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*The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards:
Professional Assessment for Teachers of Students with Exceptional Needs*

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Abstract:

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has established five areas of Exceptional Needs as new certification areas: Early Childhood through Young Adult/Exceptional Needs (birth to 8 years), Mild and Moderately Impaired (5 to 21+ years), Severe and Multiply Impaired (5 to 21+ years), Visually Impaired (birth to 21+ years), and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (birth to 21 + years). Pre K - 12+ Exceptional Needs teachers may now be recognized by their schools, communities, state, and nation as master teachers. Teachers are clearly central to planning, implementing, developing, and modifying NBPTS policies and procedures. Only Special Needs educators will assess Special Needs educators as NBPTS candidates.

Introduction

A recent article in the Journal of Inclusive Education discussed the role of Special Needs teacher assessment. Michael W. Apple (<http://www.ed.wright.edu/~prenick/ma.html>) maintained that many teachers may be wary of bureaucratic modes of teacher assessment for good reasons. The history of the evaluation of teachers' professional competence has not always been pleasant; and it has too often been based on a profound misunderstanding of the complexities of the lives of teachers in classrooms. I would posit that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards now provides a very positive method of assessing teachers of children Special Needs. Most National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) value the certification process as the most rewarding professional development activity that they have undertaken. The NBCT has acquired the ultimate symbol of professional excellence. The NBCT proudly carries the label, NBCT following her/his name as a doctor cites MD. or Ph.D. following her/his name.

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment has become a goal of many teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers for many years. There are many models that are available for K-16 students. Whether the decision is to develop a paper model or an electronic model, the concept of portfolio development is a solid concept (Helms, February 27, 2000). National curriculum leaders have long encouraged the development of student projects and exhibitions (Sizer, 1992). Goodlad's recommendation to provide future educators

with multiple experiences in classroom settings further emphasizes the need for authentic assessment (Goodlad, 1994).

Helms & Herrelko, (October 23, 1999) are also developing a model for incorporating the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards into a master's degree program. A recent seminar in Washington, D.C. gathered scholars from several National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education institutions to consider several paradigms for redesigning the master's degree. The process of authentic assessment required by the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards may replace the master's projects or the master's thesis (Blackwell & Diez, 1999.)

Five areas of Exceptional Needs

Five areas of Exceptional Needs have been established as new certification areas by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS): Early Childhood through Young Adult/Exceptional Needs (birth to 8 years), Mild and Moderately Impaired (5 to 21+ years) Severe and Multiply Impaired (5 to 21+ years), Visually Impaired (birth to 21+ years), and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (birth to 21 + years). Pre K - 12 Exceptional Needs teachers may now be recognized by their schools, communities, state, and nation as master teachers.

The process of assessment is relatively new. (National Board for Professional Teacher Standards, 2001, What Every Teacher Should Know, 6). McKinley, Welch, and Zambone (August 12, 1999) were featured at the Sixth Annual National Board Academy held in Las Vegas. Their presentation, Breaking New Ground for NBPTS: New Certificates provided this author and the conference with an in-depth view of the teacher of students with Special Needs certificate. This presentation focused on five certification areas for teachers of students with Special Needs. A clear continuum was established for these teachers: Teacher Education Accreditation (NCATE) to Initial Licensing (INTASC) to Advanced Certification (NBPTS). This presentation focused on the Council for Exceptional Children's Standards and Certification: A code of ethics and standards for professional practice for educators of persons with exceptionalities, international standards for entry into professional practice, and guidelines for special educational professional programs in colleges and universities and accrediting agencies (NCATE.)

The process is a challenging one, and sections of the procedure may be revised by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Again this is a new certification area, and many special educators may not be aware of this important opportunity. It would certainly be appropriate for special educators to attend National Board for Professional Teaching Standards orientation sessions during summer and fall, 2002.

Exceptional Needs Certification

A review of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification areas will indicate that Pre K -- 12 special educators teachers have a number of options to consider for National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification. The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards has developed rigorous national standards of learning and teaching assessment in several areas. Currently National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification is available in the following areas:

- Early Childhood/Generalist (ages 3-8)
- Middle Childhood Generalist (ages 7-12)

- Early Adolescence Generalist (ages 11-15)
- Early Adolescence/English Language Arts (ages 11-15)
- Early Adolescence /Science (ages 11-15)
- Early Adolescence/ Mathematics (ages 11-15)
- Early Adolescence/Social Studies- History (ages 11-15)
- Early Adolescence through Young Adult/Art (ages 11-18+)
- Adolescence through Young Adult/Mathematics (ages 14-18+)
- Adolescence through Young Adult/Science (ages 14-18+)
- Adolescence and Young Adult/English Language Arts (ages 14-18+)
- Adolescence and Young Adult/Social Studies-History (ages 14-18+)
- Early and Middle Childhood English as a New Language (ages 3-12)
- Early Childhood/Young Adult Exceptional Needs Specialist (ages 3-18+)
- Early Adolescence/Young Adult Career & Technical Education (ages 11-18+)
- Early Adolescence/Young Adult English as a New Language (ages 11-18+)
- Early and Middle Childhood Physical Education (ages 3-12)
- Early Adolescence - Young Adult Physical Education (ages 11-18+)
- Early and Middle Childhood Art (ages 3-12)
- Early and Middle Childhood Music (ages 3-12) (NEW)
- Early Adolescence Through Young Adult Music (ages 11-18+) (NEW)
- Early and Middle Childhood World Languages (ages 3-12) (NEW)
- Early Adolescence Through Young Adult World Languages (ages 11-18+) (NEW)
- Early Childhood through Young Adult Library Media Specialist (NEW)

This list means special educators may choose one of the above listed areas for NBPTS certification. It follows that successful candidates might apply for NBPTS certification in additional areas in subsequent years.

There does appear to be a current problem for teachers of students that are Talented and Gifted. While NBPTS currently does not have a special certification for teachers of Talented and Gifted students, NBPTS is hopeful that these teachers might choose an existing area of certification. The Council for Exceptional Children's position is to establish a special certification area for teachers of Talented and Gifted students (CEC Today, Special Education Teachers now Eligible for National Certification, August, 1999, 15).

Where can I find information on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards?

Because of time constraints, teachers are encouraged to use the World Wide Web to keep abreast of current developments. The following URL's and site information are vital to a comprehension of the NBPTS:

- <http://www.NBPTS.ORG>: NBPTS homepage -- the primary source of NBPTS information;
- <http://www.NBPTS.ORG/nbpts/where>: Where is it happening? A clickable US Map which lists the states that are supporting NBPTS;
- <http://www.NBPTS.ORG/nbpts/where/support.html> -- types of support available from school districts, educational associations, and state departments of education;
- <http://www.NBPTS.ORG/> -- a link on this page will list specific assistance from states participating in NBPTS;
- <http://www.NBPTS.ORG/nbpts/nbctindex.html> -- complete list of NBCTs by state, by certification area,

and by alphabetical index.

<http://www.NBPTS.ORG/nbpts/about/IHE.html> -- list of colleges and Universities that offer support groups and assistance in preparing for NBPTS;

<http://www.NBPTS.ORG/nbpts/about/IHE.html#Ohio> -- author's university and support program;

<http://www.NBPTS.ORG/nbpts/about/institutes.html> -- NBPTS Institutes: Facilitators' Institute, Facilitators' II Institute, and Scoring Institute.

Inservice classroom teachers

The leaders of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are inservice classroom teachers. The standards for teachers of students with Special Needs will closely parallel the standards established by the Council for Exceptional Children. Leaders and members of the Council for Exceptional Children have been consulted in developing this new national certification. Bob Garcia, member of the Exceptional Needs Standards Committee was quoted in CEC Today: " For the National Board to recognize and elevate the teaching profession is very important, as is the effort to recognize exemplary teachers and set standards for the profession" (CEC Today, Special Education Teachers now Eligible for National Certification, August, 1999, 1). CEC Today (August, 1999, 5) also indicated that Rosalie Dilbert, Matty Rodriguez-Walling, and Ann Welch, past Clarissa Hug Teachers of the Year were instrumental in developing the Special Needs Standards for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The NBPTS Certification Process

Special Needs educators should request the special publication, The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (2000). Guide to National Board Certification. This publication contains general information applicable to all certification areas. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification process is both a general process and a content specific process. Special Education teacher candidates will be working side by side with candidates in all areas for the first few months of preparation. These candidates may realistically expect to complete the process within one year of application. As principle Investigator and NBPTS facilitator, this author has experience in working with new certification areas. If teachers of students with Special Needs choose to begin work on a specific certification area, it is recommended that the teachers request current materials from the NBPTS.

Teachers who have completed the NBPTS certification process express a good deal of satisfaction with the process. The essential concept is "completion" and not "certification." NBPTS emphasizes that teachers will improve by completing the process. Not all teachers will be certified. Many teachers feel that the process is equivalent to the work required for a master's degree. Just as it is difficult to explain the process of studying for a master's degree, so too is it difficult to fully conceptualize the NBPTS process until one has experienced the process.

NBPTS assessment of teachers of students with special needs consists of two major parts: the portfolio entries and the assessment center exercises. There are several sources of introductory information for teachers involved in Special Education about the NBPTS process, including sessions at Council for Exceptional Children and state affiliates as well as resources available from NBPTS.

Educators of students with special Needs may attend a three-hour orientation session. Many state departments of education provide a listing of local orientation sessions. These sessions are general sessions because the purpose is to provide information to candidates at all levels and in all teaching

fields. Many state departments of education also provide direct financial support for the fees involved in the assessment process. Following application to state departments of education for financial support, the teacher must apply to NBPTS for actual candidacy status. A visit to the NBPTS site at <http://www.nbpts.org> will provide application materials.

The Five Propositions of Accomplished Teaching

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards seeks to identify and recognize teachers who effectively enhance student learning and demonstrate the high level of knowledge, skills, abilities and commitments reflected in the following five core propositions (<http://www.nbpts.org/standards/five-props.html>).

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.

2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.

Accomplished teachers have a rich understanding of the subject(s) they teach and appreciate how knowledge in their subject is created, organized, linked to other disciplines and applied to real-world settings. While faithfully representing the collective wisdom of our culture and upholding the value of disciplinary knowledge, they also develop the critical and analytical capacities of their students.

Accomplished teachers command specialized knowledge of how to convey and reveal subject matter to students. They are aware of the preconceptions and background knowledge that students typically bring to each subject and of strategies and instructional materials that can be of assistance. They understand where difficulties are likely to arise and modify their practice accordingly. Their instructional repertoire allows them to create multiple paths to the subjects they teach, and they are adept at teaching students how to pose and solve their own problems.

3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.

Accomplished teachers create, enrich, maintain and alter instructional settings to capture and sustain the interest of their students and to make the most effective use of time. They also are adept at engaging students and adults to assist their teaching and at enlisting their colleagues' knowledge and expertise to complement their own.

Accomplished teachers command a range of generic instructional techniques, know when each is appropriate and can implement them as needed. They are as aware of ineffectual or damaging practice as they are devoted to elegant practice.

They know how to engage groups of students to ensure a disciplined learning environment, and how to organize instruction to allow the schools' goals for students to be met. They are adept at setting norms for social interaction among students and between students and teachers. They understand how to motivate students to learn and how to maintain their interest even in the face of temporary failure.

Accomplished teachers can assess the progress of individual students as well as that of the class as a whole. They employ multiple methods for measuring student growth and understanding and can clearly explain student performance to parents.

4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

Accomplished teachers are models of educated persons, exemplifying the virtues they seek to inspire in students -- curiosity, tolerance, honesty, fairness, respect for diversity and appreciation of cultural differences -- and the capacities that are prerequisites for intellectual growth: the ability to reason and take multiple perspectives to be creative and take risks, and to adopt an experimental and problem-solving orientation.

Accomplished teachers draw on their knowledge of human development, subject matter and instruction, and their understanding of their students to make principled judgments about sound practice. Their decisions are not only grounded in the literature, but also in their experience. They engage in lifelong learning, which they seek to encourage in their students.

Striving to strengthen their teaching, accomplished teachers critically examine their practice, seek to expand their repertoire, deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgment and adapt their teaching to new findings, ideas and theories.

5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

Accomplished teachers contribute to the effectiveness of the school by working collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development. They can evaluate school progress and the allocation of school resources in light of their understanding of state and local educational objectives. They are knowledgeable about specialized school and community resources that can be engaged for their students' benefit, and are skilled at employing such resources as needed.

Accomplished teachers find ways to work collaboratively and creatively with parents, engaging them productively in the work of the school.

If educators believe that these propositions are true, then these educators might consider National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification and assessment. The successful candidate must hold a baccalaureate from accredited institutions of higher education. The candidate must have completed three years of successful teaching. And the candidate must hold a valid certificate (license) in the state in which the candidate is teaching (What Every Good Teacher Should Know, 2001).

The Portfolio

The portfolio for teachers of students with Special Needs has several major components: linking assessment and instruction, fostering communications development, enhancing social development, writing a portrait of a student, contributing to the profession, and documenting outreach to families and the community. Two videotape entries will be required for facilitating instruction and for fostering small group interactions. The portfolio entries have been designed to correlate with actual classroom practices. While new, the entries have been field tested by the NBPTS. It is estimated that over 100 hours will be required by the candidate to complete the portfolio.

Candidates are requested to assemble a portfolio according to the specifications/directions provided for the portfolio of teachers of students with Special Needs from the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards. The portfolio consists of several different entries, each of which asks for direct evidence of some aspect of the teacher's work and an analytical commentary on that evidence. The portfolio requires four different classroom-based entries, two of which ask candidates to videotape classroom interactions, and two of which ask candidates to collect student-writing samples. In all four classroom-based entries, teachers are required to write a detailed analysis of the teaching reflected in the videotape or student work. While a descriptive narrative is required, the candidate is also expected to write a reflective analysis of the teaching practice.

Documentation of the entries is required. And the candidate must document their work outside the classroom with families and the larger community and with colleagues and the larger profession. In these entries, which emphasize the quality of the contributions rather than the quantity, candidates are asked to show evidence of their accomplishments and then comment on the impact and importance of those accomplishments.

The Portfolio recommends the following time line:

Month one -- Gain an awareness of the process and make application for formal acceptance by NBPTS. Typically, a candidate will begin this cycle in the spring of the year. However, NBPTS will consider applications through December of any year.

Month two -- Receive the "box." The "box" contains all of the information that the candidate will be working with during the next several months. Examine the Portfolio materials and read the special educators standards. The candidate should plan a calendar for the next several months, have student sign NBPTS release forms, and begin working on practice exercises. The candidate will begin to work on the Communication Log in the Portfolio.

Month three -- Continue entries and documentation.

Month four -- Commence the videotape entries and compose documentation for these entries.

Month five -- Finish final drafts of all entries; photocopy materials; send "the box" to NBPTS for assessment.

The NBPTS assessment plan is to hire educators of students with Special Needs who are teaching similar content and who teach at the same student development level to assess the portfolio entries. The idea

is to have a process whereby other Special Needs teachers assess portfolio entries. All entries are assessed part to whole. A portfolio will undergo multiple assessments. Parts of the portfolio may "pass", while other sections may not. Thus NBPTS has introduced a "banking" process. A candidate may now have three years to resubmits components of the portfolio.

Portfolio entries and directions are very specific. For example the two videotape entries must be 20 minutes in length. Editing of the videotape is not permitted. Standard VHS videocassettes must be submitted. The candidate must focus on different lessons on different classes for each student entry and for each videotape entry.

The following is an inventory of portfolio entries (McKinley, Welch, and Hambone, August 12, 1999):

Linking Assessment and Instruction
Fostering Communications Development
Enhancing Social Development
Portrait of a Student
Contribution to the Profession
Outreach to families and communities

Each of these areas must be described, documented, and verified by other teachers or by people familiar with the entry submission. NBPTS defines descriptions as a retelling of the classroom lesson. Analysis is defined as providing concrete evidence that demonstrates the significance of the evidence submitted. Reflection (which is always more difficult) is thinking through decisions employed to instruct the lesson. It is important in reflections to indicate how future instruction might be improved. Analysis and reflection may overlap, but the focus of analysis is to provide reasons and interpretations. Analysis addresses how and why.

Pedagogical content knowledge

The assessment center portion of the process consists of a full day of assessment exercises that are focused on pedagogical content knowledge. This written assessment asks candidates to respond to specific prompts, some of which may be based on stimulus materials that are sent out to candidates well in advance of the assessment center date. The exercises may be simulations of situations to which teachers typically must respond or explorations of particular questions on pedagogical content topics and issues (The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards Assessment Center Orientation Booklet.)

The assessment center day typically consists of four 90-minute sessions, with different prompts or questions administered during each session. The four standards assessed follow: Using assessment information, adapting the curriculum, managing challenging behavior, and planning and facilitating transitions (McKinley, Welch, and Zambone, August 12, 1999). The assessment center exercises are administered at more than 230 testing centers across the United States during the summer on a schedule that typically allows several weeks' availability for each certificate. All candidates have the choice of handwriting or using a word processor to produce responses to the assessment center exercises.

The National Board Application Fee

The application fee for the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification process is \$2,000.00. It is proper to ask, "why does the assessment cost \$2,000 and where does the money go?" In anticipation of these questions, NBPTS has posted a Fans site at

<http://www.NBPTS.ORG/nbpts/about/candfaq.html>.

The primary reason for the fee is to compensate peers for scoring teacher entries. Performance-based assessments are a lengthy and complex process. The majority of the assessment fee is used to pay for scoring. A primary feature of NBPTS certification is that this process is certification by peers. Teachers are clearly central to planning, implementing, developing, and modifying The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards policies and procedures. While universities may assist in the certification process, only NBCTs assess NBPTS candidates. Thus the rigor of the process is judged by other educators of students with Special Needs. Only NBCTs may offer orientation sessions; however, many educators in special education may become NBPTS assessors by attending assessor-scoring institutes. The assessment occurs during the summer months, and a \$100.00 per day honorarium is provided. Assessment centers are at several locations in the U.S., and the assessment period ranges from five to fifteen days. Educators of students with Special Needs do not need to be NBCTs on order to assess. Please visit the website at <http://www.nbpts.org>. If interested in assessment opportunities.

State Departments of Education

Many state departments of education are supportive of the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards process. At this time the many state departments of education will fund the \$2,000.00 application fee for the Special Needs educators applying for The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification. As an additional incentive many state departments of education will pay additional stipends to those Special Needs educators achieving The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification (NBCT). For example Ohio pays \$2500.00 stipends annually for a period of ten years. This may mean an additional pay increase of \$25,000.00 to Ohio teachers. Florida teachers will earn an additional \$10,000.00 per year stipend. Several local school districts have negotiated additional salaries for successful National Board Certified Teachers. Another incentive is the concept of "license portability." Several states have agreed to accept National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification as acceptable for teachers moving into the new states. See the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards website for current information on "license portability."

Higher Education

Many Universities offer facilities, course credit, and formal sessions for candidates for National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification. Colleges and Universities are an integral component in preparing educators for National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification (Helms & Herrelko, 1999). The NBPTS website provides a list of universities which offer assistance to NBPTS candidates. University credit is optional, and Special Needs educators are encouraged to work with a university that offers the teacher the optimum support. The author's university, Wright State University is one of many Universities that offer facilities, course credit, and formal sessions for candidates for National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification (Bailey and Helms, 7).

It is not necessary to affiliate with a university in order to receive NBPTS certification. A primary benefit is that candidates have a "ready-made" support group while working with a university. The author recalls that NBPTS facilitator training insists that providing emotional support for the candidates is an essential component for universities. Current statistics indicate a much higher "pass rate" for university cohort groups than for teachers who are not part of cohort groups. The Teacher Education Division of CEC might actively seek collaboration with university colleagues who are currently administering NBPTS programs for teachers. In universities where established NBPTS cohort groups exist, professors from the Teacher Education Division of CEC will be most welcome.

Indeed, professors from the Teacher Education Division of CEC are encouraged to write grants that will bring the NBPTS process to their university or college. Teacher Education Division professionals may choose to work with Special Needs cohorts or to expand and to work with any of the NBPTS certification areas.

Conclusion

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification requires the reflective construction of a teaching portfolio. The record of evidence must be in written form and video form. The two video entries must be classroom based, and the videos must support the written documentation. Generally the record of evidence is concerned with comprehension of higher level thinking skills, stimulation of the learning process, discovery and inquiry, intellectual engagement, and reflection (by both teacher and student.)

Another component in National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification is a full day at approved assessment center. The assessment center is computer based and typically consists of four ninety-minute sessions.

Each portfolio entry and each assessment center activity will be carefully evaluated and scored. The scoring rubric is part of the initial materials provided to the candidates. Thus the components of the final score are the videotapes, student work samples and teacher comments, and the written responses that have been mailed to the assessment centers.

The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards national office is located in San Antonio, TX. This office has established varying dates for applications, portfolios, and assessment centers. Due date on portfolios will vary between April and June. Notification of certification will occur between November and December. Another essential concept is that of "banking." Candidates who fail certain components are permitted to bank the "passed" components and have a period of three years to complete the final process.

Please refer to the author's website (<http://www.ed.wright.edu/~rhelms/home.html>) for much more information on World Wide Web sites and information relevant to National Board for Professional Teaching Standards online information. It is critical that special educators visit these web sites as soon as possible. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards provides high and rigorous standards for accomplished teachers. The Guide to National Certification (2001) is recommended for all special educators who would apply for certification. The URL for the NBPTS is <http://www.nbpts.org>, and the phone number for the NBPTS is 1-800-22-TEACH. The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards national office is located in San Antonio, TX. This office has established varying dates for applications,

portfolios, and assessment centers. Due date on portfolios will vary between April and June. Notification of certification will occur between November and December.

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The author has taught special education in the public schools for nine years, and has given several presentations at CEC, DEC, NAEYC, NCSS, and NAGC (Helms, R., November 20, 1999.) The author is a trained facilitator the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.