

**PEER COACHING:  
A MEANS OF ASSISTING BEGINNING TEACHERS**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	1
Dedication and Acknowledgements.....	2
I. Abstract.....	3-4
II. Introduction.....	4-8
A. Background.....	4
B. Need and Purpose.....	5
C. Research Questions.....	7
III. Literature Review.....	8-15
A. Related Literature.....	8
B. Related Research.....	9
IV. Method.....	15-17
V. Data Analysis.....	17-18
VI. Results.....	18-37
A. Description of Peer Coaching Project.....	18
B. Needs of Beginning Teachers.....	20
C. Forms of Assistance Given By Peer Coaches..	22
D. Basis for Effective Peer Coaching.....	26
E. Needs of Peer Coaches.....	27
F. Challenges/Obstacles to Effective Peer Coaching.....	28
G. Benefits of Peer Coaching.....	31
(i)For Beginning Teachers.....	31
(ii)For Peer Coaches.....	34
(iii)For Schools and School District.....	36
VII. Discussion.....	37-62
A. Nature of Effective Peer Coaching.....	37
B. Major Issues.....	40
C. Commendations.....	48
D. Recommendations.....	52
VIII. Summary.....	62-65
IX. Bibliography.....	66-69
X. Appendixes.....	70-92

### Dedication

This project is dedicated to my wife Lorie, and to our three children, Julie, Amanda and Bradley. Throughout my sabbatical year, the members of my family have each, in their own way, made personal sacrifices to make the year and this study possible. To Lorie, I wish to express my deepest gratitude and love for her encouragement, support and for her ability to help keep things in perspective.

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"THOSE HAVING THE TORCHES WILL PASS THEM ON TO OTHERS."  
- Plato, The Republic

I. ABSTRACT

This study was designed to provide important feedback to the Fort McMurray Catholic School System regarding the nature and effectiveness of a Pilot Teacher Peer Coaching Project which has been implemented to make the induction year a more positive experience for beginning teachers. It was hoped that the study will contribute to the growing body of literature on teacher mentorship as a means of providing support to novice teachers by focussing on the nature, features and prerequisites of effective peer coaching.

The study focussed on the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of the nine trained peer coaches regarding the nature of effective peer coaching, the types of assistance given by these mentors to beginning teachers, and ways of making peer coaching projects more effective. The perceptions of a number of beginning teachers were sought in order to corroborate the data gathered from the peer coaches. The first year teachers were questioned about their needs as inductees to the profession, the forms of assistance they received and the effectiveness of that assistance.

The study was qualitative in nature and attempted

to construct meaning from what the peer coaches expressed about their work with beginning teachers and what the novice teachers expressed about their year of induction. Data were collected through structured interviews using field notes, written surveys, and direct observation.

In general terms, the study found that the peer coaching pilot project was very effective in making the induction year more positive and in providing guidance, counsel and resources to beginning teachers. Furthermore, the peer coaches indicated that there are a number of benefits for them as mentors in such an endeavor. The findings also provide information about the nature and prerequisites of effective peer coaching, and indicate some apparent deficiencies in practice which may need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of such work.

## II. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND

The term "mentor" has its roots in Homer's "Odyssey." Odysseus, before leaving for Troy, entrusted his son Telemachus "in loco parentis" into the hands of Mentor. Mentor was responsible not only for the education of his protege, but also for the parenting of young Telemachus. Homer described the task of the ancient literary figure, Mentor, as one of guiding the impressionable young man through this part of his life. At times Athene, the goddess

of wisdom, manifested herself in Mentor, and Mentor thus became counsellor, confidant, and role model for Telemachus.

Contemporary applications of the term "mentor" are derived directly from Homer's work. Today a mentor is one who guides a protege through a developmental process, whether that process be the transition from childhood to adulthood or from student to professional. The application of mentorship or peer coaching to public education is seen in a growing number of innovative projects designed to assist beginning teachers to make a smooth transition from university training to full-time employment in the public education system.

#### B. NEED AND PURPOSE

The Fort McMurray Catholic School District has a history of low retention of first year teachers. Many beginning teachers find the geographic isolation of Fort McMurray very difficult to deal with. Typically, Fort McMurray offers a starting point for careers, a chance for teachers to gain experience while waiting for positions with larger school systems to the south. More recently, many beginning teachers from Eastern Canada, particularly Quebec, have been hired to meet the needs of an expanding French Immersion Program. Many of these teachers experienced problems adjusting to the language and culture of a northern

Alberta community such as Fort McMurray and have not been able to stay.

In 1987-88, the Fort McMurray Catholic School system hired forty-three new teachers out of a total staff of 196 full-time equivalents. In 1988-89, forty-six teachers new to Fort McMurray were hired, the vast majority being in the first year of teaching experience. In response to this recurring phenomenon of having a large percentage of the teaching staff in their first year, the Fort McMurray Catholic educational system developed the Pilot Peer Coaching Project, designed to assist the new staff members to have a more positive induction year.

In recent years, an increasing number of school jurisdictions, most notably in the United States, Great Britain and Australia, have applied formal mentorship or peer coaching to first year teachers at the local level. The evidence seems overwhelming in support of such measures as a way of making the first year of teaching a more positive experience. However, very few Canadian studies are available for comparison purposes, or there exists a need for further study to be made in this field.

Furthermore, when a school system takes the initiative to implement such an innovative pilot project, several additional needs for research arise. First, the school system needs to determine to what extent the objectives of the project are being met, and what other positive and

negative consequences the project brings to those involved and to the system in general. Second, the teachers and administrators participating in the project must be shown if the time and resources expended in such a pilot project are worthwhile. Such data would also be of interest to other school jurisdictions and to Alberta Education because projects of this nature have the potential to fill the void left by the recently cancelled provincial program, the Initiation to Teaching Project.

### C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature provides overwhelming evidence that mentorship and peer coaching programs work and are needed. Therefore, the effectiveness of these strategies, properly implemented, is not at issue. Thus, the major focus of this study was to investigate the quality or nature of truly effective peer coaching. The following research questions were used to guide the investigation:

- (1) What are the key factors which make peer coaching effective?
- (2) What apparent deficiencies exist in current peer coaching practice which inhibit its effectiveness?
- (3) To what extent does the Fort McMurray Peer Coaching Project corroborate established findings regarding the effectiveness and need for such a project?

These issues were to be considered by investigating the responses to the project by the participants, with a primary focus on the thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences



of the peer coaches, with a secondary look at beginning teachers.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. RELATED LITERATURE

Because of the complexity of the task, mentors are variously considered to be teachers, counsellors, friends, role models and more (Brzoska, 1987). Schein (1978) defines mentors as coaches, positive role models, developers of talent, openers of doors, protectors, sponsors, and successful leaders. Today the role of mentor or peer coach is occurring increasingly within public education systems. These mentorship roles range from informal "buddy systems" to specifically designed roles. In either case, the mentors' roles are defined more by their relationships with the protege than by position or title. It should also be noted that within the context of educational research, "mentor" is a very new term, seen first in the ERIC database in 1980.

An important application of peer coaching recently has been to provide support for beginning teachers. Studies conducted on difficulties experienced by novice teachers clearly demonstrate the need for such programs. Tisher (1980) states that comparable induction issues exist for all countries. He adds that there are remarkable similarities with respect to the professional support needed by beginning teachers in different countries.

Typically, teachers work in isolation. Although they do have frequent contact with colleagues in the staffroom, at various faculty meetings and in the hallways, teachers rarely utilize these contacts for in depth discussions related to instruction, curriculum or pedagogical problems (Lortie, 1975; Feiman-Nemser, 1986; Rosenholtz and Kyle, 1984). For the beginning teacher, this situation means that during the time when teachers face many difficult problems, very little assistance is given them (Adams, 1982). Schulman (1986) suggests that the existing norms of isolation and autonomy prevent teachers from seeking help from colleagues.

Inevitably, studies of the first year of teaching present similar descriptions of the "trauma" involved with the initiation into teaching (Little, 1981; Zeichner, 1983; Tisher, 1980). The first year of teaching has been described by Houston and Felder (1982) in general terms as a lonely, emotionally draining and frustrating experience. Lortie (1975) adds that first year teachers are usually given a full complement of teaching duties, often more vigorous than those of experienced colleagues. These new teachers are confronted with a "sink or swim" expectation, and are often expected to perform at the same level as twenty-five year veterans.

According to Howey, Matthes and Zimpher (1983), new teachers arrive in their classrooms ill-equipped to handle the "regular duties" of teaching and the concomitant

"reality shock" of the first year of teaching. University teacher training produces teachers who are enthusiastic and idealistic. However, the school setting leaves inductees isolated and lonely, without nurturing support found in student teaching experiences. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) suggest that the effects of university teacher training are often "washed out by this initial school experience." Childres and Podemski (1982-83) add that the idealism and enthusiasm learned at university may be the teacher's worst enemy, resulting in job dissatisfaction, loss of confidence and burn-out.

The specific problems faced by inductees are multi-faceted. Veenman (1984) has shown that first year teachers experience problems in eight areas: classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing student work (evaluation), relationships with parents, organization of class work, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students. A similar study by Broadbent and Cruickshank (1965) shows virtually identical findings, suggesting that the situation has been persistent and consistent for at least the last twenty years.

Stoddard, Losk, and Benson (1984) note that no other profession allows novices to accept so much responsibility without more practice and on the job supervision. The result is that many teachers have been taught that good teaching

can be mastered by a trial-and-error approach. Such a notion is contrary to current research findings. For example, Joyce and Showers (1982) state that the successful mastery of teaching skills requires teachers to undertake theoretical study, observation of demonstrations, practice, and feedback in protected conditions. Little (1981) adds that school improvement is most surely and thoroughly achieved when teachers engage in concrete and precise dialogue about teaching practice. Furthermore, teachers do not automatically transfer their learning to new settings. The transfer of teaching skills is a most complex stage of learning which requires the support and assistance of a coaching or mentor program. (Joyce and Showers, 1981).

One of the most obvious and harmful effects of the difficult problems faced by first year teachers coupled with the general lack of support, is that many first year teachers leave the profession in the initial phase of their careers (Fuller and Brown, 1975; Ryan, 1980). Schlechty and Vance (1983) have shown that fifteen percent of new teachers leave after their first year, compared to a six percent over all turnover rate. Charters (1970) states that only forty percent of new teachers remain in the profession after the fifth year. Greene (1984) has shown that of the graduates of a single education institution, the University of Lethbridge, twenty nine percent had left or never entered the teaching profession between 1972 and 1982.

## B. RELATED RESEARCH

There is not a lot of research on mentorship or peer coaching programs for beginning teachers in public education (kindergarten through grade 12). Tisher (1980) has found that the greatest amount of published information on formalized programs to assist in the induction process of beginning teachers at the local, regional and national levels is in the United Kingdom and Australia, where funded studies of teacher induction have occurred more frequently than elsewhere. Zeichner (1979) adds that some programs have been established in the United States, but they are "few and far between." A recent computer search of the ERIC database files indicates that between the years of 1980 and 1988 there have been only twenty seven articles and/or studies completed on this topic, none of which deals with Canadian case studies.

However, the current research that is available is beginning to provide evidence that mentorship programs have the potential to deal with problems and serious difficulties experienced by first year teachers. Documented cases to date indicate that mentoring or peer coaching allows beginning teachers to move gradually from simple to more demanding tasks, and from less demanding tasks to full responsibilities under the supervision of colleagues. In addition, Brown and Wambach (1987) have demonstrated that first year teachers involved in a mentor teacher induction

project expressed more interest in continuing teaching than did colleagues not involved in the project.

Tisher (1980) states that because induction is so closely concerned with the particulars of teaching in a "real life setting," arrangements made to improve the process of induction are best based within the school where trusted, experienced colleagues can counsel inductees and capitalize on their "creative potential." Therefore, the mentor is in an excellent position to provide an inductee with knowledge and skills, and to help with the process of socialization into the new school culture.

Schulman (1986) has conducted a study on the California Mentor Teacher Program. This particular program is the result of state legislation. The study shows that mentorship can change the "norm of isolation to a norm of collegial assistance." Among the stated outcomes of this mentor program for the new teachers were: companionship and assurance, access to models of teaching, adjustments in teaching practice, and support for thinking about teaching.

From 1974 to 1978 a study was conducted on the Teacher Induction Pilot Scheme in Great Britain. This program was reduced beginning teacher workloads by five to ten percent of a normal teaching load, and utilized trained teacher-tutors (peer coaches) appointed in school to counsel beginning teachers, to observe them and to be observed by them. The tutors were rated as effective by the vast

majority of new teachers. (Tisher, 1980).

Tisher, Fyfield and Taylor (1978) have also indicated that beginning teachers in Australia cite the importance of interpersonal relationships and effective induction activities, which were dependent upon mutual trust between the beginning teacher and the more experienced colleagues or peer coaches, in making the first year of teaching a positive experience.

Within the province of Alberta, there have been some innovations in this area as well. Most obvious is the Initiation to Teaching Project, and internship program sponsored by Alberta Education. The evaluation of the project (Ratsoy, Friesen, Holdaway, et al, 1987) states that generally, the internship program was received positively by participants and many interns experienced a gradual transition and immersion to teaching. There were also a number of identifiable concerns raised in the study, including the need to ensure a common understanding of the purpose of the program, and the roles of the participants, plus training workshops for the supervisors of the interns. Since the cancellation of the Initiation to Teaching Project, there have been no formal mentorship programs available for study in the province until this year.

Unfortunately, researchers have experienced difficulty in finding organized programs for support and assistance during induction, because such projects are small in number.

(Laneir and Little, 1986; McDonald, 1980; Zeichner, 1980). Little (1981) reports that meaningful mentoring relations between experienced and beginning teachers have been the exception rather than the rule.

#### IV. METHOD

The method for this study was qualitative, and focussed on attempting to construct meaning from what peer coaches expressed about their role and work with beginning teachers. Biographic Data on the participants of the study is included in Appendix A. All Data were collected through structured interviews, surveys and participant observation to identify the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of teachers during their first year as peer coaches. In order to substantiate some of the data gleaned from the peer coaches, beginning teachers were also surveyed, and five of them participated in structured interviews. Additional perceptions of district administrators were gathered through interviews.

The Data were collected in three stages, beginning on December 5th, 1988. At that time, during an initial visit to Fort McMurray, the proposal for the study was presented to the district superintendent, Mr. Gerry Heck.

This visit also provided an opportunity to interview all peer coaches. This initial series of interviews was intended to introduce the peer coaches, and a number of beginning teachers to the researcher and to the research



project, and to glean data about impressions of the peer coaching project to date. The Data gathered during the December interviews were used to formulate questions for the first set of surveys and the second series of interviews.

The first set of surveys (see Appendix B) was distributed in mid-February. They were completed by the peer coaches, the beginning teachers with whom they worked, and by some beginning teachers not involved with the pilot project. The second set of interviews was conducted and the surveys gathered from February 22nd to 24th. During the interviews, peer coaches and beginning teachers were able to expand upon any of the topics addressed by the survey, and to report their thoughts, feelings, and concerns regarding any other aspect of the project.

The final set of surveys (see Appendix C) and interviews were concluded between April 25th and 27th. The main purpose of this visit was to confirm data from the February visit, and to gather further information on peer coaching once the project had been largely completed for the 1988-89 school year.

Participation in the research was voluntary, and each participant signed a release form (Appendix D), which outlined the purpose of the study, the methodology, the nonevaluative nature of the study, the confidentiality of the information disclosed, and the uses which are to be made of the data. All participants were informed of their right

of withdrawal from the study at any time.

Permission to enter the schools and offices was requested from the Superintendent of Schools. Principals were informed about the purpose of the research, and the district coordinator of the pilot project, Mrs. Kathleen Murphy-House facilitated the interviews, distributed the surveys, and personally acted as substitute to release the participants for interviews.

#### V. DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data were recorded through the use of field notes, which, like the surveys were analyzed in order to identify and classify relevant content characteristics. This analysis identified and categorized common patterns or themes. A point was identified as contributing to a theme if addressed by at least four of the nine respondents. The coding of the data was done by the interviewer. While this may have resulted in some loss of objectivity, the main advantage of having the interviewer perform the analysis is that first hand observations and interpretations of the interviews can be included to add qualitative meaning.

No "a priori" constructs were used to guide the analysis, because the themes or conceptual categories emerged from the data, rather than being imposed upon the data. Findings from the surveys were compared to data from

the interviews, and findings from the peer coaches were compared to data provided by the beginning teachers. The findings are presented in a narrative form with reference made to specific quotations from the data to illustrate the identified themes.

## VI. RESULTS

### A. DESCRIPTION OF THE PEER COACHING PILOT PROJECT

The Peer Coaching Pilot Project began in the spring of 1988 with school board approval. Kathleen Murphy-House, the district coordinator of staff development, was named coordinator of the project. The district then advertised the position of peer coach throughout the school system. The advertisement, (see Appendix E), stated that the project was seeking "master teachers who are interested in being trained to serve as mentors/coaches." Mentoring was described as the "process by which a trusted and experienced person takes a personal and direct interest in the development and education of fellow teachers." In addition to a resume, applicants were required to submit a three page recommendation from their principals and to have a three page survey completed by three colleagues to support the application. (See Appendix F)

From the applicants, the selection committee met and developed a short list to be interviewed. There was one peer coach named for all but one of the district schools.

Following the appointment of the peer coaches, a two day training workshop was provided for them on August 29th and 30th, 1988. This workshop was conducted by Dr. David Townsend of the University of Lethbridge, and focussed on some of the critical aspects of peer coaching. Topics included: developing trust relationships, conferencing skills, and observation cycles.

Once the school year began, the peer coaches were introduced to the beginning teachers on their respective staffs, and the project began in earnest. There was a second training workshop provided for the peer coaches in October, by Dr. Kit Marshall from Sacramento. This workshop dealt with Pro Active or Effective Instruction. The focus of the workshop was on identifying the elements of good teaching, observation skills, using anecdotal notes, providing feedback to teachers, beginning observations, negotiating agreements with teachers, and listing priorities with the peer coaches.

The peer coaches were each provided with release time by a substitute teacher for one half day every two weeks from September through April. By November all peer coaches had been provided with a small number of observation instruments and were conducting classroom observations with the beginning teachers in their schools. Toward the end of April, formal peer coaching drew to a close for the year as teacher evaluations by administrators began.

## B. NEEDS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

According to the peer coaches' perceptions, the needs of beginning teachers can be characterized as immediate. Initially, first year teachers are in great need of the materials, resources and ideas that will help them set up classrooms, prepare bulletin boards, organize classroom registers, and get through the first day, then the first week, of classes.

This reality for most beginning teachers was described by one first year teacher as a "day to day existence, in which one plans the lessons for tomorrow, teaches them, then must begin immediately to plan the next day's work." These teachers need to know "where to find things in the school such as classroom supplies, and how the daily routines work."

A second major need of beginning teachers is characterized as "emotional support." Because of their limited teaching experience, the inductees lack the skills to discern when they are succeeding, when they need help, and as one peer coach suggested, "simply some idea of how they are doing." In other words, these teachers could benefit from a great deal of regular feedback on their teaching with an emphasis on the positive features.

All of the beginning teachers began the year with concerns about classroom management, and all required some advice, counsel or support with some discipline-related

situation during the school year. This concern is amplified by the perception of most first year teachers and many of the peer coaches, that effective classroom management is one of the most critical and most easily observed characteristics of good teaching.

Throughout the school year, needs emerged as events and circumstances arose. For example, one novice teacher did not know how to fill out the report cards used in her school, while another needed advice on the weighting of various assignments and evaluations in computing grades. Four beginning teachers expressed real concern and anxiety over the first parent teacher interviews.

All beginning teachers expressed concern over the very trying and exhausting work load, coupled with very high school and district expectations for teaching excellence. This, according to the research, is the norm for most beginning teachers. Assistance in time management skills and advice about time saving strategies and devices are seen by teachers and coaches as needs in this situation.

The last area of concern or need described by the beginning teachers from Fort McMurray was in the area of student motivation. As one teacher said, "I didn't realize that a large number of my students would not want to learn. I sometimes feel completely lost in finding ways to get the kids excited about their school work." Contributing to this difficulty is the fact that many teachers feel they do not

have time to spend developing innovative, motivational activities each week.

### C. FORMS OF ASSISTANCE GIVEN BY PEER COACHES

Without exception, the peer coaches felt that the most significant form of assistance given to beginning teachers was in the area of encouragement, positive feedback and in general, emotional support. This perception was corroborated by the first year teachers. This "emotional support" took many forms. One beginning teacher said it was always comforting just "knowing there was someone down the hall who would always listen, and was always positive."

Two of the peer coaches made a point of leaving a brief note with the first year teachers after every classroom observation or visit. The notes thanked the first year teacher for finding time to work or visit, and then described and commended the inductee for something positive seen, heard or said during the time together. One peer coach-beginning teacher pair referred to these messages as "happy notes." The first year teacher told of the tremendous impact such a simple gesture had for her. "Whenever I have a bad day, or difficulty with a problem student, or feel the work is just too much, I simply open my desk drawer and read through some of the happy notes ...[my peer coach]...has given me. These things pick me right up, and make me realize that I can succeed and that I am a good teacher."

A second major area of assistance given to most beginning teachers was in providing help in getting the school year started. Peer coaches shared resources to develop classroom bulletin boards, gave suggestions on administrative tasks such as filling out class registers, provided ideas on classroom seating arrangements, and gave practical suggestions to beginning teachers about greeting and getting to know students, setting standards and expectations and developing the first lesson plans. For some pairs, this form of initial assistance was hampered because some beginning teachers started after the first of September, and because some peer coaching did not begin until after the first week of school.

All of the first year teachers found the district requirement for long term plans to be submitted by the end of September to be a source of great stress and distress. Many of them felt ill-equipped to develop such extensive plans at a time when they had no experience base to help determine timing of units and lessons on a long term basis. Coupled with that situation was the fact that for most of them, their planning was being done on a day-to-day basis, and activities for future months seemed distant and irrelevant. The peer coaches provided valuable assistance in this regard. Long term plans were shared and, in some cases, developed collaboratively.

In most cases, assistance by peer coaches specific to



observed classroom teaching was, not implemented until late November or December. As one peer coach said, "My first year teachers needs were at the 'survival stage' for the first two months, so instructional supervision was not of immediate concern until they felt comfortable, and that they were in charge of their classrooms, and were succeeding." Another peer coach mentioned that instructional supervision could only take place after a trust relationship had been established between herself and the beginning teachers. Such as relationship generally took some time (between one and three months) to establish.

However, once the relationship had been developed, instructional supervision in some form occurred for all beginning teachers involved in the pilot project. The most common situation was one which included a brief pre-observation conference, the classroom observation and a post-observation conference. For the beginning teachers, the post-observation conferences proved to be very beneficial. It was at this time that discussions focussed specifically on what had occurred in the classroom. Very often, these discussions led to consideration of alternative teaching or management strategies, reflection, and self-evaluation. For many of the first year teachers, these experiences led to changes in teaching behavior.

For example, an elementary school beginning teacher

said, "During student teaching last year, I had one bad lesson in which the students were involved with group work. They were wild, and the lesson flopped. So this year, I decided not to use it. [My peer coach]...spoke so enthusiastically about her successes with group work that I decided to give it a try. She observed my class and recorded lots of 'stuff' showing how it went. When we met to talk about it, we were able to discuss what makes such work exciting for the students, and some concrete ideas about how to group students, and how to work with a variety of groups all at once. Now I use group work at least once a week."

Many of the first year teachers expressed amazement at the willingness of the peer coaches to share their class materials and other resources. A high school peer coach supplied each first year teacher with complete unit plans and teaching materials compiled in large binders. One of his beginning teachers told of the effect this had on her planning: "I was able to really focus on teaching strategies and trying to motivate the kids. In planning the content of my courses, I could pick and choose from the vast supply of materials supplied by my peer coach, or use these resources as a basis to develop my own. I was teaching material which was the result of the years of experience of my peer coach."

A side effect of working with peer coaches for three beginning teachers was that they became used to having someone in their classes, observing them at work. These

teachers felt that this factor made them more comfortable when they were later evaluated by administrators.

#### D. BASIS FOR EFFECTIVE PEER COACHING

Without exception, peer coaches and beginning teachers stated that the basis for effective work by the peer coaches was the establishment of a positive, collegial relationship between the peer coach and the inductees. More specifically, the peer coaches had to provide guarantees of confidentiality to facilitate the development of trust. In most cases, this was initiated by the peer coaches describing their roles and verbally giving the assurance that all work, observations and discussions between them would not be discussed elsewhere without consent of the inductee. However, trust still developed slowly. It took some time to allow the peer coaches and teachers to get to know each other, and to begin working on projects that enhanced rapport.

Throughout the first month of the school year, the peer coaches emphasized the non-evaluative nature of their role, and worked to establish credibility with the new teachers. This credibility was generally developed through demonstrated concern and concrete examples of assistance. One of the peer coaches said that "the earlier I could find ways to provide meaningful assistance, and the more time I could find to spend with the new teachers in the first weeks

of the year, the quicker and stronger were the relationships between us."

While some of the peer coaches described the first year teachers as their "friends," all peer coaches said they liked and respected their proteges as teachers and colleagues and desired that they succeed as classroom instructors. It was this concern for success which the first year teachers felt most strongly in their collegial relationships, and it is exemplified in the following statement from one of the beginning teachers: "I have felt that from the day we met, my peer coach was my strongest advocate. She understands the pressures of the first year, and she will do anything she can to help me improve my teaching. She knows more about me as a teacher than anyone else."

#### E. NEEDS OF PEER COACHES

Each of the peer coaches noted that the two training workshops in August and October were invaluable experiences. The most common response to the workshops was that they each contributed to a sense of confidence in the peer coaches that they truly had something meaningful to offer new teachers, and that they could feel comfortable observing a colleague at work.

Because this was a pilot project, it was decided that needs would be addressed as they arose throughout the year. Generally, this seemed to be an effective and appropriate

approach to the project, as the peer coaches indicated that they felt that most of their needs were met either through the workshops or through informal sharing of ideas and concerns with colleagues. A number of suggestions were made regarding ways to improve the training of peer coaches for the future, and a clearer picture of needs which emerged after reflection about the first year of peer coaching.

#### F. CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE PEER COACHING

All peer coaches found the release time provided by the district to be useful and appreciated it as recognition of the importance of the time involved in such a project. However, because each peer coach was given release time at exactly the same time every two weeks, it was seen to be somewhat restrictive in that the release time was always during the same class period. All peer coaches and all beginning teachers also expressed the concern that such a schedule of release time does not recognize that there are certain "critical" time periods during the school year in which more than one half day every two weeks is needed for conferencing, observation and other supportive activities.

For some of the peer coaches, working with unilingual French teachers who were in the French immersion program, was made more challenging because the peer coaches are unilingual English. Such a situation obviously created numerous communication difficulties and made regular forms

of supervision inappropriate. A related concern was raised by two peer coaches who felt inadequate as peer coaches in areas of curriculum where they lacked experience and expertise.

All peer coaches expressed concern with the district teacher orientation program and workshops, and perceived them to be sources of stress rather than merely introductions to the district and to teaching. This perception was corroborated by all beginning teachers interviewed. It was felt that the orientation program overwhelmed first year teachers with a great expectations, meetings, and too much information. By the time the peer coaches were introduced to the inductees, there was already a degree of stress and concern which had to be addressed.

Six peer coaches indicated a desire to have a greater variety of classroom observation instruments at their disposal, and would like to have the opportunity to practice using them prior to beginning the peer coaching process. Related to this notion was the need to be able to display data collected from observations in ways which are convincing, concise and will have impact on the beginning teacher. The one aspect of the observation cycle with which the peer coaches felt most comfortable and confident was in conferencing skills.

The peer coaches were brought together occasionally during the year for sharing, and for workshops. These

sessions were very well received by the group, but were mentioned as having greater potential for providing stronger support if carried out regularly.

A significant concern was raised with regard to working with marginal beginning teachers and, generally, the way in which such situations were dealt with met the approval of the peer coaches. More specifically, the peer coaches were simply removed from the situation and school administrators, together with the district staff development coordinator worked with the teacher experiencing difficulty. However, coaches did mention a need for more definite policy and procedure to establish the relationship between peer coaching and evaluation, and to prescribe the means of involving administration without risking or breaking guarantees of confidentiality.

The pilot project was established with the goal of identifying one peer coach per school in the district and this was the case in all but one of the schools. However, some of the peer coaches felt that while one peer coach per school is much better than none, this format created some discrepancies, which interfered with effective peer coaching. For example, some peer coaches were able to focus on two or three first year teachers, but others were in schools that had as many as six beginning teachers in need of support, counsel and assistance. In these latter situations, the release time provided, and the expectations

of peer coaches were not appropriate.

As was stated previously, the peer coaches were unanimous in their endorsement of the two workshops provided to train and give confidence to them in this new role. However, the timing of the initial workshop (late August) delayed the peer coaching process. Many of the peer coaches expressed the desire to begin training in June so the peer coaching work can be initiated with the arrival of the beginning teachers.

Out of necessity, some teachers are hired after the first of September. For at least two of these teachers, the peer coaching project was not fully explained, and it was left largely to the peer coaches to introduce themselves, and to explain when and why they would be coming to watch them teach. This situation was described as "somewhat awkward," in that it delayed the process and the establishment of a trust relationship.

#### G. BENEFITS OF PEER COACHING

##### (i) FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

The Fort McMurray Peer Coaching Pilot Project confirmed the findings of many studies which indicate that the first year of teaching is made a much more positive experience with the intervention of trained peer coaches or mentors. The specific benefits were wide ranging and somewhat diverse. In at least one case, it is clear that the presence



of a peer coach in the school and the support given to the beginning teacher by the peer coach saved, or at least extended, one inductee's career.

This beginning teacher described the situation as follows: "For the first six weeks of the school year, I started work at 7:30 a.m. with last minute preparations for the day's classes. Through the noon hour and my prep period I had appointments with students in need of extra help. I started preparing for the next day at about 4:15, and left the school around 8:00 p.m. for supper. After I ate, I had more preparation or marking until I 'hit the sack' at about 10:30. Weekends were taken up with more preparation and marking and things like housecleaning and laundry. By Thanksgiving, I was so exhausted, I didn't think I could make it until Christmas break. In two months, I had only seen the school and my apartment. I didn't even know what Fort McMurray looked like, and other than teachers, I didn't know anyone. In the last week I wrote my letter of resignation. I knew there were other things I could do which wouldn't kill me like teaching was. That is when my peer coach really got involved with me. He spent hours talking about how to use my time better, and assuring me that things get much better and much easier over time. He started inviting me to his home for supper with his family, or just to talk. He got me involved with some sports activities just to take me away from school work for a while. By

mid-November, I had decided not to submit my resignation and to stick it out. By Christmas, I felt much more in control of my time and of my life. I know I would not be teaching right now if I had not been assigned a peer coach."

For most of the first year teachers who participated in the project, the benefits were not as dramatic as the case described above. All beginning teachers indicated that the most significant benefit was simply having a trusted colleague available with whom one could question, complain, cry, brag, or just chat at the day's end.

Six first year teachers specified that they received needed help in dealing with discipline problems and in dealings with parents. One peer coach published a list of suggestions to make parent teacher interviews more successful. These ideas were eventually used not only by the beginning teachers in the school, but by the entire staff.

Basically, the benefits derived from the peer coaching pilot project were the result of increased manpower helping first year teachers throughout the school district. The beginning teachers all expressed great satisfaction with all aspects of the peer coaching project and with the relationship they had with their respective peer coaches. A common theme from these feelings was that there was a great deal of individual attention being paid to both large problems and small concerns, long term difficulties and immediate needs. The coordinator described the peer coaches'

approach, and a major reason for its success as follows:  
"The peer coaches focussed on good teaching based more on personal experience than on some external model of good teaching. As a result, the beginning teachers saw the assistance as workable, practical, and saw the peer coaches as credible."

(ii) FOR THE PEER COACHES

Without exception, the peer coaches stated that they felt that they had derived a number of very important benefits from their work in the pilot project. The first and most common response regarding benefits for peer coaches was that they felt their own teaching improved because of this work. One peer coach described his feelings as follows: "I found that in working with my beginning teachers, I had to think about what I did in the classroom that worked, and figure out WHY it worked. I had not spent this much time reflecting on my teaching ever before. In doing this, I recalled many of the ideas, strategies and experiences from the past and began trying them again or improving on them. I feel my own classes are being taught better this year than they have in a long while." This benefit derived from observing and analyzing teaching was widespread among the peer coaches.

Another peer coach suggested that "in working with first year teachers every week, you can't help but pick up

on some of their enthusiasm and energy for teaching." A third peer coach said that working with a recent university graduate introduced her to a number of innovative strategies she had never seen nor tried and she was now implementing ideas gleaned from classroom observations into her own classes.

It was also suggested that peer coaching helps the peer coaches to learn more about themselves. "I found out I need to work on being more objective when speaking with colleagues," said one peer coach. Other related comments from different peer coaches included:

"I needed to develop confidence in dealing with and discussing negative aspects of a colleague's work; to be critical and supportive at once."

"I found out that I really do have some knowledge and skills which can help a colleague in very important ways."

Although no peer coaches suggested it, three beginning teachers and two in-school administrators stated that there were also intrinsic rewards derived by the peer coaches in relation to other staff members. A vice-principal said that on his staff, the peer coach came to be viewed as an excellent teacher, and as one who could be of help with instructional matters. "There is a certain amount of prestige or status that comes with being a peer coach. The peer coaches have been selected because their principal, some colleagues and district personnel see them as superior

teachers. That has to be gratifying."

(iii) FOR THE SCHOOLS AND THE DISTRICT

There is no data available providing documentation of the direct benefits schools and school district derive from this project because it has been in existence only for a short time. However, peer coaches and district administrators have hypothesized and speculated on this topic. It is anticipated that a new "norm" of collegiality will be one result of peer coaching over several years. Successful beginning teachers who remain with Fort McMurray Catholic Schools for a few years will have started their careers experiencing the benefits derived from working and sharing with a trusted colleague, and will have recognized that one's teaching is improved through such collegiality. These people will likely make excellent peer coaches in the future.

An additional benefit to the schools and the system is that perhaps the peer coaching program will help address the historically low annual teacher retention rates. This could be a result of making the first year of teaching such a positive experience that teachers will prefer to remain in Fort McMurray for a longer time.

There are now some data indicate at least some of these benefits for the schools and the school district may be realized. By February, it was observed by two

vice-principals and by one district consultant that there were some noticeable changes in the schools with peer coaches compared to past years. While informal peer coaching has gone on in the past for some beginning teachers, there had not been trained coaches with a designated position which made mentorship a part of their assignment. As a result, school and district administrators expressed a new confidence that inductees were receiving assistance when it was needed. They also felt that this situation relieved some of the time pressure on administrators so they could focus on working with the marginal teachers on a more concentrated basis, rather than splitting time among a larger number of inductees.

One of the vice-principals also felt that professional development throughout the staff was enhanced by the peer coaching project. He said that it was his impression that "the teachers are spending more time than in previous years talking about teaching in the staffrooms and hallways." He attributed this to the fact that the peer coaches and beginning teachers tended to discuss some aspects of their work with other colleagues in an attempt to share and to seek additional feedback and ideas.

## VII. DISCUSSION

### A. Nature of Effective Peer Coaching

The results clearly demonstrate that the Fort McMurray

Catholic Schools Peer Coaching Pilot Project supports and confirms the current literature on teacher mentorship. The evidence is overwhelming that peer coaching works. The testimonials given by the beginning teachers indicate that many benefits were accrued to these novice teachers through their involvement in the project and their association and work with peer coaches.

It is interesting to note that all of the concerns related to the induction year as described by this group of beginning teachers and their peer coaches are found in the literature dealing with needs of first year teachers. (Veenman, 1984; Broadbent and Cruikshank, 1965; Stoddard, Losk and Benson, 1984; Howey, Matthes and Zimpher, 1983). Therefore, according to current educational research, the group of beginning teachers in Fort McMurray during the 1988-89 school year had "predictable" needs as novice teachers.

However, this study was not intended merely to confirm the literature. Rather, it was hoped that such research would address the nature of effective peer coaching, and identify some possible deficiencies in current practice. In-depth analysis of such findings might then result in conclusions regarding the larger, underlying issues related to peer coaching.

Clearly, the most important prerequisite to effective peer coaching is the development and maintenance of a

"trust relationship" between the peer coach and the beginning teachers. Such a relationship appears to develop best in an atmosphere of sincere concern, and care, coupled with a mutual desire to work together to make the induction process more positive and to improve instruction. A second related prerequisite is the guarantee of confidentiality.

Additionally, the mentorship process is affected by the credibility of the peer coaches. Some of that credibility is derived from the fact that the peer coaches have considerable experience as successful teachers. Some results from the training in observation and conferencing skills which provided the peer coaches with needed confidence and some skills to initiate the process.

Most important in developing credibility is the ability of the peer coaches to demonstrate their understanding of the work life of beginning teachers by providing the assistance that is really needed. Key in this regard is the ability of the peer coach to provide resources, counsel, advice, and feedback based on observations, on concerns raised by the inductees, and on the peer coaches' own experiences, in a manner which recognizes and respects the individual worth, the professionalism, and the abilities of beginning teachers.

The relationship must be seen as a horizontal one characterized by shared responsibilities between colleagues rather than a top-down one in which the peer coach is the



focal point and simply disseminates "information and answers." In all cases, both the peer coaches and the beginning teachers described their relationships as "collegial, friendly, trusting, and sharing." The first year teachers viewed their peer coaches as trusted colleagues with tremendous demonstrated credibility.

The single most important and most common form of assistance was "emotional support." The novice teachers felt this addressed their most immediate set of concerns. They needed a confidant, "someone to talk with, to cry with and to share my successes and help deal with my failures... always helping to keep things in perspective." This form of assistance characterizes effective peer coaching. Emotional support can occur best within an environment of trust.

#### B. Major Issues

Having identified what the data suggest regarding the characteristics of effective peer coaching, it may be useful to consider larger related issues in light of the Fort McMurray experience. Three issues seem to have emerged. First, why have the peer coaches and beginning teachers not had the improvement of instruction as the most common and important focus of their work? Second, is the role of school administrators in relation to the peer coaching project all that it could and should be? Third, what is there in the culture of this school system which explains why peer coaching has been implemented and which illuminates the

motives behind the structure of this program?

Without exception, the participants in the peer coaching pilot project identified "emotional support" as the most common and most useful form of assistance provided by the peer coaches. Second to this support was the provision of materials, resources and ideas to "get the school year started, the classroom organized, and lessons planned." Undoubtedly these forms of assistance were greatly needed and appreciated. Beginning teachers are in need of encouragement and positive feedback, and they must have assistance in initial, organizational matters.

However, in addition to making the induction year more positive through emotional and organizational support, peer coaching has the broader stated objective to provide peer assistance to improve instruction. Why, in some cases, have the peer coaches and beginning teachers not focussed directly on teaching at all? Why, in other cases, has such important work been delayed until very late in the school year? The answers to such questions are neither simple nor readily apparent. Many of the findings in current literature either overlook such considerations or assume that when teachers work together in collegial settings teaching is the focus.

One possible explanation is that to focus on teaching

is to take great risks. For teachers to truly open their classrooms and their instructional practices to the scrutiny of a colleague can be likened to "bearing one's soul." Even when the colleague is in a non-evaluative and supportive role, the risks remain. This is why trust is the key ingredient to effective peer coaching. The development and maintenance of a level of trust between colleagues sufficient to precipitate true collegial sharing regarding one's teaching, with the intention of changing behavior and, thus, improving instruction, appears to require a great deal more time than is typically available. This time requirement provides a partial explanation for delays in the occurrence of meaningful instructional supervision.

At all times the peer coach must work to demonstrate sincere concern for the beginning teacher as a colleague in order to build trust. This is often accomplished by supplying those things of immediate concern to the beginning teachers, such as resources and ideas to help with classroom organization, and by providing the encouragement, support, and advice which comprise emotional support. In the Fort McMurray Peer Coaching Project, the pairs of teachers required most of the first year and, in some cases, all of the first year to get to a point of "readiness" to focus on teaching.

Furthermore, the peer coaches had two brief formal training sessions in the fall of 1988 to prepare them for

their role as peer coaches. All other preparation came from their own experience as classroom teachers while further emotional support was provided by the project coordinator and other peer coaches. Consequently, although major successes were achieved in the peer coaching project, the full potential of peer coaching has not yet been realized. The peer coaches lack many of the skills which are best achieved through theoretical study, observation of demonstrations, and practice and feedback in protected conditions prior to actual work in the field (Joyce and Showers, 1982).

The peer coaches are able to provide resources and organizational ideas partly because these answer the immediate concerns and needs of the beginning teachers, but also because the peer coaches feel more comfortable and confident in these areas than in the supervision of actual instruction.

Moreover, while the peer coaches lack assurance that they have the knowledge and skills to become involved with meaningful instructional matters, the beginning teachers do not initially want to be involved with such matters either. The beginning teachers feel a real sense of urgency to "survive" the day-to-day pressures of the first year of teaching. Unfortunately, as careers develop such concerns may either be considered resolved, and the teacher is thus no longer in need of assistance, or, alternatively, may

generalize into a prevalent and continuous mode of teacher behavior. In either case, the collegial relationship does not address the question of how to improve and sustain the quality of instruction. Perhaps this situation indicates that peer coaching must be considered on a larger scale than during the first year of teaching exclusively. This induction year may deal with the "survival needs" of beginning teachers and can establish a norm of teacher collaboration. During a second year, it might be expected that the major focus of peer coaching would indeed be teaching.

The second large issue which has emerged from the data concerns the relationship of school administrators to the project, to the peer coaches and to the beginning teachers. While the study did not focus specifically on this relationship, the data gathered through interviews with the peer coaches and beginning teachers indicates that this issue needs to be addressed.

Beginning with the first peer coaching training workshop in August, the relationship between peer coaches and principals was at question. During the opening session, when principals were in attendance, the peer coaches appeared reluctant to participate to any great extent. In the second day of the workshop, when principals were not present, several peer coaches indicated much higher levels of comfort with the activities and with their role in them.

Do the peer coaches see the principals as supporters and facilitators of their work with beginning teachers? What is the role of the principal in relation to the peer coaches and to the project?

Only two of the peer coaches indicated that their principals demonstrated an active interest in their work, and tried to monitor the needs of the peer coaches and beginning teachers. Others felt that their principals seemed unsure of how to approach or whether to approach the peer coach, perhaps because of fear of breaking the confidentiality guarantees.

In two schools members of the administration (both vice principals) were active in providing support in the peer coaching project. Coincidentally, both were also involved with the training as peer coaches to some degree.

Of apparent importance in this discussion is the fact that the principals and peer coaches need some clarification of their respective roles and their relationships to each other. While administrators are generally not in a position to "make peer coaching work" in their schools, they do have the power to undermine the efforts of peer coaches. Alternatively, administrators can choose to ignore the people involved in the project allowing them to "go their own way," or they can explore means of facilitating effective peer coaching in their schools.

Principals should be able to provide potentially

enabling structures to ensure effective peer coaching takes place. But, in order to do this, administrators must be aware of the needs of those involved in the project. In addition, they must be familiar with the methods being used, and the various objectives being sought through peer coaching. With this knowledge, principals can ensure that sufficient time and support are provided to those staff members who are committed to improving instruction. In this way the principals can encourage genuine sharing of the instructional leadership responsibilities.

The third major issue has to do with the "culture" of the Fort McMurray Catholic School District in relation to the peer coaching project. This school system is accurately characterized as innovative and dynamic. The superintendent models hard work and dedication, and has instituted a number of measures to establish and maintain high standards at all levels of the system. He is aware of current educational research and innovations. He works to implement these and other proven management strategies. Visitors to this school system are immediately impressed with the "ethos" of the school system. Effectiveness and efficiency are valued in Fort McMurray Catholic Schools.

While the system has achieved high standards for teachers, such working conditions can also contribute to the

stress experienced by teachers. This is especially true for beginning teachers, who lack the experience base to determine for themselves their level of proficiency. They may find such expectations as communicated during the orientation, and exhibited in the schools, to be very stressful.

An innovation such as the peer coaching pilot project is consistent with the dynamic nature of the system. The peer coaching project is designed to be easily managed, visible and credible at all levels of the district. At the district level, "enabling structures" have been put in place to enhance the chances of success for the project. The peer coach selection process, the release time provided, and the financial commitment to conduct training workshops and this study provide clear examples of such structures.

However, the district commitment to the peer coaching project will be determined by future, not past performance. Based on the experience of the pilot project and the findings of this study, the board, central office administrators, principals, and professional staff will have to decide the extent of commitment they are willing to make in providing meaningful collegial assistance to teachers to improve instructional practice.

Full commitment to such an ambitious project would require much greater financial and administrative support.



It would be necessary to develop an over-all plan for the project. Such a plan would include immediate and long-range objectives, clarification of the relationship between peer coaching and teacher evaluation, the role of principals, long-term training for peer coaches, formative evaluation of the project and peer coaches, and methods of communicating the purpose, goals and methods of the project to all levels of the district and to the public that the school system serves.

Although the pilot project at Fort McMurray has clearly succeeded in easing the difficulties experienced by beginning teachers during the transition from university training to full-time teaching, data from the project also suggest that peer coaching has not yet realized its fullest potential. Difficult decisions will now have to be made to determine future directions for peer coaching at Fort McMurray and the role the project will play in instructional leadership.

### C. Commendations

Growing out of the analysis and interpretation of the data is a recognition that participants in the Peer Coaching Project have demonstrated success in a number of key areas. Individuals and groups at all levels of the Fort McMurray Catholic School systems have contributed to the success of the project and are deserving of commendations.

(i) To the Board and Central Office Personnel

The school board, Mr. Gerry Heck, the Superintendent of Schools, and the other central office personnel are to be commended for their financial and moral support of this innovative and most worthwhile pilot project. Such innovations place the Fort McMurray Catholic School District in a position of leadership in the areas of professional development and demonstrated concern for quality instruction in the province of Alberta.

Mrs. Kathleen Murphy-House must be singled out for commendation as the coordinator of the Peer Coaching Project. As staff development coordinator for the school district, Mrs. Murphy-House became a "peer coach" to the peer coaches. Many of the peer coaches indicated that they found her support most important in the mentorship process. Once again, the most vital form of assistance given was "emotional support." One peer coach said that Mrs. Murphy-House "gave me the encouragement and confidence I needed to make my first classroom visit. I always knew she would be willing to discuss in confidence any concerns I had."

Mrs. Murphy-House remained informed about progress made in each school, and was aware of the strengths of each beginning teacher and of each peer coach. She was responsible for facilitating the training workshops for the peer coaches, and brought the peer coaches together

periodically to check perceptions about the project and share successes and concerns.

(ii) To the Peer Coaches

The peer coaches are to be commended for the professional and conscientious manner in which they undertook the job of mentor. Without exception, the peer coaches demonstrated real concern for the beginning teachers with whom they worked. Judging by the comments made by the beginning teachers, the peer coaches had very real and positive impacts on the first year teachers with whom they worked.

The peer coaches were willing to share anything at their disposal to provide assistance and direction to their proteges. This sharing included materials and resources, units, planning ideas, teaching strategies, personal experiences, and most importantly, it included the sharing of time.

The role of peer coach carries with it a number of extrinsic rewards such as improved teaching by the peer coach, and enhance status among colleague. As well, there are several intrinsic rewards including the feeling of satisfaction derived from helping colleagues and from seeing one's suggestions implemented for improvement. However, regardless of the rewards, peer coaches still often "went the extra mile," spending extraordinary amounts of time with

struggling novice teachers at critical points during the school year.

The peer coaches are also to be commended for the support and concern they expressed during the study for the future of the peer coaching project. All but three of the peer coaches are leaving the Fort McMurray Catholic school system next year for a variety of reasons, including maternity leaves, transfers of spouses to other communities, and job opportunities elsewhere. However, every peer coach stated most emphatically that this innovative program is needed and must continue. They were also most open in sharing experiences as peer coaches, and in suggesting meaningful ways to improve the program in the future.

### (iii) To the Beginning Teachers

The first year teachers who participated in the Peer Coaching Project are to be commended for their openness, and willingness to seek assistance. It is not an easy task during one's induction year to seek assistance or advice while still desiring to make a positive impression on one's colleagues and superiors. Successful peer coaching requires novice teachers who have a strong desire to become excellent classroom instructors, and who recognize that professional development is enhanced through a collegial approach to improving one's teaching skills. It should also be noted that five peer coaches described ways in which the beginning

teachers helped them to improve instruction, and reminded them of specific pedagogical concepts which they had not consciously addressed for many years.

#### D. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been formulated from the study. They are intended to address concerns expressed by participants in the peer coaching pilot project and to rectify deficiencies in practice as observed and noted by the researcher. It is anticipated that by addressing these recommendations, the peer coaching project and the peer coaches in the Fort McMurray Catholic Schools will continue to improve the types of assistance provided to beginning teachers throughout the district.

(1) Continuation of Peer Coaching. Undoubtedly, the most significant recommendation is that the school board and the school district continue to provide peer coaching on an on-going basis. Such innovations are greatly needed in every school jurisdiction in the province, but the need is considerably more acute in school districts such as Fort McMurray where there is historically a low teacher retention rate. In other words, due to the tremendous number of beginning teachers being employed by this school system each year, peer coaching is greatly needed.

In order to work more effectively in the area of instructional improvement, the peer coaching project may

have to be extended to include work with teachers in their second year with the system. The goals of the first year would be making the transition to teaching more positive, while in the second year the objective would be to focus improved instruction.

Furthermore, the peer coaching project is most appropriate for this school system given the Fort McMurray Catholic Schools District Priorities, which include continuing to examine and implement innovative practices to make this system a good one in which to work. Peer coaching certainly contributes to such an important goal.

(2) Long Term Peer Coaching Plan. It is important that the superintendent of schools, the coordinator of the peer coaching project, and the peer coaches collaboratively develop a long term plan for the continuation of the project. A statement of purpose, methods, expectations, and integration into the existing school system and the relationship of peer coaching to teacher evaluation and the relationship of principals to peer coaching is needed. It is also recommended that the long term plan include an ongoing training program for the peer coaches. This plan must also outline methods for continuous or formative evaluation of the project. The project needs a statement of vision to provide guidance over the coming years.

(3) Communication to Decision Makers. It is also recommended that the district coordinator of the peer

coaching project (Mrs. Murphy-House) make quarterly reports of the peer coaching project to principals at the regularly scheduled principal meetings. In addition, it is recommended that she make a bi-annual report to the school board in addition to maintaining the current practice of keeping the superintendent informed. It is important that all administrators and decision makers in the district be continually informed about progress and concerns regarding this project. Peer coaches should meet periodically with their respective principals to keep the school administrators informed of their successes, needs and objectives while respecting and maintaining the guarantees of confidentiality between peer coaches and beginning teachers.

(4) Visibility of Peer Coaches. It is recommended that the peer coaches have higher visibility within the school district. They should make a presentation at one of the principal meetings during the school year to inform the senior administrators of the strategies, innovations, successes and difficulties being experienced.

(5) Teacher Orientation. It is recommended that the peer coaches be active participants in the teacher orientation which takes place in late August. In this regard, the peer coaches should conduct at least one session for the beginning teachers on the peer coaching project, telling them what to expect from the first year of teaching,

and what types of assistance they can expect from their respective peer coaches.

The peer coaches should attend all other sessions of the orientation with their beginning teachers in order to initiate the mentorship process, and to assist these inductees in interpreting and prioritizing the vast amounts of information given at this time.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the school district consider alternative means of supplying some of the information which lacks immediacy, which has been distributed at the orientation. Perhaps some of this material could be given to the peer coaches to be released throughout the school year as needs arise and time permits.

The orientation period should also include an in school orientation for each beginning teacher of at least one half day, spent with the peer coaches locating materials, setting up classrooms, and reviewing school procedures and routines. The orientation workshops scheduled throughout September after school were well received, but the timing was somewhat ill-conceived in that September is a terribly stressful month for beginning teachers. Consideration might be given to re-scheduling some of these sessions until later in the school year.

(6) Long Range Plans. It is recommended that the school district reconsider its expectations of the first year teachers regarding the submission of long range plans early



in the school year. While long range planning is a necessary component of effective teaching, and provides an effective means of ensuring that the prescribed curriculum is being implemented, alternatives could be considered for the novice teachers. These teachers lack the experience to do this well. The result is that this project creates a great deal of stress on the first year teachers.

The district now has abundant examples of excellent long range plans for every course and grade level offered. It would be of great value to all teachers if these plans could be compiled into grade level and/or subject binders and circulated throughout the system. Teachers should be encouraged to glean planning ideas from their colleagues. At the end of the year, first year teachers would be in a better position to prepare amended long range plans developed or derived from those supplied by the district. These could then be amended further for future years. Such an approach would help to alleviate some of the stress produced by current practice and expectations and would still meet the district and school goals regarding implementation of curricula.

(7) Peer Coach Training. In the area of training for the peer coaches it is recommended first that initial training occur during the month of June to allow the peer coaches to do some planning during the summer and to begin the mentorship process when the beginning teachers arrive in

late summer. Such a scheduling of the initial training session would also provide the opportunity for peer coaches to practice observation and conferencing skills within the group of peer coaches and in their schools prior to summer holidays.

In addition, it is highly recommended that the peer coaches who remain in the school system and continue their participation in the program become peer coaches to the peer coaches and participate in the training sessions for their colleagues. Furthermore, over time, the district could almost certainly make better use of local resource people to supplement external trainers.

(8) Release Time for Peer Coaching. While the release time given to peer coaches was greatly appreciated them, there were some difficulties related to release time which need to be addressed. First, the release time should be provided in a manner which provides more flexibility. Some peer coaches were greatly restricted in that they could only observe the same class every other week. The provision of substitutes must allow teachers to vary the days of the week and the times of the day in which they are released.

It is also recommended that some release time be integrated into the timetable in order to avoid the need for a great number of substitute days. Furthermore, due to the tremendously demanding working schedule of the beginning teachers, consideration should be given to

providing release time to the beginning teachers (as well as the peer coaches) at the same time, periodically, to accommodate collaborative work and conferencing during the work day.

Release time should also be provided with the knowledge that if more time is provided during the first two months of the school year less time may be needed later. It is also recommended that school based administrators, including principals and vice principals be encouraged to demonstrate their support for the peer coaching project by periodically offering to cover classes for the beginning teachers and/or peer coaches to accommodate some of the work being done during particularly stressful times of the year. Such gestures would greatly strengthen staff morale and might serve to enhance the administrators' credibility, in that they would be seen as teachers and colleagues as well as administrators.

(9) Development of Support Groups. It is recommended that the coordinator of the Peer Coaching project facilitate periodic informal gatherings for peer coaches to share successes, concerns, strategies, methods, and anecdotes. Such gatherings would in provide a mechanism for support of the mentorship process and those directly responsible for it. It may be desirable to include the beginning teachers in some of these sessions. It is also recommended that consideration be given to the establishment of similar peer

support groups exclusively for beginning teachers. Since the numbers may be prohibitive on a district level, this may be best done at the school level or preferably at the grade level and subject level to accommodate mutual sharing and some socialization with peers.

(10) Ratio of Beginning Teachers to Peer Coaches. All peer coaches agreed that the optimum number of beginning teachers per peer coach was three. This number is large enough to accommodate some comparative work and some collaborative work but is not so large as to inhibit effective peer coaching for all beginning teachers. If numbers rise above five first year teachers per peer coach, effectiveness will most likely be limited by time available for the work.

It is also highly recommended that efforts be undertaken at all administrative levels to encourage every school to have at least one peer coach on staff in addition to administrators who may choose or be assigned to work on formative evaluation processes with teachers.

(11) Compatibility of Peer Coaches and Beginning Teachers. The most obvious obstacle to effective peer coaching observed during the study was created by language barriers. The assignment of unilingual English peer coaches to unilingual French teachers is a contradiction in terms. Peer coaching is by definition based upon effective communication. Therefore, it is recommended that French

immersion peer coaches be identified to work with the French teachers in their respective programs. It is further recommended that consideration be given to other forms of compatibility. For example, in junior and senior high school peer coach assistants could be identified who will work only in particular curriculum areas to assist in specialized subjects. Similarly, peer coach grade level assistants might be identified to provide some needed assistance to peer coaches whose beginning teachers have assignments outside their areas of expertise such as E.C.S. or grade one.

(12) Role of Supervision Cycles for Instructional Improvement. It is clear from the literature and from the experiences of the project participants this year that the most immediate needs of beginning teachers during the first two months of the school year are in the areas of "survival skills," such as finding resources, getting classrooms set up and routines established, and "emotional support," including encouragement, counsel, someone to speak with and positive feedback. However, while each peer coaching situation is unique, it is recommended that peer coaches establish a tentative time line for the year's work to begin classroom observation cycles at least by November.

It is also recommended that these supervision cycles be reciprocal, so that there will be occasions when peer coaches will conduct "demonstration lessons" and the inductees become the observer, and other times when peer

coaches will act as peer supervisors. It is also advisable that the peer coaches use some of their time to provide release time to the beginning teachers to allow them to observe other colleagues not yet involved with the peer coaching project.

(13) Feedback for the Peer Coaches. It is recommended that the peer coaches develop mechanisms to gather reactions, perceptions and other feedback from the beginning teachers periodically throughout the school year. This perception check may take a variety of forms, including surveys, conferences, informal evaluations by a third party such as a trusted third colleague or administrator, or a combination of some of the above. Such periodic checks can be useful self evaluations, and may lead to work in areas or approaches not yet considered by the peer coach.

(14) Providing Assistance to Teachers Hired After September 1st. It is recommended that teachers hired after the school year has commenced, be provided sufficient orientation to the peer coaching program so that the purposes, procedures and personnel are adequately introduced to the new staff members. This could be done most adequately through the combined efforts of the staff development coordinator, the principal of the school to which the new teacher is being assigned, and the new teacher's peer coach.

(15) Social Needs of Beginning Teachers Not Addressed by Peer Coaching. Because of the uniqueness and relative

isolation of the community of Fort McMurray coupled with the predictable stress of the first year of teaching, novice teachers in this school system have needs which go beyond what can be reasonably expected of peer coaches. Therefore, it is recommended that the school system develop mechanisms to assist first year teachers to make a smooth transition to the community as well as to the school system and the teaching profession.

(16) Recognition of Peer Coaches. It is recommended that a small portion of the peer coaching budget be used for a social gathering to recognize the efforts of the peer coaches at the end of each year. This might be accomplished through a year-end banquet or luncheon for the peer coaches at which time they might be presented with letters of commendation from the superintendent or project coordinator. It is also recommended that all peer coaches receive recognition by the district at the annual "Excellence in Education Awards."

#### VIII. SUMMARY

This study has resulted in a number of important conclusions. First, the data analysis indicates that the Fort McMurray Peer Coaching Pilot Project confirms current literature in a number of ways. The literature is quite clear and consistent in its description of the needs and difficulties of beginning teachers. The description of the

first year of teaching and the types of concerns most frequently reported by beginning teachers in recent educational research are virtually identical to the concerns expressed by the inductees from Fort McMurray. These findings were corroborated further by the peer coaches.

A second aspect of the literature confirmed by this study is the fact that peer coaching does indeed have most positive consequences for novice teachers as they make the transition from university training to full time teaching. Innovative programs of peer coaching or mentorship are clearly beneficial.

Furthermore, such innovative programs of professional development and support carry numerous extrinsic and intrinsic benefits, not only to the first year teachers, but also to the peer coaches, the school staffs and the entire school district.

While the confirmation of current literature on the subject of peer coaching is important, this study attempted to go beyond merely determining the efficacy of peer coaching to determine the nature of effective mentorship programs and processes, and to identify deficiencies in current peer coaching practice in order to provide recommendations for improvement.

The nature of effective peer coaching can be summarized in a single word: "trust." Without exception, the peer coaches and beginning teachers indicated that the single



most important aspect of the peer coaching program which made meaningful assistance possible was the establishment and maintenance of a trust relationship between the peer coach and the first year teachers. Such a relationship requires a conscious effort by those involved to develop sincere concern for the success of their colleagues, and a willingness to be open, honest, and sharing. Such a relationship also requires time to become firmly established.

Commentary on the area of deficiencies of current practice must be preceded with the statement that there were far more successful practices observed than areas of concern. It must be noted that in general, the peer coaches did a most commendable job, and have succeeded in meeting and surpassing the expectations placed upon them by the Fort McMurray Catholic School District. However, there were a number of practices which were obviously intended to provide assistance and support to beginning teachers, which in fact added to the stress of the first year. Included in this regard were certain aspects of the teacher orientation program, and the expectation for long term plans to be submitted in September.

As the peer coaches gained confidence and skill in teacher mentorship, they were able to identify a number of obstacles to effective peer coaching, which formed the basis for most of the recommendations for change.

This study confirms that teacher mentorship or peer coaching is a most vital means of providing greatly needed support and assistance to beginning teachers in the process of induction into the teaching profession. The Fort McMurray Catholic School board, central office personnel, and especially the team of peer coaches are to be commended for their demonstrated concern and meaningful action taken to enhance the professional development of beginning teachers.

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PEER COACHING TEACHER SURVEY (Appendix B-1)

INSTRUCTIONS: Please take time to respond to each of the questions. Feel free to add extended written responses to clarify or to expand upon your answers. The survey should be completed anonymously. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is your age and gender? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What degree(s)/diploma(s) do you hold? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did you choose to teach at Ft. McMurray? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. For how long have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you plan to remain at Ft. McMurray:  
\_\_\_\_ a) this year only.  
\_\_\_\_ b) for one or two years  
\_\_\_\_ c) until a "better" position is available  
\_\_\_\_ d) indefinitely
6. Why did you decide to become a teacher? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your current teaching assignment? (grades, subjects, co-curricular, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What aspects of your job give you the greatest sense of satisfaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What aspects of your job cause you the greatest amount of concern or dissatisfaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What are your long-term career goals? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PART II: PEER COACHING

(Appendix B-2)

1. What were your expectations for the first year of teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. In what ways have these expectations been met, and in what ways have they been changed? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. In which areas has your peer coach provided assistance? (Please check the points which apply and feel free to add detail, examples or comments to any of the points)

\_\_\_\_socialization to the city

\_\_\_\_socialization to the school district and the school

\_\_\_\_assistance in getting the school year started

\_\_\_\_assistance in classroom management/control/discipline

\_\_\_\_teaching strategies

\_\_\_\_unit/course planning

\_\_\_\_lesson planning

\_\_\_\_identifying resources

\_\_\_\_student evaluation

\_\_\_\_development of teaching philosophy

\_\_\_\_emotional support/encouragement

\_\_\_\_modeling of teacher excellence

\_\_\_\_understanding school and district expectations

\_\_\_\_coping with teacher workload

\_\_\_\_dealing with parents

\_\_\_\_developing collegial relationships

\_\_\_\_establishing realistic teacher performance expectations

\_\_\_\_others???



(Appendix B-3)

4. What form(s) have the peer coaches assistance taken? (informal discussions, structured interviews, classroom observations, demonstration lessons, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you satisfied with the amount of assistance you have received from your peer coach? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. In what ways could your peer coach be of further/better assistance? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Was the peer coaching project adequately explained to you when you started this year? Please describe/explain. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What are the characteristics of an effective peer coach and of a positive teacher-peer coach relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Please describe the relationship that exists between you and your peer coach. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What could be done to improve the peer coaching project by

a) central office \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) school administration \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c) peer coach(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d) beginning teacher(s) \_\_\_\_\_

11. What is your evaluation of the peer coaching project?

TEACHER SURVEY (Appendix B-4)

INSTRUCTIONS: Please take time to respond to each of the questions. Feel free to add extended written responses to clarify or to expand upon your answers. The survey should be completed anonymously. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is your age and gender? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What degree(s)/diploma(s) do you hold? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Why did you choose to teach at Ft. McMurray? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. For how long have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you plan to remain at Ft. McMurray:

\_\_\_\_\_ a) this year only.

\_\_\_\_\_ b) for one or two years

\_\_\_\_\_ c) until a "better" position is available

\_\_\_\_\_ d) indefinitely

6. Why did you decide to become a teacher? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What is your current teaching assignment? (grades, subjects, co-curricular, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What aspects of your job give you the greatest sense of satisfaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What aspects of your job cause you the greatest amount of concern or dissatisfaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What are your long-term career goals? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PART II

(Appendix B-5)

1. What were your expectations for the first year of teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. In what ways have these expectations been met, and in what ways have they been changed? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Please write "yes" to any of the following areas in which you have received assistance from colleagues, write "no" to any for which you did not, but wish you had received help, and write "N/A" for those items for which you did not need assistance.

- \_\_\_\_\_socialization to the school district and the school
- \_\_\_\_\_assistance in getting the school year started
- \_\_\_\_\_assistance in classroom management/control/discipline
- \_\_\_\_\_teaching strategies
- \_\_\_\_\_unit/course planning
- \_\_\_\_\_lesson planning
- \_\_\_\_\_identifying resources
- \_\_\_\_\_student evaluation
- \_\_\_\_\_development of teaching philosophy
- \_\_\_\_\_emotional support/encouragement
- \_\_\_\_\_modeling of teacher excellence
- \_\_\_\_\_understanding school and district expectations
- \_\_\_\_\_coping with teacher workload
- \_\_\_\_\_dealing with parents
- \_\_\_\_\_developing collegial relationships
- \_\_\_\_\_establishing realistic teacher performance expectations
- \_\_\_\_\_others???

PEER COACHING TEACHER SURVEY (Appendix B-6)

INSTRUCTIONS: Please take time to respond to each of the questions. Feel free to add extended written responses to clarify or to expand upon your answers. The survey should be completed anonymously. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is your age and gender? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What degree(s)/diploma(s) do you hold? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Why did you choose to teach at Ft. McMurray? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. For how long have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you plan to remain at Ft. McMurray:

\_\_\_\_\_ a) this year only.

\_\_\_\_\_ b) for one or two years

\_\_\_\_\_ c) until a "better" position is available

\_\_\_\_\_ d) indefinitely

6. Why did you decide to become a teacher? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What is your current teaching assignment? (grades, subjects, co-curricular, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What aspects of your job give you the greatest sense of satisfaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What aspects of your job cause you the greatest amount of concern or dissatisfaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What are your long-term career goals? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PART II: PEER COACHING

(Appendix B-7)

1. What types of guidance and training did you receive to assist in your role as peer coach? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What additional guidance or training would be beneficial to you now or to future peer coaches? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How well were the district expectations of you as a peer coach communicated to you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. In which areas have you as a peer coach provided assistance? (Please check the points which apply and feel free to add detail, examples or comments to any of the points)

- \_\_\_\_\_socialization to the city
- \_\_\_\_\_socialization to the school district and the school
- \_\_\_\_\_assistance in getting the school year started
- \_\_\_\_\_assistance in classroom management/control/discipline
- \_\_\_\_\_teaching strategies
- \_\_\_\_\_unit/course planning
- \_\_\_\_\_lesson planning
- \_\_\_\_\_identifying resources
- \_\_\_\_\_student evaluation
- \_\_\_\_\_development of teaching philosophy
- \_\_\_\_\_emotional support/encouragement
- \_\_\_\_\_modeling of teacher excellence
- \_\_\_\_\_understanding school and district expectations
- \_\_\_\_\_coping with teacher workload
- \_\_\_\_\_dealing with parents
- \_\_\_\_\_developing collegial relationships
- \_\_\_\_\_establishing realistic teacher performance expectations

(Appendix B-8)

5. What form(s) have the peer coaching assistance taken? (informal discussions, structured interviews, classroom observations, demonstration lessons, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Are you satisfied with the amount of assistance you have been able to give as a peer coach? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. In what ways could you as peer coach have been of further/better assistance to your assigned teachers? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What are the characteristics of an effective peer coach and of a positive teacher-peer coach relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Please describe the relationship that exists between you and the teachers with whom you work. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What could be done to improve the peer coaching project by

a) central office \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) school administration \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c) peer coach(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d) beginning teacher(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What is your general evaluation of the peer coaching project? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Appendix B-9)

12. As a peer coach, please describe your feelings about the program. What successes and frustrations or difficulties have you experienced as a peer coach? What concerns do you have with the project in general, with your role, preparation and support you have been given? How could the project have been improved this year, and what can be done in the future? What other needs or forms of assistance do first year teachers need? Please feel free to make any additional comments as well.

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PEER COACHING TEACHER SURVEY (Appendix C-1)

INSTRUCTIONS: Please take time to respond to each of the following questions. Feel free to add extended answers to clarify or to expand upon your responses. Please also add any additional suggestions, comments, accolades or concerns which might be useful to this study of the peer coaching pilot project.

1. As a peer coach, what training/in-service needs do you have which would make you more effective in this role? Please check and give examples or details.

- conferencing skills
- development and use of a variety of observation instruments
- classroom observation skills
- data gathering skills
- data display skills/writing and communicating observations
- identifying criteria for effective teaching
- development of long term peer coaching plan
- understanding the concerns and difficulties of beginning teachers
- others???

2. How could the release time given to you as a peer coach be more useful or effective? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. How could the district orientation for new teachers be made more effective? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What role could peer coaches play in this orientation? \_\_\_\_\_

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(Appendix C-2)

5. What is the most desirable and most realistic ratio of beginning teachers per peer coaches? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. In what ways should the peer coaching program be modified in future years? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. In what ways did you as a peer coach provide the most significant assistance to the beginning teachers with whom you worked? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. In what ways could you have been of more use to the beginning teachers, or in what ways will you be of more use in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. In what ways could administrators in your school and/or in the district provide more assistance or support to you and/or to the beginning teachers? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Please describe what you would envision to be the future of peer coaching in your school district. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What are the effects of peer coaching for beginning teachers, the peer coaches, and for the school and school district?

a) for beginning teachers: \_\_\_\_\_

b) for peer coaches: \_\_\_\_\_

c) for school/district: \_\_\_\_\_

PEER COACHING SURVEY (Appendix C-3)  
FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

INSTRUCTIONS: Please take time to respond to each of the following questions. Feel free to add extended answers to clarify or to expand upon your responses. Please also add any additional suggestions, comments, accolades or concerns which might be useful to this study of the peer coaching pilot project.

1. Please list and describe the specific ways or areas in which your peer coach was of assistance to you as a beginning teacher throughout the year. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. List and describe any of your needs as a beginning teacher, and as a teacher new to this district which were not addressed by the peer coaching project. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. List and describe the areas related to your teaching which you wish to improve upon in the future and in which a colleague such as a peer coach could be of assistance. \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Describe how the district teacher orientation could be improved in the future. \_\_\_\_\_

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5. In what ways could the peer coaching program be modified to be more effective in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

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PARTICIPANT RELEASE FORM (Appendix D-1)

You have been selected to participate in a study of the Teacher Mentorship and Peer Coaching Project which was initiated in the Fort McMurray Catholic School System this year. The focus of the study will be the activities, successes, needs and concerns of the peer coaches. The study is intended to describe the feelings, thoughts and actions of teachers regarding the pilot project.

During this school year you will be asked to complete a written survey during February, and to participate in a structured interview in late April. The data collected will be confidential, and will not be used or related to your evaluation as a teacher. The major intent of the study is to describe you thoughts, feelings and actions about the peer coaching project and possible reasons for them. The study is evaluative in that it is designed to provide the school district with information regarding the participants' perceptions about the effectiveness of the program, concerns with it, and the needs of the participants.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, the information you have provided will be eliminated from the research.

Should you have any questions now or throughout the study, please contact David George at 381-6594.

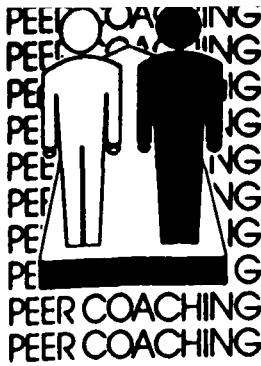
\_\_\_\_\_  
David George,  
Graduate Student,  
University of Lethbridge

-----  
My signature below signifies that I am willing to participate in the study described above. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time. I understand the purpose of the research project, the methods to be used. I am also aware that all data disclosed is confidential, and that data will not be used in my teacher evaluation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
School, school phone no.



(Appendix E-1)

## PEER COACHING PILOT PROGRAM

is

looking for master teachers who are interested  
in being trained to serve as mentors/coaches.

"Mentoring is the process by which a trusted and experienced person takes a personal and direct interest in the development and education of fellow teachers."

If you are interested in this pilot position, here are the application requirements to follow:

### Preferred Background Training

1. Classroom Management Skills
2. Motivation Techniques
3. Blooms Taxonomy
4. Lesson design
5. Objective Writing and Task Analyzing

### Training Timeframe

- 2-day training workshop - August 29 & 30, 1988;
- follow-up training workshops. Bi-monthly (release time)
- on site training with Peer Coaching Coordinator

### How to Apply:

In the school office you will find the necessary forms for completing an application for a Peer Coaching Position with the Fort McMurray Catholic Schools.

- a) Peer Coaching Application Form - Appendix I
- b) Principal's Recommendation - Appendix II
- c) Peer Coaching Prediction - School Staff Opinion Survey - Appendix III

You are required to submit the names and addresses of three teachers (Appendix IV) with whom you have taught and ask them to complete Appendix III.

**DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS: June 22, 1988.**

Submit to Kathleen Murphy-House, District Office.

FORT MCMURRAY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS  
APPLICATION FOR PEER COACHING APPOINTMENT

(Please Type)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I. PERSONAL DATA:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Present Position: \_\_\_\_\_

II. List below any relevant training or education background (including non-credit courses.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

III. List significant co-curricular or extra-curricular activities in which you have actively participated.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

FORT MCMURRAY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

C O N F I D E N T I A L

PRINCIPAL'S RECOMMENDATION FOR PEER COACHING APPOINTMENT

Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You are asked to assess the above applicant on each of the following items and return this form to:

Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources  
Fort McMurray Catholic Schools  
9809 Main Street  
Fort McMurray, Alberta T9H 1T7

(PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS)

The information provided will be treated in a confidential manner.

- 1. The following criteria have been identified as desirable characteristics of Peer Coaches. Please check the one category which best represents your opinion of the applicant.

The two scales which follow deal with how successfully you think the applicant will provide leadership.

a) In relation to teachers

b) In relation to community

Ability to recognize staff members potential and to motivate staff to actualize this potential

Ability to draw on the resources of the community and its representatives in a way which facilitates the attainment of educational goals.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_

Very Good \_\_\_\_\_

Very Good \_\_\_\_\_

Good \_\_\_\_\_

Good \_\_\_\_\_

Fair \_\_\_\_\_

Fair \_\_\_\_\_

Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

Principal's Recommendation continued

The next four scales provide an opportunity for you to indicate your judgement of the applicant in the areas defined.

c) Communications Skills

Written, verbal, listening, consultative.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

d) Management

Goal setting, decision making, delegating, task completion.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

e) Instructional Competency

Classroom performance, instructional techniques, classroom management, student assessment.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

f) Creativity

Recognizes trends and can adapt to change, forward looking.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

Principal's Recommendation continued

1. How many years has the applicant taught in your school?

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3. Do you recommend this applicant for a Peer Coaching Position?

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4. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being low and 10 high, what overall evaluation would you assign this candidate?

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Principals Signature



FORT MCMURRAY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

C O N F I D E N T I A L

PEER COACHING PREDICTION - SCHOOL STAFF OPINION SURVEY

Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You are asked to assess the above applicant on each of the following items and return this form to:

Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources  
Fort McMurray Catholic Schools  
9809 Main Street  
Fort McMurray, Alberta T9H 1T7

(PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS)

The information provided will be treated in a confidential manner.

- 1. The following criteria have been identified as desirable characteristics of Peer Coaches. Please check the one category which best represents your opinion of the applicant.

The two scales which follow deal with how successfully you think the applicant will provide leadership.

a) In relation to teachers

b) In relation to community

Ability to recognize staff members potential and to motivate staff to actualize this potential

Ability to draw on the resources of the community and its representatives in a way which facilitates the attainment of educational goals.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_

Very Good \_\_\_\_\_

Very Good \_\_\_\_\_

Good \_\_\_\_\_

Good \_\_\_\_\_

Fair \_\_\_\_\_

Fair \_\_\_\_\_

Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

School Staff Opinion Survey continued

The next four scales provide an opportunity for you to indicate your judgement of the applicant in the areas defined.

c) Communications Skills

Written, verbal, listening, consultative.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

d) Management

Goal setting, decision making, delegating, task completion.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

e) Instructional Competency

Classroom performance, instructional techniques, classroom management, student assessment.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

f) Creativity

Recognizes trends and can adapt to change, forward looking.

Excellent \_\_\_\_\_  
Very Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Good \_\_\_\_\_  
Fair \_\_\_\_\_  
Unsatisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

School Staff Opinion Survey continued

2. Do you recommend this applicant for a Peer Coaching Position?

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3. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being low and 10 high, what overall evaluation would you assign this candidate?

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

FORT MCMURRAY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

APPLICATION FOR PEER COACHING APPOINTMENT

PEER COACHING PREDICTION - SCHOOL STAFF OPINION SURVEY

You are required to submit the names and addresses of three teachers with whom you have taught. These teachers will be contacted and asked to comment on your effectiveness as a teacher. Please inform these people you have submitted their names.

NAME OF APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_

	<u>Name of Teacher</u>	<u>Home Address and Postal Code</u>	<u>Present School</u>
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____