

Lustick, D. (2011). *Certifiable: Teaching, Learning, and National Board Certification*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

In his book, *Certifiable: Teaching, Learning, and National Board Certification (2011)*, author and researcher David Lustick addresses the critical issue of National Board certification at perhaps the most important juncture in its young history. Lustick presents a thoughtful examination of National Board certification based largely on his rather impressive national study of candidates seeking National Board certification in Adolescence and Young Adult (AYA) Science. The primary focus of his study was to answer what seems to be a straightforward question: "What are candidates learning from National Board certification?" Lustick's book reveals that what appears to be a simple question is not simple at all.

In the introduction, Lustick identifies his intended audience to be quite broad, including educational researchers, educational policy-makers, and any K-12 teachers interested in learning about National Board certification. Although this is a worthy aim, I question whether the entirety of this book would be compelling reading for all of these audiences. For example, although educational researchers may be interested in the extremely detailed chapters on methodology and the quantitative analysis of the research, I believe the majority of readers will be content to skip over these chapters and move on to others more relevant to their needs. Nonetheless, this book has something for everyone if the reader is willing to skip around from time to time.

In Part I of the book, Lustick provides context for National Board certification. He offers background on the almost 25 years since the National Board was created in 1987, and also lays bare the problems inherent in identifying exceptional teaching in a profession that has largely shunned any attempts to distinguish performance of its members, either exceptional or otherwise. Part II offers the reader a detailed description of Lustick's comprehensive mixed-methods study, which examines National Board certification as professional development and attempts to determine its effects on teacher learning. The final section, unquestionably the best part of the book, focuses on the significance of Lustick's findings and implications for the future of National Board certification. In these chapters, Lustick addresses the implications of his research findings for teacher quality, some ways to improve National Board certification, and most importantly, the future of the Board, appropriately titling the final chapter "The Future of the National Board: Relevancy or Obscurity?"

One of the most interesting chapters in the book presents brief case studies of five different teachers seeking National Board certification. Most eye-opening was the end-of-chapter summary, which helps the reader begin to understand some of the constructivist and student-centered philosophies underlying the National Board Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

In the largest part of his book, Lustick devotes separate chapters and generous detail to the study's methodology (Chapter 4) and both the quantitative evidence (Chapter 5) and the qualitative evidence (Chapter 6) that answer his research question about candidates' learning from National Board certification. Although Lustick apologizes repeatedly for the "messy"

nature of his research, the fact is that his study and educational research in general is a necessary endeavor that needs no apology.

A strong point of the research section was Chapter 6, devoted to the qualitative evidence of Lustick's study. Unlike the preceding chapters on methodology and quantitative analysis, which many readers will find heavy and plodding, the qualitative analysis brings the research to life. Lustick uses interview transcripts to build on his quantitative conclusions. Here, for example, is a quotation by a teacher from Florida, discussing how her own assessment practices have changed as a result of the National Board certification process.

I know I've changed the way I correct papers after having to go through that process. There is that one section in your portfolio where you had to put in student work and your comments. I pulled some student work and I started looking at it and it was just full of misconceptions. This was a physics worksheet and I said, "My God, these would have just gone right by me if I hadn't taken the time to sit down and read every word that they wrote." . . . So I correct papers with just a real eagle eye now. I read everything that they write. To me that was the biggest eye opener I've had in a long time. (p. 150)

Clearly, the teacher's words are illuminating, offering a first-hand perspective regarding what the candidates have learned.

Many readers will find the most valuable part of the book to be the final section, which includes the last three chapters. In Chapter 7, Lustick constructs his conception, based on his own research, of the types of learning that take place as a result of National Board certification. He proposes that the learning of a National Board candidate falls into one of three distinct categories of learning: dynamic, technical and deferred. Lustick's research makes a convincing case for this categorization. Anyone who has come across a Board-certified teacher who describes the process as one big hoop-jumping exercise will immediately relate to the inherent differences between what Lustick characterizes as dynamic learning versus technical learning.

In Chapter 8, Lustick offers insightful, creative, and pragmatic ideas for improving National Board certification: moving to an electronic portfolio system, for example, and including a standard that would acknowledge and accept direct instruction approaches in addition to the many standards espousing a student-centered focus. Another intelligent proposal he makes is to encourage the National Board organization to improve its business model by removing politics and dependence on outside funding. In one of my favorite quotations from the book, he perceptively states: "To become a truly nonpartisan, nongovernmental entity, the National Board needs to wean itself off the federal government teat and establish a more sustainable and independent means of funding its work" (p. 197). As usual, he follows this conclusion with several practical ideas on how that mission might be accomplished. In the final chapter, Lustick states that the National Board organization is at an important crossroads. He argues quite accurately that National Board certification has been devalued and perhaps marginalized in the eyes of today's education policy-makers largely because it fails to focus its assessment process on high-stakes testing and accountability, which have been at the heart of educational reform since No Child Left Behind was adopted in 2001.

Overall, Lustick's book is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the history or future of National Board certification. Although I would have liked to see more discussion of the resistance to National Board certification by rank-and-file members of the profession, I give him credit for pointing out several vital issues facing the profession, including the education system's myopic view of student achievement as the only worthy measure of teacher quality. More importantly, he keenly observes that in the immediate future, members of the profession will need to make a critical choice: to remain an egalitarian occupation where excellence is decided by outsiders, or to take ownership and responsibility for policing our own profession by embracing the duty of distinguishing the best in our ranks from the worst and everything in between. If we choose the latter, Lustick's work suggests that the National Board has an important place in that challenging but vital task.

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