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**A Case of Authentic Redesign:  
Collaborating with National Board Certified Teachers to  
Revise an Advanced Middle Level Program**

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**Abstract**

Three concerns prompted the search for literature to guide revision of a master's program in middle level education: the existence of multiple standards, the desire to accommodate the needs of various groups of master's candidates without designing a new program solely for teachers who wanted to pursue National Board Certification, and the wish to involve partners from local schools in the collaborative redesign. "Authentic redesign" emerged as the preferable standards-based approach to achieving a new vision of master's education for all candidates in the middle level program. Focus groups of National Board Certified teachers provided specific suggestions for redesigning the program to incorporate National Board skills. Faculty also aligned the Conceptual Framework with National Board Standards and the new National Middle School Association/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education standards, along with performance-based assessments. Complete results from focus groups, specific program changes, and a sample alignment chart are provided.

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**Introduction**

Teacher education is undergoing a profound shift in its fundamental grounding. During the past one and one-half decades since the publication of *A Nation Prepared* (The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986), professional societies have begun to replace the process-based model that dominated teacher preparation for many years with a standards-driven, performance-based approach (Galluzzo, 1999). In the late 1980s the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) revised its unit accreditation procedures to reflect a standards-based system for initial and advanced programs, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) soon followed suit, creating a similar approach to the assessment of accomplished practice (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1989). In addition, like many learned societies who followed the lead established by NCATE and NBPTS, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) published standards for initial programs in 1989 and advanced programs in 1990 and revised them to include performance outcomes in 1995 (NMSA, 1995).

Many colleges and universities that prepare teachers have recognized the need to align existing requirements for initial and advanced middle level programs with the new standards-based vision for teacher education. Nonetheless, the existence of National Board standards for accomplished practitioners means that teacher preparation programs must now envision a new configuration of master's education for teachers (Blackwell & Diez, 1998). Thus, college and university faculty need guidance regarding the best ways to incorporate standards for accomplished practitioners into advanced programs.

The revision of national accreditation standards for middle level specialists and the creation of new standards for accomplished practitioners necessitated a self-study of an existing middle level program for advanced educators at Winthrop University. Newly approved in 1999, the master's degree in middle level education represented a body of collaborative work by College of Education, College of Arts and Sciences, and public school faculties accomplished over a period of several years (see figure 1). The new master's program, which provided an advanced degree in middle level education for already certified teachers, was thriving with a strong enrollment among initial cohorts. When the National Board Certification (NBC) process became popular in the late 1990s, university faculty noticed that a large percentage of successful NBC candidates in the state were middle level practitioners from the surrounding locale. The group of nationally certified middle level teachers provided a valuable new source of practitioner expertise. Faculty wanted to ensure that the master's level program in middle level education would meet the professional needs of all potential candidates for the advanced degree and designed a way to collect information from the NBC teachers to inform subsequent program revision. In addition, a review of research-based literature provided a rationale for the basis of program redesign.

### ***Rationale***

Three concerns prompted the search for literature to guide revision of the master's program in middle level education. First, faculty recognized the existence of multiple standards and sought some means of organizing them to achieve quality and coherence. Second, faculty wanted to accommodate the needs of various groups of master's candidates without designing a completely new program solely for teachers who wanted to pursue National Board Certification. Third, following the historical tradition established at Winthrop University within the past several decades, faculty wanted to involve partners from local schools in the collaborative redesign of the master's degree program. A subsequent literature search yielded "authentic redesign" as an appropriate means of collaborative program revision (Blackwell & Diez, 1999).

Given the proliferation of standards in recent decades, faculty saw, first, a need to achieve coherence and consistency among standards recommended by various professional groups. Galluzzo (1999) acknowledges that there is no one best way to achieve consistency among sets of standards but recommends starting with the alignment of standards across multiple domains such as those for unit accreditation, content and professional knowledge, student learning, and accomplished practice. Such an approach provides a coherent whole from which to proceed with program design.

Within the College of Education at Winthrop University, faculty began with the Conceptual Framework for Advanced Education Programs, Educator as Leader, and aligned the standards of NBPTS, NCATE, and NMSA with learning outcomes of the framework for advanced programs (see table 4). Three organizing concepts of the Conceptual Framework for Advanced Education Programs include Leadership, Stewardship, and Scholarship (Winthrop University College of Education, 1997). Faculty found that the College of Education's organizing concepts are congruent with the National Board's emphasis on development of key abilities such as "reflection on practice, systematic inquiry into practice, and collaboration with others in meeting learners' needs" (Diez & Blackwell, 1999, p. 353). Moreover, use of a cohort model in the advanced middle level program helps to achieve empowerment of candidates through guided reflection in a community of learners, a goal of professional development for accomplished practitioners (Galluzzo, 1999).

A second concern of faculty engaged in self-study of the master's program was to find a way to accommodate the needs of multiple groups of learners without expanding the number of existing degree programs. The faculty had to consider the circumstances of several different groups. First, within the middle level degree program itself, there were at least three distinct groups of teachers: those who expressed an intent to pursue

NBPTS certification concurrently with the middle level advanced degree program or at some time in the reasonably near future; those who had no current intention of pursuing NBPTS certification but might consider it at some future time; and those who had no desire to pursue NBPTS certification at all. Second, the professional educational core had to accommodate the needs of students in myriad advanced programs. All graduate students took three required courses to provide a common, unifying set of experiences, and revisions to those courses had to be accomplished in a manner flexible enough to accommodate the needs of many different adult learners—teachers in varied degree programs, administrators, and counselors alike.

In addition, experts recommend the design of master's programs that support experienced teachers as they pursue NBPTS certification but acknowledge a few key difficulties that must be resolved regarding issues of assessment and criteria for program completion (Auton, Browne, & Futrell, 1998). Whereas the NB certification process involves a single high stakes assessment, assessments within any single advanced degree program must be developmental for all degree candidates (Diez & Blackwell, 2001). Since entering candidates vary greatly in their background characteristics, assessments common to all candidates must show not only how candidates demonstrate competencies at the end of the master's program but also how they develop across time spent in program completion (Diez & Blackwell, 2001). Another difficulty concerns criteria for program completion. Faculty must avoid the designation of specific elements of the NBC process as essential for program completion. Otherwise, candidates may not graduate if they do not complete the NBC assessments within a specific time frame or if they do not achieve National Board Certification, for example (Auton, et al., 1998).

Finally, a third area of concern for faculty was the desire to involve partners from local schools in the collaborative redesign of the master's program in middle level education. According to experts in the design of standards-based programs, a new vision of master's education for accomplished practitioners is achieved through continuous involvement of teachers in all facets of program design (Diez & Blackwell, 2001). Because faculty at Winthrop University possess a proud history of partnership with school and university personnel, a sound basis for further collaboration existed. Since 1992, faculty at Winthrop University have aligned their teacher education programs with principles of the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER), an organization that promotes simultaneous renewal of P-12 schooling and teacher preparation (Goodlad, 1990). In addition to simultaneous renewal, key elements of school-university partnerships within settings of the NNER include a shared vision, a culture of inquiry, and effective collaboration, elements that overlap with the goals of the NBPTS (1989). In accordance with recommendations of the NNER (Goodlad, 1990; Patterson, Michelli, & Pacheco, 1999), Winthrop University had created new structures, such as a Center for Pedagogy and Professional Development Schools, in which faculty from the College of Education, College of Arts and Sciences, and public schools collaborated to design programs, structures, and policies for teacher preparation. The involvement of National Board Certified teachers and candidates in redesign of the master's degree program for middle level teachers was a logical next step in the sequence of partnership activities.

### **Authentic Redesign as a Program Model**

From the literature review, a method called authentic redesign emerged as the preferable standards-based approach to achieving a new vision of master's education for all candidates in the middle level program. "Authentic redesign" is one of several approaches cited in a descriptive study of processes through which university faculties aligned master's degree programs with standards of professional practice (Blackwell & Diez, 1999). As a result of their research, Blackwell and Diez (1999) recommend the use of a benchmark approach in which program requirements are aligned with standards and processes of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Benchmarking is preferable to use of a template approach that maps exact NBPTS exercises onto existing master's programs (Blackwell & Diez, 1998, 1999). As a means of program redesign, Blackwell and Diez (1999) recommend an authentic approach in which standards inform revision of a master's program, a process preferable to many other approaches currently employed such as studying the possibilities, offering a course to support applicants for National Board Certification, offering a series of courses to guide the NBC process, and adding information to otherwise unchanged courses. In contrast to less coherent approaches, authentic redesign uses NBPTS as benchmarks to achieve program consistency, makes teachers an integral part of the program revision process, and offers one way to design a more flexible pro-

gram for varied degree candidates. For all of these reasons, authentic redesign offered a compatible framework for program revision at Winthrop University. The use of focus groups of NBC teachers provided a way to collect data for program redesign in an authentic context.

## **Method**

Krueger (cited in Creswell, 2002) states that focus group interviews are a good way to collect data because they facilitate interaction among the participants, participation of all individuals, and collection of extensive amounts of data. Because of these important factors, focus groups were used in this project. The accessible population consisted of every middle school teacher in the contiguous surrounding counties of York County, South Carolina (including counties in both North and South Carolina) who had successfully completed the National Board process or was at that time completing the process. These teachers were invited to take part in one of three focus groups to be held on the campus of Winthrop University. This resulted in a total sample of 14 teachers. This sample of teachers was then sent a short questionnaire that was to be completed prior to the focus groups. The focus groups were held in March of 2001. The groups discussed several questions related to the National Board Certification process, graduate programs, and the needs of teachers. A recorder was present for each focus group and listed the ideas generated during the discussions. This data was collected at each focus group. The data was then subjected to content analysis.

## **Results**

Tables 2-6 highlight the key questions and/or subjects discussed in the focus groups. The common responses are listed in order of prevalence. Table 2 indicates that most teachers believed that teaching experience was a strength they brought to the National Board process. Participants had more plentiful and varied responses concerning inadequate preparation for the process. The most common responses were knowledge of a variety of assessment strategies, understanding students, and knowledge of national standards (See Table 3.).

Participants were also asked to describe activities they had previously participated in that were similar to requirements for National Board (See Table 4.). Most participants stated none. Others mentioned collaboration with peers and portfolio development as previous experiences related to National Board. Participants were also asked to reflect on how any previous graduate work facilitated the National Board Certification process. Most participants had no graduate preparation or indicated that graduate work was not related (See Table 5.). Others indicated that graduate work helped them in the areas of effective assessment, reading professional literature, and analysis and reflection skills. To culminate the focus group discussions, the teachers were asked to think about specific knowledge, skills, or dispositions that should be included in a graduate program that would facilitate the National Board Certification process. Table 6 reveals that this topic generated much discussion and the respondents had many suggestions. The most prevalent suggestions were opportunity to reflect on teaching, writing, knowledge of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, effective student assessment, and collaboration.

## **Implementation**

To implement changes, faculty focused on the specific recommendations provided in Table 6. The two most prevalent responses were to "offer plenty of opportunity to reflect on teaching" and to emphasize writing. Reflective writing opportunities previously existed in the program, particularly to show growth of graduate candidates. During their first semester in the program, graduate candidates write their philosophy of middle level teaching. Each successive semester, students are asked to reflect on their experiences during the semester and to refine their initial philosophy and a final revision is included as a part of their exit portfolio. Through this process, the notion of reflective practice is reinforced, as is the idea of teaching as a growth profession (rather than a stagnant event).

To add to the existing process of reflective writing, Theory into Practice (TIP) Logs will be used in the Pedagogy and Assessment Course. During the course, graduate candidates learn about specific research-based practices and implement those practices in their own classrooms. The TIP Logs will allow teachers to reflect on specific teaching practices and the impact the strategies have on their middle school students. Since this course occurs later in the graduate sequence (one semester before graduation), candidates' reflective skills are at a higher level. Opportunity for reflection on these strategies was in place, but occurred through email reflections sent to the professor. The TIP Logs will enable a graduate student to view the reflections from an overall perspective of self-observation, rather than seeing them as isolated, short responses to a teacher. In addition, the logs support Winthrop's program emphasis on using research to inform practice.

The third, fourth, and fifth responses (in order of prevalence) suggested that a graduate program should include:

- Knowledge of National Board Standards
- Effective assessment strategies and ways to document student learning
- Collaborative group work.

The National Board, its certification process, and its standards are introduced to students in the first middle school class, Curriculum, Philosophy, and Organization of the Middle School, during the focus on teacher leadership. To ensure a thorough knowledge base, the National Board process is now specifically referenced during all classes at appropriate times and will be revisited during the capstone course as a possible next professional growth opportunity after graduation. Typically, at least one graduate student is National Board Certified, or is in the process of certification, and he or she is encouraged to share his or her experiences with other students. In addition, when students show interest in the process, they are paired with a graduate student who is National Board Certified.

Effective assessment strategies and documentation of student learning are taught in the Pedagogy and Assessment Course. In a follow-up interview with a cohort member who is National Board Certified (and who participated in the focus groups), she noted the appropriate coverage of assessment strategies in the course. Based on the feedback from current students, future classes will continue to emphasize these areas, supported by the ideas of data-informed decision making for teachers.

Finally, collaborative group work is used as an integral part of the entire graduate program. In evaluating responses from focus group respondents, faculty built on the existing foundation of collaborative opportunities. Two specific collaborative activities were added. During the "Integration of Curriculum and Technology" course, graduate students are required to develop an interdisciplinary technology project with other students. In the Pedagogy and Assessment Course, graduate students develop, implement, and assess an interdisciplinary teaching unit. Students are required to work with their teaching team in their school to complete the unit. Both projects emphasize collaboration for successful completion and both include written reflections focusing on the collaborative process.

### **Videotaping of Instruction**

A specific suggestion discussed by one focus group was to allow students to videotape lessons and accept feedback. Follow-up interviews with two members of the focus group (one a current student in the middle level program) provided clarity as to the implementation of this suggestion. Based on their recommendation, a National Board Certified teacher visits the Pedagogy and Assessment class to discuss reflective practice. Next, the teacher shows a portion of a videotaped lesson from his or her classroom. Graduate students are asked for specific items observed during the lesson and which areas they would write about. After a short discussion, students are given a copy of an actual reflection written by the National Board teacher and they compare their observations with those of the teacher. This provides a basis for a discussion of the need to move beyond surface observations of behavioral issues (such as a student's excessive talking) to the deeper instructional con-

cerns (teacher assuming her more advanced students would understand the concept, therefore not monitoring their learning during the lesson). Students are then given sample questions to prompt reflection (adapted from National Board materials) to use for their assignment: videotape a lesson implementing a research-based strategy appropriate for young adolescents and write a reflective essay on the lesson. This specific activity and assignment was used in Spring, 2002. The focus group member who provided feedback was a member of the class. Based on her feedback, and that of the other students, this entire process will continue to be a part of the program, but it will be moved to an earlier class. During Adolescent Development, students implement a strategy or program to meet the needs of young adolescents. The instruction and videotaping will be incorporated into this class for incoming students, so graduate students are introduced to the process much earlier (second course as opposed to eighth course). Then, during the Pedagogy and Assessment Course, graduate students will repeat the videotaping and reflection, hopefully showing growth in the depth of their reflections.

## Conclusion

The use of focus groups of local National Board Certified teachers proved to be extremely helpful in authentic program redesign. Each teacher was quick to share in the discussions and provided thoughtful input. Their perspectives as high reflective practitioners provided clarity about the strengths and weaknesses of program design. In addition, they were grateful for the opportunity to participate. NB certified teachers have high levels of expertise in the art and craft of teaching, and, due to the reflective nature of the NB process, they are quite insightful about educational issues. However, many of the teachers commented that they had never been asked their opinion about revising curriculum or programs at their schools or in their school districts. An important lesson was that NB teachers are a valuable resource that should be utilized on a regular basis.

Faculty also found that the use of focus groups during program revision enhanced the revision process. Focus group methodology allowed for the emergence of several helpful ideas. In particular, the NB teachers provided a different viewpoint, one based on the authentic experience of accomplished practitioners. They helped bring into focus a variety of options to better accommodate the needs of varied groups of advanced learners. Faculty needed to avoid including one group at the expense of another group or excluding one group to benefit another.

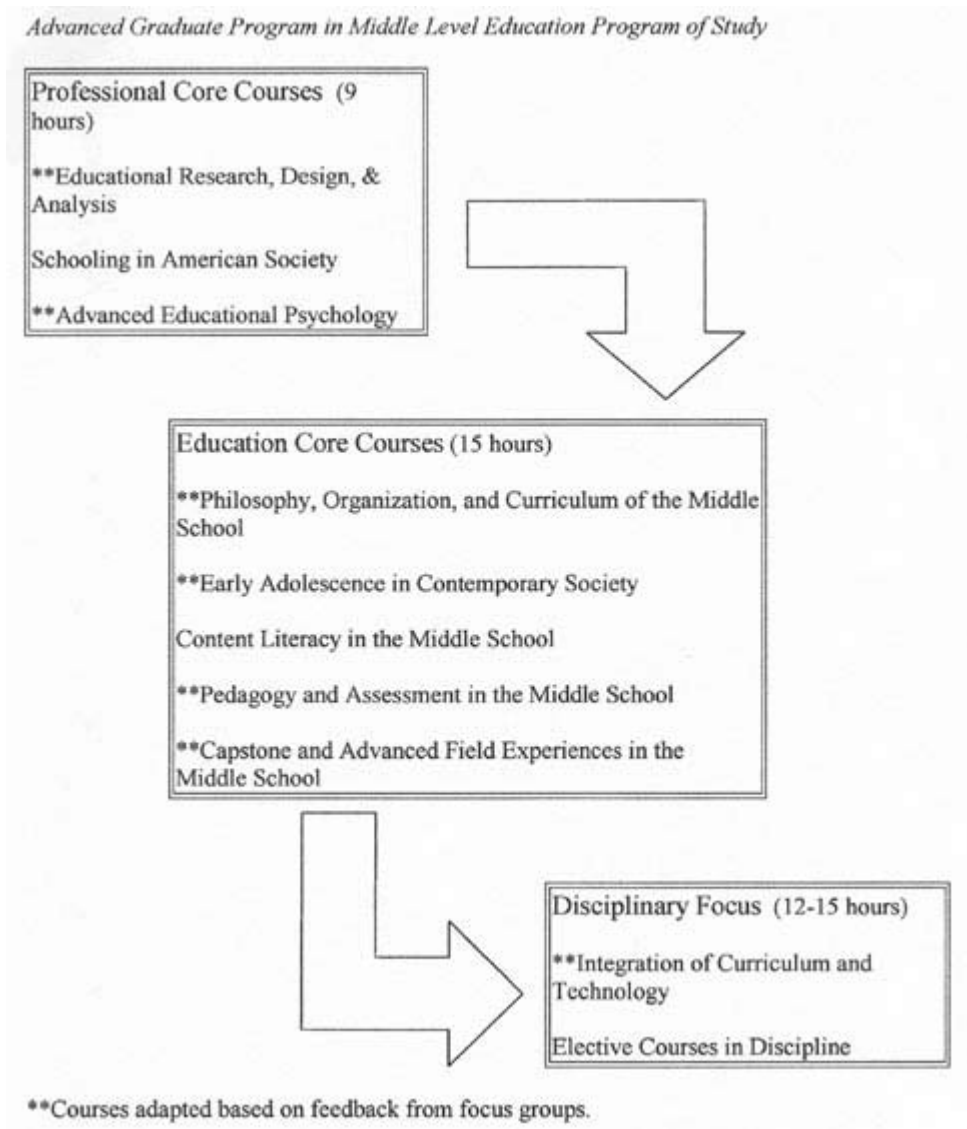
Another benefit of the focus groups was that the results reinforced that the middle level education program was already partially aligned with NB standards. There was no need for wholesale revision of the program; rather, faculty were able to build on the existing girders to enhance the alignment of the Advanced Conceptual Framework with NB Standards. From the review of literature, we had discovered that the organizing concepts of the College of Education's Conceptual Framework are congruent with the National Board's emphasis on development of key abilities such as "reflection on practice, systematic inquiry into practice, and collaboration with others in meeting learners' needs" (Diez & Blackwell, 1999, p. 353). The responses from the teachers simply reinforced the need to enhance efforts in these areas, particularly those of reflection and collaboration. Faculty also discovered that the Conceptual Framework provides a unifying lens through which all standards—NNEP, NB, NCATE—come in focus. In hindsight, faculty also found that implementing the suggestions from the focus groups (provided in March, 2001) thoroughly prepared us for the NMSA/NCARE performance-based standards released in October 2001. Each of the specific revisions made based on the focus group responses aligned with the new standards, which made the transition to the new standards much easier.

The ideas generated in the program at Winthrop University may be of benefit to Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) and public school districts. School districts may want to utilize the information from NB teachers for staff development ideas in the future. IHEs may benefit from this work in a variety of ways. Some may wish to use the entire process as a model for program renewal or modification of existing graduate programs. Other IHEs may be interested in using the information as the beginning point for a conceptual framework for advanced programs. Others may wish to utilize the information provided by NB certified teachers to modify their current graduate courses.

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FIGURE 1



**TABLE 1**

<i>NBPTS Core Propositions</i>	<i>Winthrop Advanced Conceptual Framework (The advanced educational leader:)</i>	<i>NMSA/NCATE Guidelines</i>	<i>Performance-Based Assessments</i>
Teachers are committed to students and their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocates for the development of individuals to their full potential (Leadership).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard 1: Middle level masters candidates understand and analyze the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to young adolescent development, and they apply that knowledge in their practice.</li> </ul>	<p>Interdisciplinary unit</p> <p>Integrated Curriculum and Technology project</p> <p>Theory into practice journals</p>
Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhances specific knowledge in content areas (Scholarship).</li> <li>• Develops school curricula and/or educational interventions based on contemporary theories of learning and development, applicable technology, collaborative discourse, and evaluation (Stewardship).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard 4: Middle level masters candidates understand and analyze the major concepts, principles, theories, standards, and research, related to their teaching fields(s), and they apply that knowledge in their practice.</li> <li>• Standard 5: Middle level masters candidates understand and analyze the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to effective middle level instruction and assessment, and they apply a variety of effective strategies to meet the varying abilities, interests, and learning styles of all young adolescents.</li> </ul>	<p>Interdisciplinary unit</p> <p>Integrated curriculum and technology project</p> <p>Theory into practice journals</p>
Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates the ability to construct a supportive, well-managed, motivational learning environment that promotes equal access to education for people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Stewardship).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard 5: Middle level masters candidates understand and analyze the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to effective middle level instruction and assessment, and they apply a variety of effective strategies to meet the varying abilities, interests, and learning styles of all young adolescents.</li> </ul>	<p>Interdisciplinary unit</p> <p>Videotaping and reflection</p> <p>theory into practice journals</p>
Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluates oneself as an educational leader through knowledge, reflection, and professional discourse (Leadership).</li> <li>• Appreciates the value of using research to inform practice (Scholarship).</li> <li>• Evaluates, clarifies, and refines personal philosophy of professional practice (Stewardship).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard 7: Middle level masters candidates understand and analyze the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to their professional roles in middle level education, and they apply that knowledge in their practice.</li> </ul>	<p>Videotaping and reflection</p> <p>Theory into practice journals</p> <p>Personal philosophy (revised each semester)</p>

<p>Teachers are members of learning communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Applies current theories to enhance individual learning of others and promote professional development (Leadership).</li> <li>● Models life-long learning (Scholarship).</li> <li>● Cares for and relates to students, families, and the larger learning community (Stewardship).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Standard 6: Middle level masters candidates understand and analyze the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to working collaboratively with family and community members, and they provide leadership in helping all stakeholders offer high quality learning opportunities for all young adolescents.</li> <li>● Standard 7: Middle level masters candidates understand and analyze the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to their professional roles in middle level education, and they apply that knowledge in their practice.</li> </ul>	<p>Interdisciplinary unit.</p> <p>School evaluation.</p> <p>Action research project.</p>
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**TABLE 2**

<p><i>Focus Group responses to the question, "As you reflect on your National Board Certification experience, what strengths did you bring to the process?"</i></p>
<p>Common Categories of the Responses Listed in Order of Prevalence During the Discussions</p>
<p>Teaching experience                  Knowledge of state curriculum standards                  Knowledge of the content I teach                  Writing</p>

**TABLE 3**

<p><i>Focus Group responses to the question, "As you reflect on your National Board Certification experience, in what specific skills or knowledge did you feel you were not adequately prepared?"</i></p>
<p>Common Categories of the Responses Listed in Order of Prevalence During the Discussions</p>
<p>Knowledge of a variety of assessment strategies                  Understanding my students                  Knowledge of national standards                  Lack of content knowledge                  Knowledge of brain research                  Utilization of a variety of teaching strategies                  How to work with ESL students                  How to work with special needs students                  Writing ability                  Teaching experience</p>

**TABLE 4**

<i>Focus Group responses to the question, "What particular activities required by the NB certification process had you previously participated in or experienced?"</i>
Common Categories of the Responses Listed in Order of Prevalence During the Discussions
None Collaboration with peers Portfolio for professional development required by district Workshops on effective teaching strategies Some experience with videotaping my lessons

**TABLE 5**

<i>Focus Group responses to the question, "What knowledge, skills, or dispositions did you gain through a graduate program that facilitated your NBC process?"</i>
Common Categories of the Responses Listed in Order of Prevalence During the Discussions
No graduate preparation None Knowledge of effective assessment Reading professional literature Analysis and reflection skills Cooperative learning ideas

**TABLE 6**

<i>Focus Group responses to the question, "What specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions should be included in a graduate program to facilitate the National Board Certification process?"</i>
Common Categories of the Responses Listed in Order of Prevalence During the Discussions
Plenty of opportunity to reflect on teaching Writing Knowledge of National Board Standards Effective assessment strategies and ways to document student learning Collaborative group work Videotape lessons and accept feedback Effective ways to know and meet the needs of students Build portfolios Effective ways to make content material relevant to students