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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the voices of California beginning teachers who completed focus group discussions on their perceptions of their own development as reflective practitioners, analyzing the nature and extent of teachers' thinking. Teachers were part of the California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CFASST), which is framed around a cycle of reflective inquiry and uses the California Standards for the Teaching Profession as the standard description of reflective practice. Analysis of the focus group data indicated that beginning teachers in the CFASST program reflected regularly about their practice, and they used multiple formats (e.g., written, verbal, small groups, one-to-one, and alone) to enhance reflection. While many described themselves as being naturally reflective about their work, data indicate that the nature and extent of such thinking changed as they participated in a program of structured support organized around cycles of inquiry and reflection. Reflection became more focused on specific elements of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. At the same time, teachers began to examine larger issues related to the profession and to the organization of schools. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

## How Do Beginning Teachers Perceive Their Development as Reflective Practitioners?

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## How Do Beginning Teachers Perceive Their Development as Reflective Practitioners?

In 1998, the state of California added a two-year formative assessment experience (CFASST) to some of the school districts that were using its decade-long, integrated approach to support and assessment of beginning teachers (BTSA). The California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CCTC & CDE, 1998) is framed around a cycle of reflective inquiry and uses the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CCTC & CDE, 1997) as the standard description of reflective practice.

Long regarded as an important aspect of effective teaching (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983), reflection involves conceptualizing a problem setting and re-framing it within the context of learning, so as to make rational choices and assume responsibility for those choices (Feiman, 1979; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). CFASST imbeds reflection in many of the activities that the beginning teacher and support provider complete together. Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning – where learning is portrayed in a four-stage cycle of 1) concrete experience, forming the basis for 2) observation and reflection, which are used to 3) generalize or build an idea, from which 4) new action is created – forms the basis for the "Plan, Teach, Reflect, and Apply" cycle that is imbedded in the support program.

CFASST incorporates several aspects of what research has indicated to be effective staff development: a consideration of the developmental nature of learning to use reflection (Ross, 1988; Kitchener & King, 1981); the use of peer observation and coaching around a narrow range of teaching behaviors (McGreal, 1982; Showers & Joyce, 1996); and the use of classroom research or teacher inquiry to help teachers assess their own teaching (Cross, 1897). Acknowledging that self-assessment procedures enhance the teachers' abilities and willingness to be reflective about classroom instruction (Freiberg, Waxman, & Houston, 1987), CFASST provides beginning teachers with multiple tools that can be used to provide rich information for self-assessment of practice.

### Methodology

During the second year of the implementation of CFASST, seven sites throughout the state were selected for case studies that were designed to provide policy makers and practitioners with pertinent information about the effect of the new system on California's beginning teachers, their support providers, and the district organizations coordinating the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment programs. Methods used in the case studies included focus interviews with approximately forty beginning teachers, separate focus group discussions with support providers, and interviews with directors of BTSA programs. Those discussions were guided by structured protocols that asked beginning teachers to talk about such things as how they worked with their support providers, which CFASST events were most or least helpful to them, how they thought they had grown as teachers, and how they used the materials provided in the CFASST "box."

Beginning teachers described their experiences working with CFASST events and with a support provider, offered their opinions and perspectives about those experiences, and related examples of ways in which their classroom practices and views of teaching had been influenced by the activities that they had carried out. The researcher at each of the seven sites summarized the findings from these focus groups, as well as from the discussions with program directors and support providers. Those summaries were included as part of the CFASST Implementation Report prepared by Educational Testing Service in October 2000 (Storms, Wing, Jinks, Banks, & Cavazos, 2000).

The purpose of this paper is to provide access to the voices of the beginning teachers as they were captured during the taped focus group discussions, so that readers may learn how the end users of the California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers – the beginning teachers themselves – perceived their own development as reflective practitioners. Transcripts of all taped beginning teacher focus groups from the seven sites were read and analyzed for patterns and categories of responses that emerged. In addition to presenting the teachers' voices, which predominate, this paper will analyze the nature and extent of teachers' thinking, and consider implications for policy and practice.

### Findings

Analysis of the data in the transcripts provides evidence that beginning teachers in the CFASST program reflected regularly about their practice, and that they used multiple formats (e.g., written, verbal, in small groups, one-to-one, alone) to enhance that reflection. While many of the beginning teachers described themselves as being "naturally" reflective about their work, data indicate that the nature and extent of such thinking changed as they participated in a program of structured support organized around cycles of inquiry and reflection. Reflection became more focused on specific elements of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. At the same time teachers began to examine larger issues related to the profession and to the organization of schools.

#### **CFASST Provides Multiple Tools for Self-assessment of Practice.**

CFASST incorporates several tools that new teachers may use to develop skills in assessing their own practice. Peer observation and coaching, observations of other teachers, opportunities to attend professional seminars and workshops, and access to educational literature are among the tools built into the program. In addition to the opportunities to reflect provided by these components, specific guided reflection is an integral part of several CFASST events.

Peer observation and coaching, in addition to informal observations, is required in CFASST Event #2: Inquiry into Establishing a Learning Environment, in events #3 and 6: Profiles of Practice, in Event # 5: Inquiry into Developing Instructional Experiences, and Event #8: Inquiry into Understanding Student Learning Through Assessment. Each of these observations follows the peer coaching protocol (Showers & Joyce, 1996) where the observation is preceded by a

planning conference and followed by a feedback conference. A significant component of these observations is that each CFASST event asks the beginning teacher to focus on a specific aspect of teaching, and refers to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession for the teaching behaviors to be explored. Many beginning teachers in the case studies expressed how these observations and coaching helped them think about their teaching.

*"I thought it was very helpful because I don't think I would've done that on my own. I would've just focused on 'Oh, my God, what do I do?' and the next day. What am I going to teach the next day? With her help, we looked at the standards, or we looked at one goal that I was going to do. 'Ok, these are the people you should go and look at - they're good at doing this - and by this day you should complete - let's focus on what your goal could be at about two weeks or at about four weeks.' That's what we did. I think if I were to be on my own in this, I wouldn't even think about these things." (BT Site 7, 6/00)*

*"It's nice when you have these little checklists - 'Oh, I better think about this. I better think about that. How do I feel about that? What am I thinking about that? Has that changed? Do I need to be different than what...?' " (BT Site 5, 3/00)*

*"I found it much more helpful to have my Support Provider come in and just write down what she saw and just write down my words as I said them. I actually found I was more positive and encouraging that I thought I was, which made me proud and want to do it more. So that was good. Then a few things, like focusing on a couple of students too much. I was also favoring girls for a while there, and I found that out through the POP. So I really found out some real practical information and ways to solve that. I was also teaching to the right of the room - just little things like that, that I am not aware of that I can try to pull myself away from the right - moving around the room. I do ten times more than I used to do. So, just little, little things like that have really made me more aware of myself." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"... so I would try something new and she would come in and give me positive reinforcement in areas that were weak so I could build — I could direct and build. Also, I felt more reflective and felt that I knew less this year than I did last year. So, my tool, a lot of my tools weren't working, so I had to adopt new tools. That exchange and sharing with other teachers and realizing that they have a common experience - and strategies - that I could take back and use directly in the classroom." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

*"I really like it because she'll look for particular evidence of things that are very positive. She'll also respond to whatever I think is going to work first, and let me try it. Then, if it doesn't, then we go back together and she'll tell me a strategy she might have." (BT Site 5, 3/00)*

*"... my Support Provider would always remind me, 'I'm going to be looking at [something specific]. I'm not going to be looking at this. I'm not going to be looking at that. Just literacy. So make sure you're focusing on literacy.' So she goes, 'Remember, you had your plan as this? That's what you're going to be focusing on.' So, it's helped me make sure I focus on one thing at*

*a time and not the whole thing. So slowly I'm getting more into the other aspects of the whole thing." (BT Site 5, 3/00)*

*"... it's nice to set goals off of that rubric. So, you can see the things that you've done real well. Then you go through it and you say, 'Ok, well, I slipped in this area and this what I need to get myself to this professional level.' It's just a nice map to see where you want to go and what steps you need to take to get there." (BT Site 3, 3/00)*

Observations of other teachers is frequently a component of BTSA. New teachers related how these observations complemented the self-assessment work that they were doing with CFASST. This was especially true if the support provider and the beginning teacher visited other classrooms together, and then had opportunities to talk about what they had observed.

*"... my support provider and I watched for a whole day this fabulous fifth grade teacher. ... After we went and saw her together, I said, 'I want to be like this. This is how I want to handle my day. This is what I want to do.' But then I said, 'But this is what I have and this is what I am doing.' So, having her be in both places with me, we were able to sit down and talk, 'Ok, how can I get from where I am to where this is? How can we find a medium ground that's going to start me to eventually get to there?' ... it's the observing and the observing together - because then if I wouldn't have gone there with her, it would have been a lot harder to come back and describe, 'Well, she does this. I want to do that too.' ... It's been kind of nice that she's almost held me accountable, saying, 'Remember that thing we saw in that classroom, have you tried it yet? How's that coming along?' ... So, it's - the observation just has so many different aspects to it that are really beneficial, I think." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

*"Having someone observe me or going into a class that's successful with those kinds of children and watching that, for me, is invaluable, I think. So I really like the checklist and I like all the opportunities. You go and watch the [support] provider. Then you choose somebody for some subject that you maybe you don't know as much in and you go and you watch that person. Then that person will come to watch you." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

*"That has definitely proven to be an excellent resource and opportunity for me to be able to come back to my Support Provider and discuss those things. And pull things from there to work on as goals of my own and stuff. I had - she's accompanied me on some of my observations so we've been able to really just talk - 'Remember when they did this and remember when they did that?' That sort of thing. Her coming in and observing me, too, even though it's kind of nerve wracking, it's always proved to be helpful, too." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

*"I had a mentor - my provider - observe me, comment. We had feedback; that was good for me. I got to choose the very, very best teachers in the district to go and observe and have them, even, come and observe me or teach a lesson. I loved watching those people give lessons. That's part of what they do in that CFASST stuff and that's great." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

Workshops, seminars, articles, and professional conferences provided opportunities for beginning teachers to learn new strategies and think about how they related to their own teaching. Transcripts of the focus group interviews indicate that for several teachers, these were significant tools for self-assessment.

*"I'm a former military naval intelligence and stuff - so I kind of come from a hard line of things. So kids come and get out of line at the beginning, 'Hey, sit down where...' But then I started thinking about, 'Why were [they] doing that particular thing? Were they trying to get my attention in the first place? Is any attention good attention for them? They don't care what kind of attention it is. So I've learned instead of coming down hard - just ask them a question, 'What's going on? What's the problem?' instead of nailing them. It kind of starts their day off, maybe a little bit, especially in first period, if they're getting nailed coming in right off the bat, it might ruin their whole day and other teachers may experience similar problems that I have. Maybe I can set the tone a little different for their day. ... The guest speaker talked about the way you ask a question of the kid or the way you give a demand or a command can change the situation in general. It has changed some things. I've noticed a difference. If I've got some kids acting up, instead of going back there and nailing them, I'll come back ... and instead of standing up and saying over the class, I'll around to the back and kind of put my hands on their shoulders and say, 'Is there something I can help you guys with? No? Get back to work?' Instead of a confrontation taking place, it's more of a subtle approach. Maybe sometimes you have to, but not all the time. So, I changed from last year. I would nail them and I was writing all kinds of paperwork out - referrals, detentions and stuff. I've probably written a third, maybe a fourth as much as I did last year." (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

*"These speakers come in, ... Just sitting there and listening to them, I can't help but reflect on what I'm doing in the classroom. It's whether the information I'm getting from our speakers, especially, is new or if it's something like, I really know I'm doing that and I should continue doing this... it's a motivational thing, I think. Just coming here, you know, the once a month and sitting there and taking it in and thinking about it motivates you. It kicks you in the butt a little bit and gives you a little more energy." (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

*"I have [attended workshops on] emotional intelligence. So through - what I learned from that is, I'm recognizing emotions in my classroom. So what the students are going through, kind of - it's building a rapport with them. So if the student comes in - I mean, a lot of things that they do, I do not agree with, but I have to kind of put myself in their shoes and see it from their point of view. They come and tell me things about their lives or they come in with piercings and so - and I ask them and get to know what they feel and what they went through. That kind of makes me get closer to them, so it's not a bad idea to recognize emotions in the classroom. The students' emotions also makes me reflect on my own emotions and how does that work in the whole learning process. (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

*"For me, especially some of the articles that are in there for you to read and some of the extra reading materials, those have been some of the most beneficial things.... A lot of it is stuff I*

*learned in school, but I wasn't - I didn't have my own classroom then, so it went in one ear and kind of went to the back corner. Now that I'm in my teaching and I'm like - you just kind of get into this mode and get started with one thing and it's like, 'Ah, I'm frustrated because this is not working.' But going through that and reading some of those things and talking with my provider, it reminds me of the other things to try and other ways to do things. 'Oh yeah, now that I have my own room, I can try this.' So it makes me, definitely, kind of reevaluate and change things more than - you get stuck in this rut, 'Oh this is the only way I can think of, so I've got to make this work.' That helped me to be able to read those things." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

*"I think I've gotten some good ideas from some of the speakers. ... There was a guest speaker talking about time. He had a little timer on his belt. As a matter of fact, I passed it on to my wife, who is an elementary teacher. She uses it all the time. She's been teaching for 13 years and she just loves it. Set that little timer, no matter what happens, after ten minutes you go on. I should have applied things I learned in basketball the same way, because if you do a drill too long, you don't get anything out of it. You've got the problem of diminishing returns. That's the same thing with teaching in the classroom. That's one thing I got out of it." (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

Structured reflections are required in all CFASST events. Reflection is one of the four components of the Plan, Teach, Reflect, Apply cycle that is embedded in the program. The lavender-colored papers in each event signify that beginning teachers consciously and explicitly will be using reflection; they are asked to record their reflections by writing responses to specific prompts. While this aspect of the CFASST process often drew criticism from the beginning teachers because it was "forced reflection," most of the teachers in the focus groups indicated they not only realized the value of reflection, but recognized the significance for their teaching of their increased ability to reflect on their teaching and student learning. They also acknowledge that being "forced" to reflect paid off for them and for their students.

*"It allows for explicit reflection, which I think in the first year of teaching can get lost. Because sometimes I feel like I'm on a treadmill and someone is turning up the speed. And it really gives me an opportunity, forced or not, to sit back and look at what I'm doing." (BT Site 1, 3/00)*

*"I reflect all the time, but it's internally. CFASST made me actually write it down and look at it. Reflecting on growth - on the continuum really helps me and looking at previous ones. Then, especially in number 10, looking back through all of them — it just helps in everything I do because I'm a person that reflects - I see something, reflect that night and implement it the next day. ... Somehow when it's on paper and you're looking at the continuum - you have to actually write down what your reflection is - what you're going to apply that to - it moves through the cycle a lot faster. I think that has helped me tremendously this year." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"I think for me, it's made me reflect on a lot of things I do. And we have to go through the teacher standards. It makes me think about, 'Oh, maybe I'm not doing that.' Or maybe, 'Oh look, I am doing that. How great.' Sometimes it reaffirms. One was really nice, after we did our lesson when she had to go through and kind of talk about where she thought we were. And we talked*

*about where we thought we were. And it was really nice to have some affirmation on some things. 'I think you're kind of up here. You seem to do that very well.' I thought, 'Oh good.' It felt good to know that someone saw that in what I was doing. 'And maybe this is something you could work on.' I really liked that. It was really helpful for me to know where I need to focus." (BT Site 1, 3/00)*

*"What it did for me ... is that it helped me reflect. I really like that portion of the CFASST. I found that I've been so busy that I just can't stop to focus and think about what I'd done. I'm so busy trying to catch up and do things. Doing CFASST events that have the reflection built in, kind of forced you to do that and taught me a lot about myself." (BT Site 4, 5/00)*

*"Being with my grade level colleagues at their monthly grade level meetings, that I think has [done] the most to help influence what I'm doing. The CFASST reflections have kind of deepened that - those thoughts - on a more personal level." (BT Site 7, 6/00)*

*"I was pretty happy with a lot of things I had set up in my class. But it - going through all the steps made me realize, ok, there's that one thing that's missing or there's two things that are missing that will just fine tune the flow of the class, or my planning or just anything - the routines that I have in here. It helped me be a little more introspective and say, you know, ask myself these questions, 'Ok, what am I missing here?' 'If it's not working exactly how I want it to be, but so close. It's helped me just fine tune things, I think." (BT Site 3, 3/00)*

### **CFASST Is Accompanied by Changes in Teacher Thinking .**

While many teachers in the case studies indicated they "reflected naturally," analysis of their comments during the focus groups indicates that the nature and extent of the reflection changed. Teachers became more focused on specific aspects of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Some comments indicated the way in which teachers thought about and used the Plan, Teach, Reflect, Apply cycle.

One of the Program Directors in the study expressed her confidence in the results of teachers using the Plan Teach Reflect Apply cycle. *"I think that they learn that all of the components of teaching are interrelated. Many times beginning teachers think if I'm really good at classroom management or if I really know content, then that's enough. So when they tie all the pieces into the PTR cycle, they really see it integrates the art of teaching. They see it much sooner than teachers who do not participate in the BTSA program." (Storms et al., 2000, p. 232).* Analysis of comments from the focus groups seems to support that assertion.

*"... while I'm teaching the lesson I'm thinking about my purpose - how are the kids responding; are they getting it. Then after I [pull] the lesson, I do a second [for understanding] or whatever, then if I see that they didn't really get it that well, I will think back to it after the lesson or after the end of the school day and see if I can think about it. What were the good points, what were*

*the bad points. If the lesson went pretty well and I can easily feel when a lesson went well because the kids are engaged and they were focused and on task, then I'll feel like the lesson went well. ... If the lesson didn't go that well - some lessons have bombed because it's like over the head or something - then I think back. I can tell immediately when I'm teaching the lesson that it's not going well. I usually give it two more minutes. If the students don't change, then I stop the lesson and I tell the students that we're moving onto the next thing so I can, on Sunday afternoon, think about how I'm going to redo that lesson the next day or something." (BT Site 7, 6/00)*

*"Inquiry has really helped me to make sure that when I'm teaching, I sort of know what my purpose is for doing it. I can look back and there are times ... when I couldn't tell you what I was teaching - they were reading. I don't know if we were reading for sound, if we were reading for a story - I mean, I just knew there were six kids at my table and we were doing reading, whereas now, I know what we're focusing on." (BT Site 1, 5/00)*

*"I think, mainly, in the area of planning. I think CFASST definitely helped with that. It gives you a system for planning. You plan and then apply, reflect... I think in that way, it's helped me because I've been able to use that in every aspect of my job. So I can do it planning for lessons or planning for any other extra duties that I have or planning for discipline - all that kind of stuff." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"The planning, it always looks good on paper. It looks fine. Then I realize that the delivery was different or I'd revert back to direct instruction. Or, if I was in a kinesthetic mood, maybe I was doing that the whole week and I had to look at my paper and see - highlight different things that were working for different kids. I think more than anything, it helped me realize that different children have so many different ways of learning.... Of course, CFASST did help with that because I can see it in writing and highlighted those areas of weakness and it helped me plan instruction. It kind of tweaked my delivery a little bit to get it there." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"So it made me really look at, well, what does that mean, then? What are you looking for? Then, being able to go back and replan the way I was setting up my guided reading lessons and make sure I got that to happen..." (BT Site 1, 5/00)*

*"At the very beginning of the year, I used a lot of what the master kindergarten teacher was doing. I was just sort of piggybacking... I really looked at the state standards a lot... I started looking at what was going on and where the standards were. I felt like I could teach the standards in a different way. So it was probably around November that I regrouped and started to work more independently. It really changed my teaching - changed everything. It changed the time that we spent on different things. It's changed what we were doing. It changed how I was planning... As far as my teaching goes, it changed radically from the very beginning to where I am now. I feel really good about where I'm at." (BT Site 7, 6/00)*

*"It kind of hit me that one of the things that had really changed me this year, too, is - well, the*

*kids change. They do my planning. I plan that day-to-day because I can be more reflective and I can build more sequentially, and they pretty much write my plan. I take it today, and I said, 'What happened today? What do we need for tomorrow?' That's how it occurs. If it doesn't work, I just throw it away. It really helps me. It really, really helps me, day to day, to keep them - to keep meeting their needs or attempting to meet their needs or ... it's hard to reflect on always how well you're doing." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

Many of the comments included references to increased attention to student work and the assessment of that work.

*"... but the one thing I really thought, like, I didn't know why I was doing what I was doing. I didn't think my assessments were addressing what I - I wasn't sure what I was looking for. I didn't know if I was measuring learning or if I was measuring test-taking skills or if I was measuring critical thinking. I wasn't sure what my testing ... just using the test that someone else has given me and writing my own test ... I wasn't sure if I was getting a valid picture of whether they were standards; whether they were just parroting back. ... So, I was concerned with the stuff that - and being able to authentically assess, as opposed to this hunt and peck. So, for me, CFASST 8 helped me plan a unit from the start of the plan to the assessment. I knew what I was looking for, kind of backwards. That was, really, the first time that I had the luxury of having the time to [do that]. Last year, I was just - every day I was two days ahead, if I was lucky, making copies and trying to get stuff graded and back to them. I didn't sit down and look at, conceptually, what do I want them to have at the end? What do they need? ... [My support provider and I] spent time looking at it and afterwards, after the unit - I mean, it wasn't the best assessment ever, but she did ask me, 'How did it go?' 'It wasn't right. I wanted to go back and re-do it, but at least I felt like I knew what I was looking for. So that was - my goal was clear. I ran out of time, but my goal was clear. So I thought - like if anybody came in and asked me, 'What are you doing and why?' I could say, 'This is why and this is the standard it meets.' ... Now, over the summer, I can go back and look at all of my units that way, put them in an order that will make sense to the kids." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

*"... this year there was a test and ... all my classes didn't do as well on this one section, so I saw it immediately. I must not have presented it properly. If out of 166, 150 got all ten of this section on these two verbs wrong, then I didn't present it clearly, or I presented it in a very confusing way. So I would say that's a main indicator." (BT Site 1, 5/00)*

*"... if I'm looking at their writing ... I look at their writing and I look at it - I kind of make different piles. 'These kids are getting this. These kids are starting - needing...' And what do they need in each pile? Then I can look for literature that I can read and ... I can focus my lessons then, so that I meet the goals of the different piles. ... I've also learned that by doing that, I can also group them, and then they can learn from each other." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

*"The way I use the students' assessment is I look at it and see what they didn't do well so I can go back and revisit - which I haven't really been doing because time is limited; I can't go back a*

*revisit a lot because I have to go on - but what I've mostly concentrated on is how it would help me next year. What kinds of things I need to focus on next year that this year's students didn't do well on, so that hopefully next year, I will teach that or touch that in a different way or better so that my next year's class will get it or do it better." (BT Site 7, 6/00)*

*"When I go back on the reflections, it often helps me to look at [student work] now based on what I taught and what the results were, what do I need to do now to get them where they need to be? Then I can go through that and figure out the assessment that I can make up so that they'll get to that point. ... After you've done the reflection, 'Ok, well, what am I going to do about this?' instead of saying, 'Gosh, I had such a terrible day today. It was miserable.' Then leaving it and actually think, 'Oh, what am I going to do tomorrow?' Then you can implement it. That really helps to guide what the students know and what you need to do to help them get there." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"I think it's when you look at the lows and see why they're low, let's you figure out what you can do to get them up here. And, look at the highs, and not just say, 'Well, they're a little bit ahead.' You can challenge them and help them to do more than what you are doing with the other kids. They're the ones that you don't, necessarily, worry about because they're already at grade level. It kind of makes you think, 'Well, what can we do now for this kid, even though he's ahead? What can you still do for him?'" (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

As one might expect, many of the comments indicated that the teachers were thinking about their students in more complex ways.

*"It must have been CFASST [event] 1. It told you to choose a class to do a study - some studies on- which I didn't do at all in my first year. I mean, I was just getting through every day, it being my first year and never having taught high school before. I decided to choose a class that I was having problems with from day one. Thirty-seven students in a tiny room and I didn't really know why I was having so much trouble. I couldn't attribute it just to the number. There was something going on and they weren't getting anything I was giving them. That CFASST, like I said, I think it was one - you know, find out the level of your students. Find out their grade, which on our roll sheet up until recently at [school] we didn't know what grade they were in. ... I found out not only what grade they were in, but their [test scores]. And I - it was like, 'OH!' All but five students in that class were the lowest level scores on the [test]. That was why I needed to approach them differently than my other classes. The CFASST questions and the data I had to come up with opened my eyes in a way about that class that I wouldn't have. ... though the paper work is tedious a lot of times and I don't have time for it, it helped those students in that class a lot." (BT Site 1, 3/00)*

*"Well, I think this year I just learned that the kids need to be more active. They can't sit still for very long. Last year I remember doing longer lessons, couldn't hold their attention. I was going, 'What's wrong with this class?' So, this year I worked on breaking the lesson apart, having them sit for a shorter time.... It seems to be working well. They sit for a while. They're done with the*

*activity, we'll do something else. We just keep on moving. Last year, it was a struggle to have them sit for very long periods of time. I just didn't get it, why couldn't they sit? So I had to change that. I made sure my lesson plans were shorter. Or, if it's longer, have them take breaks and do some sharing together - something active - involved in the lesson. Then that would break it up so they weren't just sitting there and listening to me." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

*"... one of my boys who was struggling. I did sit and reflect with myself, with my mentor, with anybody who would open their ears and listen to me, and look at how I could change the way that I was teaching to meet his needs; how I could change the way I was communicating with his parents, to help them meet his needs. That wouldn't have happened had I not stepped back and really reflected and looked to others to help me reflect. That wouldn't have happened. ... Obviously you do think about the kids. ... But I think the CFASST and the way that some of the questions were worded and the reflections aspects. That actually did help me. I did more reflecting this year than in the past" (BT Site 1, 5/00)*

*"... this year a lot of my children don't come with too many previous experiences. So it was really hard in the beginning of the year to understand why they were having a tough time. Part of it was they didn't have that core knowledge. They didn't have a common language yet. So, I was building a community, but we weren't a community until we had common experience, so that had to happen first, and it's really hard for me to see that, gee, experience comes before community. I wanted to have community before experience. So we're just now building our community, but it's often - the learners are - you really have to listen. I listening so much more than I was last year." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

Some comments were clear indications of how teachers were trying new pedagogical strategies and reflecting on the impact of those on student learning.

*"... because I think one thing I put down was the guided reading - in the small group reading instruction, that I know that's one thing I can really improve in. I had other teachers come into my classroom or I went to observe other teachers who were good in teaching that guided reading and trying to use some of their techniques. I know I didn't do it as good as they did - and I haven't done it as good as I would like to have done it - but it gave me one or two good ideas that I could come back and try and in the future, go back and learn another technique or another strategy and come back and try that in addition to what I have learned." (BT Site 7, 6/00)*

*"Well, for this year, my focus was my centers for student learning. That was hard. They're on their own. I don't know what, really, they're doing in their centers and I didn't think they were going to be learning much, but there's a lot of learning going on in those centers. They're independent. I don't have to worry about it. I can actually sit there and watch the class, and they're running themselves. They're on task. To me, I thought, I can't do this. I'm not going to do centers because it's a little scary. So that's what it was last year. At the end of last year I didn't have centers going, but I said, 'I've got to do centers. I need to learn about it. So that's what my focus was at the end of the last year. I researched on it over the summer, went to some*

*workshops, got my centers ready, from day one, I started my centers. ... It's going great. ... They're learning. I'm going to work on developing my centers more ... because I see much growth in my students by having them do independent things - not me telling them what to do, what to create. They're doing it on their own." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

Many teachers identified the increased "focus" in their teaching as being the direct result of the reflection in CFASST.

*"I think as new teachers we want to focus on maybe —like I know at the beginning of the year I was so worried about the noise level of my room. But you know, that isn't really what's most important, you know what I mean? If they're being noisy, are they interacting with one another? Like my concern was ... the principal is going to walk in. Is she going to see them under control? But now, that's not what's most important to me. If she walks in, they're noisy, okay as long as she can walk over and see that they're doing something productive. So I think CFASST through those principles kind of says, 'This is what you need to be looking for. This is what you should be focusing on.' So it's helped me kind of refocus my thoughts. I don't like them noisy still, but it makes me think about what they're really doing." (BT Site 1, 3/00)*

*"I felt like most of the CFASST allowed me to focus in on certain areas that I could grow in. Specifically, I work in building up center organizations and making independent learners. ... Because you know, as a student teacher, you're taking everything in, but when you're in the classroom the first year, that's when you really realize, 'Oh, this is the part that I need to focus on when I go in to observe something.' So it's helped me focus and tackle one issue at a time. I was able to go through a few things this year, to take on different issues." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

*"I've become more organized. ... the CFASST process gave me a vehicle to work on issues. ... it's given me a model to then take on my own. ... I can say, 'Ok, sit down. Reflect. What's going on in my classroom? What are my biggest areas of need in this classroom? Let me pick one and work on it, and go to different people. Who are the people I need to see?' ... They might direct me to some literature or I need to go look at some literature and read. Just get a background first, before I even change anything in my class, that I can take what I've learned from what I've seen and what I've read and then reflect again and see what's happening in my class and see where I can apply those things, and change a little bit at a time, rather than all at once. So I think that sort of guided me in my professional growth cycle. Where I might have gone, 'Oh, that's not working... let me try something else.' You know, throw it away ... I think it gave me some perspective on how to change." (BT Site 5, 5/00)*

*"I do think there are times when it helped me to focus my thinking. I do think that it has the benefits of making you consider kind of picking an area to work on, because I think as a new teacher, you can be overwhelmed by all the things you want to work on. You want to be perfect. You want to be the best teacher that ever was. You just can't do it all at the same time. So it's helped me just kind of realize it's OK to take one thing at a time." (BT Site 1, 5/00)*

*"I don't know if it was so much filling out the CFASST, but then that's been so much where I've reflected ... . But like we had to choose an area to focus on. I focused on doing differentiated instruction ... . I don't know how much I've written it down, but it's definitely in my mind all the time. So I do think CFASST has helped me keep the focus." (BT Site 1, 5/00)*

### **Beginning Teachers Examined Larger Issues Related to Profession and Organization of Schools.**

The process of participating in BTSA and completing various CFASST events evidently attributed to new teachers' growing awareness of larger issues in the profession. One teacher, for instance, noted that although she was becoming more aware of the importance of looking at student work and adapting instruction accordingly, she also recognized the challenges of doing so within the expectations of her district.

*"I think the whole evaluation, summary, and collecting student work and assessing what they have accomplished, checking to make sure that the goal that I set is what they actually ended up getting and achieving, has helped me with it. It's also - it made me become aware of our district and the time constraints on us as far as what we can do, once we've seen the assessment of the student. I saw that my students needed remediation, but in our district, you can't do that because you've got to get on to the next lesson in math or the next lesson or report and there's this - they want us to get all the way through it, so it's — I wrote it up several times in my CFASST — just because it's like a double edge sword. You want to do it and you see it and then you try, then someone comes and tells you, you needed to do that, too." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

Another teacher noted that participating in CFASST made him notice different behaviors and attitudes among his colleagues. *"One thing about the CFASST that I think I like is interacting with some of the other veterans, not so much the support of my mentor, but the veteran teachers is that the CFASST keeps you thinking and growing and changing in your teaching as opposed to a lot of the teachers, the veteran teachers, it seems like, when you go to their classrooms or I talk to them, they're the same way they were ten years ago and probably the same way they're going to be five years from now." (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

*"... and I was at a meeting and they talked about, 'This is like the tenth thing in a long line of things, just wait it out. The school district will change. The school board will change. This will also pass.' So it's kind of like, 'We're in this rut and we're going to keep going down it. I've noticed that with the older teachers..." (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

Other teachers expressed their awareness of the way in which CFASST addressed some of the challenges in teaching. *"It really taught me that I need to reach out and ask for help and get help for the future. ... So it's like, I learn how to take care of myself as a teacher through this program." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"I think you talk about your different problems, different challenges in your class in a more*

*professional manner. I think you focus in on things. You can specifically pinpoint what the problems are when you sit down. You write them down and do CFASST and look at ... what's happening in my class. This is what I've done. A lot of the teachers - I think a lot of veteran teachers may look at you and just say, 'Ok, unless you have something for me to go by, then I can't help you.' .... I felt very comfortable approaching other people, not just other teachers, but the principal and anyone and just saying, 'This is what I've tried. I've already reflected, myself. I've already written things down. I've already planned this. I've planned it three different ways, or whatever I did. I think it gives you a more — it gives professionalism.' (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"The thing with CFASST, it brings up, ... springboards for either sticking with what you are or what you are going to do or changing what you're going to do. So, it gets you to reflect on yourself on what you're doing; how the students are. Whereas, ... sometimes I talk to the veteran teachers and I'm just going, 'That's who you are now. That's who you were. That's who you're going to be. It doesn't matter if I talk to you today or next year.' " (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

*"... the key word ... was that you were forced to reflect. [Another teacher] also mentioned that often when you get comfortable - I mean, I come from an industry. I come from Corporate America into teaching and being in an ownership position, sometimes you don't reflect - you demand and you react. The situation makes you change. In teaching, unfortunately, the longer you're in it, the less you have to react. Once they get their 'stuffs' under them. CFASST and BTSA gives us good ammunition that's tried and true and tested. So we're coming in a better level than they did. So, it's not that we're different in any other way, except we have more ammunition and the belt to go into the classroom with. We're forced to reflect on, 'Gosh that didn't work.' ... it makes you reflect on what worked for you. 'Tell me, what didn't? Why didn't it?' Ok, those are good thing. Those are good questions. ... So, we approach teaching now from the student, whereas they approach teaching from the teacher with omnipotent ability. Whereas we go in there and think, 'It's a little bit terrifying today because all these kids think they know more than me. So what am I going to do to keep them in their seats for 55 minutes? How am I going to make them leave with more than they came in with?' " (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

*"The one thing that worries me is that, like you said, we are forced to reflect. I don't want to get to a point where two years down the line, I'm years out of BTSA and suddenly I'm going, 'I've got too much paper. I've got too much to grade. I got this going. I don't have time to reflect.' That's the one thing I try to focus myself on, that it's not that CFASST is making me, it's just to give me another avenue to do it, because if I feel like I'm just being made to, then I, eventually, I'm going to download and become the vet that just sticks with what I do and it doesn't matter who comes in or out of my class; this is the way I do it. It could be ten kids; it could be 40 kids; it could be the problem kids, the honor kids — this is what I do. I don't want to get to that point. But, that's also a very stressing point, too, because you have to change, not the kids. You have to be adaptable. So, it's a difficult part for me. It's hard to be fickle or chameleon like in the classroom. It's much easier to be the one who says, 'You change for me. I don't change for you.' Which is what BTSA tries to get us to do, is to change who we are or what we do per class, per person in the classroom and this is much more challenging than if I talked to the vet teachers who*

*are like, 'No, you abide by the rules that I've had for 20 years. I don't care who you are or where you come from, what your problem is ...' It's much more challenging for us - even with all the stuff the BTSA gives to us. It's kind of like, with knowledge comes sorrow. I don't know where that comes from. I forget. I think it's from Shakespeare." (BT Site 4, 3/00)*

### Implications for Policy and Practice

#### **Professional Development Is Enhanced by Individualized Support Within a System.**

Beginning teachers perceived CFASST as part of an organized, integrated system of induction that included opportunities to talk about teaching with their support provider and other teachers, to learn new strategies, and to reflect on their practice. The structured events in the CFASST box appeared to guide these new teachers by using common language and common descriptions of effective practice. Providing new teachers with clear expectations, and the means to achieve those expectations, requires systematic and comprehensive programs. One strength of the implementation at the sites in the case studies appeared to be the ability of the programs to meet individual needs of beginning teachers, while, simultaneously, using a uniform system. This ability to provide individualized support was recognized by program directors and support providers, as well as by the beginning teachers themselves. It is an aspect that should be of primary importance even as, or especially if, programs expand.

A program director commented: *"... that [a strictly prescribed procedure] goes against all that we teach in BTSA and tell new teachers - to stop and assess where your kids are, and if the assessment shows a need to stop and wait and go back over material — then the same thing should apply to BTSA and we practice the same thing we apply in the classroom."* (Storms et al., 2000, p. 199)

As a support provider commented, *"[this is a] beginning teacher-driven program and not a form-driven program... and that's why I'm in it."* (Storms et al., 2000, p. 199)

A beginning teacher recognized the advantages of being able to receive individualized support: *"I'm old enough to be her [support provider] mother. ... I'm not - I've never had a difficult time. You hear the first year horror stories and I really wasn't having difficulty. When she observed me, I had good classroom management, which I think is from everything I've done in CFASST. ... In addition to that, I've had a lot of work experience. ... So, when I met with my provider at the beginning of this year, she was like, 'Right, you need me.' ... So I talk to her by email. We chat on the phone. ... I really like the part where the reflective, the self-reflection — for me, it's probably a lot more useful than meeting with someone else."* (BT Site 7, 3/00)

#### **The Lives of New Teachers Are Complex.**

Policy makers and practitioners who, with all good intentions, set out to provide and/or require a formative support and assessment system for beginning teachers are reminded by those teachers to

remember the complexity of teaching today.

*"There's times when it's frustrating because it's like, OK, I just want to read about it and do it. I don't want to have to fill out all these things. But then there's other times that I really like it because it really makes me stop and think and process and go through. I almost feel a bit more rejuvenated because I've - they tend to make me stop and reflect and really think, 'Ok, what is my [problem] or what do I need to work on or what comes next?' So that's nice. But then when you get into the business of life, it's like, 'Oh no, I have one more meeting with her today' I mean it's not that it's bad. It's just kind of like as a first year teacher, it's one more thing to juggle and that gets kind of frustrating at times." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

*"I think reflection is super-duper important, but I think when they're planning it, they really need to think about how does that really apply in a real teacher, who's taking on their first year and dealing with all the things that come with. How much can they really handle? Man, at our school, there's construction, there's ... every school has got something that they've got going on that it makes it one more thing. ... that's what I want them to think about, is how is this really going to play out in a real person's life." (BT Site 1, 5/00)*

*"We have a staff meeting every week. We have grade level meetings every week. We're a charter school, so this year we're in the process of renewing our charter, so we've had charter meetings. Many times a third day of the week or longer days, we have school within a school, which is like the upper grades and lower grades meetings that we do. We have - I meet with my mentor. Our BTSA, which is our mentoring program, which has different modules and stuff for us to go through and take. So we do that. That's usually once or twice a month." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

*"Our school is involved in Math Matters program, we're piloting that. So we have those meetings and that sort of thing. We also committees at school for SIT and SSC students - that sort of thing - we do those in conferences. So there's a lot. Then, with the challenge class that I have this year, I have a lot of parent meetings and extra outside child meetings and conferences that I have to deal with, not like first grade. You guys have 20, we have 32. So there's a lot that spreads my time, along with a life that I try to live outside of school. That's why I feel a little bit stretched at times with trying to have to do this. ... Then in my planning, you have to also, if you're going to the CFASST day and you'd have a meeting, then as you plan you have to incorporate that, make sure you do all that stuff. So that's one more aspect of your plans to detail out. I mean, it's beneficial in the long run and in theory, it's great, but it's a little bit [too much] in practice." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

*"Ok, then [I attend] MARA, which is the reading association, I think. ... Now the buy-backs; I've done a writing one, which is two times, two days. I've done a reading one and I'm going to do the other reading one. I've done a - there's a math one we're going to do, so those are those ones. BTSA, I did the diversity training and I've met several times with my provider. In addition to that, I do some of the reading and that kind of thing in the box, which is very helpful for me. I haven't written as much this year, but it's helpful. I took a California history class and I plan to take*

*three English class, upper division English classes because I wanted to add to my credential... Then I want the social science... , which means I need some upper division work in English. I'm going to finish this summer. We have the Math Matters.... that's been, let's see, this summer we did five days, then we've had another five days this year - pull out from our classes. Charter has taken days and days. It's been incredible." (BT Site 7, 3/00)*

### Conclusion

The transcripts from the focus group discussions with beginning teachers provided access to their personal descriptions of their experiences during the CFASST implementation. Their voices articulate keen insights and analyses of their own professional growth. It is only fitting that the teachers should have the last word, summarizing the way in which many teachers in the focus groups attributed their professional growth to participation in CFASST.

*"I feel like it's helped me articulate the problems that I have. I think the biggest help that I've gotten from it, just to be able to kind of do some self-discovery and every day, to be able to say to another teacher, 'I'm having this specific problem. I've gone through and reviewed because I've seen — I've tried this and I've tried that.' Rather than going to them and saying, 'My kids don't get it.' Like I can actually say what they don't get, why they don't get it, and 'Can you help me with that?' ... It's helped me pinpoint what problems are or it at least helps me start the process of going through and finding those problems. I think that's what's helped me the most, is just being able to discover those things; discover the things I'm doing wrong in a non-threatening way. It's hard to be kind of critical of yourself without being threatening too. So, that's been a real help, also, is just being able to discover those problems, coming up with solutions for them and then implementing those solutions or trying again." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

*"... but with BTSA, it's so ingrained now that I reflect every day. I plan on a weekly basis. I teach the lesson. Every day I go home and reflect and say, 'Ok, what could I have done better?' I'm constantly reminding - it's not that you're going to think, 'Oh, I'm going to do an inquiry now.' It's just part of you and you're just constantly going home at night — I tell my kids, 'I go home at night. Think about you while I'm watching TV and then I sleep. That's all I dream about, what I can do. I wake up here and I come in here and you guys are there.' But it's constantly reflecting what can I do to get that kid engaged, because today he wasn't or she wasn't. What can I do to commit more strategies in there? What can I do? You're constantly - it's just - you don't have to think about it because it just happens ..." (BT Site 3, 5/00)*

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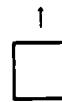
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