

CFASST Implementation
and Reflective Practice:
The Interplay of Structures and Perceptions¹

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What does it take to implement an innovative teacher induction program? A history of research on the implementation of educational innovations has illustrated the need for mutual adaptation of programs (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977) and highlighted the importance of local context (Fullan, 1991). This work raises a number of important considerations for those who would undertake large-scale program implementation. To what extent can adaptation occur without undermining the purpose of a particular improvement effort? What factors in the local context are most relevant in supporting effective implementation of a “proven practice”?

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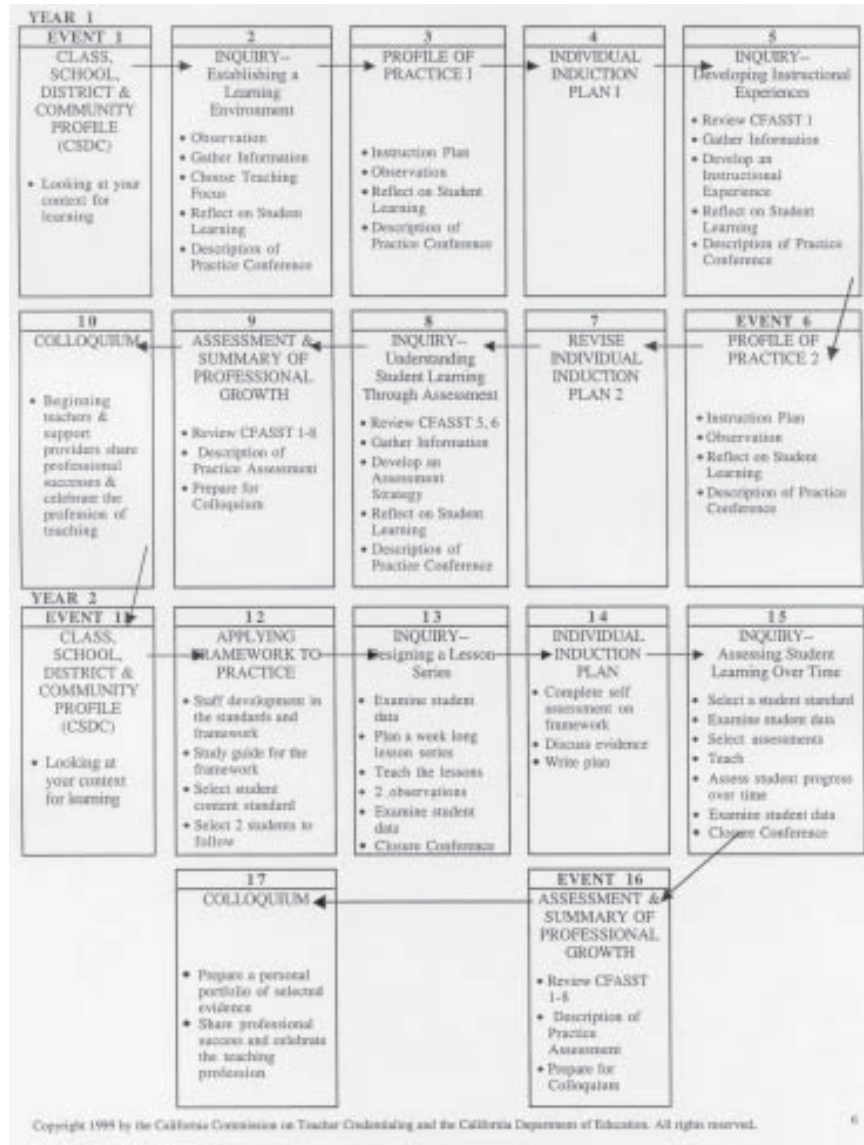
This article reports an investigation of the ways in which implementation of a new teacher induction process in California contributed to teachers' reflective practice. Beginning with a description of the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program [BTSA] (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing [CCTC] & California Department of Education [CDE], 1997a), the authors frame a set of research questions about implementation and link these to relevant literature. The study description presents the methodological approach, the study sites, the data sources and the analysis strategies. Findings are organized into two areas: structures that support implementation and perspectives that support reflection. The conclusions and recommendations highlight the limitations of implementation structures for achieving intended outcomes. Other significant implementation factors include the nature and depth of participants' understandings of the program's approach and the centrality of BTSA within the district organization.

California's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program [BTSA] (CCTC & CDE, 1997a) is a large-scale, statewide teacher induction program that served about 23,000 beginning teachers during the 1999-2000 academic year. The statewide effort comprises approximately 140 local BTSA programs, each of which was developed by an individual school district or a consortium of neighboring districts in accordance with a set of program quality standards. Each local BTSA program is required to include a formative assessment strategy for beginning teachers over a two-year period of induction. During 1999-2000, most (more than 130) local BTSA programs elected to meet this requirement by using the *California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers* [CFASST] (CCTC & CDE, 1998), a process that had been developed by consulting agencies in collaboration with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the California Department of Education. Pilot implementation of during the 1998-1999 school year had illustrated its usefulness in supporting formative assessment around inquiry and reflection.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the two-year process which has been described as follows:

... engages first- and second-year teachers in a series of tasks including inquiries, classroom observations and individual professional development planning based on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession [CSTP] (CCTC & CDE, 1997b). In addition, beginning teachers learn about and apply California's State-Adopted Student Content Standards and Frameworks through CFASST. With the guidance of a trained support provider (experienced teacher), beginning teachers gather information about best practices, plan lessons, and receive feedback on their teaching through observations by the support

Figure 1
California Formative Assessment
and Support System for Teachers, Field Review Version



provider. They then reflect on their practice, think about how to apply what they have learned to future lessons, and assess their teaching using a set of scales, the Descriptions of Practice (CCTC & CDE, 1999). A series of structured activities, termed events, has been developed to focus, guide, and direct beginning teachers through these investigations (CCTC & CDE, 1998). CFASST was developed through a collaborative effort among the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the California Department of Education, WestEd, University of California Santa Cruz, and Educational Testing Service. (Storms, Wing, Jinks, Banks, & Cavazos, 2000)

In taking CFASST “to scale” (i.e., moving from a few dozen programs to 140+ statewide), the CCTC and the CDE wished to understand more about implementation. This study sought to articulate the ways in which the design and implementation of the induction process by local BTSA programs shaped the ways in which beginning teachers experienced and benefited from their involvement. More specifically, it asked the question of whether and how differences in program implementation shaped the opportunities of beginning teachers to engage in reflection about their work. CFASST aims to strengthen beginning teachers’ capacity to inquire about and examine their practice through supported reflection. Developing teachers’ capacity to engage in reflective practice is necessary to retain teachers in the profession, strengthen the profession, and ultimately improve and reform schools (LaBoskey, 1994; Calhoun, 1994; Ross, 1988; Schön, 1983).

The study relied on case study methods (Yin, 1994) to understand how local programs were organized, how they operated, and how their operation influenced participants. Several conceptual frames contributed to a set of “sensitizing issues” that shaped the fieldwork and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Spradley, 1980). The work of Berman and McLaughlin (1977) suggested the importance of local adaptation. Fullan’s work (1991) emphasized that large-scale implementation must be understood at the local level, prompting an in-depth examination of factors at the level of school sites, districts, and consortia.

Additionally, Fullan (1991) called attention to the issue of meaning and pointed out that understanding any implementation process requires examining the meanings that stakeholders attach to their experiences. Implementation occurs in social settings in which various participants bring and create their own understandings of the experience. Whether and how these understandings cohere into shared meaning is critical. Other scholars called attention to the role of (formal and informal) leaders in shaping how members of a professional community view their roles and their work (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, & Ford-Slack, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992). This literature led the

authors to examine three domains of implementation: (a) the organizational arrangements and tools that local implementers put in place to support implementation; (b) the processes, relationships, and experiences of participants; and (c) the understandings that participants and stakeholders brought to and derived from their engagement.

Study Methods and Design

This study examined data from a set of case studies that were conducted during the 1999-2000 school year as part of an evaluation of the implementation of CFASST. The CCTC and CDE selected seven BTSA programs as study sites that were using CFASST for a second year. Relying extensively on open-ended, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1980; Spradley, 1979; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), researchers interviewed the local BTSA program directors three times between January and June, 2000. Researchers also led separate focus groups for beginning teachers and for support providers at each site, twice between February and June, 2000. All interviews and focus groups were tape-recorded and transcribed.

This article presents a secondary analysis of data from six of the seven case study sites. The authors elected not to include one site because the data was incomplete. Table 1 below summarizes information about the six sites.

Table 1
Description of Secondary Analysis Sites

Type of District	Number in Study	Location
K-12 urban/suburban school districts	3	2 in southern California 1 in northern California
Suburban high school (9-12) district	1	1 in southern California
Consortia of Urban/suburban districts	2	2 in northern California

For each site multiple sources of data were included in the analysis. Table 2 summarizes the sources of data for this study.

Table 2
Sources of Data for Secondary Analysis

Study Sites	Director	Beginning Teacher Focus Groups	Support Provider Focus Groups
K-12 district 1	3	2	2
K-12 district 2	3	2	2
K-12 district 3	3	2	2
9-12 district 4	3	4 ^a	4
Consortium 1	5 ^b	2	2
Consortium 2	3	2	2
Total	20	14	14

^aThis site was using Year 1 and Year 2 CFASST and because of differences in the focus and content of the two levels, separate focus groups were held for each level.

^bTwo additional interviews were held with district coordinators in two of the four districts in this consortium.

The authors began the cross-site analysis by identifying implementation factors that had been frequently mentioned by CFASST participants. Several iterative cycles of coding and refining yielded two overarching areas (structures and perspectives) that informed the final coding and analysis activities. When the coding was complete, the authors met and reviewed the data to determine both the common and unique ways in which the set of programs approached implementation.

Findings

Analysis and interpretation of the data focused on understanding how program implementation across the sites influenced beginning teachers' capacity to engage in professional reflection. The analysis demonstrated that, in and of itself, program structure alone does not guarantee achievement of desired results. The analysis illustrated the importance of participants' perceptions and how these intersected with program structures. Whether and how participants benefited from experiences was associated more with the meanings that they attributed to those experiences than to the simple presence or absence of certain design features. Most of the programs used the same materials and similar structures; however, participants' interpretations of program goals, activities, and processes were essential to the quality of their experiences. Taken together, the interplay of structures and perceptions shaped the way reflection was regarded, valued and used.

Structures that Support Implementation

The organization of CFASST events, linked by a recurring inquiry process, helped to focus the users of CFASST on reflection; however, use of CFASST materials alone was not necessarily enough to insinuate reflection into the practice of beginning teachers. A range of program structures shaped beginning teachers' opportunities for reflection. These included program administration, policies for identifying and matching participants, structuring opportunities for professional learning, and monitoring and assessment practices.

Program Administration

Each BTSA program was headed by a local program director who was responsible for administering the program in compliance with state program standards. Directors were the ones to envision and put the implementation structures into place. The complexity of the organizational structures was generally determined by the size of the BTSA program. In larger programs, it was common to have an assistant director working closely with the director. In both of the consortia, there was also a director for each participating district.

BTSA program directors had varied responsibilities. As administrators they managed all aspects of implementation. As professional developers they trained and coached support providers, and monitored the progress of all participants. As program leaders they created visibility and legitimacy for CFASST within the site. The directors recognized that their roles were multifaceted and required a myriad of skills and knowledge not the least of which was a vision of what CFASST would become at the site.

You definitely need to have a strong background and understanding in the needs of beginning teachers [to be a director]. You need to have a strong knowledge and research base on quality professional development. You need to be a really good time manager, organizer. You need to be in tune to developing not only the growth of beginning teachers, but what constitutes professional development that's quality for the support providers and for your staff. ...I think you need to be able to communicate local contexts to state leadership so that they understand why you're doing things the way you're doing them. (Director 2, District 2, 4/00)

Policies Related to Participants

The implementation design for CFASST assumes that pairs of beginning teachers and support providers will work together throughout the school year. Identifying and matching beginning teachers with

support providers was an essential task. Even the seemingly simple task of reaching all BTSA-eligible first- and second-year teachers was sometimes a major endeavor that required much effort and time by the program director. For sites in which BTSA was voluntary or cases in which beginning teachers were hired after the start of the school year, some eligible beginning teachers were not able to engage in all of the CFASST experiences.

While programs used different criteria to identify support providers, the goal was matching in such a way as to maximize the interactions between the support provider and beginning teacher. The two major factors considered in matching were physical proximity and teaching content (i.e., grade level or subject). Additionally, directors limited the number of beginning teachers with whom a support provider was working. Typically a support provider worked with one to two beginning teachers.

The quality of beginning teachers' experiences depended in large part on the quality of the support providers. It mattered if a selection process was in place to ensure that excellent, veteran teachers filled the role of support provider. Settling for teachers who were available, or coercing those who were more interested in traditional mentoring positions, to take on the support provider role did not work well.

In each of the six case study sites, directors set out expectations about the support provider role including a minimum number of contacts or hours per month for working with the beginning teacher. In some sites these expectations were formalized in a written memorandum of understanding. The intent of these expectations was to ensure that beginning teachers were receiving on-going intensive support intended to help them improve their practice.

Structuring Opportunities for Professional Learning

Much of the effort of these directors went into structuring initial trainings and follow-up meetings. These trainings and meetings provided opportunities for participants to develop understandings of CFASST by coming together to review, discuss, relearn, share and explore CFASST materials and processes. The emphasis of follow-up meetings mattered. If completing written forms were the focus, then participants tended to regard CFASST as a series of discrete tasks. If, however, thinking about improving practice was stressed, then participants were more likely to view CFASST as an ongoing process of reflection.

Internal Monitoring and Assessment

Directors developed strategies for monitoring the progress of CFASST users and assessing the impact of their programs. They monitored not

only how many of the CFASST events users had completed at regular points during the year, but also the kinds of support new teachers were receiving, as well as the understandings and tools beginning teachers (and support providers) were gaining from their CFASST experiences. As one director pointed out, "You also need to be ... committed to using evaluation data to improve the program." (Director, District 2, 4/00)

Program administration, participant selection and matching, ongoing professional learning opportunities, and ongoing monitoring and assessment comprised the structural elements that directors attended to in striving to implement a high quality program. While these elements helped assure that implementation unfolded in a well-organized, timely, and coherent manner, and were therefore necessary in creating conditions for beginning teacher reflection to occur, they were not sufficient to assure that beginning teachers experienced reflection that contributed to their development in meaningful ways. The actual benefit of reflection depended on the perspectives of participants and other stakeholders, the ways in which they understood and viewed CFASST.

Perspectives That Support Reflection

Directors referred to an array of perspectives that enhanced or detracted from CFASST implementation: school and district professional culture; support providers' understanding of the program and their role; the extent to which the "theory of action" implicit in CFASST was aligned with the mental models of individuals and groups; ways in which CFASST was seen as integral or peripheral to new teacher development; and other similar factors related to beliefs, values, and priorities (Lee & Storms, 2001). Individual and collective interpretations shaped implementation activities and experiences. These interpretations included the perspectives of the participants themselves (primarily beginning teachers and support providers) as well as views of other educators in the environments surrounding the BTSA/CFASST programs the beginning teachers. The findings that follow present the analysis of perspectives in three domains: participants' understandings of CFASST, participants' understandings of their roles, and educators' understandings of CFASST within the larger context.

Participants' Understandings of CFASST

Individuals' perceptions and interpretations of CFASST and its essential elements varied considerably and did not always conform to the design intention. A common factor that emerged for both support providers and beginning teachers was the tension between viewing

CFASST as a process of inquiry and reflection versus a paper-driven set of activities to be completed for their own sake. For many participants, their understanding of CFASST was linked to their ideas about what was “allowable” or “appropriate” in terms of flexibility (e.g., what portion of forms needed to be completed and the pacing for completing events) in applying the CFASST approach. Some participants believed that the structured CFASST process had to be followed with total fidelity. For example, support providers might interrupt a “natural” flow of reflective dialogue to turn their attention to completing the forms. In other cases, participants were excessively “loose” with respect to modifications; an instance of this would be a support provider suspending the CFASST process to provide more directive support such as advice or lesson plans.

Directors wanted participants to regard CFASST as a flexible process. “One of my concerns in terms of CFASST is that the support provider understand that it isn’t just a paper driven process; that there’s flexibility in the process; and that the intent is to provide the scaffolding for a conversation between the support provider and the beginning teacher that helps them focus on teaching and learning” (Director, Consortium 1, 3/00). At the same time, directors felt responsible for maximizing opportunities for beginning teachers to benefit from CFASST experiences that required directors sometimes to emphasize the completion of events.

In addition to how participants viewed the purpose of CFASST events, their views of the legitimacy of CFASST also shaped their engagement. This was especially the case for support providers who came to CFASST with a set of views about teacher induction, formative assessment and teaching itself that were based on prior experience. These views influenced how they regarded CFASST and the extent to which they considered it to be a legitimate process and set of activities for beginning teachers. In addition to their CFASST role, many support providers were also district mentors who were providing other assistance to teachers not involved in BTSA. For some support providers these varying demands were difficult to address with equal attention and to regard as equally valuable, especially the newest and most complex role, that of CFASST support provider. When this occurred, support providers sometimes faltered in their commitment to CFASST as a useful induction strategy. Directors understood how important participants’ understandings were to quality implementation. As one director stated, “we really need experienced practitioners here. We need people who really understand this process” (Director, Consortium 1, 3/00).

Participants’ Understandings of Their Roles

Since the support provider was the vehicle for “delivering” CFASST,

the support provider's understanding of his or her role was essential to the success of CFASST, including how beginning teachers came to view and understand this induction program. If support providers understood and valued reflection, then that was what they emphasized in their interactions. If, however, support providers believed that their role was one of more general support, then reflecting on practice might not take precedence. Some support providers, for example, believed that they could best support their new teachers by providing them with lesson plans and assisting them with more prescriptive suggestions than by engaging in inquiry and reflection.

I think the thing they [support providers] grapple with the most is the difference between a technical assistance kind of model and a support model. There continues to be a tendency to tell beginning teachers what to do...It's the kind of model that we would use with somebody who was struggling, who's in jeopardy of losing their job, for example...versus the support assistance model which is reflective in nature. (Director, District 2, 4/00)

Even though beginning teachers might find it frustrating not to be given answers, they recognized that the support providers were trying to develop the beginning teachers' capacity as professionals to self-analyze in order to improve their practice.

I think too that one thing that really helped me was that my support provider, she would never give it to me, the information. She would make me think. (Beginning Teacher, Consortium 2, 5/00)

For many beginning teachers, CFASST processes introduced them to entirely new concepts of teaching, the teacher's role, and professionalism. For example, many beginning teachers commented that CFASST's emphasis on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (1997) helped them achieve a new level of understanding about their responsibilities to their students. Beginning teachers' ideas about accountability along with using various forms of data to assess their own effectiveness deepened as they progressed through the sequence of CFASST events. Similarly, beginning teachers' ideas about professional interactions, collaboration, and learning with their colleagues were challenged and extended by their CFASST work. "We're creating a generation of teachers who accept responsibility for their role in what the students accomplish" (Director, District 1, 2/00).

While the individual perceptions of support providers and beginning teachers were important to their participation in CFASST, the impact of the experience was a function of the working relationship between the two. When the relationship helped the beginning teacher think deeply

and systematically about his or her practice, it was more likely that the beginning teacher would come to realize the power of reflection as a professional stance.

It [CFASST] has taught me to be self-correcting. Again, it's reflecting, reflection. You think about your lesson. Did it get through? Did you meet the standards? Are the kids getting the standards? ... You never get to it, but when you have the majority of the class who don't get it, you're thinking about what else can I do? I'm going to go back. Let me try it again whether or not my support provider is there to watch... whether or not the principal is coming in. (Beginning Teacher 2, Consortium 2, 5/00)

My second-year teacher has just taken off and is blossoming, and is so willing to try new things and reflect and think about his own practice. He not only reflects about it, but then he takes that information and he uses it on the next cycle. (Support Provider, Consortium 2, 2/00)

Understanding CFASST within the Larger Context

Meaning-making about CFASST occurred not only for participants but also within the larger district and consortia contexts that housed related sets of values, ideas, and beliefs about teaching, teacher induction, and teacher development. The “fit” between CFASST and the larger context manifested itself in many ways, and the ways in which the program and the larger context mediated meaning was, for the most part, a two-way street. Contexts shaped BTSA/CFASST, and BTSA/CFASST shaped contexts. In general, beginning teachers were supported in their reflective practice to the extent that their CFASST programs were connected to set priorities, values and other site initiatives. Program participants had an easier time attending to their CFASST work when they knew that others who influenced their professional lives (such as site and district administrators) considered this effort worthwhile.

The location of the BTSA/CFASST program, both physically and with respect to reporting relationships and functional activities, influenced opportunities for coordination and collaboration across teacher recruitment, development, and retention efforts. In one case, the BTSA program was situated in the professional development office of the district, helping to ensure that BTSA was seen as just an initial step in continuing efforts to support teachers and help them grow. In another district, BTSA was located in the curriculum department because it was seen as a way to improve instruction. Likewise, the role and status of the BTSA program director was a factor in how BTSA was perceived. Some directors were experienced, well respected administrators. Other directors were teachers on special assignments, who stepped out of their classrooms for a period of time to direct the program, but who did not have formal status

among district leaders and were not as strongly networked as their administrator counterparts. Decisions about situating BTSA and the role and status of the person to direct it created not only substantive opportunities for coordination, but also symbolic messages about the fit of BTSA/CFASST efforts at the site.

At all of the case study sites, CFASST activities alone did not comprise the entire set of staff development opportunities for beginning teachers. Most beginning teachers were also required to participate in activities related to district priorities. Depending on how easily these additional professional development activities could be conceptually integrated with CFASST, beginning teachers saw them either as helpful or as competing for their attention. In some programs, the CFASST process was regarded as one piece of a “web” of induction and growth experiences for teachers. In other instances, CFASST was regarded more as an “add-on” piece.

The reason why I think I'm going to be able to carry it off [implementing CFASST Year 2 the next year] is because my director—and probably the people above her—see the connection between what BTSA does and what it can do to support aligning curriculum and standards and that type of thing. (Director, District 1, 2/00)

In addition, district and school administrators played important roles in shaping the place of CFASST within the larger site context. If the administrators encouraged beginning teachers and support providers to participate, then fuller involvement was more likely. To the extent that these leaders were knowledgeable about CFASST and supportive of its intent, they signaled its value to others.

Our superintendent has said, “This program is law. It will be first priority.” That makes a big difference . . . [Administrators] realized that if we don't make it first and you've got over 50% of your staff who are turning over on a regular basis, that they're going to continue to face the same problems over and over and over again. We're not going to have any success retaining teachers. That's what this is all about. (Director, Consortium 1, 2/00)

Conclusions and Significance

This examination of CFASST implementation in six sites illustrated the essential but insufficient role design structures contribute to program implementation. Having the “pieces” in place was a necessary condition for implementation, but not sufficient to achieve the desired accomplishment of reflective practice on the part of beginning teachers. Equally important to the structures was the web of understanding,

interpretation, and meaning that surrounded the participants in the larger context. The participants themselves both shaped and were shaped by the interpretive perspectives that encompassed their work.

Key to the success of CFASST, including its centrality and importance within districts and school sites, was the work of the director. The ways in which directors administered CFASST, structured CFASST experiences and monitored the progress of participants helped determine the ways in which CFASST was regarded. As important was the directors' communication with CFASST participants and with stakeholders in the surrounding context, whereby they provided opportunities for individuals and groups to understand CFASST's intentions, strategies and processes and to shape implementation. These efforts also helped ensure that CFASST was viewed as complementary to, rather than separate from or supplanting, other site priorities.

Directors who realized that BTSA/CFASST represented a new way of thinking about teacher induction and teacher professionalism paid attention to the perceptions of participants and others about CFASST. In their communication within CFASST (e.g., with support providers and beginning teachers) as well as outside CFASST (e.g., with district and site leaders), they attempted to combat older notions of how to help new teachers enter the profession. Directors saw the shift in thinking as a significant one and understood that such shifts were difficult to make.

This is new. This is a paradigm shift in how we look at our profession and if they [support providers] don't have the solid buy in and they're not completely supporting this piece, then the beginning teachers are not going to receive it in its richest and purest form. So that's just all part of this change process and getting the experienced teachers to see, this is how we look at our profession now. It's getting them to think that they have to do this (reflect on their practice), too. ...let's look at what you're doing, think about what you're doing and your kids and see what we can do. It's a different way of thinking. (Director, District 2, 6/00)

It [CFASST] provides the curriculum, the structure for our support providers to work with beginning teachers. It keeps them out of the band-aid, fix today's tragedy cycle. (Director, District 3, 5/00)

Directors knew that the ways in which participants conceived of their roles, and the degree to which site and district administrators regarded CFASST as legitimate and important, would determine whether and how well CFASST, and its priority for reflective practice, became institutionalized in their settings. The most effective implementation occurred in programs where the director actively worked to develop a shared understanding of the purpose of CFASST.

However, while effective structures and a culture supportive of

reflection were necessary, they were not sufficient for ensuring that new teachers would come to understand and use reflection to improve their practice. Ultimately, it was participants' perceptions that determined whether the program goals were met. In particular, it mattered how support providers came to understand and act out their role and the degree to which they valued reflective practice. Those support provider perceptions strongly influenced how beginning teachers viewed and used reflection (Wing & Jinks, 2001).

Most importantly, the opportunities for beginning teachers to develop their reflective practice were tied to their experiences with the particular support providers with whom they had been matched. The quality of the support providers' understandings of the CFASST purpose and facility with the CFASST support provider role, as well as the relationship between the support provider and the beginning teacher, were cited repeatedly as the keys to program success. From a design perspective, this suggests the importance of focusing on the selection criteria necessary to identify strong support providers, the preparation of those support providers to ensure they understand the purpose and processes of the support provider role in CFASST, and paying attention to how support providers and beginning teachers are matched.

While BTSA/CFASST is a statewide program, this study has illustrated the truism that all implementation is local. Moreover, the data underscore the ways in which the meanings that are attributed to the program shape the experiences of participants. Thus, program implementation necessarily involves attending to structures, procedures, policies, and practices that support the design and intent of the program; it also requires attending to the ways in which individuals and groups understand, value, and interpret the effort. By attending to both of these aspects, directors increased their opportunities to fully implement and create sustained support for the program.

Note

¹A version of the paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April, 2001, Seattle, WA.

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