Professional Growth for New Teachers:
Support and Assessment Through Collegial Partnerships

By Ellen Moir & Colleen Stobbe

New teachers enter the complex environment of teaching as novices with varying levels of skill, knowledge, and experience. They are often given the most challenging assignments and placed in difficult-to-staff schools. They require significant amounts of support and assistance in their first few years in order to effectively incorporate all they need to know to have a successful teaching experience. Veenman (1984) suggests that novice teachers need both pedagogical assistance and psychological support; this is congruent with recommendations from developmental theorists such as Furth (1981) and Vygotsky (1978) who point out that a supportive atmosphere is necessary for learners attempting to master new and complex thought and action.

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The latest research on staff development indicates that teachers learn best when they are given opportunities to construct their own knowledge, share with their colleagues, and directly apply new learning in their classroom. Thus, teacher development

should involve the continuous inquiry into educational practice within a structure that provides systematic support and feedback at different stages of the teacher's career development.

Historically, inservice education and staff development have been based on a banking model of learning in which teachers are filled with new methods and techniques with the content often being derived from individuals outside the classroom. This deficit-training model views teachers as "the passive recipients of someone else's knowledge rather than as sources of knowledge themselves or active participants of their own growth and development" (Lieberman, 1990). Sustained and long-term professional growth involves the acquisition of new knowledge and the transformation of that knowledge into personal development. This kind of growth is empowering and creates qualitative change in teachers. The notion that professional growth is a continuous process of teaching, assessing, reflecting, and reteaching in a collegial setting is the norm we want to establish for new teachers and for the profession as a whole.

In this article we describe a model for supporting and assessing beginning teachers in which we move away from traditional inservice education and staff development into the notion of ongoing teacher development. The program's emphasis on collegial partnerships, personal inquiry and reflection, and ongoing self-assessment is described in relationship to the needs and phases of development of new teachers. We also discuss how support and assessment come together to inform assistance, move teachers on the growth continuum, and ultimately give teachers control of their own professional development.

Building a Collegial Partnership:
A Collaborative Model to Support
the Continued Growth of New Teachers

In 1988, the Board of Studies in Education at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), in conjunction with the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and seven districts in the county designed an interactive, collaborative program for new teacher support and professional development. This county-wide consortium, led by the director of student teaching at UCSC, is composed of 17 representatives from the sponsoring organizations, including superintendents, principals, mentor teachers, new teachers, staff development coordinators, personnel directors, union representatives, university faculty, and project advisors. A distinctive feature of this project comes from the close ties developed between the teacher education program and the school districts. The consortium builds on a ten-year legacy of effective collaboration between the university and county schools. The consortium meets six times a year and communication and collaboration occurs across districts and institutional boundaries. The consortium members determined program philosophy, program components, and ongoing evaluation.

Over the last six years, the Santa Cruz County New Teacher Project (SCCNTP) has served 300 K-12 teachers, with 225 teaching in bilingual classes. The overall philosophy of the program is that teaching is complex (Good & Brophy, 1987; Shavelson, 1983) and that the process of becoming a teacher involves career-long or life-long learning. The project recognizes that new teachers enter the profession at different developmental stages and with individual needs. The cornerstone of the project is the professional relationship between an experienced veteran teacher and the new teacher. Consistent and non-judgmental support by the advisor is tailored to the specific classroom context of the new teacher. The project supports beginning teachers' efforts to translate what they have learned in their preservice preparation into classroom practice. The statewide evaluation of the California New Teacher Project demonstrated that with this type of high-intensity support new teachers not only stay in the profession, but also, as reported by their principals, demonstrate higher levels of professional growth in a shorter period of time (Southwest Regional Laboratory, 1990). The professional model of the project enhances teacher growth, collegiality, and retention.

In this project, exemplary veteran teachers are on loan from their full-time teaching positions to serve as advisors for new teachers. Each advisor has a caseload of 13 new teachers. Advisors meet weekly with each new teacher for two hours before, during, or after school. While in the classroom, they teach demonstration lessons, observe and coach, co-teach, videotape lessons, respond to interactive journals, and assist with problems as they arise. Time outside the classroom is spent planning, gathering materials, and providing emotional support and safe structures for reflection and feedback. By being familiar with the students in the class, the overall curriculum plan, and the class structure and organization, the advisor is able to provide each new teacher with context-specific praise and suggestions.

Building trust between the new teacher and his/her advisor is crucial for providing effective support and assessment. The advisor and the new teacher form a year-long collegial partnership. Knowing the importance of a trusting relationship in the teaching and learning process, the advisor enters the new teacher's classroom in a non-evaluative and non-judgmental way. The advisor is a resource and facilitator to support the new teacher's development and self-assessment. As a result of their intensive involvement, the new teacher advisors develop a unique and powerful collegial relationship with each of their new teachers. Both mid-year and end-of-the-year evaluations from the new teachers use such descriptors as "saint," "guardian angel," "friend," and "co-teacher" to describe the relationship. This trusting partnership provides a safe context for sustained professional growth.

From week to week, the advisor and the new teacher work together to strengthen the new teacher's program. Foremost in the advisor's mind is the awareness that each new teacher must construct his/her own knowledge in order to progress and grow professionally. The advisor assists the performance of the new teacher at every step of the way, while being cognizant of the new teacher's skills,

knowledge, abilities, and capacity to accept and implement new ideas or under-standings.

Responsive Use of Support and Assessment During Phases of New Teacher Development

Paying particular attention to the developmental needs of new teachers is central to the SCCNTP. Based on our work in the past five years (Moir, 1990), we have found that new teachers move through different stages of development throughout the year. While not every teacher moves through this exact sequence in these predicted time periods, understanding these phases can be helpful to support-ing new teachers.

In the first month new teachers go through a survival phase in which they are consumed with the day-to-day details of running a classroom. At this point, the advisor's role is more oriented toward providing resources, systems for classroom organization, possible structures for management, ideas for curriculum, emotional support, and just assisting the new teacher with the assimilation of the vast amount of information that confronts them. Interactions between the advisor and the new teacher may not require a great deal of reflection at this time. Nevertheless, the advisor poses questions to elicit rationale for classroom decision making. Through these structured interactions the inquiry process is modeled. The advisor helps the new teacher to clarify and narrow his or her focus, to reflect on what has occurred in the classroom, and to begin to understand the variables that affected the learning event. Through these discussions, the new teacher begins to develop a set of understandings that can be applied to future learning events and classroom structures.

In October, after six to eight weeks of non-stop work, new teachers move into the disillusionment phase. Since the beginning of school, the new teacher has been working exceedingly long hours, has prepared for Back to School Night, parent conferences, report cards, and his or her first formal evaluation by the site admin-istrator. Each of these important milestones places an already vulnerable individual in a very stressful situation. Providing emotional support and helping the new teacher prepare for each of these major events seems to be the most useful role of the advisor at this time. During this phase new teachers generally lose their confidence and wonder if teaching is the right profession. A first-year teacher wrote in her New Teacher Project interactive journal:

> October 20—Still unsure of myself. Feel like I'm not teaching much of value. What do I do with my tough 4th period? How do I keep up with planning, much less grading? Am I in the right grade level for me? Should I even be a teacher?

One of the most important roles of the advisor at this time is to reassure the new teacher of her or his self-worth, their successes, and their continual growth. In

addition, the reflective conversations between the advisor and new teacher address such areas as organizational strategies, time management, stress reduction, and how new teachers can meet the needs of their classroom responsibilities while maintaining a life of their own.

In early January, following the winter break, teachers enter what we call the rejuvenation phase. Having a vacation from school gives new teachers a more normal lifestyle with plenty of rest and time for family and friends. This is the first opportunity that new teachers have for organizing materials and planning curriculum. It is a time for them to sort through materials that have accumulated and prepare new ones. The rest from school, regaining their confidence, and the realization that they are halfway through the school year moves the partnership with their advisor into new areas. From this point forward, the reflective conversations between the new teacher and the advisor generally shift into the realms of curriculum development, teaching strategies, assessment, meeting the diverse needs of students, parent involvement, and school leadership. New teachers take charge of their own professional development. A third-grade teacher wrote:

> February 6 —For our next meeting I'd like to meet after school, if possible, to plan a math schedule like the one you showed us at the in-service. I'd like to bring in some other strands from the math framework like your model does. It is obvious to me that many of the students need additional opportunities for hands-on activities.

In April, most new teachers enter a reflection phase where they tend to summarize their work with an eye toward beginning again the next year. They bring a different type of question to the reflection process with their advisor. The new teacher's questions are more global and are based on what they have or have not accomplished in the previous months. The new teachers' abilities to self-assess are most developed and useful at this time because they recognize the components of successful teaching and are able to self-evaluate in a more comprehensive manner. They use the pedagogical knowledge they have developed over the year to frame their personal theories of teaching and learning.

Merging Support and Assessment
Through Structured Inquiry and Guided Reflection

The SCCNTP has developed a wide variety of mechanisms for support and assessment, including observations, reflective conversations, interactive journals, video taping, and analysis of student work. New teachers also use the *Continuum of Teacher Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities* (Moir, Garmston, 1992) for self-assessment by gaging their own growth and development in several areas, namely, Organizing and Managing the Classroom/Creating a Positive Learning Environment, Planning and Designing Instruction, Delivering Instruction to All Students,

Demonstrating Subject-Matter Knowledge, Diagnosing and Evaluating Student Learning, and Participating as a Member of the Learning Community. With their advisors, the new teachers then create their professional growth goals which become part of their individual learning plans. With these mutually-discussed goals in mind, the advisor can then target support and feedback in conjunction with the new teacher's inquiry. The new teacher maintains a portfolio which is used to document growth over time. The portfolio may include samples from the interactive journal, video selections, samples of student work, and other professional artifacts.

Teachers want to assess their current practices as part of their own investigation into what works and what doesn't work in the classroom. As teachers talk about their decision-making and their rationale for instructional approaches in consultation with their advisor, they are better able to define and refine their instructional procedures and processes. Because there is no one correct way of teaching, it is important to instill in new teachers the notion that answers to educational questions often emerge from within as a result of personal inquiry and reflection.

The advisor and the new teacher have various structured opportunities for guided reflection. Classroom observations offer one of the richest opportunities for reflective conversations. Following an observation, the advisor and the new teacher analyze the learning events and discuss the variables that affected the outcomes, such as planning, instructional strategies, management, decision making, and materials. Inquiry into educational events and the decision-making process contribute to the professional development of the new teacher. Throughout the entire year, the advisor knows that the new teacher is the decision maker in that classroom and through reflective conversations, interactive journals, and other assessment tools the new teacher can rethink his or her teaching, pose questions, and carry on a professional dialogue with the advisor. This approach provides safety for the new teacher and establishes his or her personal responsibility for professional growth. The willingness on the part of a new teacher to positively accept these reflective opportunities and assessments is a result of the trusting non-judgmental nature of the partnership between the new teacher and the advisor, the teacher's ownership of his or her own professional goals, and the structures that are built into the program for reflection.

The new teacher and the advisor maintain a weekly ongoing dialogue through the use of an interactive journal. The journal is a safe place for new teachers to write about their feelings and frustrations, to describe critical events or perplexing situations, to request resources, and to pose questions. The depth of the trusting relationship between the new teacher and the advisor is evident as new teachers extend their journal entries into areas of personal vulnerability as they explore their role as a teacher. The advisor responds with empathy, acknowledging or restating the problem or need that the teacher has described. The advisor often shares his or her own perspective while encouraging the new teacher to further reflect by posing questions and raising issues. Journal entries often extend into extensive discussions,

as well. A second-grade bilingual teacher wrote:

> I haven't been happy with my writing program. I had great plans at the beginning of the year. I guess where it bogged down was with my frustration with trying to attend to each student's writing needs. It wasn't possible for me to get around individually and actually do much teaching. Because I was disturbed by all these factors I tended to avoid writing, especially revision and editorial stages. Maybe you could demonstrate a writing lesson for me sometime.

After the advisor completed a demonstration lesson the new teacher wrote:

> I loved the writing lesson. This is exactly what I've been missing, some motivating material to be creative with. They really do need some motivating structure to bounce off from. I guess it's asking too much for them to create from a vacuum, which I often have done. As beginning writers, they need to play with vocabulary in this way, one step at a time. I also read your comments on their papers. Makes me see how infrequently I give positive feedback. It's so easy to write "fantastic idea." Why don't I do it more?

In addition to encouraging reflection, the journal gives the advisor a better understanding of how beginning teachers think about teaching, their particular needs at any given time, and the depth of their personal development.

The use of videotape is another important vehicle for reflection, self-assessment, and documenting growth over time. The advisor videotapes the new teacher three times during the year. The new teacher selects both the learning activity and the specific focus for the taping, which is based on the goals and areas for growth identified in the individual learning plan. Prior to the taping, the advisor and the new teacher have a pre-conference in which the new teacher presents the rationale and objectives for the learning event, discusses any potential problem areas that might occur, and solicits advisor input. Following the taping, the new teacher takes the video home and reviews it prior to the post-conference with the advisor. As part of the post-conference the advisor and the new teacher view the tape together, with the new teacher taking the primary role for analysis. The advisor structures the conversation by posing reflective questions to encourage greater understanding and insight. For example, the advisor might open the conference by simply asking the new teacher to describe what is occurring in the learning event. The advisor would then pose additional questions to elicit the teacher's thought processes, decision making, and reflections regarding the learning event on the tape. The videotape becomes a part of the new teacher's portfolio, along with samples of student work.

The SCCNTP brings new teachers together monthly to present their portfolios. In pairs or triads, the new teachers review their individual learning plans, share artifacts that show evidence of growth, and reflect on their progress. As a part of the sharing and analysis, new teachers model learning events, show video clips, create learning centers, present samples of student work, and demonstrate any other artifacts that represent their growth. The presentation and discussion with their

colleagues also includes self-assessment and reflection on their teaching. This moves the new teacher forward in the assessment cycle to making new goals and identifying new ways of documenting their growth.

By creating and sharing a portfolio based on these assessment strategies, new teachers can document their growth over time, take responsibility for their own professional development, and become empowered professionals through their structured collegial interactions. The move toward formative and ongoing assessment within a developing community of learners is an essential component of teacher development and restructuring the profession.

Conclusion

Building a community of teacher leaders and learners is at the core of our profession. Only when teachers rely on each other and share their practice within safe structured contexts while participating in effective assessment practices can we develop teacher reflectivity and true professional growth. An advisor comments:

> Participating in this project has me fully convinced that teacher development depends in a large part on the opening of our doors to our peers. Teachers must control the process. It can't be done to them.

The structured interactions and the commitment toward professional growth between the advisor and the new teacher creates an atmosphere that encourages new teachers to develop norms and standards for professional collegiality, inquiry, reflection, and assessment. Through these experiences, new teachers enter the profession with the expectation that teaching is collegial, that teaching is a continuous cycle of teaching, assessment, reflection, and reteaching, and that learning to teach is a life-long process.

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