

Can State Policy Mandate Teacher Reflection?¹

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On September 6, 2001, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing adopted for the first time *Standards of Program Quality and Effectiveness for Professional Teacher Induction for the Professional Multiple and Single Subject Credentials* (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing [CCTC], 2001). This action culminated a decade of incentives by policymakers and efforts by local educators to make support for the professional growth and education of beginning teachers an integral component of teacher credentialing in the state of California. For the approximately 26,000 first and second year teachers in public school classrooms who hold preliminary teaching credentials and are coached by an additional 17,000 experienced teacher "support providers," this action represented the institutionalization of a set of ideas, perspectives, policies, and practices these teachers have experienced in their professional lives as part of the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program.

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Although conceived as a legislative intent in 1992 (SB 1422, Bergeson), and expanded through hefty annual increases in the state budget during the past five years, the inclusion of beginning teacher induction in the credentialing system nine years after passage of the bill hit political stumbling blocks within a month of its adoption, and in October 2001 the Commission rescinded its action. Unlike the Commission's previous adoptions of program standards for professional clear credentials in Administrative Services and Special Education that include induction components, these professional clear credential standards for teachers would be implemented primarily by school districts and county offices of education, and not by institutions of higher education. Although local education agency sponsorship of credential programs has been available since 1983, there are only nine district-sponsored programs in California today. The prospect of this expanded role in professional level teacher education and credentialing on a large scale has caused administrator representatives and employee associations alike to seek clarification of how beginning teacher induction will operate in local settings.

While the policy pathway to inclusion of beginning teacher induction is being cleared, participation in BTSA continues to be normative for new holders of the preliminary credential in California. The intended outcomes of the program remain unchanged and its stature as a large-scale reform in support of new teacher development remains unequaled in the nation. The purpose of this article is to examine the extent to which participating teachers' perceptions of their experiences in BTSA affirm the program's essential goal: to increase new teachers' abilities as classroom professionals through the development of reflective teaching practice.

Background

The BTSA program was created through legislation in 1992 (SB 1422, Bergeson, Chapter 1245, Statutes of 1992). Intended to build upon the results of an earlier state funded research and development effort, the California New Teacher Project (CNTP), its original purposes were:

- ◆ Provide an effective transition into teaching for first and second year teachers in California;
- ◆ Improve the educational performance of students through improved training, information and assistance for new teachers;
- ◆ Enable the professional success and retention of new teachers who show promise of becoming highly effective professionals;
- ◆ Identify teaching novices who need additional feedback, assistance, and training to realize their potential to become excellent teachers;

- ◆ Improve the rigor and consistency of individual teacher performance assessments and the usefulness of assessment results to teachers and decision makers;
- ◆ Establish an effective, coherent system of performance assessments that are based on a broad framework of common expectations regarding the skills, abilities, and knowledge needed by new teachers; and
- ◆ Examine alternative ways in which the general public and the education profession may be assured that new teachers who remain in teaching have attained acceptable levels of professional competence. (Education Code Section 44279.2)

Between 1992 and 1997 the State of California created a system of locally sponsored programs and a technical assistance network as its implementation mechanisms for BTSA. It supported the development of several products to guide the work at the local level, including *Support Provider Training* (CCTC & California Department of Education [CDE], 1994), the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* (CCTC & CDE, 1997a), and the *Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for BTSA Programs* (CCTC & CDE, 1997b). It also financed and encouraged innovations in formative assessment for beginning teachers, a field of limited practice at the time. Subsequent legislation in 1997 (AB 1266 Mazzoni) added new purposes to the program built from what was learned about induction in the intervening years. They include:

- ◆ Enable beginning teachers to be effective in teaching students who are culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse.
- ◆ Ensure that a support provider provides intensive individualized support and assistance to each participating beginning teacher.
- ◆ Establish an effective, coherent system of performance assessments that are based on the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*.
- ◆ Ensure that an individual induction plan is in place for each participating beginning teacher and is based on ongoing assessment of the development of the beginning teacher.
- ◆ Ensure continuous program improvement through ongoing research, development and evaluation. (CA Education Code, 1997)

In 1998 state policy makers and assessment developers merged their resources to create two additional program components, *Equity Training* and the *California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers* [CFASST] (CCTC & CDE, 1998). During this period the program grew incrementally in size, followed by a phase of rapid expansion from 1998 to the present (Table 1). A more complete history of BTSA is

described in “A Decade of Support for California’s New Teachers: The Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program” (Olebe, 2001).

Table 1. BTSA Program Growth 1992-2000			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Programs</u>	<u>Teachers</u>
1992-93	4.9 million	15	1,700
1993-94	5.0 million	30	1,750
1994-95	5.2 million	30	1,800
1995-96	5.5 million	30	1,920
1996-97	7.5 million	33	2,480
1997-98	17.5 million	60	5,200
1998-99	66.0 million	84	15,400
1999-2000	72 .0 million	132	23,000
2000-01	87.4 million	143	26,500
2001-02	104 million	147	29,800

Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Reflective Practice in BTSA

There are four signature characteristics of BTSA at the local level: (a) Two years of professional education and growth targeted for first and second year beginning teachers; (b) Weekly meetings between beginning teachers and their support providers; (c) Individual support integrated with formative assessment of teaching practice; and (d) Ongoing professional development for support providers, site administrators, and local program directors as well as beginning teachers. This work is defined and guided by two policy documents, the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* [CSTP] (CCTC & CDE, 1997a), which delineates exemplary teaching practice, and the *Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for BTSA Programs* (CCTC & CDE, 1997b), which delineates best practices for program sponsors.

Interactions between novice and experienced teachers are shaped through a complex program of professional development, the *California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers* [CFASST]² (CCTC & CDE, 1998), that takes beginning teachers and support providers through a series of events that ask beginning teachers to collect evidence of their teaching and examine its efficacy against the CSTP. Undergirding each event in the series is a single cognitive framework intended to shape teacher thinking called the “Plan, Teach, Reflect, Apply” cycle. The *CFASST Guidebook* (CCTC & CDE, 1998, p. 6), describes reflective teaching in this way:

Reflection is the key to growth, the means of reliving or recapturing experience in order to make sense of it, to learn from it, and to develop new understandings and appreciation (Knapp, 1993). The “reflection” comes from the Latin “reflectere,” to bend back. Think of a mirror: “As a mirror reflects a physical image, so does reflection as a thought process reveal to us aspects of our experience that might have remained hidden had we not taken the time to consider them.”

In teaching, reflection is the act of stepping back and taking a fresh look at what you’re doing in the classroom and how it’s affecting student learning. It means asking the difficult questions: Are the students engaged? Are they getting it? Were they able to apply knowledge learned earlier? Reflective practitioners seek answers to such questions as a window into their teaching.

Within CFASST, a four level scale, the Descriptions of Practice (DOP), is used to measure evidence of teaching in relation to the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*. Beginning teachers share classroom-based evidence of teaching they have collected during a CFASST event, and assess it together with their support provider using the DOP during a closure conference. Interactions during a closure conference stem from the skilled use of questioning techniques by the support provider called “reflective conversation.” The outcome of a closure conference is the identification of action steps to change teaching practices based on a mutual assessment of the evidence by the beginning teacher and support provider.

This emphasis on teacher thinking and the importance of reflection has been a hallmark of BTSA since its inception and is evidenced in a long series of professional development documents that have evolved over the history of the program (Olebe, 2001). It is essential to understand that the activities in CFASST described here emerged from a five year investigation of how best to formatively assess reflective practice and teacher growth using an array of innovative assessment approaches. Prior to the introduction of CFASST, however, support and assessment were treated as distinct, parallel, yet related aspects of new teacher induction.

Analysis of Survey Data from BTSA Teachers, 1998-2000

The two state agencies that co-administer the BTSA program, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) and the California Department of Education (CDE), have investigated the extent to which local programs have fostered collaborative practice and reflective thinking through large scale statewide surveys of beginning teachers and their support providers. From 1996 to 2000 these surveys were adminis-

tered under contract by the California Educational Research Cooperative [CERC] (Mitchell, Scott, Hendrick, & Boyns, 1998, 1999; Mitchell, Scott, & Boyns, 2000). The data examined here are drawn from annual technical reports provided by the contractor. Table 2 summarizes statewide participation in these annual surveys. It reveals that the response rates are well above the minimum acceptable for survey research, and overall numbers are high. While caution in interpreting self-report data is always advisable, the size of these samples and the consistency of data over time lend confidence in the results.

Role Group	Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Group Total
Beginning Teachers	Popul. N	1,900	2,166	4,118	12,330	22,156	42,670
	Resp. N	593	1,538	2,777	7,560	13,725	26,193
	% Respond.	31.2%	71.0%	67.4%	61.3%	61.9%	61.4%
Support Providers	Popul. N	1,338	1,404	2,431	7,191	12,563	24,927
	Resp. N	563	1,027	1,704	4,502	8,197	15,993
	% Respond.	42.1 %	73.1%	70.1%	62.6%	65.2%	64.2%

The survey instruments examine reflective and collaborative practice through a series of items that have remained somewhat stable over time. While the overall survey examined a large set of factors related to local program service delivery and outcomes, teacher confidence and teacher persistence, this paper focuses on only those items associated with the attributes of reflective practice. These include overall engagement with formative assessment and support activities intended to support reflective practice, specific participation in reflective conversations and writing, and teachers' perceived value of these activities. It is important to remember that this data is collected against the backdrop of rapid expansion of the program and the introduction of the concept of integrated support and assessment. The sample size doubled each year, introducing large numbers of novices into the respondent groups. While increasing numbers of beginning teachers would be expected to impact item means, in induction programs the inclusion of novices is in itself normative. For support providers, item means each year would be affected both by the doubling of group size and by the introduction of novices in the group. The quality of beginning teacher experiences is directly related to the efficacy of support providers in transmitting the norms and practices of reflective teaching espoused by the BTSAs program.

Table 3 presents a three year summary (1998-2000) of beginning

teachers' experiences with selected support services, and the value they attach to those activities. Table 4 examines assessment activities from the same perspective for the years 1999 and 2000. Because of policy changes in the statewide program, items related to formative assessment have changed over time and are not always comparable. Both tables present the five most frequently cited items from a list of 18 possible activities and services. The data in Table 3 show that the five most frequently cited support activities have remained stable over three years. Of the five, four items describe the type of contact, and one, "Engage in reflective conversations," describes the nature of the interaction. The data show that the frequency of reflective conversations did not change over time, but the perceived value of these interactions increased each year. In 2000, reflective conversations were the most highly valued support activity by beginning teachers, rating 4.38 on a 5-point scale.

Table 4 examines the frequency and value of assessment activities for two survey years, 1999 and 2000. While the frequency data are not directly comparable due to shifts in the scales used, the values assigned to these activities by beginning teachers are. The data show that for both years reflective conversations (4.3, 4.1) were valued only slightly below direct classroom observations (4.4, 4.2) on a 5 point scale.

Table 3.						
Mean Frequency and Value of BTSA Support Services: Beginning Teacher Responses						
Survey Items	1998		1999		2000	
Support provider:	Freq.	Value*	Freq.	Value**	Freq.	Value**
Makes informal contact	4.2	NA	4.1	4.21	4.3	4.25
Holds scheduled conferences	4.2	NA	4.1	4.25	4.2	4.28
Engages in reflective conversations	4.1	NA	4.0	4.34	4.2	4.38
Visits during non-instructional time	3.7	NA	3.6	4.0	3.7	4.03
Visits during instructional time	3.4	NA	3.4	4.13	3.4	4.16
Frequency 1 = never; 2 = once; 3 = every 2 or 3 months; 4 = about monthly; 5 = at least weekly						
Value* (1 = not valuable; 4 = very valuable). Statewide mean on all items = 3.2						
Value** (1 = not valuable; 5 = very valuable)						

**Table 4. Mean Frequency and Value
of Five Most Frequently Cited Assessment Activities:
Beginning Teacher Responses**

Assessment Activity	1999		2000	
	%*	Value	Freq.**	Value
Reflective Conversations	92.9%	4.3	3.7	4.1
Direct Classroom Observations	92.3%	4.4	3.2	4.2
Inquiry on classroom environment for learning	91.2%	4.4	3.6	4.1
Inquiry on engaging students in a learning process	91.2%	4.3	3.6	4.1
Inquiry on instructional planning	81.6%	4.3	3.4	4.0
Teaching in relation to CSTP (tie -'00)		3.4	3.9	
Percentage* = percentage of respondents reporting using these assessment activities Frequency** 1 = never; 2 = once; 3= every 2 or 3 months; 4 = about monthly; 5 = at least weekly Value (1 = not valuable; 5 = very valuable)				

These data reveal that (1) the specific activities most often engaged in have not changed over time; (2) the perceived value of these activities has remained stable; and (3) reflective conversations are recognized as a key component of both support and assessment. All scores for frequency and value are well above expected means. While there is a slight downward trend in values between 1999 and 2000, this is expected given that the number of respondents nearly doubled in 2000. These data tend to confirm the robustness of the core activities of the BTSA program and of the primacy of activities associated with reflective teaching practice. The identification of reflective conversations with both support and assessment activities by participants suggests that the concept of integrated support and assessment has taken hold.

To further examine participants' engagement in reflective teaching, in 2000 the state agencies asked the contractor to include a new single item global indicator, "Participation in BTSA helps me increase my ability to be a reflective practitioner." This item yielded a mean of 3.5 for beginning teachers and 4.0 for support providers on a five point scale (1

= not at all; 5 = a lot). For beginning teachers, this result is similar to other survey items linking BTSA participation to broad indicators of professional efficacy. In the same year, beginning teachers associated BTSA participation with 'being a successful teacher' with a mean of 3.7, and 'engaging with colleagues, parents and students as members of a learning community' with a mean of 3.3. The respective means for support providers on these two items were 4.1 and 3.7.

These items also reveal a trend visible throughout the data sets. Support provider data invariably have yielded higher mean values than beginning teacher data, regardless of the item in question. One likely explanation for this trend is that support providers themselves did not participate in an organized program of beginning teacher induction at the onset of their careers, and contrast the experiences of BTSA beginning teachers with their own. Also, support providers participate in a rich program of professional development in preparation for working with beginning teachers, and can more accurately judge the influence of these experiences on their own practice than beginning teachers who have no basis for comparison.

For the past two years specific data have been collected about CFASST in addition to the more general items on support and assessment. Beginning teachers and support providers were asked about the value of specific dimensions of the CFASST system, which as a whole is intended to develop reflective practitioners.

As shown in Table 5, CFASST processes related to the closure conference were the most highly valued by both groups. Means for the two items rated highest by both support providers and beginning teachers, "Held a closure conference" and "Closure conference was valuable," are well above mid-point on the scale. Although intended to last about an hour, data from the CFASST evaluation study (Storms, Wing, Jinks, Banks, & Cavazos, 2000) show that closure conferences are frequently much longer.

Because it is based on an evidence set, a closure conference focuses on selected specific aspects of teaching. Not surprisingly, support providers assigned the third highest value to the item "CFASST helps focus on areas to improve teaching" in 1999. In contrast the mean for beginning teachers on that item, 3.59, was slightly below the mean for the item "CFASST creates a productive relationship between beginning teacher and support provider" at 3.62 for 2000. Although not reported by the contractor, it is difficult to imagine statistically significant differences on these items given the large number of respondents.

Strikingly, values for all the items increased from one year to the next despite the increase in sample size. Although some of this change

can be accounted for by increased experience with the system, this could only be true for about half the respondents. Clearly perceived value of the system is most closely associated with those components designed to elicit reflective practice, and this value is understood from the time of introduction of the program.

**Table 5. Mean Value of CFASST Experiences:
Beginning Teacher and Support Provider Responses**

Survey Item	1999		2000	
	BT	SP	BT	SP
I understand how to use the CFASST system	3.26	3.82	3.48	4.05
CFASST creates a productive relationship between BT & SP	3.4	3.65	3.62	3.83
CFASST helps focus on areas to improve teaching	3.47	3.93	3.59	3.99
Held a closure conference with SP/BT	3.48	3.78	3.64	3.82
Closure conference was valuable	3.49	3.80	3.66	3.90
Reviewed student work from two types of learners	3.10	3.49	3.59	3.88
Review of student work was valuable	3.26	3.68	3.60	3.92
Descriptions of Practice assessed teaching	3.44	3.89	3.49	3.91
Descriptions of Practice were valuable	3.31	3.85	3.38	3.87
1 = not at all; 5 = a lot				

Interpretations and Musings

These data provide glimpses of the eventual power of the BTSA program to change the nature of daily teaching practice. Based on the program evaluation data presented here as well as on the CFASST evaluation data discussed in other papers in this volume, there is evidence that structured formative assessment and support drives, focuses and increases reflection about teaching for both beginning and experienced teachers. One can also see that participating teachers connect successful teaching with being reflective about their students and student learning. Normative analysis of teaching based on evidence of student learning through individual teacher's reflections and their professional conversations with colleagues has been long sought by

school reformers (Sarason 1996, 1971). These data also suggest that such teacher learning is most productive when it is focused through a deliberate framework of knowledge and practice, and the content and form of professional development is consistent (Franke et al, 2001). At the same time, it confirms long held notions that it is the interactions between individuals in local school settings that turn state policies into changed teaching practices (Coburn, 2001; McLaughlin, 1993).

Certainly the data point to clear areas for additional growth in local BTSA programs. The frequency of class visits by support providers during instructional time at about eight week intervals is not where it should be. Scheduled conferences and informal contacts occur at about four to six week intervals. This falls below the desired norm of weekly contact with the support provider if each of these activities is treated discretely. On the other hand, if they are considered as parts of an array, it may be that beginning teachers do work with their support providers almost weekly on one of these activities. Given the current realities of public education in California, including a teacher and therefore a substitute teacher shortage, and the frequent assignment of beginning teachers to low performing schools with high faculty turnover, it may be unrealistic to expect to achieve this norm for some time (Shields, Esch, Young, & Humphrey, 2000).

It is true, however, that these minimally acceptable intervals represent the expected frequency of formal observations and closure conferences set out in CFASST. The frequency and character of what happens at the local level is driven by implementation of the intended design. What these numbers mean in the lives of teachers is probed in the articles on the evaluation studies of CFASST implementation found elsewhere in this publication. An optimal interpretation of these studies suggests that the BTSA program increases the likelihood of good teaching in low performing schools, given the concentrations of beginning teachers in these schools, and the presence of their support providers on campus. They also imply that when well-understood and implemented, the BTSA/CFASST design can be exactly the sort of job-embedded, ongoing professional development national experts have called for (National Commission Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1996).

Can state policy mandate teacher reflection? Probably not, nor should it. Government forays into controlling human thought are distinguished throughout history by their notoriousness. Yet shaping professional thinking is a legitimate concern in any regulated profession. One expects neither the police detective nor the physician to use idiosyncratic methods for sorting evidence and reaching conclusions, although personal practical knowledge gained from individual experience

is highly prized in the application of professionally recognized standards and methods. This is the same in teaching. There is a role for policymakers to synthesize what is learned from research and practical experience into standards for professional practice. Systematizing personal practical knowledge into public knowledge can be a rich resource for teacher preparation and policy creation, provided it is standardized and self-correcting (Snow, 2001). It is this sort of marriage of public and private knowledge that was envisioned in the creation of the BTSA program.

By shaping the context for teacher learning, by drawing from research yet valuing individual knowledge and experiences, and by insisting on high quality programs, those responsible for beginning teacher induction in California have sought to push teachers to become reflective practitioners clearly focused on student learning. In the words of a support provider,

Before I became a BTSA support provider and experienced *CFASST* training, all I did as a classroom teacher was “Plan-Teach; Plan-Teach.” Now I have learned that to be effective I must “Plan, Teach, Reflect and Apply.” And you can see the difference in my students’ accomplishments. (Support Provider, East Bay Consortium, October 2000)

As these norms become embedded in professional teacher induction programs that every beginning teacher experiences as a part of learning to teach, the tantalizing possibility that something worth doing is worth mandating dangles before us. Let’s hope the policymakers give us the opportunity to try.

Notes

¹ A version of this paper was co-presented with Amy Jackson at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April, 2001, Seattle, WA.

² The use of *CFASST* in local BTSA programs is not required. Approximately 12 of 150 local programs use locally developed formative assessments.

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