What Skills, Beliefs, and Practices Enable Experienced Teachers To Promote Reflective Practice in Novice Teachers?[1]

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> The reflective piece is the crux of what we're doing [in CFASST] because if you can help the new teacher really focus on the idea of reflection and self-criticism ... [to] be an ongoing thing, that's what will eventually make that person a better and a better and a better teacher. We're lifelong learners as teachers. (CFASST Support Provider, District 1, 3/00)

California's public school system, like others across the nation, faces a tremendous challenge in the recruitment, preparation, induction, and

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retention of well qualified teachers for its increasingly diverse and growing population of students. Research indicates that the depth of teachers' content knowledge and the quality of their pedagogy are among the most significant factors in influencing student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1996), and that the poorest schools, districts, and students have the least access to such highly qualified and effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999). It is an issue of equity.

Policymakers at the state level are in a position to establish policies and provide the resources to address issues of teacher quality and access to quality teachers. In California one such effort is the *California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers* [CFASST] (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing [CCTC] & California Department of Education [CDE], 1998a) used in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program (CCTC & CDE, 1997a). It represents an important statewide effort to strengthen the quality and retention of beginning teachers, and to make greater use of experienced teachers in facilitating that goal in every school district.

Unlike conventional mentoring models in which experienced teachers are available to beginning teachers for consultation or as role models, CFASST calls for an intensive, two-year formative assessment and support relationship between a new teacher and an experienced teacher (called a support provider) who is trained in CFASST's Plan/Teach/Reflect/Apply cycle of inquiry and reflection, and in the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* [CSTP] (CCTC & CDE, 1997). For teacher participants in this process, a clear outcome is a new or renewed understanding of how to acquire, enact and sustain high quality pedagogy in their assigned classrooms. For schools and school districts, the outcome can be an overall higher quality of teaching practice no matter the socioeconomic or achievement status of the local school setting.

This article focuses on the question: What skills, beliefs, and practices enable experienced teachers (support providers) to support the development of reflective practice in beginning teachers who are participating in a teacher induction program with a formative assessment component? It describes some of the ways in which support providers both influenced and were influenced by the process of working with beginning teachers within the structure of the CFASST program.

Characteristics that reportedly facilitated support providers in assisting beginning teachers with inquiry and reflection were grouped into three domains: (a) One domain involved the specific skills, knowledge, and understandings that prepare support providers to take on their role in working with novice teachers. Support providers with strong skills in

pedagogy, curriculum, student assessment, classroom management, and similar areas of practice were reportedly better prepared to facilitate novice teachers in their reflections about their own practice; (b) A second domain involved support providers' beliefs, values, and perspectives about the teaching profession, and about teachers and students as learners. Support providers whose ideas were more closely aligned with the principles underlying CFASST were reportedly better prepared to guide and support beginning teachers in engaging in reflection; and (c) The third domain related to the support provider's personal commitment to mentoring a new generation of teachers, to building a non-judgmental partnership, and to engaging in an intense learning relationship with a novice teacher.

Fundamentally, the CFASST process treats both experienced and novice teachers as professionals. Although CFASST is organized around events in a cycle of inquiry, the program involves a systemic process of learning, not just a series of activities. The events are designed to help beginning teachers focus on real classroom problems and to constantly reflect upon the plans and choices that they make.

For support providers, the CFASST activities in the cycle of Plan/Teach/Reflect/Apply parallel what are widely accepted as best practices of classroom teaching, though these parallels are not explicitly drawn within the CFASST materials. Through the CFASST events, beginning teachers are guided to focus on student-centered pedagogy (Freire, 1973), to use multiple forms of assessment, to promote collaborative learning, to find ways to address individual student learning, and to look at learning (both the students' and their own) as a lifelong process (Dewey, 1938). CFASST support providers parallel these pedagogies in coaching their beginning teachers. They personalize CFASST and recognize that each beginning teacher has different strengths and a different style of teaching and learning. They assess their beginning teachers using multiple methods, including frequent classroom observation in Year 1, collaborative reflection (verbal and written), and close examination of student (and beginning teacher) work as evidence of learning. The support provider acts more as a coach who asks the kinds of questions that foster inquiry and reflection, which in turn should result in changes in practice.

Of particular interest in the data was the question of whether the experienced teachers themselves became more reflective practitioners. From a socio-cultural perspective, when individuals work collaboratively they experience a transformation in their cognitive process, which is reflected in their acquisition of new strategies and knowledge (Sullivan-Palinscar & Rupert-Herrenkohl, 1999).

Data Sources and Methods of Analysis

Data sources include the following, which were all collected during the 1999-2000 CFASST evaluation conducted by Educational Testing Service for the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the California Department of Education:

- Data from 1999-2000 CFASST support provider training surveys across the state. Open-ended responses from these surveys are attributed to support providers from particular districts by assigning a letter (e.g., District A).
- Data from three in-depth interviews with CFASST program directors in each of seven case study districts or consortia of districts, conducted in winter/spring 2000.
- Data from a total of 16 focus groups with beginning teachers and a total of 16 focus groups of support providers held at a total of five CFASST Year 1 and three CFASST Year 2 case study sites, conducted in winter/spring 2000. In total, there were five district and consortium case study sites for Year 1 located in different regions of the state, and three case study sites for Year 2 (with one of the sites included as a case study site for both years). In this article, case study sites are indicated by a number (e.g., District 1).

In these multiple sources of data, experienced teachers commented on the program's strengths and challenges, including the training and follow-up support that they received. They also provided descriptions of, insights on, and commentary about their experiences in working with the beginning teachers with whom they had been matched. In addition, data from interviews with program directors and focus groups with beginning teachers were collected and analyzed to examine issues related to how support providers were chosen, trained, matched, and supported in their role as mentors to beginning teachers. All comments were reviewed for patterns or themes with respect to characteristics that enable experienced teachers to become effective support providers. Beginning teacher, support provider, and program director comments are identified by BT, SP, and PD, respectively, followed by the date on which the quote was taken.

Characteristics That Enable Support Providers To Promote Reflective Practice by Beginning Teachers in a Teacher Induction Program

Support Provider Training

Support provider training occurred during the summer and throughout the year (CCTC & CDE, 1993; 2000). Many of the experienced teachers trained as support providers had not received intensive support from an experienced teacher at the outset of their own careers, nor did they learn to use a Plan/Teach/Reflect/Apply cycle of practice. Participating in CFASST training was an introduction for many first-time support providers to this formal, two-year teacher induction process. This is evidenced by one support provider, who noted on her training survey response, "This [CFASST] is a great program and I would have loved the feedback and guidance when I was a beginning teacher" (District A, SP 5/00).

The initial training serves two important functions: to introduce support providers to the CFASST events and to prepare them to work intensively with beginning teachers. Subsequent training is primarily used to refresh the essential components of supporting beginning teachers through CFASST, and to provide an atmosphere of professional collegiality and collaboration among support providers. Many support providers spoke about the value of the networks formed during the trainings. One commented that the training was important because it allowed " . . . for people in the district to hook up and get to know each other" (District 5, SP 5/00). Another added that the monthly training meetings are useful " . . . so we can get really clear and set on what we're suppose to be doing and share our personal successes and failures . . . it's reassuring . . . that we're all in the same boat" (District 5, SP 5/00). Several support providers commented about their preparedness after participating in the CFASST training:

> The CFASST training has been very enlightening. I'm brain dead, but have gained a lot of knowledge. I hope to be a good [support provider]. (District A, SP 5/00)

> What an informative training! In all the years of teaching and serving as a Mentor Teacher, this is one of two intense training that is very useful. I learned so much. (District S, SP 5/00)

One theme that support providers perceived as an important aspect of the training was that through the training sessions support providers build upon each other's strengths. One program director noted that,

> They [support providers] are mixed throughout the room so that the more senior support providers can share their learnings with our new support providers, as well as the new support providers kind of sharing some of their energy and things they've learned. (District 4, PD interview, 3/00)

Finally, the training reportedly provided many support providers with a sense of the potential benefits with respect to their own teaching practice. As one support provider put it,

> [The training was] very helpful in focusing my own thinking about my practice- an opportunity to learn with the beginning teachers. (District C SP, 5/00)

Selection and Matching of Support Providers and Beginning Teachers

Selection and matching of support providers with beginning teachers was a program implementation issue that varied among our case study sites (Storms, Wing, Jinks, Banks, & Cavazos, 2000; Storms & Lee, 2001). In some districts, support providers were chosen from among a strong pool of applicants and were matched with beginning teachers based on criteria including site proximity, grade level, and subject matter. In other programs, the need for support providers was so great that experienced teachers simply volunteered. In CFASST Year 1, both beginning teachers and support providers tended to feel that same-site matching was particularly important in facilitating the frequent observations, and in allowing for the precious time to meet.

Grade level and subject area matching also reportedly proved important as a curriculum resource and as a lens for the frequent classroom observations in CFASST Year 1, and for helping the beginning teacher with short- and long-term lesson planning in CFASST Year 2. Several Year 2 support providers, especially at the high school level, commented that their beginning teachers welcomed the Year 2 focus on content, and asked many questions about how to teach specific curricula.

> I think for my teachers this year, the most useful part was the ability to start talking curriculum, the actual teaching of our subject … where it seemed like the first year, we never really got into teaching of the subject. It was all peripherals. I really felt like a lot of light bulbs went off this year when we talked about different ways to present lessons and then asking them to reflect on what worked? What didn't work? Why was that? How could we have changed that to make it better? It's just planting some seeds for their careers. (District 5 Year 2 SP, 5/00)

However, for particular teaching specialties such as special education and foreign language, CFASST was not directly applicable, and support providers noted that they had to be creative with regard to the state

curriculum frameworks, professional standards, and teacher reflection. One foreign language support provider in District 5 commented on making use of student data in an innovative, integrated way:

> ...Some of the training and the forms and what we're doing with CFASST, we have to take a look at and decide what does this mean to us ... We don't have information on students in foreign language, but their reading scores may be important to us, so we can definitely look at that. There's a correlation. (District 5 SP, 2/00)

Moreover, since many beginning teachers receive preservice training in teaching English language learners, some support providers found the beginning teachers to be better trained in this domain than the veterans.

Specific Skills, Knowledge and Understanding of Support Providers

Several skills and understandings emphasized in training included coaching skills (e.g., building trusting relationships, defining roles and expectations), knowledge of how to apply the continuum of mentor support, opportunities to try out observation protocols to learn how to collect evidence of teaching practice, and the capacity to use reflective or mediational questioning.

Setting a tone of learning is one important skill that support providers must develop early in the relationship. When support providers were able to help beginning teachers understand the purpose and intent of CFASST, to establish a professional culture of inquiry and reflection, and to serve as knowledgeable colleagues, beginning teachers tended to demonstrate meaningful learning.

Support providers also developed skills in providing adequate support to beginning teachers based upon their individual needs. The theory behind the continuum of support is that support providers should provide the appropriate level of support, ranging from directive to collaborative to non-directive. For example, support providers are trained to give more direct assistance if the beginning teacher's classroom practices are inappropriate, such as allowing students to become physically aggressive with one another. In such instances, information flows directly from support provider to beginning teacher in the form of suggestions and solutions. In other situations, the support provider acts as a facilitator of the beginning teacher's thinking and problem solving, and the beginning teacher actively directs the flow of information. Support providers also find that they must learn how to adapt their support to match the complexities of the new teachers' lives. One program administrator noted that beginning teachers need

> …to not be pushed to teach a 6/5 load; to not be asked to be a head football coach …to be released of all duties outside of teaching …if I could give them anything, I would give them a guarentee that all they're being asked to do is teach …not move to five different classrooms and have five different preps …and make sure they had a place to store their materials. (District 5 PD 4/00)

Many support providers have demonstrated skill by being flexible with their scheduling of meetings and observations, by maintaining the attitude that the program is doable, and by helping beginning teachers to fill out some of the CFASST forms that are part of the process of learning through reflection.

Another skill that fostered reflective practice was that of conducting classroom observations for the purpose of collecting evidence of the beginning teacher's practice. Both beginning teachers and support providers emphasized the significance of having objective evidence upon which to base decisions about areas in the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CCTC & CDE, 1997b) where the beginning teacher was strong and where opportunities for improvement existed. One support provider reported that the beginning teacher was surprised when she realized the extent to which support providers follow a particular protocol to ensure unbiased observations.

> [The BT] didn't realize that I, too, had a certain process to follow through the observation, that I'd been trained through the CFASST events. "This is what I'm looking for. This is what I'm going to focus on. This is what I'm taking notes on as we go through this observation." So that the first time we sat down and debriefed, she was amazed that I saw all these things . . . She was worried about me observing her. But then, when she realized that we were just going to use this more for reflection back onto that lesson, it really did start to boost her confidence . . . (District 2 SP, 5/00)

Observation data are valuable in promoting reflective, substantive conversations. Support providers noted that the quality of the conversation that occurs following an observation depends on the evidence that was gathered.

> The fact that it was based on the evidence that you gathered . . . was very helpful because the BTs are inclined to make generalizations and comments and they can't back them up . . . they may be critical of themselves or they may be over-praising of themselves, but both ways it was a good opportunity to stop and say "All right, if this was your impression, these are the data that I gathered. How do these [data] support what you are saying—or not support it?" (District 5 SP, 5/00)

The nonjudgmental and reflective nature of the support providers'

comments and questions were essential factors in supporting beginning teachers with self-examination and assessment. Mediational or reflective questions helped beginning teachers to hypothesize what might happen, analyze what worked or did not work, imagine possibilities, compare and contrast what was planned with what ensued, extrapolate from one situation to another, and evaluate the impact of their instructional practices (CCTE & CDE, 1998b). Several support providers stressed the importance of engaging in this type of reflective conversation with beginning teachers. According to one support provider,

> The reflective conversation is really where the work is done. Where the questions that are in the forms are guides for us to look at and to start a conversation and go from there. (District 5 SP, 5/00)

From the standpoint of a beginning teacher, a sense of efficacy was expressed in the focus groups, where the importance of the support providers' role in being nonjudgmental was mentioned.

> The beauty of the BTSA program is that no one is judging you. When they see you teach, that is the heart and soul of this thing. When you sit down and say, "These are the goals I want for this lesson, and this is what I want to achieve and this is my plan." Then she [support provider] watches and we sit down and say, "Okay. This is what happened, now why did the results ... miss the goal?" As I understand it, our goal is, when the BTSA program is over, to be able to do that ourselves without having to rely on that outside eye . . . (District 5 BT, 3/00)

Some support providers suggested the importance of acquiring other, less obvious skills, such as the ability to model reflective thinking. Many support providers would encourage their beginning teachers to observe their own classrooms and participate in a reflective conversation about the support providers' teaching.

Support providers also mentioned the importance of being able to balance the demands of their own teaching assignment with that of providing support to a beginning teacher. As one support provider explained,

> . . . There was no way that I could take away from the time I always spend preparing for my classes and that I always spend with my students – trying to balance that and stay peppy and energetic in dealing with two new teachers. Do I compromise with my teachers? Or do I compromise with classroom and my students? (District 5 Year 2 SP, 5/00)

Many support providers in the focus groups were still struggling with this problem.

Support Providers' Beliefs, Values, and Perspectives about the Teaching Profession

CFASST allows for numerous opportunities for beginning teachers to reflect on their work, thus creating a process that will become part of a teacher's normal repertoire. As such, it is important for support providers to view the forms in CFASST as important to the process, rather than as paperwork to be completed. When participants regarded and used the forms as tools to assist them in the process of inquiry, reflection, planning, and so forth, these records became useful artifacts.

Program directors consistently referred to one understanding as being most important: Support providers must understand the purpose and intent of the CFASST process and must commit the time needed to assist the beginning teacher in using the process. One program administrator commented that

> When SPs understood the purpose of CFASST and the strategies that it employs, when SPs could explain the events and their purpose, the BTs were more likely to see the activities as meaningful and as connected to each other. When SPs were unclear, unsure, or confused, their BTs were also perplexed. (District 2 Consortium PD, 4/00)

If support providers are made aware of the overarching purposes and benefits of good teacher induction programs, then they are likely to be more willing to put in the time and effort that it takes to complete the CFASST process.

One final theme that support providers emphasized as important to the CFASST reflection process was understanding the developmental, individualized nature of the learning process. This understanding enabled them to be more flexible with their beginning teachers as they undergo the difficult process of becoming reflective practitioners. The comments from the following two support providers describe their sentiments:

> I think one of the main goals with – dealing with children—is to help children become lifelong learners. I think that BTSA does contribute a lot to the idea of teachers realizing that they're going to be lifelong learners in their profession, and that they will not just come to a point of mastery and skill. They're still going to be asking questions and reflecting and finding challenges. (District 4 SP 6/00)

> I think my expectations were higher the first year because I expected to turn out a clone like myself, maybe. So then when I let go of that and realized that everybody has their own personality and way of doing things, and that it was OK, I felt there was lots of growth. I wouldn't want

> him to be like me because he brings such a great – he's wonderful by himself. (District 4 SP 6/00)

Personal Commitment to an Intense Learning Relationship

The CFASST process consumes time and energy, and requires initiative, perseverance, patience, and creativity on the part of the support provider. Support providers identified several time-related issues which affected their role — insufficient time to meet with beginning teachers, to complete paperwork, or to observe beginning teachers' classrooms. These clearly ranked at the top of the anticipated concerns of support providers following the initial summer support provider training. One commented

> The program seems fantastic. I'm very excited about working in it with my new teacher. My one worry is the time factor, and I hope that we can work through it. (District C SP, 5/00)

Adding to the time concerns, support providers frequently reported that the events often took longer to complete because the experienced teachers were dealing with beginning teacher survival, or because they were taking a developmental approach. Moreover, some support providers described difficulties in getting beginning teachers to prioritize CFASST. The classroom observations took time and juggling of schedules, and were sometimes difficult to set up. Both beginning teachers and support providers reported, however, learning a great deal about effective teaching practice from the post-observation reflection. Here is a sample comment:

> I think the piece that I saw [improving] was just … that stopping and looking all the time. She had very set ways to do things in the beginning and now, the planning process, the assessing process are really a broad bank of things . . . that constant reflection about the lessons — about where the kids are in the lesson, do I need to re-teach? Am I hitting all the styles I need to be hitting? I saw her ballooning in the use of instructional strategies. (District 7 SP, 5/00)

The support provider's ability to keep the "big picture" in mind is important in sustaining the commitment required to build a relationship with the beginning teachers and keep up the momentum of the cycles of inquiry and reflection. One support provider stated, "We're basically training them to be pioneers" (District 5 SP 2/00). The process of training beginning teachers to be reflective practitioners is described as difficult and intensive, especially at the start.

> Whenever there's a change and you're learning a new trade, it's always with some misery because you think this is so foreign to me that it's so

> difficult to have to do this. But when it becomes internalized, they're doing it without even knowing they're doing it. (District 3 SP, 5/00)

Strong commitment to a new generation of teachers is especially important when things do not go smoothly. One support provider described a resistant beginning teacher, and talked about his approach to this teacher over time. This support provider said,

> He fought it. It was like a little kid not wanting to do the homework. He would never come back prepared. The second year, he was a lot better. And then I saw the difference in his lesson plans, for example . . . and the fact that, when he sat down and told me all of the things that he knew he needed to work on, I thought that was awesome . . . I've seen such a difference in his discipline and how . . . what he was doing was trying to push away from it [BTSA/CFASST] because he didn't really feel competent enough, and he didn't want to let me know, in the beginning, how much he didn't know. (District 3 consortium SP, 6/00)

A factor that is important in helping support providers sustain their commitment is the program director and the structures of BTSA/CFASST that address the question: Who supports the support provider? One support provider suggested that

> It's nice to know there's a structure there for getting answers to things, whether it's related to CFASST or BTSA, or whether it's just a procedural thing that belongs to the school. (District 3 consortium, SP 5/00)

Several support providers explained that the reward for the high degree of commitment was seeing the beginning teachers become more effective, confident teachers, which in turn made the support providers feel more successful.

Support Providers as Reflective Practitioners

Many support providers who participated in the focus groups were veterans of 20 years or more. These experienced teachers repeatedly described the impact of CFASST on their own practice, particularly in the quality and quantity of reflection by the support providers about their own practice. One support provider described how she altered her mathematics curriculum plan based on her reflecting on student assessment data:

> . . . at my school, everybody teaching Algebra II has the same test. I gave a quiz, and the first time in the ten years of my career, half of my classes failed that quiz. I had that many Fs. I went back to the (other Algebra II) teachers. I said something's wrong, I'm re-teaching, I'm re-quizzing. I'm giving the exact same quiz. I put out—I was absolutely exhausted. The other teachers said, "Now, you know, I'm just going to move on." And I knew after all the teaching that I've done to my new teachers . . . there's

> no way I can do it. So, just basically out of guilt, I had to stop and literally—I mean, blood and sweat and tears for three days to get them ready again. (District 5, Year 2 SP, 5/00)

In taking on the role of support provider, experienced teachers often reflected on the importance of modeling what you expect from the beginning teachers—a kind of "practice what you preach" approach.

> I find a lot more pressure, going, "Oh, my god, I'm supposed to be really good in *BTSA* because I'm somebody's coach." So I feel a lot more pressure being sure that I am doing all these things . . . and trying to find the answers in my own lessons as to why this is working. So that's good because it made me realize my own faults and what not. It's made me try a lot of new, different things. Before I would say, "Well, I know you could do this." I don't want to say that to a new teacher. I want to be able to say, "I have tried this. I have done this." (District 5, Year 2 SP, 5/00)

Several support providers commented on the importance of reflecting on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CCTC & CDE, 1997b). Most did not know the standards, or even that they existed. Using them with beginning teachers was helpful in renewing a sense of what teaching is all about.

> I feel I'm a different teacher than I was two years ago based on continually looking at the standards, the reflection part, and looking at the Descriptions of Practice and thinking that's where I want to be, too, and I'm not always right there. That's what I tell people—I'm not in it just for them [beginning teachers], I'm in it for making myself better. (District 4 SP, 5/00)

Support providers reported improved observation and listening skills, as well as gaining the patience to resist the urge to jump in and tell the beginning teacher what to do. One support provider described a phenomenon of moving "...away from solving beginning teacher problems into asking better reflective questions to help beginning teachers come to their own solutions." (District 7 SP, 5/00)

Professional Development of Experienced Teachers

Most of the support providers in this study had been teaching for ten to thirty years, and their own experiences as novice teachers were significantly different than those of the CFASST Year 1 and Year 2 teachers. As one support provider described,

> My first year of teaching, I had a regular mentor because BTSA didn't exist. I received a bookmark and one telephone call. That was my support for the entire year. (SP District 2 Consortium, 5/00)

Although experienced teachers invest a great deal of time and energy in carrying out their role as CFASST support providers, the professional development benefits are enormous. Most support providers in the focus groups reported some example of becoming more reflective in their own classrooms and changing their own practices as a result of CFASST, and most were thoughtful, articulate, and detailed in their reflections on their own growth as professionals. Thus, the more that experienced teachers are able to participate in CFASST, perhaps the more schools and districts will benefit with regard to the veteran teachers becoming more reflective practitioners. One support provider addressed the issue of veteran teachers who are not trained as CFASST support providers, and who continue to teach in ways that are out of line with the current state standards.

> What we really have to keep emphasizing for [beginning teachers] is the strength they're going to have to have in being in departments where the veteran teachers are still in the old mode of thinking, until we get around to being able to train the veteran teachers on the standards. Many, many of them are unaware that they exist, let alone what they are. (District 5 Year 2 SP, 2/00)

Having CFASST-trained beginning teachers *and* experienced teachers in schools throughout the state becomes a way of beginning to change the culture and pedagogy of schools and departments. Student learning and success can flourish when all children have access to qualified teachers. The professional development provided through CFASST is a critical step toward reaching that goal.

Note

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