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Living in Dialogue

By Anthony Cody

After 18 years as a science teacher in inner-city Oakland, Calif., Anthony Cody now works with a team of experienced science teacher-coaches who support the many novice teachers in his school district. He is a National Board-certified teacher and an active member of the Teacher Leaders Network. With education at a crossroads, he invites you to join him in a dialogue on education reform and teaching for change and deep learning.



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True Teacher Leadership: Next Step for NBCTs?

A new report on the future of National Board certification has just been released, ([download here](#)) authored by a diverse national group of National Board certified teachers, including me. Perhaps it is not surprising that a team of 10 NBCTs could agree that the process is worthwhile. But our report is not blanket endorsement of the product; rather, it's a thoughtful consideration of what the NB certification process has meant and could mean for teaching.

In developing a reliable way to identify effective teachers, the **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards** has accomplished something great for our profession. It wasn't easy to arrive at, and the certification process is intense and rigorous, requiring teachers to provide solid evidence for how they are meeting the standards defined by the Board. That said, our group is not satisfied with the results the process has yielded. Although we have achieved recognition as effective teachers, the system does not seem to know what to do with us beyond giving us some bonus money and a certificate for the wall.

The report arrives at a time when "teacher quality" has been rediscovered by education policymakers. Teacher quality was never well-defined under NCLB. The law allows a person with a bachelor's degree who is enrolled in a credential program and zero classroom experience to be defined as a "high quality teacher." So now policymakers are scrambling to figure out how to promote real quality teaching. Unfortunately, many proposals seem to miss the point. We have learned some incredibly valuable lessons since the National Board was launched 21 years ago, and any policy to promote quality teaching needs to take these lessons into account.

- Quality instruction is based on core values that treasure every child as both a unique learner and also as a member of a classroom community.
- Teachers who look closely at evidence of student learning can use that information to guide instruction and give powerful feedback to their students.
- Teachers can improve their instruction when they collaborate, learning together how best to meet their students' needs.

When you look closely at these things, you see that each of them requires teachers to be intellectually engaged, critically evaluating their students and reflecting on themselves and their practice. Further, you see that students benefit most when teachers are working as a team to build powerful learning



Anthony Cody.

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across their grade level, school, district and state. Policies crafted in Washington, DC, and in our state capitals, tend to miss these critical marks, largely because they are designed to work in spite of teachers, rather than drawing on us as full partners.

As we worked on the report, our team spent a considerable amount of time discussing the teacher leadership role of NBCTs. We concluded that NBCTs themselves (rather than the NBPTS organization) have the ultimate responsibility to assert the value and importance of leadership roles for NBCTs in schools, districts and states. Local, regional and state NBCT organizations are in the best position to champion this leadership aspect of National Board certification – even as we recognize that teacher leadership is not the exclusive domain of NBCTs.

The most important part of the report may be contained in the preamble, which is an open letter to our fellow NBCTs, a call to action. It says, in part:

We cannot wait to be invited to the policy table. Nor can we wait for any organization or initiative to guide us, endorse us, or train us. We invite their support, but we must begin at once to find our own voices, to hone our core messages, and develop our own leadership ideas and muscle, both personally and collectively.

Let us act, not react.

If we continue to sit by and let others define effective teaching, we will always be reactors, not actors, on the school reform stage where the policies that control our daily work are played out.

This letter closes by posing a choice:

Will teaching become a technical occupation, staffed by a revolving-door cadre of entry-level knowledge workers who follow instructional templates and are judged by narrow data sets?

Or will we finally develop and realize a conception of teaching as complex, nuanced professional work, supported by a strong base of knowledge and constant inquiry, and marked by commonly accepted and rigorous standards of practice?

Although this open letter is addressed to NBCTs, its message clearly applies to all of us who consider teaching more than just a job. **Teacher leadership is not just for NBCTs. We all need to learn how to lead if we expect to move forward.**

So what do you think? How has the National Board process affected our schools? Have you found avenues open to you to exercise your leadership as a teacher? What is needed to strengthen teacher leadership?

Posted by Anthony Cody on July 21, 2008 12:02 PM | [Permalink](#)

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The true next step for NBCT is to recognize that there is little or no correlation between board certification and actual teacher quality just as there is no correlation between having a master's degree and teacher quality (with the exception of upper grade math teachers). If you want to see the research just google "national board certification teacher quality". In fact because board certification is so time consuming, student achievement often decreases during the time that their teacher is involved in trying to achieve national board certification. Last year my principal informed me that my students had made greater gains in reading than the students of any of her other teachers. No other teachers even came close to producing these gains and these results have been consistent over several years. I would love to help other teachers get similar results, but because I have not jumped through the educational hoops, I am not considered for a leadership role.

Posted by: Judy | **July 22, 2008 1:08 PM**

First of all, the report I reference (and helped write) acknowledges that there is mixed research on the effectiveness of the National Board process in identifying teacher quality. However, we discuss this research at some length, because much of it uses standardized test scores as the primary means of indicating effectiveness, and we do not believe these scores are

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adequate to represent what we strive for as educators.

That said, when I follow the advice of the previous poster and do a search for National Board certification teacher quality, the first study that comes up is one by Goldhaber and Anthony, which states "We find consistent evidence that NBPTS is identifying the more effective teacher applicants and that National Board Certified Teachers are generally more effective than teachers who never applied to the program." (see <http://www.urban.org/publications/411271.html>)

Down a bit further is a second study by Cavalluzzo, entitled "Is National Board Certification an Effective Signal of Teacher Quality?" which states: "Based on a variety of different specifications and student subsamples, we find robust evidence that NBC is an effective indicator of teacher quality."

But as I stated several times, I do NOT believe teacher leadership is or should be the exclusive domain of NBCTs. There are fantastic teachers who are not certified, and quite honestly, not all NBCTs are suited for leadership. It is a shame that effective teachers are often overlooked as a source of expertise, and that is a big part of the paradigm shift I believe NBCTs can help promote -- not just for ourselves, but for our profession, and the children with whom we work.

Posted by: Anthony_Cody | July 23, 2008 10:11 AM

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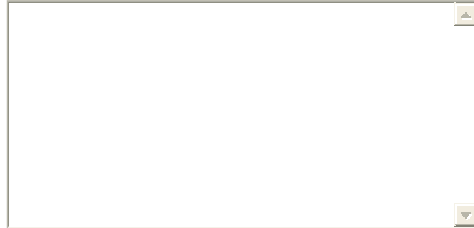
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