

Learning to Lead with Purpose: National Board Certification and Teacher Leadership Development

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How do teachers decide what leadership work to engage? This exploratory study examined the leadership activities and responsibilities that National Board Certified Teachers identified prior to and after achieving National Board Certification. We conducted structured interviews with a diverse group of 15 National Board Certified Teachers from a metropolitan region in the USA. Teachers described that the National Board Certification process influenced their leadership in three ways: (1) opportunities for leadership; (2) choices of leadership activities and responsibilities; and (3) approaches to leadership activities and responsibilities in which they engage. Implications for teacher leadership development around articulation of purpose for what leadership opportunities to engage are discussed.

This study pursues two particular questions about teacher leadership development in relationship to the National Board Certification process in the USA: What do National Board Certified Teachers do for leadership broadly defined, and how did working toward National Board Certification change teachers' leadership? Surveys of National Board Certified Teachers have shown the increasing leadership opportunities available to this group of teachers (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2001; Stokes, Helms, & Maxon, 2003). This interview study tapped a small number of National Board Certified Teachers ($N = 15$) to explore the impact that the National Board Certification process had as a mediating process for developing teacher leadership for National Board Certified Teachers in more detail than the existing body of survey studies. Existing survey studies have shown the kinds of roles and responsibilities that teachers have accumulated after achieving National Board Certification, but have not explored how teachers make strategic choices about their leadership opportunities or how they conceptualize the purpose of their leadership¹.

We examined the leadership activities and responsibilities that National Board Certified Teachers identified prior to and after achieving National Board Certification as well as their reasons for selecting particular leadership opportunities. The findings show that the National Board Certification process influenced teachers' leadership in three ways: (1) opportunities for leadership; (2) choices of leadership activities and responsibilities; and (3) approaches to leadership activities and responsibilities in which they engaged. From the findings in these three categories, we conclude that the issue of *leading with purpose* is a substantial part of the leadership development process that became more salient for the teachers through the National Board Certification process and we suggest that this is an area of teacher leadership development that needs more intentional focus in leadership development and research on teacher leadership.

Conceptions of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership has been conceptualized and studied in many ways over the past twenty years. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) identify three waves of how teacher leadership has been conceptualized by educational reformers, administrators, and policy makers over several decades of efforts to engage teachers as leaders. In the first wave, teacher leaders were viewed as serving in formal roles, often in a managerial capacity, which would enable the school to operate more efficiently. For example, we can see from Smylie's (1997) literature review of 208 original empirical studies that formal teacher leadership programs including master, mentor, and lead teacher programs, career ladder programs, and participative decision making initiatives dominated the development of teacher leadership in the 1980s and 1990s. Leadership for teachers was positioned in formal roles and titles.

The second wave drew more directly on the instructional expertise of teachers, with hopes of leveraging greater impact on the curriculum and instruction in the school. Teachers took on greater responsibilities as curriculum leaders, staff developers, and mentors of new teachers. York-Barr and Duke (2004) reviewed 41 empirical studies on teacher leadership that characterized this wave of teacher leadership development and study. In their review, teachers were viewed as leaders who had significant teaching experience, were known to be excellent educators, and were respected by their peers. In the model of teacher leadership the authors put forward, the ultimate outcome of teacher leadership was anchored by student learning, and leadership was targeted to have influence on individuals, groups, as well as organizational policy and capacity. The authors argued that to be successful in leadership toward teaching and learning, teachers had to have trusting and constructive relationships and build influence through both formal and informal avenues with peers and administrators.

The third wave of teacher leadership emphasizes teachers' roles in "re-culturing" schools as efforts toward schoolwide instructional improvement take hold. This conception of teacher leadership relies not only on the classroom-by-classroom effort to effect change in instruction, but takes advantage of collaborative and continuous learning opportunities for teachers. The third wave emphasizes that teacher leadership is a process rather than a concept of locating leadership within one's position or role. However, traditional school culture can often stand in the way of teacher leadership with culture shifting aims:

The traditional norms of teaching—autonomy, egalitarianism, and seniority—exert a powerful and persistent influence on the work of teachers. They reinforce the privacy of the individual's classroom, limit the exchange of good ideas among colleagues, and suppress efforts to recognize expert teaching. Ultimately, they cap a school's instructional quality far below its potential. (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007)

Teacher Leadership Development

Teacher leadership development is based in a variety of specific knowledge and skills. For instructional leadership, curricular expertise, instructional competence, and facility with models of coaching and adult learning are typically part of the preparation for teacher leaders. When considering the organizational learning that teachers lead, knowledge of school culture, organizational improvement, and models for professional collaboration are important elements of leadership development. In emerging models of teacher leadership development, the use of data, supporting instructional improvement, practices of shared leadership, and a diverse array of

professional expertise selected by the teacher leader are part of the leadership development curriculum (Levenson, 2014). Acknowledging that development for teacher leadership is not a one-time proposition, York-Barr, Sommerness, and Hur (2008) suggest that three types of support are needed for teachers as they begin and continue their work as teacher leaders: a formal introduction to the expected work scope and the working context; formal leadership development via courses, graduate programs, institutes, or workshops; and ongoing learning support through reflection and interactions with other leaders.

A generally held proposition about teacher leaders is that they choose to lead. Some even argue that teaching is leading regardless of making this choice (Collay, 2011). Smylie (1997) concluded from his review that teachers choose to take on leadership roles to help improve their schools and the overall practices within their schools, as opposed to a desire to change their own status or for extrinsic rewards. Teachers are also attracted to leadership roles if they think there will be opportunities for their own professional growth or if they can identify specific connections to their daily work with students. Teachers are not attracted to leadership roles that they perceive to be incongruous with the existing norms of professional relationships. Based on her career-long interest in school leadership, Lambert (2003) notes:

When leadership means a person in a specific role enveloped in formal authority, teachers do not see themselves reflected in that image. When leadership becomes a broadly inclusive culture concept, it provokes a different response: I can see myself as a participating in this learning work with my colleagues. Leadership realizes purpose, the sense of purpose that teachers brought with them into this profession. (p. 425)

The results of this study raise two important questions for teacher leadership development. First, what kinds of development processes can support teachers in how to make choices about leadership activities that align with their core principles and values? And second, how does the field of leadership development acknowledge these purposes for leadership more formally in leadership development activities?

The National Board Certification Process and Teacher Leadership

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (referred to throughout as the National Board) was created in the USA in 1987 with the mission to “establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, and to develop and operate a national, voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards” (NBPTS, 1991, p. 1). During the National Board assessment process, teachers use the professional standards to analyze and reflect on their own teaching and leadership practices.

The process for gaining certification requires documentation and analysis of teaching practices, as well as leadership and collaboration with colleagues, parents and other members of the community, and in the broader educational system. Over the course of one year, candidates develop comprehensive portfolios showing their lesson plans, videos of lessons, samples of student work, and analytical commentaries about their teaching and their students’ learning. Candidates document their work outside of the classroom as a professional leader, learner, and collaborator and also sit for a written exam focused on subject matter expertise.

In addition to the growing number of practicing teachers who are participating in the National Board assessment, the National Board teaching standards have also impacted teacher education and professional development practices across the country (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Similarly, increased interest in the National Board teaching standards and assessment process has triggered research about the potential impact and effects of National Board Certification on instructional practices (Sato, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2008), what teachers learn from the certification process (Lustick & Sykes, 2006), and identification of effective teachers (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Cavalluzzo, 2004, Goldhaber & Anthony 2005; Smith, Gordon, Colby, & Wang, 2005; Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004).

With regard to the question of impact of the certification process on teacher leadership, the National Board conducted a survey of almost 5,000 National Board Certified Teachers in 2001 to learn about their leadership activities and how National Board Certification impacts their leadership (NBPTS, 2001). Of the more than 2,000 respondents to the survey, National Board Certified Teachers reported being involved on average in ten leadership activities since achieving National Board Certification, with the most frequent responses reported in the categories of mentoring or coaching candidates for National Board Certification (90%); mentoring or coaching new or struggling teachers (83%); developing or selecting program or materials to support or increase student learning (80%); and school or district leadership (68%).

A survey completed by 153 NBCTs (71% response rate) in Washington state reported in spring 2003 showed that since becoming a National Board Certified Teacher, teachers increased their leadership related to work in their schools and districts and their work on state level initiatives. The most pronounced increase was in work related to the NBPTS such as mentoring and supporting new candidates and advocating for teacher quality with policy makers. Prior to achieving certification, the teachers already reported strong leadership involvement in their schools and districts such as developing and facilitating teacher study groups and mentoring new teachers. The teachers reported an overall increase of 10% in their local leadership activity after achieving National Board Certification (Stokes, Helms, & Maxon, 2003).

The Center for Teaching Quality in North Carolina surveyed almost 1,400 math and science National Board Certified Teachers within the state about their teaching experiences and their interest in leadership work outside their classrooms. The survey emphasized how the teachers might share their content area expertise with other teachers. Almost 1,000 teachers showed their interest in engaging in a range of professional supports for teachers, including assisting out-of-field teachers, improving professional development programs, and preparing new teachers. More than 150 of these teachers subsequently joined an on-line network as mentors for mathematics and science teachers who were teaching out-of-field (Center for Teaching Quality, 2008).

These survey results provide a broad look at what National Board Certified Teachers are doing in terms of leadership activities since achieving National Board Certification. In the NBPTS survey, teachers reported that being recognized as a National Board Certified Teacher played a major role in helping to land or retain positions or roles of leadership (Kennelly, 2001). In Washington, teachers report that their leadership enactment is increasing in a variety of activities at local and state levels. And in North Carolina, teachers are reaching out as mentors to teachers they do not know to support their instructional practices and content knowledge development.

What these studies do not address, however, are the connections between the process of National Board Certification and the choices teachers made about their leadership. Returning to the questions posed in the opening of this article, how do teachers decide what leadership work to engage? How do teachers prioritize the many and varied leadership opportunities and initiatives available to them? How do teachers find and articulate their purposes for leadership?

We will explore these questions through a lens of leadership that emphasizes the practical and moral dimensions of teachers' leadership work as described in the next section.

Study Design and Procedures

This is an exploratory study designed to begin to understand what drives teachers' leadership choices based on a data set of 15 interviews. We used a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) to develop some interpretive categories for how teachers make leadership choices. Our systematic guidelines and procedures for collecting and analyzing our interview data are described below.

Theoretical Framework

A limitation we see in the literature on teacher leadership are the tools or protocols by which we "measure" or describe teacher leadership. Survey items and research studies often attempt to place labels on teacher leadership activities, role-based forms of leadership, or discrete functions of leadership. Leadership toward cultural change and other informal leadership actions are much more difficult to capture given their fluid, often non-specified nature, and few studies address this (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). For this study, we recognized that the participants' schools would be offering specific leadership positions and roles for the teachers and we wanted to remain true to the teachers' experiences as we asked them to discuss their leadership. Yet we also recognized the everyday work of teachers—conversations with school administration, their collegial interactions, public displays of their instructional practice—as having influence on their principal, their colleagues, and their parent community. These informal acts of influence are the fluid, re-culturing practices of leadership and we needed to capture these in our data along with the new roles such as curriculum coordinator, mentor, and coach.

To capture these forms of leadership, we draw upon the concept of practical leadership (Sato, 2005) to tease out the embedded forms of leadership in everyday practice that often go unrecognized as leadership. Practical leadership requires a deliberative process that is bound to the local contexts. This form of leadership is less about holding a specific position or role and is more aligned with the teachers' everyday choices; that is, choosing to act in ways that will influence or have impact on others. Practical leadership emphasizes how teachers' passions, purposes, and moral agency in education guide those actions. One's guiding purpose for leadership serves as a compass that provides direction of the influence one exerts on others. Moral virtue is not only present in the means by which the teacher exerts influence—acting courageously, caring for others, using just practices—but is simultaneously the ends toward which the teacher is seeking to influence others.

Teachers are often viewed as a resource in the school that can be put into service roles at the discretion of others when needed. Framing teacher leadership as *practical leadership* recognizes that leaders act with purpose and fit their actions to the local context. By shifting away from a role-based frame of *teachers as leaders*, the practical leadership frame views *teacher leadership* as the actions that the teacher takes within a context or situation and values the purposes that drive those actions.

Data collection

We conducted structured interviews with 15 teachers who had achieved National Board Certification within three years of being interviewed, so enough time had lapsed for them to be recognized as a National Board Certified Teacher, yet the experience of the certification process was still a recent memory for them. Interviews were conducted on the telephone and lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed by a professional transcriptionist.

By recognizing the variety of ways in which teacher leadership is enacted—through formal managerial or advisory roles, through functions that may serve instructional improvement, and through everyday purposeful acts that influence changes in one's context—we cast a broad net to capture teachers' experiences with leadership. In order to convey our conception of teacher leadership without leading the participants in their thinking about influences on their leadership decisions, the following statement was read during the interviews to help the teacher think broadly about leadership in their responses:

Leadership can encompass a broad range of responsibilities and actions. For example, you can hold particular positions of leadership (e.g., committee membership, mentor teacher, department chair) or you might participate in activities that you consider to be leadership (e.g., developing new curriculum, develop initiatives or programs on your own, or volunteer for extra projects at the school) or you might engage in behaviors that influence others or set an example (plan with a teacher partner, take risks in your own classroom, or openly share ideas about instruction). I want you to think broadly about your leadership while talking about your leadership responsibilities today.

In the interviews, participants were asked to talk about three things: (1) the kinds of leadership they engaged in prior to the National Board Certification process; (2) the kinds of leadership they engaged in after achieving National Board Certification; and (3) why they made choices to engage in these particular forms of leadership.

Participant Selection

We sought a diverse group of participants to gain a variety of perspectives for this exploratory investigation. We had access to a population of 76 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) who had participated in a regional support group located in a diversely populated metropolitan region of the USA. We eliminated NBCTs who were not currently employed by a public school system. We limited participation to teachers who teach grades seven through twelve—or those who achieved certification in an *early adolescent* or *adolescent through young adulthood* certificate area. While recognizing that elementary school teachers actively take on leadership responsibilities, this decision was made to make the school contextual comparisons among the participants similar. Teachers from a variety of subject areas were invited to participate in this study. In order to capture multiple perspectives on leadership and leadership opportunities, we sought a broad mix of participants with regard to gender and ethnic backgrounds. A summary of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Study participants

Number of Teachers	National Board Certificate Area	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	School type*
2	Adolescence and Young Adulthood English Language Arts	F	Asian American	Suburban
2	Adolescence and Young Adulthood English Language Arts	F	White	Suburban
1	Adolescence and Young Adulthood English Language Arts	M	African American	Suburban
2	Adolescence and Young Adulthood Mathematics	F	White	Suburban
1	Adolescence and Young Adulthood Social Studies/ History	F	White	Suburban
1	Early Adolescence English Language Arts	M	White	Suburban
1	Early Adolescence English Language Arts	F	White	Suburban
1	Early Adolescence Mathematics	F	White	Urban
1	Early Adolescence Science	F	African American	Urban
1	Early Adolescence Science	M	Asian American	Urban
2	Early Adolescence Social Studies / History	F	White	Suburban
Total = 15	Adolescence and Young Adulthood = 8 Early Adolescence = 7	F = 12 M = 3	Asian American = 3 African American = 2 White = 10	Urban = 3 Suburban = 12

**Schools are classified as urban if they are located in dense population centers and as suburban if the school is located in areas of high population with lower densities than typical in city centers.*

Data Analysis

Background data for each teacher were tabulated in a contextual information chart. Each co-author analyzed a set of five randomly chosen interviews and independently coded them. This initial coding resulted in the following categories: leadership activities prior to National Board Certification, leadership activities after National Board Certification, new opportunities for leadership since National Board Certification, National Board processes transferred to leadership, impact of National Board Certification on choices of leadership enactment, impact of National Board certification on the person, impact of National Board certification on leadership approach, and other impacts. Our coding had a high degree of consistency, giving us confidence in our reliability. All interviews were then coded independently into these categories.

We compiled the coded data into categorical files that allowed us to identify the nuance and variation for each of these categories across the 15 different teacher experiences. Through deliberation among the three authors, we reached consensus on three overarching analytic themes: (1) opportunities for leadership; (2) participants' choices of leadership activities and responsibilities; and (3) approaches to leadership activities and responsibilities in which they engage. The findings for each of these analytic themes are discussed in turn next.

Findings

To reiterate, this study asked what do National Board Certified Teachers do for leadership broadly defined, and how has working toward National Board Certification changed teachers' leadership? We first describe the change in leadership opportunities that National Board Certified Teachers experienced. We acknowledge that all of the participating teachers held leadership positions prior to National Board Certification and that not all of the teachers attribute new leadership opportunities to their National Board Certification status. Second, we describe the teachers' choices about leadership. In these data, we begin to see the teachers' clarifying their own goals for their leadership, identifying feelings of obligation, and locating contextual needs for their independent actions. Finally, we report how teachers changed their approaches to leadership when they linked their leadership choices and actions to the National Board Certification process. In our summary of our findings, we report how many teachers identified particular aspects of leadership in order to disclose a sense of how prevalent a particular finding was within the population of 15 teachers we interviewed. However, we report all findings, including those with just one respondent since this is an exploratory study and we did not want to dismiss ideas due to lack of prevalence at this stage of exploration.

Leadership Opportunities after Achieving National Board Certification

All of the teachers in the study identified having some leadership responsibilities prior to pursuing National Board Certification. These responsibilities included, but were not limited to, formal roles such as being a mentor teacher, department chair, serving on curriculum development committees, and membership on school site councils. Leadership was also part of teachers' activities in which they participated without having formal positions. These activities included developing curriculum projects with teaching partners, fund raising, and writing grant proposals. Teacher leadership behaviors included modeling practices that he or she believed to be effective and sharing those practices with other teachers, taking initiative to develop new programs at the school, and coordinating schoolwide or school departmental events.

After achieving National Board Certification, the teachers continued to carry out most of the leadership activities in which they were engaged prior to achieving National Board Certification. All 15 teachers took on new leadership responsibilities after achieving certification and six teachers identified specific leadership activities that they discontinued. In cases where leadership was discontinued, frequent reasons identified by the teachers included the discontinuation of a position or program or because the teacher's priorities about how to spend his or her time had changed.

The teachers were mixed in their opinions about whether their new status as a National Board Certified Teacher resulted in new opportunities for leadership; however, the majority thought that their new status was a factor. Eleven teachers said that their experience with the National Board led to new opportunities for leadership while three said it had not, and one said it

was too early to tell. Six of the teachers in the study indicated that being identified as a National Board Certified Teacher added to their credibility as a professional. Even for teachers who were secure in their roles as educational leaders, the recognition of being a National Board Certified Teacher carried some weight in the educational system. These results are aligned with the results of the NBPTS survey in which more than 90% of NBCTs polled said that their status as an NBCT gave them more credibility in the education profession and 81% agreed that National Board Certification opened new leadership opportunities for them (NBPTS, 2001).

The teachers who had access to new leadership responsibilities after their National Board experience worked in a variety of roles. Nine of the teachers in this study supported candidates for National Board Certification, with two coordinating local support programs for candidates. All of these teachers spoke of their desire to give back to those going through the process, since they had learned and gained so much as a result of their experiences as candidates who had been supported by other teachers. As one teacher said, “I don’t think I could have done it without the kind of support that I got. Again, I feel like if I can help somebody...that would be a good [thing].”

One of the teachers who had taken on the role of supporting National Board candidates had been involved with pre-service teacher education, but had not seen effective ways to work with veteran teachers before his involvement with the National Board Certification process. He said:

Prior to National Board, I had done a lot of staff development. I always tended toward the newer teachers, because they seemed more open to absorbing new strategies, and even after a lot of staff development work with veteran teachers, there was always that feeling of old dogs and new tricks. And I think what National Board did is it created an excellent vehicle for veteran teachers who really wanted to improve their teaching to pursue that. I hadn’t really seen that as an option of professional development.

Two teachers explained that they had become a part of university-based research projects as a result of their certification; these projects gave these teachers more opportunities for self-assessment. One developed personal and professional relations with leaders of a university-based support program, leading to an invitation to join a research project focused on the use of assessment in classrooms. This project brought researchers into his classroom and afforded him opportunities to continue to reflect on his practice. Another teacher became involved in a research project specifically focused on National Board Certified mathematics teachers. Because this project originated in Australia, most of the communication took place through surveys and letters. However, when directed to survey her students about her effectiveness as a teacher, the teacher was prompted to reflect upon her work with her students.

Three teachers shared that they had gained new positions on state and national committees after achieving National Board Certification. One teacher was asked to become a member of a statewide commission on redesigning teacher education. In this role, he has become a representative of practicing teachers. Another teacher was selected to serve on a National Board Standards Committee. In this role, he is contributing to the development of performance standards for his profession. A third teacher was invited to become a member of the National Commission for Accreditation of Teacher Education Board of Examiners. He will contribute to the development of teacher education program at institutions across the country.

Two teachers have also become involved in school reform efforts that use a small school redesign model. Both teachers were hired as a result of their certification status and will serve as teachers in new charter schools dedicated to underserved students.

All teachers who identified their National Board Certification status in affecting their leadership opportunities mentioned their involvement in school or district initiatives. These teachers reported being involved in a wide variety of activities at the local level, including professional development, new teacher education, pre-service teacher education (located at their school sites), acting as cooperating teachers, membership on standards committees or initiatives, curriculum development work, and/or representing their colleagues. Most teachers felt their administrators specifically requested them to work in new roles because of their experience with National Board Certification. As one teacher said:

I know that National Board Certification is a strong factor in why [my administrator] chose me. Because she feels strongly that the new teacher work in our district should be led by Board Certified Teachers....She feels strongly that the National Board Certification is a much stronger credential than the master's degree from a university, in terms of teacher leadership.

On the other hand, a few teachers felt less certain about the connection between their new status and their involvement in new initiatives. As one teacher said:

I think maybe I was put on [this committee] because I was National Board Certified, although nobody ever said that and nobody can figure out how they picked who they picked for this leadership team.

To varying degrees, National Board Certification appears to create more opportunities for teacher leadership. Though some felt their new status did not have an impact on their roles as leaders, most felt that they took on new roles as a result of being identified as an NBCT. We also note here that the teachers' reports relied strongly on identifying new designated roles and responsibilities for leadership and not as much on informal or practical ways in which their leadership changed. Some examples of leadership actions outside of designated roles described by the teachers are described in later sections. The next section describes more thoroughly how the National Board Certification process influenced the decisions that teachers made regarding enacting leadership.

Choices about Leadership Activities and Responsibilities

The National Board Certification process played a role in helping some of the teachers make decisions about what kind of leadership they wanted to enact along four dimensions: a clarification of the teacher's goals for leadership; a felt sense of obligation; increasing the teachers' confidence in pursuing leadership; and the contextual opportunities and constraints on the teachers' choices.

Clarified goals for leadership. For several teachers in this study, the National Board Certification process helped them clarify their goals and make choices about their leadership enactment. They attributed the certification process with helping them to focus their leadership choices on particular goals, helping them make strategic choices for how to have the greatest

impact given the limited time they have to dedicate to leadership activities, and helping them shift to an action-oriented stance to bring about change where they saw a need for change.

Some teachers reported being able to ask themselves key questions before embarking on a leadership role or responsibility. For one teacher, the question was focused on how his work as a leader would contribute to the overall goal of assuring quality teaching for students in schools:

I notice the things that I respond to...are connected to making sure that we have the most effective teachers that we can have in the classroom and to have the highest student achievement and learning as possible. And so I look at it from that standpoint when I say, "Okay, what can I do here to make that happen?" I'm concerned about that. If I can't connect it or relate it to that, I won't bother...So all of the little assignments that your principal or vice principal or your department chair wanted you to do, that were unrelated to student learning, this committee and that committee, those types of things I just gave up, and I made it a standard for me not to be involved in those in the future.

For two teachers, the focal point was how to use limited time effectively to generate the greatest benefit for professional growth, for other teachers' development, and for students. For example, one of the teachers explained:

Overall, I would say I'm a lot more focused on my time now. I think I'm more specific about what I consider important, or choosing things to be involved with, knowing that I have a very limited amount of time, and there are all these great opportunities out there, that I'm choosing things in particular that would have the most benefit, either to my own personal growth or to the growth of other teachers.

Another teacher indicated that she approached problems that she encountered differently, choosing to focus her leadership on the possibilities of dealing with problems rather than spending her energies complaining about problems:

I'm a lot more aware of effects, where I think before I was more cause oriented, and I think I'm better at seeing long-term goals and asking why we're doing what we're doing....Meaning okay, it's really unfortunate that we don't have enough supplies, it's really unfortunate that this kid came from a feeder school that didn't prepare them, a lot of the things we have no control over are really unfortunate, but let's stop whining about it. Let's look at what the effect is, and what we're going to do, since that's the situation.

Obligations. Some teachers in the study felt an obligation to take on new responsibilities. As described above, this sense of obligation was most prevalent among the teachers who were providing support for National Board candidates. The sense of paying back to others what they themselves had received as candidates showed up regularly in the interviews of the nine teachers who were now supporting National Board candidates. Teachers also expressed feeling other obligations that led them to choose new leadership roles and responsibilities. For example:

I've been off and on a mentor...for the last ten years officially and unofficially. And that's very meaningful to me, because if people hadn't volunteered to mentor me when there were no mentors, I wouldn't be teaching. I'd have left. So I felt it was my professional responsibility, as well as just sort of a noble obligation to my fellow colleagues, to make sure teachers survive their first through third year. Because we need good teachers, and it's a shame, sometimes, we lose them because there's no one helping them out. And I felt it was my personal role to do that.

This teacher now leads a National Board candidate support program and offers a similar explanation as to why she chose to take on this tremendous responsibility on top of her full-time teaching load.

Contextualized choices. Looking across the 15 interviews shows no discernable pattern of leadership opportunity or enactment based on gender, years of teaching experience, subject matter, or school type (see Table 1). None of these characteristics are more predictive of increased opportunities for leadership, the prestige of leadership opportunities available, the approaches that teachers reported taking with their leadership, or purposes the teachers reported undergirding their leadership enactment.

Choices for enacting leadership were often bound by the specific school and district context in which the teachers worked. Economically, programs were cut and teachers lost leadership roles such as mentoring new teachers. Politically, some school administrators did not value the identification of National Board Certification, so new opportunities were not as prevalent for the NBCTs in those schools. Some teachers took on or stayed in roles such as department chair because no one else in the department would take on the responsibilities.

The teachers' working context presented opportunities for leadership enactment and it was up to the teacher to act to fulfill a context-specific need in the school. For example, one teacher spearheaded a new curriculum development effort because she felt that the existing curriculum did not match what she thought was an important and appropriate approach to the subject matter. Similarly, another teacher took on a curriculum development project at her school because her school had such high teacher turnover, she felt that the curriculum development would put high quality materials into the hands of new teachers and create greater consistency across teachers and for the students. Another teacher discontinued her role on the faculty senate at her school because she felt that the interactions in that setting were creating tension between her and the school administration. She did not want these tensions to disrupt other initiatives she was supporting, so she made the political move to give up her representational role in order to protect work she held in higher priority. And a fourth teacher created a lesson-sharing time for teachers in her school because she thought that the teachers needed more opportunities to work together at her school. These are just four examples within the data of teachers expressing that they "saw a need" that was specific to their working context and felt like they had to or wanted to do something about addressing that need. Leadership here is represented as action rather than filling a designated role.

Leadership Approaches after Achieving National Board Certification

When asked whether or not the National Board Certification process affected the way that the teachers approached leadership, most of them in the study shared that it had, while four indicated that National Board Certification had not significantly impacted their leadership

approach or style. When we examined the affirmative responses, we found that for ten teachers, processes promoted by the National Board during certification had been transferred into the teachers' approach to leadership: reflection focused on how leadership impacts student learning; use of the National Board teaching standards in leadership; and use of student work to examine teaching practices. In addition to these directly-transferred processes, collaboration with colleagues was also identified as a new approach to their work that these teachers connected to the National Board Certification process. Finally, we identified a theme of increased confidence post-National Board Certification that has an influencing factor on some participants' leadership (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Leadership approaches after achieving National Board Certification

Leadership Approach	Connection to National Board Certification
Focused on student learning	Direct transfer of National Board Certification process to leadership approach
Use of National Board teaching standards	
Use of student work analysis in professional development of other teachers	
Collaboration with colleagues	Attributed to National Board Certification process and status
Increased confidence	
Reinforced existing leadership approaches	Pre-existing leadership approaches not attributed to National Board Certification

Leadership focused on student learning. Six teachers found that they were more reflective about their leadership as a result of their involvement with the National Board Certification process. Their reflection on their leadership choices was specifically focused on the student learning outcomes of their leadership. These teachers report asking themselves the same questions that the National Board portfolio asked them to write about: "Why do I do what I do, and how can I do it better?" They connected their reflection on their leadership roles to their efficacy with students. For example, one said:

The nice thing about the certification process is that they started asking you, "Okay, so you're on this committee, but how does that help kids?" And when I started looking at that kind of question, it's like, "Oh my gosh, think of all the time I'm really not doing anything that's bettering education."...It makes you more aware of how everything you do affects your teaching, and affects your students....Right in the portfolio, you had to explain why those things helped children.

In constructing their assessment portfolios, National Board candidates repeatedly explain how their work in and out of the classroom contributes to student learning. The teachers' decision making about their leadership roles and responsibilities described here echoes the portfolio emphasis on reflecting on the impact of one's teaching and leadership action on student outcomes.

Use of National Board teaching standards. In addition to focused reflection, five teachers used the National Board teaching standards in their work as leaders. Teachers reported using the standards in their leadership decisions, as illustrated in this example: “The standards are really helpful in guiding me in terms of what I’m doing [as a teacher leader].” Teachers also discussed using the standards to inform curriculum and to improve curriculum. One teacher looked at the standards while examining and writing curriculum in social studies with her grade level team, and another used the standards with her department to improve curriculum in English. Finally, some teachers used the National Board teaching standards as a centerpiece of interaction with other teachers: “And so I spent most of the new teacher meetings..., talking about the professional teaching standards.”

During the certification process, teachers read and re-read the standards and assess their practice using the standards as a benchmark. In writing their portfolios, NBCTs provide evidence of meeting specific standards. Once they turned to their leadership roles, these teachers reported applying the standards of the National Board to their practice and encouraging those around them to do so as well.

Student work analysis. In demonstrating that they meet the standards, teachers pursuing National Board Certification must analyze and share student work samples in their portfolios as evidence of effective teaching practices. One teacher now relays how he uses this central feature of the National Board portfolio to help his inexperienced colleagues develop as teachers. He explained that in his work with pre-service and new teachers, he now asks them to bring in their students’ work in order to examine their practice:

So even though it won’t be a huge portfolio or in as much depth or with as many entries, just that basic process of looking at student work and reflecting on it, I will do that in my methods course with new teachers....I’m hoping what it will do is clear away the muddle and let them focus in on the important thing, which is, what the Board says, “let’s look at your kids in your classroom at this time.” “What do you need to do to move them forward?”

Collaboration with colleagues. Three of the teachers in this study also commented on their increased use of collaboration and discussion of practice with colleagues in their leadership roles as a result of the National Board Certification process. For example, one said:

I chose to come out of my cave, the cave of the classroom, and I also started sharing a classroom with a woman who is the best English teacher I’ve ever seen...and we collaborate. Three years ago, I would have said, “I do not have time for this.” And actually, my curriculum is much better, my job is much more fun, and my students are just getting a better education.

A teacher who runs a support program for National Board candidates reports fostering collaborative work among her teacher-candidates because, “I really wanted feedback, I really wanted somebody, whether it was validating what I did, or to say, ‘I don’t understand what you’re talking about.’”

Putting together the National Board portfolio does not directly require teachers to work with others, but collaborating with other teachers can facilitate completing the National Board

portfolio. This suggests that the National Board Certification process indirectly promotes collaboration for those teachers who had access to collegial support. Yet, one of the teachers who mentioned greater collaboration as an outcome completed her portfolio alone, one was involved in a support program, and a third was involved with two different support programs that promoted collaboration. The National Board portfolio also requires evidence of teachers' work with their colleagues, with families, and with the school community. Preparing this portfolio evidence may have promoted this stance toward collaboration.

Increased confidence. For four of the teachers in this study, achieving National Board Certification built up their confidence in some areas, leading them to pursue roles and responsibilities that they had not previously pursued. For example, one teacher described:

It's maybe just made me a more confident leader, to know that at least I feel that if I say something, I can at least back it up with "I have been through a process." It doesn't make me better than anybody else, but at least it's a little bit of a validation of what I believe is okay, to believe that...I'm not better than anybody, it's just I feel like some of my beliefs and methods have been validated.

Increasing the individual confidence of the teacher, along with increasing his or her sense of credibility, as discussed earlier, can lead to new choices about what kinds of leadership roles and responsibilities he or she takes on. One of the teachers described himself as being more vocal in speaking out to represent teachers now that he is an NBCT, while another spoke of furthering his own development by serving on a policy-making committee that is completely new to him and his experience. One teacher summed up how becoming an NBCT provided a little push toward a new outlook on his leadership: "I think part of the National Board process compelled me or got me to move in the direction of wanting to be a leader more than I had been."

Existing leadership approach reinforced by National Board Certification process. Finally, there were those who felt the National Board Certification process did not change their approach to leadership, but rather had a reinforcing effect on already existing approaches to leadership. For these teachers, their leadership had always been an integral part of their professional work and they were active in many dimensions of their school. However, they said that their approach to leadership before their experience with National Board Certification and after remained consistent. One teacher said:

I'm not dogmatic, I'm not dictatorial, I'm not exclusive. I have an open willingness to hear and listen, and to then discuss and then to consider other people's ideas. I've tried to see if I can incorporate their ideas into the way I'm thinking or even be changed by them. I've always done that.

In this case, the National Board Certification process appears to validate what she had always done rather than operating as a change force. For another teacher, the National Board Certification process provided an opportunity for her to reflect on aligning her goals with her leadership work, but she said the process did not change what she was doing or her approach to leadership.

A third way that the certification process was reinforcing to the teachers' leadership approach was for a teacher who said that he had "leadership skills already within me, and I think my going through the National Board process lent itself to bringing those leadership skills to the forefront." He elaborated that his focus for his leadership had been changed to attend more to his impact on students, but that his approach to working with colleagues had not undergone any change.

Discussion: Learning to Lead With Purpose

We now look across the findings and discuss the larger themes we identified in how these 15 NBCTs described their leadership. From looking across the types of changes in leadership that the teachers experienced, how they made choices about their leadership enactment, and how they approached their leadership post-certification, the issue of *leading with purpose* is a substantial part of the leadership development process that became more salient for many of the teachers in this study. In looking at how the teachers decided what leadership work to engage and how they prioritized varied leadership opportunities and initiatives available to them, we were struck by how frequently and clearly several teachers reported that the National Board Certification process helped them to develop a stronger articulation of purpose for *which* leadership opportunities to engage. Intentionally choosing leadership opportunities with personal or professional goals in mind appeared to be a new way of thinking about leadership opportunities for the majority of teachers in this study. We suggest that two overarching ways of focusing their purposes for leadership can be located in the findings reported above—leadership toward student learning and leadership toward professional stewardship.

Student Learning as Leadership Purpose

Based on the findings described above, we saw a prevalent theme in promoting the best possible learning opportunities for students as a driving force behind leadership decisions for many of the teachers in the study. For example, student learning was identified in how several of the teachers described how they now choose leadership engagement by clarifying their goals with the purpose of benefiting students. Some teachers said they pursued a goal of promoting student learning in a variety of ways, ranging from improving their own teaching effectiveness to developing curriculum for their school or district. Some teachers reported that they were more inclined to make deliberate choices about how to be more effective educators after experiencing the certification process. Some teachers said they sloughed off some responsibilities so that they could conserve time to pursue work that they felt would have greater impact on student learning. These NBCTs said that they became more focused on the teaching and learning processes, and less devoted to educational bureaucracy and fruitless complaint.

This purpose for teacher leadership aligns with previous literature that suggests that teacher leadership is often grounded in the work of classroom instruction and guided by the desire to improve student learning through a variety of avenues (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). What we find compelling here is that the teachers who report student learning as their purpose for leadership located this purpose through the National Board Certification process. The certification process seems to have provided the teachers with a framework for making choices about their leadership grounded in student learning.

The choices about leadership engagement based on student learning are further reinforced by the leadership approaches that several teachers reported as described in our findings above.

Several teachers reported that the National Board Certification process gave them a new lens for maintaining a focus on student learning while engaging in leadership activities and that the National Board standards provided a framework for talking with others about effective instruction and how to locate evidence of student learning. Student work analysis was even directly transferred to the practices of one teacher as a means of engaging other teachers in a focus on evidence of student learning.

These teachers may have been influenced toward this focus on student learning by the National Board Certification process which repeatedly asks teachers to describe and reflect on how their instructional practices lead to student learning. One portfolio entry, in particular, asks teachers to explain how their professional learning, leadership, and other collegial work outside the classroom supports student learning. As one teacher explained:

What really drove it home was when I was doing the professional development aspect of the portfolio, where you had to show what you accomplished in the professional arena, and right in the portfolio, you had to explain why those things helped children. And so I found myself not even including several of the committees I was on, because I...didn't have a good case as to why that was really benefiting kids. And so that was like, "Gee!"

Professional Stewardship as Leadership Purpose

When we looked across our findings about the choices and approaches that the teachers began to make about their leadership enactment after achieving National Board Certification, we noted a second theme grounded in several teachers' comments about working with and supporting other teachers. Several teachers in the study reported how they supported the professional development and collegial opportunities for themselves and other teachers. These teachers said that they felt an obligation to give back to others the kind of assistance that they had received while engaging in the National Board Certification process. And some were motivated to carry the messages of the NBPTS into the schoolwide change efforts and mentoring programs in which they worked. Several teachers in this study felt a communal responsibility to contribute positively to their own work environment and to share ideas and resources with their colleagues as noted in the findings about felt obligations as a way to choose leadership enactment and seeking collaborations as an approach to leadership.

Prior research suggests that "teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning, contribute to school improvement, inspire excellence in practice, and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement" (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000, p. 28). This sentiment about teacher leadership is born out in our findings. We link this purpose of leadership to the concept of professional stewardship (Sato, 2002) as a means of naming the commitment that some of the teachers in this study described. This theme suggests that a driver of teacher leadership could be finding purpose in preserving and supporting professional ideals. To be members of the profession of teaching means to uphold a set of responsibilities and behaviors (Shulman, 1998). The concept of stewardship is commonly used to refer to careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. Being a steward of the profession signifies that the teachers feel that they are part of a larger community of practitioners that hold something in common—practices, ideals, purposes—and that part of their drive for leadership enactment is linked to helping others live and work within those same professional expectations.

Sergiovanni (1992) used the concept of stewardship to describe his notion of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977, as cited in Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 273)—leadership enacted in the service of the people one is leading. The examples he draws upon illustrate engagement in work that is less bureaucratic and closer to the needs of the people. Sergiovanni (1992) makes the point that he is not focusing on the process of leadership, but wants to draw attention to the substance of leadership by pressing on key questions such as “What are we about? Why? Are the students being served? Is the school as learning community being served? What are our obligations to this community? With these questions in mind, how can we best get the job done?” (p. 277). In other words, leadership becomes the responsibility of the members of the organization in order to take care of the organization and to nurture thoughtfully its development.

We draw on the idea of professional stewardship (Sato, 2002) as a way to describe how teachers take care of not only themselves, their students, and their school organization, but also as a way to uphold quality and high expectations among their colleagues when questions of teaching practice are examined. As York-Barr and et al. (2008) note: “Learning side-by-side, teacher-leaders inspire high levels of professional engagement among colleagues.” Leadership with the purpose of professional stewardship creates a shared responsibility for continual improvement of practice and shared professional knowledge growth (p. 17).

Conclusion

We set out in this study to explore the questions of what National Board Certified Teachers do for leadership broadly defined, and how working toward National Board Certification changed their leadership. The findings from the interviews show the National Board Certification process influenced teachers’ leadership in three ways: (1) opportunities for leadership; (2) choices of leadership activities and responsibilities; and (3) approaches to leadership activities and responsibilities in which they engage.

From the findings in these three categories, we clearly saw that the teachers in this study gained new opportunities for leadership engagement, including new positions within schools, advisory roles with state and national organizations, and roles as collegial mentors as a result of their National Board Certification status. This comes as no surprise given earlier studies that documented the increase in leadership roles and opportunities offered to NBCTs (Center for Teaching Quality, 2008; Stokes, Helms, & Maxon, 2003).

The more surprising outcome of this exploratory study is that the National Board Certification process appears to have helped teachers develop ways to choose their leadership activities and shaped some of the teachers’ approaches to leadership enactment. The purposes that the teachers chose to champion varied widely according to their own propensities (e.g., a focus on curriculum development or a focus on new teachers); their own professional goals (e.g., start a small school or turn around the math department); their professional backgrounds (e.g., teacher preparation program influence, experiences in different schools); and their individual beliefs. The National Board Certification process appears to help some teachers bring clarity and focus to the purposes for their leadership. Through these interviews, we saw some teachers articulate their professional goals. Their purposes rose above a desire for personal success and aimed at larger social and professional goods, namely student success and professional ideals of being a teacher among other teachers.

Prior research has documented the purposes of teacher leadership, connecting those purposes to student learning and professional collaboration. This study suggests that those

purposes are not necessarily immediately evident to teachers when making decisions about their leadership and that they can be developed or refined through professional learning processes. We conclude that the issue of *leading with purpose* is a substantial part of the leadership development process that became more salient for the teachers through the National Board Certification process and we suggest that this is an area of teacher leadership development that needs more intentional focus in leadership development.

Leadership development is often cast as a set of skills or knowledge to be acquired by leaders (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The results of this study raise questions for teacher leadership development about the kinds of development processes that can support teachers in making choices about leadership activities that align with their core principles and values. This study suggests that locating one's purpose or a collective purpose of a group in a distributed leadership frame (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007) should not be a taken-for-granted aspect of teacher leadership development. Frameworks and structured reflections on professional expectations and one's own motivation to engage in leadership can have an impact on how one chooses to spend one's energy and direct one's professional commitments.

Teacher leaders are often described in the literature as seeking collaboration and have a learning or growth mindset about themselves and other teachers:

Such teachers are respected and viewed as credible by teaching peers when they demonstrate in-depth curricular knowledge along with significant experience and expertise as classroom instructors. Teachers who lead well tend to be learning-oriented people who take initiative and responsibility for their own learning, are effective communicators with strong interpersonal skills, and have a collaborative orientation toward working with others. A less visible but very powerful influence on the effectiveness of teacher-leaders is a belief in the positive learning and growth potential of people, even grown-ups. (York-Barr et al., 2008, p. 15)

The results of this study raise questions about how the field of leadership development acknowledges these purposes for leadership more formally as a purpose for leadership rather than as a description of preferred processes for engaging in leadership. In other words, in addition to viewing engaging colleagues collaboratively as a process of teacher leadership, we can also view collaboration and shared expertise among teachers as a desired outcome of leadership. If viewed as an outcome, we can name these processes as a purpose—a goal or a desire to have these processes be the norm of professional interaction. We suggest that naming this purpose as professional stewardship recognizes that teacher leaders may be aiming to define and support the professional activities of teachers and their aim is to be a steward of those professional ideals, not only a user of those processes.

We recognize that this study has limitations for broad generalization to the total population of NBCTs. We are not suggesting that all teachers who have achieved National Board Certification share these same experiences, and we are not claiming that teachers in this study are representative of all National Board Certified Teachers' experiences. Based on these teachers' perspectives on their leadership, however, we were able to explore what NBCTs do for leadership and how the National Board Certification process affected their leadership. The National Board Certification process provided a framework of professional standards, an assessment process that emphasized the outcomes of the teaching and learning interaction, and an expectation that professional learning and leading are linked to purposes greater than personal

development, but are connected to the improvement of the profession of teaching more broadly. The National Board Certification process seems to have provided processes that enhanced the leadership development of the teachers by helping give shape and definition to their purposes for enacting leadership. Other similar kinds of development experiences could have similar effects.

We suggest that teacher leadership development programs may benefit from including a focus on locating and developing the teacher leaders' purpose through structured reflections and using professional standards as a guiding framework. We also suggest that naming a teacher's commitment to the professional development of others as an act of stewardship may help teachers identify their leadership purpose among their professional peers with greater clarity.

Note

¹ Results from this study were previously presented at an American Educational Research Association annual meeting.

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