National Board Effects on School Library Media Education

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The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was formed in 1987 in response to the publication of *A Nation at Risk.* Two of the problems that the subsequent Carnegie report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century,* identified as reasons why teachers left the classroom were the lack of a career ladder for teachers and poor pay and benefits. NBPTS addressed these and other issues by creating rigorous standards for the teaching profession, devising a voluntary system of identifying accomplished teachers, and encouraging policy changes to reward and sustain those skilled teachers in the classroom.

To date, there are nearly 24,000 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). Library media as a certification area first became available in 2002. The first class of candidates produced approximately 435 library media-certified teachers, although there may be others with library media licensure who are board-certified in areas such as early- or middle-childhood generalists.

If one were told that Jones Middle School was a good library program, the immediate response might be, “What do they have?” The assumption is that good school library media programs have financial resources and supports—good facilities, sound and stable budget streams, current materials and technologies, and administrative backing (evidenced by best practices such as flexible access). The National Board standards takes the opposite approach by examining school library media specialist (SLMS) performance irrespective of resources. The influence on school library media research and practice will be profound.

SLMSs who achieve accomplished teacher status through National Board Certification (NBC) are judged against the same rigorous standards as classroom teachers. They demonstrate outstanding competence at collaborating with classroom teachers to teach information skills, integrate technology, and encourage reading and love of literature. They exhibit knowledge of management practices, technology basics, children’s and YA literature, collection development, ethical and legal tenets, and information literacy. There is good reason to be proud of those in our profession who have met and exceeded such high standards. Still, amidst the cheers, there are those of us who wonder what this means for school library media preparation programs and practices.

As awareness of the NBC process increases, and more states follow North Carolina’s pattern of having at least one certified teacher in each school, questions will arise on how to align school library media preparation programs with NBPTS standards. What and when should students be encouraged to apply? How should the NBPTS process be supported?

Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) offers an accreditation process for teacher education programs. Required in some states, but voluntary in most, NCATE’s core propositions of what teachers should know and be able to do and their subject-specific standards also affect teacher preparation. In addition to covering the syllabi,
schools of education must demonstrate that prospective teacher candidates, in NCATE’s words, “know and can do” the basic building blocks of teaching. Phrases such as “performance-based,” “conceptual frameworks,” “knowledge, skills, and dispositions,” and “assessment systems” are constantly revisited in faculty meetings in university and college preparation programs.

NCATE accredits teacher education units at both beginning and advanced levels. For initial licensure programs (first-time teachers), NCATE suggests alignment with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards for beginning teachers. INTASC represents a group of state education agencies and national educational organizations dedicated to the reform of the preparation, licensing, and ongoing professional development of teachers. For advanced programs (licensed teachers seeking master’s or post-baccalaureate degrees), NCATE advocates alignment with NBPTS standards. This poses an interesting dilemma.

School library media preparation programs are designed for beginning SLMSs, whether they are at the undergraduate or graduate level. In some states, SLMSs are required to hold a teaching license in another subject or grade level. In other words, they must have been a classroom teacher (or at least done practice-teaching) before they can begin their school library media career. In several states, no such previous licensure is required; first-time SLMSs are also new teachers. In contrast, NCATE states that preparation of SLMSs should always be considered advanced. If we are preparing first-time educators, then surely INTASC standards are more relevant. On the other hand, NBPTS library media standards are more applicable to the library media skills needed. Since NBPTS library media standards are for accomplished teachers, its place in school library media licensure is unclear. It is unreasonable to expect novice students to become accomplished media specialists within the short library school or graduate degree experience. An extensive dialogue among school library media educators is needed to agree upon the extent to which our preparation programs should be aligned with various standards, including NBPTS.

**Unresolved Questions**

**Q. Should experienced teachers seeking licensure as a school library media specialist be discouraged from seeking NBPTS certification while in library school?**

**YES**

The National Board is designed for accomplished teachers. New school library media specialists, no matter what their teaching skills, are not accomplished library media specialists. If this happens on a large scale, then what designation will there be for school library media specialists who, after gaining experience, become truly accomplished?

**NO**

Experienced teachers nearing the end of their library degree are perfect candidates. They reinforce the concept of the school library media specialist as expert teacher, plus they have the resources of the library school at their disposal. Their knowledge will never be as fresh as it is during their last semester as students.

**Q. Are successful candidates in NBPTS Library Media accomplished library media specialists?**

**YES**

The EC/YA Library Media Standards clearly describe the accomplished library media specialist, and uses that term frequently. True, there are elements of the backroom administrative tasks that are not addressed, but perhaps accomplished library media specialists minimize backroom tasks in lieu of service to students and teachers.

**NO**

The Library Media NBCT is an accomplished teacher of library media, but is not necessarily an accomplished library media specialist. There are other aspects of the job, including program administration and information access aspects, that NBPTS does not address fully.

**The Role of Preparation Programs in Supporting Candidates**

Teachers need at least three years of experience before applying for NBC, but prior state licensure in their certification area is not required. For example, students new to library media but experienced as teachers can apply for certification in library media or in any other certificate area. How should school library media educators respond when their students ask for assistance or advice concerning their application for NBC?

There are compelling reasons to seek licensure immediately. Experienced teachers may not want to wait for three years after graduation to apply for library media certification. One important consideration is that concepts and content underlying the field are fresh to current students. Three years later, a high school librarian will have to review areas that relate to elementary education, such as literature for young children. Similarly, certain aspects of learning theory, information literacy, and technology may need refreshing.

Secondly, as more school library media preparation programs become performance-based, the assignments and activities used in preparation programs will grow to align closely to NBPTS requirements. If required to develop a literature-based instructional activity as part of a children’s literature course, students working on their certification portfolio may want to enhance that same activity to submit for the literature appreciation portfolio entry.

Further, as a library school student, one has access to academic resources, learning opportunities, and mentors. While a professor may not be the best critical friend to read a portfolio entry, that person remains a source of information and advice.

Finally, students in library school are in a milieu in which writing, reading, and being assessed are everyday occurrences. After leaving graduate school, the emotional aspect of writing...
for another's review may feel like a difficult hurdle.

There are equally good reasons to discourage application for certification while in library school. First, NBPTS is designed to identify accomplished practice. While prospective SLMSs may show evidence that they will become accomplished library media specialists, they are not, yet. It is an oxymoron to designate inexperienced SLMSs as accomplished. Of future concern, if states begin to accept NBC in lieu of state licensure, SLMSs could become certified with only minimal training in the library profession.

Secondly, the focus of NBPTS is on teaching standards. While tying the program administration role firmly to student learning makes partial sense, some parts of a SLMS's job relate more closely to library science than teaching. Will alignment with NBPTS standards weigh more heavily toward the library media facility and public library media field too heavily toward education, minimizing the important role that we play in the library and information sciences?

In addition, support for unsuccessful candidates is somewhat murky. While an certification candidate who does not achieve a passing overall score can bank passing scores and retake low-scoring sections, teacher education programs rarely take responsibility for NBPTS candidates who do not pass on the first try.

NBPTS feedback is sketchy; a candidate may only learn that he or she did not provide “clear, consistent, and convincing evidence” of the required knowledge and skills. A “banker” may need guidance in designing a plan for improvement of an entry. School library media educators must ask themselves if they are prepared to accept responsibility for a graduate banker’s NBPTS portfolio or assessment center exercises. Should continuing education be offered to retake candidates on children’s and YA literature, collaboration, learning styles, or technology?

Compounding these issues is the fact that little information is available about the areas in which NBPTS candidates score poorly. Those who achieve certification are listed on the NBPTS Web site and publicly applauded. Retake candidates, already reeling from not achieving certification, must self-identify to receive assistance.

What if the knowledge needed is related more to education than library science? The school library media field asserts that teaching is an important role of the SLMS. How credible is it for educators in preparation programs to say, “Not our problem,” if pedagogical expertise needs to be revisited by the candidate?

Further, we are long overdue for a discussion about the integration of education and library and information science precepts, principles, and practices in school library media education. Are students equally prepared as educators and library and information science professionals? Should they be? In discussion, we could clarify these issues. Unfortunately, these questions have not yet been articulated, much less discussed, in some programs.

Meeting Multiple Goals
In raising these questions, I am not suggesting that we ignore NBPTS requirements, nor completely redefine our preparation programs. Rather, many programs can incorporate the beginning skills without difficulty. For example, a typical assignment for a curriculum class asks a school library media candidate to develop a lesson plan that can be taught in a collaborative setting. To turn that into a performance-based assignment to satisfy NBPTS requirements, the candidate would be asked for evidence of developing and implementing a collaborative unit. By partnering with a classroom teacher and collaborating to develop and implement an information skills unit integrated into classroom content, the candidate would also satisfy NBPTS entry 1 on instructional collaboration. To further align some of the basic skills required for NBPTS entries, a preparation program could require a videotape of instruction and a reflective writing piece. Other examples for typical assignments are listed in figure 1.

In teacher education programs, professors can lay the groundwork for writing, teaching, and action research in the early education courses, perhaps as early as the freshman year in college. Throughout the junior and senior years, these skills can be scaffolded. After teaching for a few years, the experienced but still fresh teacher could return for a master’s degree, which could build upon both the academic base and the practical experience. Teacher as writer, teacher as researcher, teacher as leader—typical courses in an MEd program—align with NBPTS standards.

In an ALA-accredited program, only a few courses are designed specifically for the SLMS. Additional scaffolding is rare. If state regulations allow school library media licensure without previous teacher certification, those courses have to lay massive groundwork. The rare individual with an undergraduate degree in school library media may decide to return to school for an ALA-accredited MLS or an advanced education degree. However the former is considered to be an entry level degree, while the latter may not even mention school library media.

Another significant difference concerns a shift in focus from working with teachers and content to focusing primarily on students. SLMS education programs ask the library school student to start the collaborative effort by identi-
fying a teacher with whom they would work well, or by choosing a curricular area in which they are comfortable. In contrast, NBPTS applicants almost never write about the collaborating teacher or the subject area. Instead, they focus on the makeup of the class, student learning styles, demographics, special needs, and personality characteristics. In later entries they analyze the learning of one or two students. Turning from collaborating with teachers to teaching students alone requires a shift in thinking. Assessing the achievement of one student’s learning of information skills is different from analyzing large-scale assessments of the impact of the library media center program.

Scholarly Research Opportunities
The school library media field has experienced two major shifts in preparation programs. The first was the Knapp School Library Project, which provided models of school library media programs as well as insight into the preparation of SLMSs. Along with the impetus provided by the 1960 standards, the Knapp project was responsible for defining the modern school library media program. Similarly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Library Power, a major school library initiative funded by the DeWitt Wallace/Readers' Digest Foundation, provided documentation and affirmation of collaborative work with teachers and administrators in both instruction and in program administration. Library Power and Information Power set the stage for the modern library media program.

NBC may represent a third major shift in the field. With both the Knapp Project and with Library Power, emphasis was placed on building the structure of the library program. Adequate resources, budgets, facilities, technologies, and staff development for classroom teachers and administrators were seen as essential for the successful school library media program. If excellence in school library media programming fell short, it was because it was a good instructional program but lacked an adequate facility, or it had a superb facility but little technology; or wonderful technology and staff but no flexible access.

Now academic researchers can begin to answer questions about how the SLMS affects that equation. Through the portfolio entries, they have a window into how the SLMS encourages reading, collaborates with a classroom teacher, and integrates technology, regardless of grade levels, physical plant, budgets, community demographics, or other factors. Can SLMSs achieve excellence with a poor budget, few resources, and an unsupportive administration?

A Proactive Response
As a first step, educators in school library media preparation programs need to become informed about NBPTS library media standards and portfolio entries. Then, we must find natural congruencies between the NCATE and NBPTS standards. The third step involves assessing which skills required for the NBPTS process could be incorporated into the school library media preparation programs.

Let us begin a national conversation about the role of school library media preparation in NBC. Preparation programs should lead the way in carefully planned, research-based approaches to school library media certification candidacy. Our school library media students are demonstrating their expertise as accomplished teachers. Our role, as yet undefined, could determine their next steps as leaders in the profession.

References and Notes