpable longing. JoAnn, my whispering supporter, told her sweetly that she’d do well to keep that thought to herself. Dee piped up with, “There’s thirteen of us here, just like at the Last Supper. No Judas, maybe, but best we depend on ourselves and keep it among us for now.”

I said, “We all have things at stake here. I’m writing a dissertation that will be the most important part of my final degree. This project is important to me. It is my National Board, in a way. I’d like for some of you to be among the first, too. I think it is okay for us to talk about that here. In fact, let’s write it down.” I wrote “*We want to be the first Black NBCTs in Polk County!*” on a big piece of chart paper in red, with blue and green and purple stars. Dotty grabbed the paper and danced around with it, moving toward Monique. Then she said, “I have a better idea. Monique, c’mere.” They took the chart tablet and some markers and moved to a corner of the room. After a few minutes, they came back, each holding a sign that said “The Pathfinders,” in the same colorful style. “This stays between us, right?” Dotty looked at me. I nodded. “Girls, we got our own Secret Club.” I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry...so I did both. So did they.

Whether a private or a public effort, the pressure to document accomplished teaching for the National Board process can be intense. Candidates need and want to provide the highest quality evidence of their teaching skill in order to leverage their

chances for success in the process and achieve certification. This need to put the best foot forward was a frequent topic of conversation when discussing the videotape-oriented portfolio entries. Candidates feel intense pressure to showcase exemplary instructional performances on videotape. I had often witnessed exchanges similar to this one recorded at a meeting in February. Because of the sensitive nature of the content, I have elected not to identify the conversants specifically.

Candidate 1: “I want you to watch both versions of this lesson and see which one you think looks best.”

Candidate 2: “Okay—what do you want me to watch for?”

C1: “Well, in the first one, the kids were really watching the camera, and one boy kept coughing. I had to let him go get a drink of water, and he knocked his backpack off the back of his chair when he stood up.”

C2: “That is real life, though. Did it mess up the whole lesson?”

C1: “Well, I kept right on teaching if that’s what you mean.”

C2: “How did the kids do? Did they get it?”

C1: “Mostly, but there were a couple who were goofing off a little, and I had to spend more time with that group, and I didn’t get to help every single student before the time was up for the tape.”

C2: “If you were teaching the whole time, though, maybe it wasn’t a problem.”

C1: “Yeah, but the second time I did it, things went better.”

C2: (giggles) “Practice makes perfect. So why do we need to look at the first try at all?”

C1: “The kids are paying attention better the second time. They knew what to expect, since we had kinda rehearsed it—almost like the Christmas pageant, I told ‘em. But one girl who had some great answers the first time hardly said anything the second time around. And I thought I picked a better-looking dress the second time. I near died when I saw myself in stripes on that first tape. Girl, whoever said stripes do you a favor was wrong, wrong, wrong. Anyway, I need to pick one of these, ‘cause I don’t think these kids will sit through this lesson again, if they are on tape or not.”

The first candidate clearly had repeated a lesson twice for the same group of children, for the sole purpose of capturing the best example of her teaching on tape. A secondary, but mentioned, priority was her own recorded appearance. The following exchange is an example of another type of “repeat/rehearsed” lesson.

Candidate 3: “I hope some of this sticks until we actually get to autobiography.”

Candidate 4: “What do you mean? They are right with you in this discussion.”

C3: “I know—they did great, but I just hit the high points for this entry. We aren’t planning to cover autobiography until after [state testing], but this lesson works great every year, so I wanted to get it on tape. I’ll probably have to do the whole thing again when we really get to it.”

C4: “How far did you take it? Didn’t you have them write after this?”

C3: “Not really. They just did the brainstorming. I had them put it in their writing folders until later. I’ll remind them when we start it then.”

C4: “But what did you do for the student work part?”

C3: “I just worked with my enrichment group for a day or two. They could go ahead and give me enough to work with for now. It worked out. They can flesh them out later. I know it’s not the best, but I wanted to do something I could count on. I didn’t want to try something new and take a chance it would flop.”

Candidates 1 and 3 used tactics I have come to call “skimming and miming.”

They skimmed the cream from prior practices, choosing and re-creating successful lessons from past practice, whether from recent classes recent or from prior years.

Candidate 1 chose to skim a recent instructional instance and repeat it to enhance the videotaped product, even noting that she had encouraged the students to consider the first lesson a “rehearsal” for the performance that was filmed during the second staging.

Candidate 3 skimmed a successful, reliable lesson from past experience and “mimed” a performance of “just enough” of the sequence to capture a videotape of what she considered an exemplary sample of her teaching practice. She worried that it would be wasted and would have to be repeated when the planned time came for coverage of the curriculum content touched upon during the videotaping and follow-up analysis of student work, but had settled for the compromise in order to produce the quality of entry she felt was required to succeed in the NBCT process.

These “skimming and miming” practices lend credence to the kinds of worry harbored by the Dotty when she said she’d been cautioned by peers not to “steal time” from her students and by the Black principal who told her teachers that they didn’t have time in their work days to pursue National Board certificates and do the job they were expected to do. In a recent qualitative study undertaken by the Florida Education Standards Commission (2004), several district administrators, while noting the high level

of expertise and accomplishment of National Board Certified Teachers, also commented that the year of application was a “wasted year” of teaching filled with “time-consuming activities” for some candidates who “focused on portfolio preparation rather than on quality teaching.”

*According to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*

NBPTS defines accomplished teaching quite specifically, and with astonishing consistency, using the five Core Propositions, as shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. NBPTS Core Propositions

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.</li><li>2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.</li><li>3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.</li><li>4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.</li><li>5. Teachers are members of learning communities.</li></ol> |
|---|

NBPTS further elaborates on accomplished practice in details of the standards for each certificate area. The Core Propositions are central to every set of standards, since the various certification area standards derive from the Core Propositions and are linked back to them in the language of portfolio development task instructions. Entry 4 of the Early Childhood Generalist portfolio is titled *Engaging Young Children in Science Learning* and focuses on Standards 1, 3,4,5,6, and 9 for that certificate area. Figure 2 lists the Standards for the Early Childhood Generalist Certificate (NBPTS, 2004). Table 8 (p.129) shows the relationships between the Core Propositions, Standards and Tasks (NBPTS, 1999a) for this portfolio entry.

Next, small groups engaged in a close examination of the Core Propositions of NBPTS. Each of these five propositions comprises a belief statement; the values of which

are embedded in every certificate's standards. These propositions provide a powerful tool for categorizing effective teacher attitudes and behaviors.

Small groups created charts and reported the key elements of the Core Propositions, focusing on key words and phrases. Teachers were encouraged to highlight these terms, using a different designated color for each of the five propositions. Words from the previously charted characteristics were compared to see if and where there were similarities and differences. This formed the basis for the rhizomatic analysis discussed later in this paper. More importantly, it provided the foundation for conversations during which the standards and processes of National Board were interpreted, re-interpreted, and applied to the work of portfolio preparation.

Building on this activity, during which the candidates related characteristics of their own memorable teachers to the Core Propositions, candidates then linked core propositions with standards and standards with tasks. It is important to note these activities as an illuminator of the clear path that does exist between the core propositions, standards and tasks. This is vital to my position that these elements form a clearly definable central discourse of NBPTS.

The published mission of National Board includes a call to integrate National Board Certification in the process of school reform, and to use the expertise of NBCTs to help guide that process. This being the case, and considering the taut linkages illustrated above, I feel justified in using these Core Propositions, the Standards, and language from the portfolio task instructions as the basis for defining the Discourse of Teaching Accomplishment from the National Board perspective.

Figure 2. NBPTS Standards for Early Childhood Generalist Certificate

- I. Understanding Young Children: Accomplished early childhood teachers use their knowledge of child development and their relationships with children and families to understand children as individuals and to plan in response to their unique needs and potentials.
- II. Equity, Fairness, and Diversity: Accomplished early childhood teachers model and teach behaviors appropriate in a diverse society by creating a safe, secure learning environment for all children; by showing appreciation of and respect for the individual differences and unique needs of each member of the learning community; and by empowering children to treat others with, and to expect from others, equity, fairness, and dignity.
- III. Assessment: Accomplished early childhood teachers recognize the strengths and weaknesses of multiple assessment methodologies and know how to use them effectively. Employing a variety of methods, they systematically observe, monitor, and document children's activities and behavior, analyzing, communicating, and using the information they glean to improve their work with children, parents, and others.
- IV. Promoting Child Development and Learning: Accomplished early childhood teachers promote children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and linguistic development by organizing and orchestrating the environment in ways that best facilitate the development and learning of young children.
- V. Knowledge of Integrated Curriculum: On the basis of their knowledge of how young children learn, of academic subjects, and of assessment, accomplished early childhood teachers design and implement developmentally appropriate learning experiences that integrate within and across the disciplines.
- VI. Multiple Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning: Accomplished early childhood teachers use a variety of practices and resources to promote individual development, meaningful learning, and social cooperation.
- VII. Family and Community Partnerships: Accomplished early childhood teachers work with and through families and communities to support children's learning and development.
- VIII. Professional Partnerships: Accomplished early childhood teachers work as leaders and collaborators in the professional community to improve programs and practices for young children and their families.
- IX. Reflective Practice: Accomplished early childhood teachers regularly analyze, evaluate, and synthesize to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their work.

### *Reconciling the d/Discourses*

This section has provided an exposition of some of the various d/Discourses central to the process for those seeking National Board Certification. This is by no means an exhaustive listing of the many other dynamic d/Discourses in which the candidates were concurrent—and sometimes simultaneous—participants. Having identified examples of how the d/Discourses connected with one another in some respects and were disconnected in others, questions arise as to how—and if—the disconnects can be bridged by certification candidates to facilitate their success in the process.

Table 8. Relationships Between Core Propositions, Standards and Tasks

Task	Standard(s)	Core Proposition(s)
<b>Videotaped Lesson</b> (Written Commentary)		
♦ <b>Instructional Context</b>		
<i>What were goals for sequence?</i>	1, 4, 5, 9	1, 2, 3
<i>Why were goals selected?</i>	1, 3, 4, 5, 9	1, 2, 3, 4
<i>What experiences comprised the sequence?</i>	1, 4, 5, 6	2, 3, 4
<i>How do experiences illustrate your approach to helping children acquire scientific ways of thinking, observing the world, and communicating?</i>	1, 4, 5, 6	1, 2, 3, 4
♦ <b>Videotape Analysis</b>		
Context		
<i>What was context for videotape?</i>	1, 4, 5, 9	1, 2, 4, 5
<i>What linked events preceded and/or followed those shown on tape?</i>	3, 4, 5, 6	1, 2, 3, 4
<i>What were goals for taped experiences?</i>	1, 4, 5, 9	1, 2, 3
Learning Community		
<i>How did you stimulate children's thinking and learning during taped experiences?</i>	1, 4, 6, 9	1, 2, 3
<i>Are you satisfied with how you interacted and responded to unfolding taped situation?</i>	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Reflecting on Videotape		
<i>How would you conduct the experience differently if you did this again?</i>	1, 3, 9	1, 3, 4
<i>How did resulting learning influence subsequent lessons?</i>	1, 3, 4, 5, 9	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Evaluating the learning		
<i>To what extent were learning goals met?</i>	1, 3, 9	1, 2, 3, 4
<i>What questions did the taped lesson/learning sequence raise about your teaching or students?</i>	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

The very language in use makes clear the need to reconcile the disconnected discourses. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has established standards which must be met by those seeking a certificate from that organization. The candidates in this study have identified from within their experiences a set of core beliefs that connects only partially to those of the certifying body. Thus, it seems clear that the candidates' core principles—their professional d/Discourse—will need to move toward those of NBPTS if the candidates are to be successful in their quest.

At the outset of this project, as an observer, I recognized that I was in some respects a translator, clarifying the intents and mechanisms of the certification process to

the participant group. This was not an unfamiliar role, since it was one I had often undertaken in working with certification candidates and process inquirers in the past as part of my district work assignment. It was also a role fulfilled by formal and informal mentors who worked with certification candidates each year. Now I began to see mentorship in a new light, one which revealed to me more clearly the mentoring roles of translator and interpreter that I had previously only dimly perceived.

### *Mentoring*

National Board Certification candidacy is an arduous process. It begins with a lengthy traditional application form that details an array of personal and professional information. Next comes a series of forms to verify employment, education, and experience. But the real application—the real work of candidacy—is the preparation of the entries to document that classroom teaching practice meets the standards for the area of certification sought. It was during this phase of candidacy—when writing was the primary task—that the focal d/Discourses converged, providing opportunities for comparisons. It was then when the impact of mentoring could be put to the test. This is when the core of the study took place and the period from which the richest data were gleaned.

### *Wrestling with Writing*

In the fall days just before and after the first support group meeting, I had visited with each of the dozen teachers who attended. This visit took the form of a structured interview, the protocol for which is available in Appendix G. This set of interviews and the conversation during the first meeting revealed clearly that writing was the chief concern of the candidates and potential applicants.

As seen in Table 9, which lists primary concerns noted during interviews, writing was not the only major worry. In a previous section, teachers' perceptions of barriers were listed and discussed. Table 9 notes concerns recorded after the teachers had actually entered the certification process and had begun preparatory work. Candidates were uneasy about the time demands of the certification process and their abilities to balance those pressures against existing work and family duties. They fretted to varying degrees about how they would be perceived by other educators if their candidacy became known. More than half of them felt nervous about the required videotaping of instruction. Those who taught in grade levels where FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test) is administered were anxious about the overlap of the portfolio due dates and the state testing window.

Table 9. Candidates' Concerns About the NB Process

<b>Concern</b>	<b>Times Mentioned</b>
Writing	24
Time	22
Other teachers, Principal	8
Videotaping	16
Computer skills	4
FCAT, Program	6

In our first and second planning meetings, we spent considerable time discussing strategies to manage and overcome these anticipated stresses. We developed group and individual timelines to help guide completion of each candidate's four entries. The general timeline for support activities can be seen in Appendix E. A timeline created by an individual candidate is seen in Figure 3. Although this particular candidate's timeline extends through June, it is important to note that formal data collection for this study

ended when portfolio entries were shipped in April, signaling the end of that year’s portfolio preparation cycle.

Figure 3. Individual Candidate Timeline (*transcribed from handwritten copy*)

Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June
Apply	Read stds.	Finish Doc. Acc.	Plan class entries	Video #1	Video #2	LAST entry	Panic	Study for AC	AC
Download from site	Plan Doc. Acc.		Video camera?			Edit	Pack UPS		wait

At the outset, I asked the participants what kind of help they needed and expected from me. Comments such as these were the response:

“I know I am going to need help with writing. Everything I hear about this comes back to writing.”

“I agree, but first I just need help going through all of the stuff I’m getting off the website and in the mail.”

“All those forms. I think I have those mostly done...except for the ones about the video and all. But now I got to figure out those standards and all that. I don’t even know where to start.”

“MmmHmmm. And the rest of that stack of instructions, too. I started readin’ about those assignments—the entries? Lord, I come near packing it all right backup and mailing it back—or putting it in the garbage. (laughs) Course by now, they got my money.....”

“And the state’s money, too.....”

“So, I guess what I need—what lots of us need—is help figuring out how to get started.”

We went through a “box”—the red and blue box of process-related materials sent to candidates after the application has been forwarded by the state to NBPTS. We explored the various packets of standards booklets, portfolio instruction, individualized bar codes for identifying submitted entries, and so forth. Participants began to rummage through the materials they had brought with them to the meeting. Some had not opened the box yet. Others had opened the box, but had not yet removed the plastic from around the various packets of papers and booklets inside. They began to sort materials and arrange them in various piles, each person in her own fashion. It reminded me of how people often rearrange the silverware and tableware when they sit down in a restaurant. It was almost as if these teachers were staking a claim on their individual materials—taking ownership of their involvement as they did so. The conversation in the room became more animated and the volume rose. The mood lightened. Then I got to have some fun.

The school district, continuing a practice started while I served as the NBPTS contact, had purchased for each candidate an assortment of materials to assist with portfolio preparation. Items such as file folders, binders, index dividers, sticky notes, highlighters, and so forth were packed in shopping bags—one for each teacher. On behalf of the district, I passed these out to the recipients who were quite delighted to receive them. I assured them that this was a gift from the district (one woman thought I was the giver), and that other candidate support groups meeting in other areas of the district were receiving identical “goodie bags.” Dotty, who had rebuked the late arrivals at the first June meeting, held up her bag and nodding her head sagely, said seriously

“Well, we really are in the club now, I say.” “Nah,” chimed in Marilyn, “we’re just waitin’ to be initiated.”

A candidate asked, “Where would you start?” I reminded the group that I was not a NBCT, but that I had worked with quite a few candidates, and had an idea for them to consider as a group. The candidates agreed to complete the entry related to professional outreach and the development of classroom community first, since documentation could be gathered from the past few years to support this accomplishment. Other portfolio entries relied on current activity, so it made sense to all of us to get the “old business” off the table first, and then concentrate on the current classroom practice related entries. We expected that while work was underway on the outreach and community entry, candidates would work to become thoroughly familiar with their respective standards and assigned portfolio tasks. Long-term instructional planning for the participants’ classrooms would begin with the portfolio requirements in mind to facilitate the completion of tasks as they became due.

This general plan coincided with my previous work to support candidates in the school district. When I discussed it with the candidates, I emphasized that working on the same entry together at first could help us get to know one another while they became more familiar with the portfolio process. The district decision to encourage this approach to group support was derived from input gained from the first group of teachers who had navigated the process. That input was solicited as part of a project I completed while receiving training in the design of professional development. As a result of the training, I organized a group of NBCTs to develop a four-week inservice course to familiarize teachers during pre-candidacy with the expectations of the portfolio preparation process

and give them practice with tasks that mirror those required for completion of the portfolio entries. During that same time period, several members of the inservice planning cadre and I completed a three-day facilitator training session delivered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The model for support which we subsequently developed, and which I adapted for use with this cohort, is the product of those staff development activities.

Our group study began with a concerted effort to comprehend the Core Propositions and their relationship to the standards and tasks of each candidate's certification area. Using a strategy I had learned from National Board Certified Teachers in the NBPTS facilitator training, small groups of candidates were instructed to carefully read the Core Propositions (one per group) and highlight recurring words and phrases, along with other words and phrases the teachers felt carried key meaning. It is important to recall that these five Core Propositions are foundational to every area of National Board Certification. Then, group members compared notes to see if they had marked the same text. Where there were differences, discussion ensued, during which deeper understandings developed. While I was present during that discussion, I quite literally moved to the side to watch and record. The teachers took complete charge of and responsibility for the direction and outcome of this activity.

Figure 4 reflects the results of this exercise for one group. Underlined words were highlighted by one member, while italicized words were highlighted by the other in this two-person group. Bold terms were negotiated as the final decision by the pair as those imparting the most important meaning to Core Proposition #1.

Figure 4. Key Phrases Selected for Proposition #1

Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

Accomplished teachers are dedicated to making knowledge accessible to all students. They act on the belief that *all students can learn*. They treat students equitably, recognizing the individual differences that distinguish one student from another and taking account of these differences in their practice. They adjust their practice based on observation and knowledge of their students' interests, abilities, skills, knowledge, family circumstances and peer relationships.

Accomplished teachers understand how students develop and learn. They incorporate the prevailing theories of cognition and intelligence in their practice. *They are aware of the influence of context and culture on behavior*. They develop students' cognitive capacity and their respect for learning. Equally important, they foster students' self-esteem, motivation, character, civic responsibility and their respect for individual, cultural, religious and racial differences.

The underlined words indicate that this participant chose sparingly, focusing on verbs primarily, but also included “treat students equitably” and most of the final sentence that emphasizes character issues. The italicized words expand most choices to phrase length, still including most of the final character-focused sentence, and also marking the many student characteristics upon which teachers adjust their practice. Neither teacher marked the phrases “accomplished teacher” or “in their practice.” After negotiation, the pair settled on terms which one or both of them had marked initially, with the exception of the introductory phrase “equally important,” which was noted as important only after the conversation between the two teachers.

#### *Considering My Role*

What would I do if there were expressed misunderstandings of the Core Propositions? This is a question I asked myself as I sat listening to and watching the group discussion. Once again, this is a manifestation of the notion of epoché. The goal of phenomenological research is to apprehend and record as accurately as possible the lived experience of the research subjects. In this instance, the experience of the teachers

revolved around their negotiation of the comprehension of the Core Propositions. That collective comprehension grew out of the various backgrounds and understandings that each teacher brought to the process, the situated contexts of each of their teaching practices, and the group's work to confirm their individual and joint knowledge of the Core Propositions. Their comprehension was a unique and shifting entity that would have been altered by my participation in its construction, and I made the conscious decision as a participant observer to step aside from the participant role in this aspect of the group interaction—to avoid the role of arbiter of the ongoing negotiations of meaning among the candidates and between them and their perceptions of the intentions of National Board. Further, the fact that I have not completed the candidacy process myself means that I would almost certainly hold a different stake in the developing understanding, and I told the group exactly that. We shared, at least to some extent, the collective experience of teaching, but the candidate experience belonged strictly to the rest of the group...not to me. This placed me in an advisory role, with their developing experience squarely at the center of the focus and with an acknowledgment that their invested involvement trumped any perspective I might have on the process or their movement through it.

During the first meeting in the summer, I had held an authority role, both as hostess for the lunch and as the central office source of process information. But during the second support group meeting, when this comprehension activity took place, I stepped aside in three ways I believe to be important. First, our meeting on university property reminded all of us that I had a new and much less direct job role related to our shared work. In fact, I had become something of a supplicant, appealing to the group for

permission to observe their candidacy work to inform my dissertation work. Second, we discussed that they were developing immersed expertise in a process I had experienced only from a support perspective. Third, their increasing understandings were proprietary to them and not to me and were inherently critical to the process. In each case, power and authority had devolved from me, where it had originally and briefly resided, to the teachers as individual candidates and as a focused group. Not insignificantly, these structures had concurrently transferred from a White locus to a Black locus.

### *Learning the Language*

Next, each candidate read and similarly highlighted one of the certification area standards identified in the portfolio entry directions. Once again, key phrases and words were identified, but this time they were listed on a separate paper, grouped by those appearing in each standard. This list was compared to the key phrases distilled earlier from the Core Propositions, and solid linkages made between the standard and Core Propositions. The final part of this activity involved the candidates reading the portfolio task for professional outreach and community building, once again highlighting key words and phrases. Then, the standards specifically tied to that entry were linked to that task by color coding matching phrases and words. Thus, the candidates could now track the usage of language by NBPTS from the Core Propositions through the standards to the specific writing tasks they were called upon to perform. This provided a thorough initial immersion in NBPTS-originated discourse. An example of the resulting cross-reference can be seen in Table 8 (p. 129).

To follow up on this meeting, I suggested that each candidate do the same linkage work with the remaining three entries before we met next time. I was explicit in

explaining the reasoning, reminding them that they would have a similarly deeper understanding of the language and expectations of the tasks if they did so. Using the work they had completed in the session, I showed them, by pointing out the links they had established, how they would confirm for themselves the focus of the entries in calling for demonstration of specific standards by completion of each task. Knowing exactly how and where they would be expected to demonstrate each standard could help them focus both their planning and their writing.

### *Tasks and Standards*

Candidates expressed enthusiasm about getting started on the first entries. The next week, several of them brought notebooks, papers, photos and other items to be considered for their potential value in supporting the entries. A few of them had completed the standards/tasks matrix (Appendix L) I had given them as a template the previous week. Others had made margin notes on the standards booklets themselves. There was evidence of intervening engagement with the standards and task directions from every candidate. I happily saw this as an indication of the impact of the initial mentoring efforts.

The candidates discussed among themselves how to prioritize the choices they made for the entry. Several factors impacted their decisions. How long ago had the considered activity occurred? In some cases, the teachers felt that the more recent activity should be showcased, even if the older activity was more significant. In this case, the matrices they had completed served as useful resources to guide decisions. I reminded them that their overriding task was to demonstrate that their practice met the standards and, therefore, they needed to choose accomplishments that could most

efficiently document that to be the case. It was at this point that things heated up considerably.

The teachers began to stridently make cases to one another about how certain activities demonstrated effective teaching. They talked passionately about the value of butterfly gardens, tutoring programs, Family Night events, book drives, and a variety of other extramural applications of their teaching role. They detailed how their plans had impacted individual students, particularly those who had been struggling or at-risk. They spoke of how they had conducted many of these activities quietly and outside normal school activity cycles—apart from the general Open House and Family Night events. Often, the support activities these teachers arranged and conducted were community efforts held for students other than those they normally served and were at locations other than at school. The help was sometimes given to individual children who were members of communities inhabited by the teachers, such as their neighborhoods or churches.

When asked to help decide which activities should take priority—which ones should be included in limited reporting space—I asked the group members to take out their portfolio entry instructions and read the guiding questions posed throughout the directions. I suggested that they find a way to be sure they addressed each of the questions. I told them that the scorer would be equipped with an organizational sheet enumerating the specific tasks of the entry, and would be searching each section of the entry for evidence of the standards referenced for that particular entry. Then, we looked at the scoring guides, which included specific rubrics for each score level. Selena suggested that they might benefit from an effort to correlate these documents (standards,

task instructions, and scoring rubrics) and form outlines for their written entries. She and Mae agreed to work on those before the next group meeting.

I also urged the candidates to pay particular attention to the Core Propositions when making these decisions. I reminded them that there had been only partial agreement/connection between their view of community and that of NB when we had compared the two in an early group session. They would need to make decisions about which activities would provide the clearest demonstration that their practice met the standards called for in the entry. Those decisions would necessarily have to be theirs.

Two of the other candidates present became a bit sullen at this point, crossing their arms over their chests with deep frowns on their faces, and wondered aloud why I couldn't just provide them with the kinds of organizational tools I was suggesting, since I "evidently had them already in mind." We talked briefly about how we viewed my role as a group supporter. Felicia expressed surprise: "Lord, I forget that you aren't doing this [seeking certification], too." Reflecting on this statement later, I wrote in my journal, "I've always worried about whether someone who hasn't been through the process could be seen as a credible mentor, but this has become a transparent issue for me with this group. Now I can focus on whether or not I can navigate the Black-White aspects of this journey without worrying about my non-NBCT status."

In fact, this formed the core of our resulting chat about a mentor's role. We talked about how, since I had not lived through the entire candidacy process (I had exited NB candidacy to pursue my Ph.D. residency), I could serve as a guide, but not as a first-hand authority on portfolio building. I told the group about the training I had received from NBPTS during two summers of facilitation workshops, and about a few successful

mentoring experiences I had shared with past applicants. I truly believed, though, that as inhabitants of their own teaching practices, and as navigators of their own candidacy journeys, they each possessed a unique expertise and perspective. I could listen attentively, observe intently, and record diligently, but I could not hope to gain a completely congruent view of their teaching situations any more than I could hope to fully apprehend a Black viewpoint. I could share strategies to help interpret the standards and tasks associated with each portfolio entry, but they each would choose and use the strategies according to their perceptions of the process and their preferences for negotiating it. At this point in the process, I could move with them and provide support from the side, but they were each following their own path, and I could not lead them there—I could only go with them. I could help, but I couldn't make decisions for them.

This launched us into a final exchange on this topic. Felicia mentioned that she had been at a small meeting where she had been told she “had it made” to be working with “Mrs. Leftwich—she can write circles around anyone else in the district.” She said had felt a little “put out—kinda sideways” at hearing this. She'd had the impression that the person who'd told her this felt she was receiving an unfair advantage. “If I get this, I don't want nobody thinkin' I didn't earn it,” she growled. “I wish they was hearing what you just said.”

We decided to write an informal agreement that we all signed in accord with the following simple terms, and which continued to define our group relationship:

- ◆ We'll share ideas and strategies.
- ◆ We won't write material for each other.
- ◆ We will read each other's work, and make suggestions, but not corrections.

- ◆ We will pray for each other, ask each other questions, encourage each other, and help each other with deadlines.
- ◆ We will be accountable to each other, but responsible for ourselves.

Later, when this section was submitted to participant-checking, one of them said, “At first, we all wanted someone to just tell us how to do it. Finding our own ways was the powerful part of writing the entries.”

### *Composing the Entries*

Enthusiasm waned quickly when the writing really began. The candidates had worried about their writing skills, and it soon became clear that the worries were not without basis. Of the ten members who consistently attended small-group support events, not one of them claimed or demonstrated an affinity for writing. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

Everything changed when our focus shifted to writing tasks. Non-verbal communication stiffened considerably. The warmth that had begun to develop between all of us seemed to cool. There was a heaviness in the air, and the light familiarity that had characterized our weekly encounters faded into the background. Whereas, in the first few planning-focused meetings, members had openly spread their notebooks and plied highlighters and pens with unselfconscious abandon, when we began to focus on the actual written composition, candidates sat with notebooks and papers closely held. When I at first suggested that candidates engage in peer feedback sessions, there was stiff, albeit polite, resistance. Writers declined for various reasons: handwritten drafts, faintly printed copy, small font size, and single spacing were all reasons not to burden peers with unnecessarily difficult reading. A few mentioned that they had made notes or had begun

writing but couldn't decide how to organize the ideas they had placed on paper. Some were quite forthright about not wanting to expose their text to outside scrutiny yet. They said things such as, "I've been writing and writing, but not anything good enough to read" and "Is it okay if I work on this some more before I show you?" Some candidates had notes or ideas, but did not reveal written texts in the support sessions. Each of these struggles provided an opportunity for mentoring.

When I reviewed field notes from this session, it seemed that the most efficient approach would be to tackle the organizational issue first. Some writers had mentioned this problem directly, while others had alluded to it through apologies for notes, sketchy text, or shyness about having others read their compositions. Maybe if I could help these writers feel more confident about the content of their text productions, they would relax and settle into collaborative feedback structures.

It is important to note here that these anxieties about writing were reflective of the kinds of anxieties I had noted in other candidates—white candidates—in previous years. Without mentioning race, I told the participants that, in my experience, most writers felt worried about having other people read their work, especially at first, and especially when they were dealing with draft work.

We turned to the outlines discussed at the end of the standards-tasks linkage session. Although two of our members had intended to work on this project, that work had not yet occurred, so we took it on as a group. Everyone looked at me for direction, but I pointed to chart paper and markers and suggested they use the meeting time to work on the outline for the community/professional outreach entry together. While they adjusted to this schedule change, I reminded them of the previous week's conversation,

and of the linkages between the tasks, standards and core propositions. We reviewed the scoring process that would link the evidence provided by candidates' answers to questions in the task instructions to standards referenced for the entry. Annie volunteered to record for the group and she began to write on the chart paper abbreviated versions of the questions in the entry task instructions. Candidates agreed to draft responses for the questions before the next meeting.

When we reconvened the following Thursday afternoon, there was considerably more paper, but it was still pretty closely held. There were papers face-down, folded, or in covers at nearly every place around the table. I asked if they minded if I got things started, and asked them to each share the topic sentence from the text they had composed for the first section of the outline.

This proved very productive. Confident writers readily shared their key sentences, which varied in emphasis. Friendly debate developed over what should be the focus for this section. The arguments relied on knowledge of the tasks and standards, so the dialogue in itself was instructive and/or reinforcing depending on the degree to which the tasks were understood and the standards had been internalized. The portfolio instructions and standards books were much in use, and papers were openly referenced. Notes were being written in margins and revisions were being drawn with arrows, lines, circles and line-outs.

Almost imperceptibly, candidates began to lean across one another's work and to pass papers back and forth. Resistance was retreating in the face of open communication. A palpable change could be felt in the room as the warmth of open communication returned. Rather than offering short reasons why they chose not to share their writing,

as had preciously been the case, they began to lean in to listen to and look at one another's opening sentences. Mae, frowning to understand what Shonda was reading aloud, asked to look at it so she could read it silently. After doing so, she said, "I think I understand where you are heading. I'm working on that part, too. Would you look at mine and see if you think so, too." Soon, they were side by side passing papers back and forth so readily that they had to stop briefly to sort them out. When I laughed and offered a staple or paper clip, Shonda rolled her eyes at me and said, "I guess we're over the shy thing now."

How interesting that, for this group of women, writing had initially been so counter to this goal. The closed demeanor of the group had dissolved when the focal mode of interchange switched from writing to talking. This characterizes a shift in language function from a transactional transference of information to the interactional exercise of relationships (Brown & Yule, 1983). This was much more pronounced in this group than in groups with whom I had worked in prior years. Previous groups, while expressing reservations initially about sharing their writing, had moved from resistance to cautious sharing very quickly, with relatively little conversation. The focus remained on the written text. For this group, however, the move to sharing their writing came only after—and when accompanied by—a high level of conversation. The importance of this became clearer through an experience I had with Marilyn.

### *Continuing Challenges*

Organization proved to be a continuing challenge for this group of writers. At almost every meeting, whether with a group of candidates or one-on-one, this topic arose as a concern. Where should I begin? How should I arrange the writing? The strategy of

relying on the structure of the entry instructions became a mainstay. Once, when I was asked to work with a group in a candidate's home, I arrived before any other members. Upon ushering me into her study area, the hostess candidate, Marilyn, sheepishly moved a large Raggedy Anne doll from the chair she invited me to use. Taking note of a number of showcase dolls—all Black—on shelves around the room, I asked about the Raggedy Anne doll's place in the ranks. Marilyn grinned and told me that she'd needed a coach to get her to answer the questions like we had done during the early group meetings when we'd discussed writing. She and I had talked about this, and I had suggested that she read the questions out loud and record her answers on tape, then use the transcriptions to help guide her writing. Trying this, she had been imagining me asking her the questions in an interview format. Her neighbor had placed the big rag doll out for a garage sale recently, and she'd bought it so she'd have a "smiling White face" to talk to, and maybe I'd keep her on her toes. We laughed at this, but then she said, "Yes, I talk different when I talk to you....more like what I need to be writing for this work." When I asked her what she meant, she answered, "We-ell-ll.....no offense, but I have to write White for this, and I can do that easier if I talk White, and I can do that better if I'm talking to a White person—white teacher—like you. So Professor Paula, meet Raggedy Paula."

We both hooted with laughter, but Marilyn's message is both insightful and sad. Not sad because she had to switch discourse styles to meet a professional need—most of us are faced with that need on a daily basis. Rather, it was sad because for Marilyn, this process meant adopting a discourse style she identified as belonging to a race different from her own in order to succeed. It was also sad because she felt the need for translating her Black discourse into White discourse to the extent that she used a prop to facilitate

the act of translation. She felt she had to translate her own normal discourse into a different one to leverage her chances to achieve certification by National Board. How would I feel if asked—required—to perform a similar transformation in order to gain full access to an opportunity purported to be open to a full and representative range of teachers in our state and elsewhere? Marilyn helped me understand how significant oral language is as a text unto itself, and how useful that text form can be as a tool for translation between modes. More importantly, Marilyn's intuitive understanding of the role ethnicity can play in situating discourse within Discourse was a powerful lesson to me. In effect she was practicing the kind of multilingualism described as a somewhat sophisticated translative skill by Baker (2002). Marilyn had strategically and cleverly leveraged this intuitive knowledge to help herself navigate the task of portfolio writing, and her trusting generosity in sharing that ploy with me had given me a new tool to assist others in future mentoring scenarios.

Word choice, text construction and text length were also persistent vexations. These candidates tended, when anecdotally compared to others with whom I have worked, to rely less on tools such as a thesaurus to vary word choices, although dictionary use was commonplace, usually for spelling confirmation. Incomplete sentences, run-ons, and confusing clause referents were frequent occurrences. Mixed verb tenses were common, as were and subject-verb disagreements. Parallel constructions were inconsistent, paragraphs tended to be loosely constructed, and complex sentence structures were not the norm. The application of conventions such as punctuation and spelling was uneven. Although these factors were stressors, they provided rich opportunity for mentorship intercession. However, if mentoring of

candidates focuses strongly on these fundamental elements of writing, there may be little chance that it will also be able to hone in on more substantive elements of preparation for and pursuit of National Board Certification.

*And so . . .*

Chapter Four has described representative interactions with Black teachers attempting pursuit of National Board Certification. These descriptions have included glimpses into the candidates' personal circumstances, their views of teaching and accomplishment, and their approaches to written composition processes. Contrasts have been drawn between the candidates' views, expectations and approaches and those of the systems with which they must engage in this pursuit—broader school communities, school district structures, and the process of seeking certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Now that the data have been gathered and explored, what conclusions can be drawn? What answers can be formulated for the questions around which this inquiry has been organized:

- Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

In Chapter Five, the data are discussed from an analytical perspective and findings from the study are synthesized into a set of conclusions, practical recommendations, and questions for further investigation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion and Conclusions

Nearly a year's work by the researcher and the study participants has been undertaken in an effort to address the following two questions:

- Is there a disconnect between the d/Discourses of NBPTS and Black candidates for National Board Certification?
- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

Although numerous other aspects of human interactions in the teaching-learning process have been encountered, described, and considered, the discussion of the whole of the accumulated data should—and will—center on the two guiding questions. Each was considered in turn.

#### *Discourse Disconnects*

As mentioned in Chapter Four, there were significant differences between the way the certification candidates in the study defined the central focus of their work and the Core Propositions of the National Board. The teachers identified the five areas around which their roles were defined as:

1. Community
2. Compassion
3. Character

4. Classroom
5. Curriculum

The National Board rests its certification structure on five Core Propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

Table 10 illustrates the fundamental disconnect between how the study participants and the National Board define the most central aspects of teachers’ work. These core elements form part of what Gee calls the “Big D” Discourse of teaching—the context within which day-to-day language use, or “little d” discourse takes place. However, this may be interpreted in several ways. In conversations with the participants about this apparent gap between the core values of the two groups, they took stances that both supported this conclusion and minimized the importance of it.

Table 10. Comparison of Focus Priorities

<b>Candidates</b>	<b>NBPTS</b>	<b>Connect</b>	<b>Disconnect</b>
<i>Source: Interaction Themes</i>	<i>Source: Core Propositions</i>		
Classroom	1. Commitment	XX	
Curriculum	2. Knowledge	XX	
Community	5. Community	XX	XX
Character	3. Responsibility	XX	XX
Compassion	4. Reflectivity	XX	XX

Candidates' views of classroom work correlated closely with the NBPTS proposition of the commitment of teachers to students and their learning. Candidates' definitions of effective teaching encompassed notions of focused attention to students and their learning needs. This rested on the teachers' mastery of a body of knowledge and the pedagogical skill to deliver an effective curriculum. These two areas of Table 10 align tightly, forming points of connection between the d/Discourses of t/Teaching.

The context within which t/Teaching occurs is less perfectly aligned, however. As illustrated in the analysis chart in Appendix H, candidates' notions of community contrasted sharply with those of NBPTS as expressed in the Core Propositions. In these differing contexts, the candidates viewed their primary mission to be development of character in a climate of compassionate care, while NBPTS promotes the value of developing responsibility in an atmosphere created, monitored and adjusted by reflective teachers. These areas of disconnect may provide important clues to the reasons behind the present disparity in certification achievement rates among members of varying demographic groups.

In one afternoon session late in November, we spent considerable time discussing this central issue. Two of the teachers, sitting at first with folded arms, somewhat balkily held that it should come as no surprise that there would be a difference between what a "big national group like NBPTS thinks matters and how things really are." One of them elaborated, saying

You see, these teachers that gets on panels like this aren't like the rest of us. I mean, how many folks down here ever heard tell of such a group before now, much less when they was writin' these Propositions? I tell you, a different kind of

teachers gets asked to those meetin's, and a different kind of systems gets asked to send 'em. They'd never ask this county to work on somethin' like that, and if they did, they wouldn't do it, and even if they did, it sure wouldn't be none of us who was asked to do it. No, ma'am. So, why would what we think about workin' with our kids look anything like what they put out? How could it? We're talkin' completely different worlds here.

In a chorus of agreement, heads nodded and a low thunder of "MmmmHmms" rumbled from among them. But then, one of them said,

Wait, though. Maybe we're talking about the same things, just in different ways. Like, the subject of community. We've talked about that before. Their list talks about learning communities (she rolls her eyes and the group giggles). That was a joke here, but it could be meaning more like what we mean when we talk about community. And maybe it rolls more over on what we said about classroom and curriculum. We talked about community like it was our towns—our neighborhoods—but this is about us more. And we went over and over that, talkin' about needing to keep learning curriculum and so forth. I think maybe it laps over more than it looks. Do you want to see? Let's see if we can map it out. It might help us do this box better.

Pulling a big chart onto the table, she began to create a table, while telling the group to think how their ideas could "plug into" the Core Propositions, with the following result shown in Table 11:

Table 11. Correlation of Participants' Values to Core Propositions

THEM	US	Community	Compassion	Character	Classroom	Curriculum
Students		x	x	x	x	x
Subjects					x	x
Managing			x	x	x	x
Thinking		x	x	x	x	x
Learning Community		x	x	x		x

From this discussion and the effort to chart the overlaps between their own meaning of the five areas they had identified and the Core Propositions of the National Board, the teachers both gained and more clearly articulated their understanding of both lists and the relationships between them. In so doing, the foundation for a rhizomatic analysis had been laid. In this case, the textual basis was comprised of the study group-derived list of central focus areas and the National Board Core Propositions. Those two lists are the previous understandings described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as tracings.

Tracings are representations of pre-existing understandings. In creating Table 11, the participants drew an interlocking map of their evolving understanding of the relationship between the tracings. The table format provided a vehicle for side-by-side comparison of the defining elements of accomplishment, showing both gaps and overlaps between the tracings and the maps. The gaps, or ruptures, reveal disconnects between previous understandings, or definitions, of the texts being compared. The resulting map,

according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is highly changeable—negotiable—depending on the conditions of and participants in its rendering. The ruptures constitute opportunities to establish new connections, forge new understandings, and grow in new directions (Hamann, 1996; Sussman, 2000).

The candidates discovered, for instance, that they relied on Community—the actual towns and neighborhoods where they and their students lived and worked—as sources for the students they taught and for the milieu in which they thought about and learned about their work. This definition and use of community differs in important ways from the National Board statement about teacher membership in learning communities. While Core Proposition #5 contains a closing statement on the need for collaboration between teachers and parents, it is neither as deep nor as wide as the participants’ view of the role they occupy within the community and the role they believe community plays in the successful performance of their work with students. By the same token, the candidates could see that the National Board notion of Learning Community touched their own categories of Community, Compassion, Character and Curriculum.

While similar agreements and ruptures could be seen among the other elements of the compared lists of core elements, the aspect of Community was the most prevalent and the most discussed.

The participants asked me to type Table 11 (p.154) and copy it for them so they could add it to the charts we’d made to correlate the portfolio tasks and certification standards. As one woman put it, “We might not see things completely eye to eye with the National Board, but we aren’t as far apart as it seemed like before we did this.” For me as the observer, this is an important summary statement. There are obvious

disconnects between the basis for accomplished practice as defined by NBPTS—the Discourse of teaching accomplishment—and as it is viewed by the members of this study group. But there are more agreements than were first apparent, and perhaps the roots of the disconnects are more subtle than first perceived.

### *Looking for Truth*

The demands of an academic study carry with them an expectation of a search for “truth,” which is, in this case is acknowledged as a subjective end to pursue. It may, in fact, even be negotiable, particularly among members of a research-directing team of scholars who embrace personal academic stances hovering at varying points along a post-modern/post-structural philosophical continuum. At a more elemental level, the emerging truth is subjectively negotiable within the psyche of the researcher, as dependent on the researcher’s evolving personal understandings as they are developed in and refracted through the observed and partly co-experienced reality of the study participants. Guattari (1998) explained this form of negotiated and constantly emerging understanding in his concept of schizoanalysis by describing the shifting definitions in terms of assemblages. Each new amalgam of experiences—as perceived by their various experiencers—constitutes an assemblage. Those unique intersections provide opportunities to explore new representations and explanations of reality.

That reality is constructed of a series of phenomena. According to one dictionary, in the realm of philosophy, a phenomenon is “that which appears real to the senses, regardless of whether its underlying existence is proved or its nature understood” (Morris, 1971). This study endeavored to describe, as accurately as possible, the experience of the participants as they went about the work of seeking National Board

Certification. The descriptions were derived from observations of the participants' activities over a period of more than a year. The researcher attempted to capture as accurately as possible the experiences of the participants and relate them in this paper in narrative form.

In this case, the effort to accurately recount the participants' stories invoked countless hours of reflective thought on the researcher's part. This was often achieved by writing journal entries, but also frequently involved uninterrupted hours of reverie while making the long, solitary drives to fulfill work travel duties and to carry out extended family responsibilities. But the most reflective—and reflexive—episodes took place during conversations with candidates during member checking. Over and over again, I found myself asking participants, “Is this what you meant?” or “Did you see it that way, too?” and later, “Did I get it right?” It was during those conversations when I felt most connected with the candidates, perhaps because it was at those times when I made myself most vulnerable to them, much as they had made themselves vulnerable to me, and to each other, when they shared their own writing, often asking “Did I get it right?”

One afternoon late in the study, in the lull between submission and score reports, Selena was reading a section I had written and giving me feedback. She was laughing about how reading back the conversations made her see the gestures and hear the voices of her friends. Her remarks were very kind and affirming, but I pressed her about whether the picture as a whole was “right.” She leaned back and said, “One day you told us we had to be the ones who decided what to put in and what to leave out—to decide when the entry was right. It made me mad then, but I know now how it works—really works—when you dig and choose and decide what to say. So, girl, you're gonna have to decide if

it's right." I grinned back at her, feeling a degree of satisfaction, but a greater degree of need for someone to tell me I was on the right track at least. I didn't say so, but I could feel my facial expression and my shoulders sag. Selena sat up, scooted over toward me, and rested her hand on my arm. She said, "I read the part where you wondered about us while you went on that website that time. Remember? You was thinking about us at home or wherever. Well, we been thinking about you, too, and I think you been changing right along with us. You question everything about all of this. Don't question what you write so much."

She was right. I have changed. I have questioned everything, many of them ideas quite fundamental to my upbringing and previous life experience. My exploration of these teachers' candidacy experience has led me on an intense personal journey, one that returned me to a different place than the one from which I embarked. Looking back at the report manuscript, I realize how much it relies on my attempts to undergo the process of epoché to properly distill my understanding of the candidates' experiences. The heuristic phenomenological lens, through which the participants experiences were filtered along with my own, has helped me assure faithfulness in reporting our mutually constructed perceptions in what I believe—and the participants have affirmed to be—a literally reflective account of our shared work.

Many issues of authority arise during the implementation of such a process. There is the matter of one's dominion over one's own cerebral stores. How much control do we actually have over the throng of information bits inhabiting our neurons? Do we—Dare we—Dare we not—apply our full faculties to the vigorous challenge to what we believe to be "true?" This question implies a conflict between existing truth and possible

truth and calls into question the very concept of truth at the outset.

This brings us back, as if by mobian circuit, to the negotiable quality of post-structural truth. In this case, the truth that is so hard sought can only be perceived through a set of shifting lenses, held by the evolving participants and the observer. The clarity achieved depends, at least in part, on the navigation of authority boundaries that wind between the observed and the observer.

### *Knowledge, Power, and Authority*

In this study, there was a thicket of authority boundaries to be navigated in the effort to stabilize the position of the wobbly lenses long enough to capture credible observations of the work at hand. There was the issue of the researcher's previous authority role as district-level manager, as it was acknowledged, respected, rejected or ignored by both the teachers and researcher. There was the matter of the teachers' views of the authority structure within their own ranks, as determined by school level, grade level, tenure, and by demographics such as race and gender. The authority of "the system"—the state, district and building-level regulations and expectations that are so inseparable from the daily rhythm of teachers' work—were omnipresent aspects of the context of this project. There was also the overarching issue of the National Board's authority that resides in the power to prescribe standards, mechanisms and evaluative processes requisite to the achievement of National Board Certification. Finally, although not inconsequentially, there is the matter of the academy's power over the student-researcher and the members of the directing committee.

While perhaps not immediately apparent, each of these power and authority negotiations situates the participants and the observer differently, both as separate entities

and in relationship to one another, and each also creates subtle tensions that highlight or mask disconnects inherent to the processes being observed. This is particularly important if one takes the Foucauldian view that power is not an entity unto itself, but is rather an activity in which one engages (Gauntlett, 2003). Further, knowledge is a prerequisite condition for governing or managing something (Feldman, 1997), in this case, the outcome and process of candidacy. Foucault (1980) proposed that power is an immutable result of knowledge. Knowledge is a prerequisite condition for governing or managing something (Feldman, 1997), in this case, the outcome and process of candidacy. This reinforces again the justification for focusing intently on context, since contextual analysis is a necessary antecedent to the interpretation of power relationships (Hall, 1997).

#### *Conclusions and Recommendations Related to d/Discourse*

What does this mean for the outcome of the study? First, it became clear quickly that all of us were, to some degree, somewhat poorly equipped to negotiate authority issues, since we, as women—mostly middle-aged women—and all but one of us Black women—were not predisposed by prior experience to do the kind of work required to challenge authority, as the candidates were required to do when they decided to seek candidacy in spite of discouragement from their communities, their principals, and their peers, and as I chose to do in deciding to pursue the project in the face of more subtle (although perhaps equally formidable) resistance from my employer. And we could not negotiate authority issues without first identifying them and then being willing to challenge both our understandings of the power structures and our relative positions within them. This work has carried us a distance along the road to full assumption of

these skills, but it will require more work for these to become internalized as more natural ways of thinking and acting for this demographic, at least those of us who represent it in this study.

It is important to note the disconnect between the participants' notions of community and those of NBPTS. This is particularly pertinent when one considers the role the Learning Community played—or failed to play—in the teachers' decisions to participate in the National Board Certification process itself. From this, the first recommendation I would pose as a result of this study would be to more carefully inform teachers of research-based reasons to participate as members of learning communities as described by the National Board, and to more carefully prepare school and district administrators with skills to expand inclusive participation in the learning communities under their care, to the professional advantage of both the individuals and the community at large. This could help prevent future episodes of explicit and implicit administrative dissuasion such as those described in Chapter Four

Meanwhile, the employment of strategies rooted in Freire's (1993) liberation pedagogy, empowering people to optimize their learning (remembering that knowledge is power!) by equalizing the teacher-student relationship may prove useful in promoting critical approaches among teachers for analyzing and structuring responses to their work. To borrow from Finn (1999), teachers, particularly those from underrepresented groups, may benefit from opportunities to think critically about their practices—both in terms of discourse and Discourse—in ways that will embolden them to act “in their own self-interest.” This environment existed in the shared workspace of this study, wherein the candidates and I became co-learners, pursuing different yet related learning goals, but

doing so side-by-side in a symbiotic fashion. These skills and strategies can be embedded in and strengthened during inservice programs, particularly those based upon supportive structures such as learning communities, which are so prominently mentioned in the Core Propositions of the National Board.

A specific skill that would perhaps boost both the belief by candidates that they possess the capacity to participate in the power associated with National Board and in the perceptions by others that such is truly the case is the skill of writing in a confident, bold style. While the vast majority of candidates for National Board Certification are female, and the perception of gendered writing styles (Earl-Novell, 2001) is not likely to be an issue of bias in scoring, there is evidence that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities—their feelings of self-efficacy—are predictive determiners of their achievement (Bandura, 1997). This returns us to the situation where the principal discouraged her teachers from participating in National Board in order to forestall the possibility that they would not be successful. This exercise of what is in effect an inappropriate use of parent-child authority (Price & Cutler, 2001) served to oppress potential candidates by viewing them as powerless. The implicit message was that the teachers were ill-equipped to succeed, particularly with regard to the writing demands of the process. Whether this was true, or whether it was an assumption, it served in either case to render the attendees powerless. Precandidacy inservice training that includes support for writing skills could be helpful in moving potential candidates from a position of powerlessness to one of increased power through the sharing of knowledge.

“Power is energy: authority is control” (Price & Cutler, 2001, p.479). With increased knowledge (and therefore power) about the National Board process, such as

that gained through participation in group and individual mentoring sessions, teachers acquire tools to help them control their movement through that process. This may be as simple as learning where to look for information about application deadlines or as complex as making decisions about the kinds of evidence to choose in order to document achievement of the standards associated with a particular portfolio entry. Whichever the case, the power gained from the knowledge facilitates the building of personal authority for the individual involved. This fuels the acquisition of new knowledge and the cycle gains strength. The empowered individual not only feels increased self-efficacy, but is also likely to project it in ways both subtle and overt. Over time, this changed behavior may impact stereotyped judgments about the ability, power and authority of a previously oppressed demographic. This can be especially important for groups who have been impacted by race-based oppression coupled with gender oppression, such as Black women have historically experienced (Harris & Hill, 1998). The benefit of increased power and authority could certainly extend to other teachers, too, since the issues of power and authority have traditionally been areas about which female teachers have experienced conflict and oppression (Maher, 1999).

Efforts, such as those undertaken in this study, to bridge the gap between preparatory instruction and written demands and expectations of NB could help mend a set of broader disconnects in the Discourse of teaching, such as those between black candidates and supportive infrastructure, between community expectations of Black and White teachers, between administrative expectations for Black and White teachers, and between perceptions of power and authority by White and Black teachers.

In summary, there are a number of significant disconnects in the d/Discourses of

the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Black teachers who participated in this study, ranging from definitions of accomplished teaching and access to infrastructure supports for the process through perceptions of community and varying administrative expectations of teachers. The disconnects have been there all along, but as with the *Magic Eye* pictures popular with children in the mid-90s, it was only with a change and intensity of focus on the part of the observer that the disconnects became apparent. The revelation of the disconnects in unexpected places is evidence of the success of this aspect of the study.

### *Mentoring*

The disconnects having been revealed, it now becomes pertinent to examine the impact of study efforts to bridge them through the process of mentoring. Although many factors in the certification seeking process were addressed through mentoring, the specific question on which this discussion focuses is:

- What aspects of d/Discourse are mediated by mentoring to facilitate the achievement of National Board Certification by Black candidates?

Two discrete D/discourses emerged as topics during the course of the study, those dealing with t/Teaching and a/Accomplishment. As covered in previous passages, the candidates worked hard, initially following my leadership but increasingly on their own, to reconcile the disconnects in those discourses. They did so by cross-matching their own categories of effective teaching characteristics against those elaborated in the Core Propositions of the NBPTS, a process described in earlier in this chapter. The teachers negotiated individually and among themselves as they made decisions about the kinds of evidence they chose to present in written accounts in which they described, analyzed and

reflected upon their classroom practices and their impact on student learning. For example, Mandy longed to base one portfolio entry on a year-long outdoor project, during which her class had created and tended a butterfly garden. “There is just so much I can say about it,” she insisted to herself. As she worked with her fellow candidates, however, she realized that an extended period of intense intervention for student with a host of social and academic problems provided a more comprehensive demonstration of how her practice met NB standards. She convinced her self that was a better choice for that particular entry, even though it was not what she considered to be her best work. This compromise was difficult for her, but yielded a score of 3.25 on a four point scale. When Mandy shared this result with me over the phone, she snorted and said, “It was worth it, but I loved that garden project.”

Mentoring activity was most evident in two areas of candidate concern: process navigation and construction of written portfolio entries. Process questions were addressed intensely in early sessions, while initial application decisions were being undertaken and process steps initiated. This aspect of mentoring faded quickly once the application deadline had passed and all forms were submitted. Then, the mentoring focused almost exclusively on writing, to one degree or another, until spring during the last two weeks of the cycle. Then, when writing was winding down and portfolio packing began as submission deadlines approached, process once again became a primary concern.

The aspects of discourse associated with the process are overwhelmingly one-sided in favor of the National Board, since the process rests almost entirely on prescriptive steps, forms and paperwork that pass through district, state and NBPTS

procedures. The discourse is very direct and not subject to interpretation or choice. Candidates simply follow step-by-step directions. However, even this seemingly cut-and-dried aspect of candidacy has been impacted by what amounts to an indirect form of mentoring. The initial assistance tends to be delivered almost exclusively from the front, under the direct control and leadership of the mentor.

When I was the district contact for the Excellent Teaching Program, I had worked to clarify the process at every opportunity. This was, frankly, an attempt to simplify my own work and reduce the number of repetitive inquiries about vague points. In the process of making the application process transparent, I developed a very detailed step-by-step set of directions that accompanied every application information packet. This packet, which my office staff assembled every spring, included published information printed by both the Florida Excellent Teaching Program and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, along with the necessary district, state, and NBPTS application forms. It included a glossary of terms and a list of relevant web links. I did not know it at the time, but I had placed myself in the role of process interpreter, and in so doing had fulfilled a mentoring role. Only during this study did I realize the impact of this effort, when seven of twelve exit surveys indicated that the clarity of the introductory steps had been an encouragement to continue in the process. Those tools had been used and found helpful by the candidates. This work, although more transparent and perhaps more consistent with what would appear to be the role of a helper-mentor, as seen from the Mandy's situation and those described in Chapter Four, the more potent assistance was that shared from the side as co-learner, as opposed to that offered from the front as authoritative interpreter.

Additionally, especially with the teachers targeted for possible inclusion in this study, the early efforts to build trust paid dividends. As evidenced by numerous exchanges related in this paper, there was a high level of trust between the participants and me, anchored partially in our mutual need, and we counted on it from both sides. The participants counted on me to “stick with them” through their candidacy, and I counted on enough of them completing the process to yield valid results of this study. We all relied on one another for honesty, confidentiality, and collegiality. By the end of our work together, we counted on each other for mutually caring friendships, some of which are still active.

Along the way, the teachers navigated the six building tasks enumerated by Gee (1999). Taken separately, they illustrate the scope of the constructed understandings developed during the study. Taken as a whole, they constitute the basis for judging the overall validity of the findings. As such, they are important to review, each by turn.

### *Semiotic Building*

The signs and symbols of communication systems are keys to understanding how meaning is constructed. For our group, this was manifested in body language: the way Dotty crossed her arms when she made an adamant point, way Selena pressed her lips together and paused before disagreeing out loud, or the way I squinted my eyes if I was getting lost in a fast-paced run of colloquial dialogue. The system was based on a set of diverse background experiences rooted in a variety of shades of family, color, creed, education, work assignment, and myriad other aspect of personal and professional culture. The system was comprised of varying casual language forms into which we lapsed only after we had covered the key topics of group concern. This contrasted

significantly with the formal, professional language used by National Board. Also, the communication among the study group was almost always oral, while communication with NBPTS was almost entirely in writing. Interestingly, I sometimes transcribed our speech with its informal variances, while at other times I transcribed it more formally. I did not notice this until a candidate mentioned it to me during member checking one afternoon. Upon revisiting several tapes, I deduced that the transcription mode depended on whether I was approaching the task primarily as a participant or as a researcher. The role I played as a listener—the audience—determined the mode in which I transcribed.

Mentoring impacted semiotic building rather directly, in that I offered direct advice to participants on the topic of code-switching, to emphasize the importance of maintaining a consistently professional tone in their portfolio writing. Marilyn's use of the "Raggedy Paula" doll is an example of this. In this respect, as mentor I served as what Amrein (2000) calls a "language broker," much as bilingual students often serve as interpreters bridging the divide between the English language world and the one in which their native language is dominant.

### *World Building*

This was a key function of our work together. I was looking for clues to how the participants defined their professional world, particularly with regard to the task of teaching and the characteristics of accomplished teaching. The candidates sought clarity regarding the expectations of NB. The viewpoints espoused by NBPTS and the study participants, especially at the outset, were very dissimilar, as evidence by the cross-compared elements of effective teaching.

Once again, as mentor, I sought to help the candidates bridge the gap between

their own constructions and those of NBPTS. With the standards and core propositions established as the basis for determining each candidate's success in achieving certification, this was high-stakes work. I chose to move aside for the most part with respect to this aspect of their work. However, the work I organized to assist the candidates in the study of the standards and their relationship to both the core propositions and the portfolio tasks was well received.

### *Activity Building*

The entire effort in our case revolved around the central activity of the candidates' quest for National Board Certification. All of our efforts were driven by the centrality goal for the candidates. The goal of completing a dissertation study was central to my own personal work, but that quickly assumed a supporting role relative to the primary goal of facilitating the candidates' achievement of National Board Certification. All of the mentoring activities undertaken were developed and carried out to meet this goal.

### *Situated Identity and Relationship Building*

This was an interesting and ever-shifting aspect of the study. At first, I was a district-level program manager, viewed with intense skepticism by the Black teachers because I was from the main office...and because I was a White woman calling a meeting of Black teachers. As detailed in numerous interactions reported in this paper, this changed during the first meeting after the two white teachers arrived late, again when I took off my shoes, and again when we talked about barriers to participation by Black teachers. It continued to shift as I changed jobs, as they entered the process of candidacy, as they developed portfolio entries and as we began to really know one another.

Mentoring touched this element of our work more indirectly than it did some

others. It became apparent in the lesson I learned from Dotty when I attempted to be a supportive mentor by connecting her with the seller of an affordable car. In that case, and in many others associated with this element of discourse, I was the one who was mentored. This became more overt as the study progressed and the participants gained confidence. As it progressed, I also became more willing to quickly admit when I was confused...or clueless...about an issue or topic where I was clearly on the outside looking in. Likewise, the candidates became much more open to talking about how they made decisions whether or not to adapt to the NBPTS discourse. Mandy made a deliberate choice in favor of NB when she chose to write about another line of instruction over her outdoor class garden project. On the other hand, Dee elected to focus on her conviction relative to the importance of character education as she composed one of her entries. She worked diligently to craft an entry that promoted her passion for this topic, and while in the end it clearly articulated her approach, it did not answer the guiding questions for the entry in a way that demonstrated her achievement of the standards. Dee was chagrined when she earned only a 1.5 of the possible four points. However, she consulted with Mandy during the following application cycle as she prepared to resubmit the entry, and increased her score to 3.0.

### *Political Building*

This is the area of great potential in this study. As described previously, the issues of knowledge, power, and authority pervade this study. It is founded on a personal concern for fairness and equity. The recommendation made earlier to deliver writing and process training to a more inclusive audience of potential program participants focuses on those areas.

The first meeting was called because of a concern I had about the under-representation of Black Teachers from our school district in the Excellent Teaching Program. I frankly told the attendees of my worry about the fact that, as of then, there were no Black NBCTs in our district, meaning that no Black teachers in our county were receiving the recognition or financial reward associated with that credential in our state. At an early support group meeting, one of the teachers confessed aloud that she would like to be the first one in our area, and others agreed. There is political capital in that status, and in the interest of fairness and equity, it was a goal I embraced. My mentoring efforts, and those of other mentors who worked with the candidates, were all focused on helping these teachers achieve certification (for this group as it had been for previous groups I had facilitated).

There were over 400 invitations issued for the initial meeting, and 30 teachers attended. Of those, 12 became candidates or pre-candidates that first year. Eight of those teachers completed the entire application process, and five of those teachers are now NBCTs. Two are in their final year of advanced (banking) candidacy. District efforts to encourage participation by members of under-represented groups continue, and each year there are more male, Black and other minority group candidates and NBCTs. Many of the “first 30” are mentors for candidates and early-career teachers, and all of “The Pathfinders” (as the group called itself after a pivotal conversation related in Chapter Four) are active trainers or presenters in our district. This emboldening as an apparent by-product of invitation and encouragement is a satisfying outcome from the work accomplished during the course of this study, and evidence of the impact mentoring can have.

### *Connection Building*

The connections between the six different elements of discourse are numerous and fluid. They, in fact, form a rhizome of their own! Semiotic building is closely related to world building and identity and relationship building. Identity and relationship building connects to political building and activity building. The work associated with each connects to the others in some way, large or small, obvious or covert.

Mentoring efforts helped to capitalize on the interrelations between each of these elements of the discourse network centered on this group of candidates' work to achieve National Board Certification. Mentoring work was, in turn, facilitated by the connectedness of the varying aspects of discourse. For example, when the candidates pushed for answers about what activities to include in their entry for Documented Accomplishments, they were advised to consult the task rubric. Rubrics are useful tools for mentors to consult to help clarify what is expected, and to what extent since they specify both the criteria and the various possible achievement levels for tasks (Andrade, 2000; Martin-Kniep, 2000 & Montgomery, 2002).

This particular interaction (described in Chapter Four), which threatened at one point to become prickly, was one in which the semiotic building provided a background of body language clues that were familiar to us and which signaled before trouble surfaced that there was tension in the air. World building made available the tools to parse the program documents and participants experiences to gain understanding of how the views of the two posed a conflict that would need to be addressed in order to facilitate success in the certification process. Activity building centered the attention of all involved on the certification goal as the end toward which the current task was only an

end. Socioculturally situated identity and relationship building helped provide a forum from which we could discuss the competing definitions and expectations in order to craft a workable approach for reconciling the disconnect, and political building kept us aware of the stakes involved.

In summary, our shared navigation of Gee's six building tasks through the process of mentoring served to reinforce my developing notions of the d/Discourses of t/Teaching and a/Accomplishment. Semiotic Building revealed the contrasting symbols of formal and informal differences in languages and expectations relative to the d/Discourses of National Board processes. World Building provided a framework within which the "worlds" of NBPTS and the candidates—the d/Discourses of t/Teaching—intersected, sometimes smoothly and at other times with jolting collisions, as in the case of differing views of Community. As we pursued Activity Building tasks—the candidates working toward certification while I worked toward graduation—we formed deepening relationships that gradually moved me from the front of the room as leader to the side of the table as mentor and, finally, to a position behind the lines as cheerleader for their blossoming professional involvements. Once again, our views of t/Teaching and a/Accomplishment were impacted—this time on a very personal level.

As the process moved toward its conclusion, my initial efforts at political building, wherein I had initiated the study, were supplanted by the candidates' strengthening advocacy for themselves. This was perhaps best illustrated by the group's co-opting of the secret club format when they identified themselves as The Pathfinders. Taken in sum, the building tasks served not only to structure our day-to-day work, but my analysis of its results as they were revealed in our evolving shared understandings of the

d/Discourses of t/Teaching and a/Accomplishment.

*Recommendations for Mentoring and Support Programs*

This study has yielded new levels of efficacy for the participants, new professional understandings for me, and new interpersonal insights for all of us who took this journey together. We shared experiences and stories, and we forged the common hope that the work we did and the obstacles we tackled would not only make our own lives better, but would serve to facilitate progress for other people. To that end, in consideration of the knowledge gained during the course of this study, I offer the following recommendations for the improvement of candidate mentoring and support activities to further the goals of this work.

Relevant current research information should be routinely disseminated among local facilitators of programs to support National Board Certification, such as the Dale Hickam Excellent Teaching Program in Florida. In Florida alone, there are 71 program facilitators who, if apprised of developing research findings about topics related to National Board, would be better equipped to make data-based decisions to assist the forward movement of area candidates through the process. Research data would also be useful to facilitators and others who craft and deliver professional development courses to teachers seeking to optimize their classroom results.

Facilitators should be encouraged to communicate with building administrators and other district officials who can translate program resources and findings into improved classroom practices and resources for instruction. This should include information about the impact of advanced teacher training on student achievement. All such information should be made available by building administrators to teachers on an

inclusive and equitable basis, and all eligible teachers should be equally encouraged to avail themselves of advanced training and credentialing opportunities. Further, efforts to support professional development initiatives among teachers should be extended equally to all participating teachers.

Activities to recruit and support candidates for National Board Certification should be advertised widely among all teacher groups. This includes teachers at all levels of school, in all covered certification areas, in all geographic regions, and in all demographic sub-groups. Information should be made available via consistent and equitably accessible means.

Program facilitators should be encouraged to develop and deliver comprehensive systems of pre-candidacy training to familiarize teachers with the requirements of National Board candidacy, and to provide opportunities for development of skills called for in the process of portfolio construction. This includes training and practice in the writing genres (description, analysis, and reflection) required in the documentation process. This type of preparation for candidacy should provide a forum for facilitated and differentiated translation and interpretation of NBPTS standards and principles for application in daily teaching practice before, during, or in lieu of pursuit of NBPTS certification.

A system of support to provide transition from pre-candidacy into candidacy, through the application process, and finally into the role of mentor could be an effective strategy to boost teacher participation and success in the process as well as provide a mechanism to both manage program size and access and monitor the impact of National Board Certification on student learning and school effectiveness. This model would

focus direct resources on the initial program application processes, refocus efforts on critical pedagogical strategies during actual portfolio development, and revisit the direct clerical approaches as each program cycle draws to a close, when paperwork and forms tend eclipse instructional decision-making as a primary concern. This study explored this approach as its model.

Professional development activities that promote and support practices facilitative of achievement of National Board Certification should be made available on a fair and equitable basis. This includes all opportunities for teachers to assume formal and informal teacher-leadership roles as trainers, presenters, action researchers, team leaders, and other activities associated with professional outreach and community building. Learning communities should be monitored to assure membership and participation are fully representational of all demographic sub-groups, and that all members have equal opportunity to engage in various and flexible levels of activity in the learning community. This would facilitate the development of practices in which Documented Accomplishments can be readily situated, and would serve to broaden the Discourses of teaching and accomplishment locally.

Program authorities should consider the implementation of bias training for all facilitators and other persons with responsibility for program oversight. This would increase awareness of issues related to under-representation in this highly remunerative process, encourage an environment where “othering” would be irrelevant, and promote a climate in which opportunity for full participation in the NB processes and rewards would be equitably accessible. Concurrent with this effort, additional research should be

conducted to document the National Board experiences and certificate achievement rates of other under-represented groups.

Finally, a thoughtful and careful effort should be undertaken to boost the level of National Board stakeholder attention to a full range of issues precluding application and achievement rates among under-represented groups, not as a specific effort to alleviate disparate impact (since this would be de facto “othering”), but as an effort to positively impact the profession (and thereby the impact of the profession on student learning). The focus on student achievement is, after all, one shared by all conscientious teachers. This central concern is the common ground inhabited by all of us who pursue our profession.

#### *Conclusions and Topics for Further Study*

The questions have been asked and answered. For the group of candidates whose experiences were observed for this study, a host of disconnects were identified between the d/Discourses of their teaching practices and those of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Mentoring served to mitigate various aspects of those disconnects as the teachers worked toward completion of their individual application processes. Continued reflection on the study and its results, in consultation with my mentor, has yielded some additional interpretations that could give rise to future study in this area. Four of them are particularly pertinent at this point.

First, the mentoring approach undertaken was grounded in critical pedagogy, linked largely to Freire and several recent adherents: Anyon, Finn, and Ogbu. This approach incorporated elements of my past work that had been directed chiefly from the front, and which was designed to provide clear and authoritative interpretations of the bureaucratic aspects of the initial application process. Once beyond those processes,

however, I chose to engage in mentoring activity planned to advance the participants' confidence and efficacy by placing me, as mentor, in a role parallel to that of the mentees. I became, in effect and in reality, an authentic co-learner. I served as an advisor on aspects of candidacy about which I had knowledge, and occasionally provided candidates with tools and strategies to facilitate their self-directed work. On the other hand, the candidates taught me what they were doing, thinking, feeling, experiencing as they pursued certification. We shared real vulnerabilities and risks: the teachers risked failure in a high stakes somewhat public process. By the same token, I worked alongside them, having opened my self to risk by touting to district officials the need for increased equity in NB effort in our area and staking my terminal degree quest to this quest. We were, in a fine sense, co-dependent. And it worked. I believe this approach holds promise for a wide spectrum of professional development activities.

Second, I was surprised to find the prevalence among this group of the view of National Board as elitist—a Secret Club, as it was described in Chapter Four. The further feeling that the club is private and closed makes this a particularly pernicious perception. Secret, private clubs are in many ways antithetical to the ideals of public education, and this obstacle is one that requires work in order for full and open access to the process can be achieved. The extent of the resentment at being excluded continues to surprise me. The teachers in this group rebounded so strongly from the resentment as they proceeded through the certification gauntlet that they, in fact, formed one of their own: The Pathfinders. The secret club mentality is a barrier that warrants sustained assault.

In fact, the revelation early on of the candidate group's disdain for the elite status of the county's NBCT cadre contrasts sharply with its later co-opting of that same

structure for what came to be known as The Pathfinders. As the group replicated behaviors that had initially made them feel shut out of the process and its rewards, they appeared not to recognize that they were doing so. Generalizing Gee's notions of d/D to the field of identity politics, the actions of the group in this regard could be construed to define a structure of s/Secret c/Club, through which their increasing empowerment becomes apparent. Further exploration of the phenomenon could provide insights into ways in which minority group achievement of National Board Certification might be more effectively facilitated in the future.

Third, another closely related aspect of mentoring that took shape rather subtly involved the need to address with a few of the candidates their sense of guilt about pursuing candidacy and achieving certification. The personal and professional communities within which the candidates in the study lived and worked were not supportive of their goals. In fact, they were actively discouraged not to proceed. They were pressured to feel guilty about stealing time from their students (a valid concern, given the skimming and mining documented in Chapter Four). They felt guilty about coveting certification, and they felt guilty about feeling pride when they scored well and achieved certification. This was an unexpected factor, one made apparent through the qualitative, phenomenological research methods employed. Future work to discuss this tendency at the outset with students and implementation of efforts to revisit the concern routinely in mentoring sessions throughout the process seem indicated as a promising strategy to study.

Fourth, it seems likely that the disposition of the mentor may have been a more significant factor than I expected. This is corollary to the impact of the critical

pedagogical philosophy that shaped the study. In seeking to engage in a realm that was largely foreign to me, I took a risk—in fact a number of risks, which have already been detailed. Making those risks apparent to the participants—making it clear that I was “in it with them”—emerged as a factor that influenced the trust that facilitated the development of the relationships upon which the study so clearly relied. Additionally, the researcher’s willingness to engage in a habit of rigorous and ruthless self-examination—as my mentor put it, to “turn [my]self inside out—and submit that self examination to the participants as a part of member checking, imparted credibility and promoted a sense of community among the observed and the observer. Without a high degree of credibility, mutual trust, and shared regard, the data available for consideration might have been of a far different quantity and quality.

The certification achievement results were reported earlier in this chapter, but those results are not considered by this researcher to be a primary outcome of the project. The numbers were included only as a corollary indicator of the impact of the study activities. While there was an acknowledgment among candidates that they would savor an opportunity to pioneer the certification among Black teachers in our district, and while I initiated the project out of concern for the under-representation of Black teachers in the local process, the achievement rate was less important to me than increasing the rate of participation in the process and the promotion of greater parity of real and perceived access by Black teachers. Also important to me was the goal to promote social justice in our community. The “win-fail” binary is inconsistent with those broader goals and the philosophy from which they are derived.

### *Some Final Thoughts*

This study grew out of a deep concern for the perceived disparity in the rates of application for and achievement of National Board Certification by Black teachers in the area where I live and work. The results are both encouraging and gratifying. The procedures undertaken to address the inquiry facilitated success in the process by a small group of participants. These teachers have continued to demonstrate increased leadership involvement in district professional development activities. Several are reaping significant financial rewards as an accompaniment to their enhanced credentials. The personal growth I experienced was profound and the relationships I developed during the pursuit of this work are enduring.

When I first began to explore the ideas that led to this study, I was asked by a district official if “.....we are going to have to offer special help to every minority group.” Our present political and educational climate is suffused with concern for underachieving student groups, and we operate in an environment where substantial resources are being marshaled and employed with the promise that within the foreseeable future, there will be “No Child Left Behind.” It is my earnest hope that the positive results of the modest and inexpensive efforts described in this paper will encourage authorities with power to impact policies that govern National Board Certification and similar educator advancement processes to take actions that will likewise help assure that there will be no eligible teachers left behind.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A

Initial Focus Group Meeting Memo

M E M O

TO: Selected Teachers  
FROM: Paula Leftwich  
Sandy Stephens  
DATE: (to be determined)  
SUBJECT: Information Session

Greetings!

We'll come right to the point. We are concerned about the fact that so few of the minority teachers in our school district are applying for and gaining National Board Certification. We want to talk about this, try to find out what the reasons are, and work to turn this situation around.

You have been identified as a minority teacher with the basic qualifications to apply for National Board Certification: at least three years of experience, satisfactory performance evaluation, and valid certification. Additionally, as a teacher with these qualifications teaching in a Florida public school, you are eligible for the state to help pay for it!

With those things in mind, you are invited to a special meeting on (date to be determined) at (place to be determined) from (starting time) to (ending time). At that meeting, our goals will be as follows:

- Share information about National Board, support programs, and how to apply
- Hold a frank discussion to identify barriers to participation and success in the process
- Consider formation of a group effort to boost minority participation and success
- Share information about a related university research project

Brenda Reddout and I have worked with the Human Resource Development Department to arrange for lunch to be provided. Please call Jane Doe at 555-5555 by (date) to let her know we can expect you, so we can be sure to have lunch and a material packet with your name on it!

We really want to know what you think about this issue, so please plan to join us on (date). Your opinions and viewpoints are important to us and to the effort to build on the district's strong local program to include a wide representation of the teaching excellence at work in all of our schools.

See you on (date)!

## Appendix B

### Initial Survey

National Board Candidates  
Support Group  
Initial Survey

Please respond to each item using the following scale:

5=Very Important 4=Moderately Important 3=Slightly Important 2=Not Important 1=Not Applicable

In thinking about your decision to consider entering the National Board process, how important is each of the following to you?

1.	Receiving a personal invitation	5	4	3	2	1
2.	Being invited by a School Board member	5	4	3	2	1
3.	Being invited to a meeting of Black teachers	5	4	3	2	1
4.	Being invited by a Black school district official	5	4	3	2	1
5.	Receiving information in a customized meeting	5	4	3	2	1
6.	The location of the meeting	5	4	3	2	1
7.	The time of the meeting	5	4	3	2	1
8.	Knowing someone else who is applying	5	4	3	2	1
9.	Being able to discuss barriers	5	4	3	2	1
10.	Learning about available support opportunities	5	4	3	2	1
11.	The opportunity to work with other Black teachers	5	4	3	2	1
12.	The salary bonus for NBCTs	5	4	3	2	1
13.	The mentoring bonus for NBCTs	5	4	3	2	1
14.	The recognition NBCTs receive	5	4	3	2	1
15.	The professional development opportunity	5	4	3	2	1
16.	The opportunity to pioneer NB among local Black teachers	5	4	3	2	1
17.	Being part of a national effort	5	4	3	2	1
18.	The opportunity to examine my teaching practice	5	4	3	2	1
19.	Being encouraged by peers to apply	5	4	3	2	1
20.	Being encouraged by my Principal to apply	5	4	3	2	1

## Appendix C

### Sample Support Meeting Agenda

National Board Certification Support Meeting  
University of South Florida-Lakeland  
Room 1276  
Wednesday, September --, 200-  
4:30 PM

*Purpose: To gain familiarity with NB standards and tasks*

*A G E N D A*

- Introductions/Welcome
- Review of September 2 meeting
- Overview of Core Propositions
- Overview of Sample Standard
- Overview of Associated Portfolio Tasks
- Plot Inter-Relationships
- Create Standards/Tasks Matrix
- Open Discussion/Open Topics
- Next Steps?
- Dismiss

Appendix D  
Support Preference Survey

## Support Preference Survey

*Please answer the following questions to help in planning support activities that meet your needs.*

I prefer to:

- work alone.
- work with a group.
- a combination of individual and group work.

I would rather meet:

- near my home.
- near my school.
- at USF.

I would rather meet with:

- candidates from my own school level (elementary, middle, high).
- candidates from my certification area.
- candidates from my area of the county.
- a mixture of the above.

I prefer to meet on:

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Saturday

I prefer to meet:

- late in the afternoon.
- early in the evening.
- morning (Saturday).
- afternoon (Saturday).

Appendix E

Sample Schedule of  
Study-Related Support Events

## Sample Calendar of Candidate Support Events

September 11	Initial Organizational Meeting
September 18	Application Assistance
September 25	Application Assistance
October 2	Understanding Standards and Tasks
October 16	Process Planning
October 30	Entry 4 Brainstorming
November 6	Writing Workshop—Description, Analysis and Reflection
November 20	Feedback Session for Entry 4 Drafts
December 4	Videotaping in the Classroom
January 8	Videotape Critiques
January 22	Forms Check/Process Benchmarking
February 5	Entry Work Groups
February 19	Entry Work Groups
March 5	Entry Work Groups
March 19	Wrap-Up Details
April 1	Portfolio Packing Party

## Appendix F

### Sample of Process Deadlines

2003 National Board Certification Assessment Calendar

Application/Eligibility Periods, Assessment Center Testing Windows and Portfolio Due Dates

After reviewing the Assessment Calendar, select the deadline for portfolio submission and the assessment center testing window that is most appropriate for your situation, and find the corresponding dates for applying and paying your candidate fee.

You may apply at any time between **January 1 and December 31, 2003**. However, in order to be able to submit your portfolio and attend the assessment center on the dates you prefer, you must apply and submit the appropriate fee amount within the application period that corresponds to your selected dates. Missing the eligibility/fee **deadline** for your chosen testing window will alter the schedule for your candidacy.

Candidates complying with these deadlines will receive results no later than Dec. 31, 2003. Candidates who meet the deadlines listed in all other application periods will receive results no later than Dec. 31, 2004.

<b>APPLY JANUARY 1 - MARCH 31, 2003</b>				
<b>Application and \$300 nonrefundable payment received by NBPTS during this period</b>	<b>Full fee payment and all eligibility forms must be received at NBPTS by</b>	<b>To be eligible to test in this Assessment Center Testing Window</b>	<b>Portfolio due at NBPTS on or before</b>	<b>And receive your results no later than</b>
Jan. 1 - Mar. 31, 2003	Mar. 31, 2003	Apr. 1 - Sept. 30, 2003	Jan. 16, 2004	Dec. 31, 2004
	Jun. 30, 2003	Jul. 1 - Dec. 31, 2003		
	Sept. 30, 2003	Oct. 1, 2003 - Mar. 31, 2004		
	Dec. 31, 2003	Jan. 1 - Jun. 30, 2004		
<b>APPLY APRIL 1 - JUNE 30, 2003</b>				
<b>Application and \$300 nonrefundable payment received by NBPTS during this period</b>	<b>Full fee payment and all eligibility forms must be received at NBPTS by</b>	<b>To be eligible to test in this Assessment Center Testing Window</b>	<b>Portfolio due at NBPTS on or before</b>	<b>And receive your results no later than</b>
Apr. 1 - Jun. 30, 2003	Jun. 30, 2003	Jul. 1 - Dec. 31, 2003	Feb. 16, 2004	Dec. 31, 2004
	Sept. 30, 2003	Oct. 1, 2003 - Mar. 31, 2004		
	Dec. 31, 2003	Jan. 1 - Jun. 30, 2004		

<b>APPLY JULY 1 - SEPTEMBER 30, 2003</b>				
<b>Application and \$300 nonrefundable payment received by NBPTS during this period</b>	<b>Full fee payment and all eligibility forms must be received at NBPTS by</b>	<b>To be eligible to test in this Assessment Center Testing Window</b>	<b>Portfolio due at NBPTS on or before</b>	<b>And receive your results no later than</b>
Jul. 1 - Sept. 30, 2003	Sept. 30, 2003	Oct. 1, 2003 - Mar. 31, 2004	Mar. 16, 2004	Dec. 31, 2004
	Dec. 31, 2003	Jan. 1 - Jun. 30, 2004		
<b>APPLY OCTOBER 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2003</b>				
<b>Application and \$300 nonrefundable payment received by NBPTS during this period</b>	<b>Full fee payment and all eligibility forms must be received at NBPTS by</b>	<b>To be eligible to test in this Assessment Center Testing Window</b>	<b>Portfolio due at NBPTS on or before</b>	<b>And receive your results no later than</b>
Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2003	Jan. 31, 2004	Jan. 1 - Jun. 30, 2004	Apr. 16, 2004	Dec. 31, 2004
<b>APPLY FOR NEW CERTIFICATE AREAS IN EMC/LITERACY: READING- LANGUAGE ARTS, EAYA/HEALTH EDUCATION OR ECYA/SCHOOL COUNSELING JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2003*</b>				
<b>Application and \$300 nonrefundable payment received by NBPTS during this period</b>	<b>Full fee payment and all eligibility forms must be received at NBPTS by</b>	<b>To be eligible to test in this Assessment Center Testing Window</b>	<b>Portfolio due at NBPTS on or before</b>	<b>And receive your results no later than</b>
Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2003	Jan. 31, 2004	Jan. 1 - Jun. 30, 2004	Apr. 16, 2004	Dec. 31, 2004

\*Approval of the assessment for this certificate is scheduled for consideration by the NBPTS board of directors in Jun. 2003. Assuming board approval in Jun. 2003, portfolio instructions for this certificate area are expected to be available for download from the NBPTS Web site by Oct. 1, 2003. Information about preparing for the assessment center for this certificate will be available prior to the scheduled Jan. 1-Jun. 30, 2004, assessment center testing window. Check back for updated information.

Source: [www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)

Appendix G  
Interview Guides

## Sample Initial Interview Script

Please tell me a little about yourself.

Where do you teach?

What grade?

What subjects or content do you focus on?

Is there anything you want to tell me about your students?

Which National Board certificate are you seeking?

Why did you decide to apply for National Board Certification?

Is there any special reason you decided to apply this year?

Have you done anything specifically to get ready for this process?

Is there anything that worries you about applying? What? Why?

Do you think you face any special barriers to achieving certification? What? Why?

How are you planning to deal with those issues?

What do you think would be the biggest help to you? What do you need the most?

Do you plan to adjust your teaching to meet the demands of candidacy?

Have you made specific personal or professional plans because of your candidacy?

Have you talked to other people about National Board much in the past?

What were those conversations like?

Are you planning to participate in local support efforts?

Do you think National Board will change you as a teacher? Why?

What are you hoping to gain from this process?

Is there anything else you want to talk about, ask me, or tell me now?

## Sample Exit Interview Script

Tell me how things went.

What surprised you the most?

What was the biggest “Ah! Ha!” ?

What was the biggest challenge?

Do you think you met it successfully?

Was anything easier than you expected?

Why do you think this was so?

What was the biggest help?

What proved to be the biggest hindrance?

How did you deal with it?

Did you work with others?

To what extent? For what purposes?

Did you lack any resources? Please explain.

Did this process affect your classroom work? How?

Do you feel you gained anything from this process? What? Why?

What would you do differently?

What advice do you have for others who are considering candidacy?

What advice or input would you offer the process as a whole (local, state, and/or national)?

Is there anything else you want to talk about, ask me, or tell me?

## Appendix H

### Rhizomatic Comparison Sample

Rhizomatic Comparison Sample

Candidates' Definitions of Effective Teaching	COMMUNITY	NBPTS Core Propositions
Unique to A (Potential <i>Disconnect</i> )	Common to Both (Potential <i>Connect</i> )	Unique to B (Potential <i>Disconnect</i> )
<p>Caring, nurturing</p> <p>Serve community, fill role</p> <p>Continue learning/Attend training</p> <p>Interpret and follow rules</p> <p>Give and receive respect</p> <p>Communicate with families</p> <p>Find ways to connect student needs with sources of help</p> <p>Focus on character development</p> <p>Bridge from school to real life</p> <p>Servant leader</p> <p>Self-sufficient</p>	<p>Knowledge of students</p> <p>Focus on responsibility</p> <p>Concern for academic growth</p> <p>Concern for emotional growth</p> <p>High level of involvement</p> <p>Work toward excellence</p>	<p>Learning community</p> <p>Collaboration with other professionals</p> <p>Policy decisions</p> <p>Question status quo</p> <p>Professional development/trainers</p> <p>Leading activities</p> <p>Conducting research</p> <p>Partnerships with parents</p> <p>Focus on intellect</p> <p>Balance social needs with academic needs</p> <p>Find ways to harness resources</p>

## Appendix L

### Standards/Task Matrix Template

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Leftwich entered the education profession at mid-life. After several years as a parent volunteer in her sons' schools, she initiated a program to tutor struggling readers. The principal soon employed her as a paraprofessional in a reading support program. While working in that capacity, Paula completed her undergraduate teaching degree.

After several years of highly successful classroom teaching, during which she earned a Masters degree, Paula embarked on a course of doctoral study. Concurrently, she served as a district-level teacher training manager. She is now Director of Teacher Education at Florida Southern College, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate literacy-related courses. Paula was recently elected to serve as Chair of the Florida Education Standards Commission.

Paula is daughter of Bud and Mary Ellen Fielder, wife of Jim Leftwich, mother of three adult sons (Hank, Sam and Jake Leftwich), and grandmother of Lainey and Zoey Leftwich.