

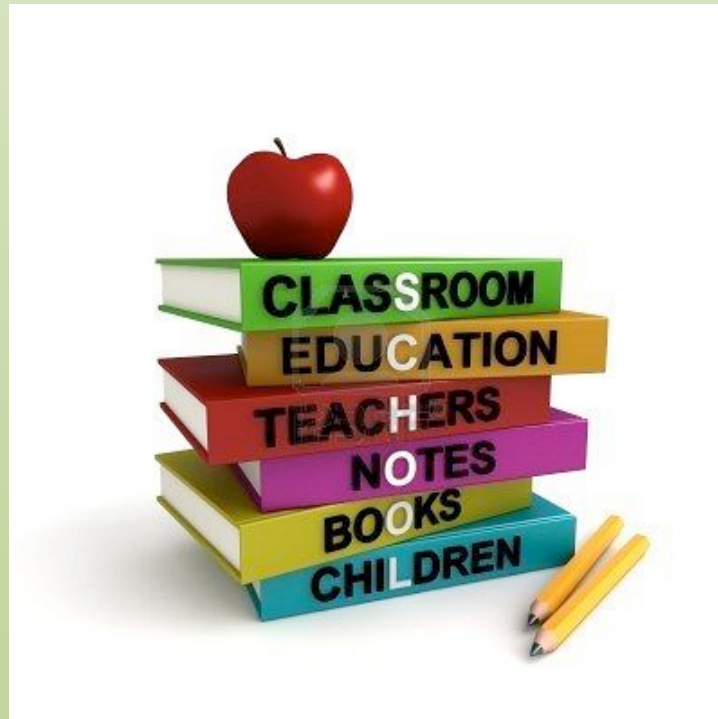
Beginning Teachers Initiative

Rocky View Schools 2012-2013

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Abstract

This action research paper will outline the development, implementation and evaluation of the Beginning Teachers Initiative in Rocky View Schools in Alberta, Canada. This program has evolved over the last three years into a powerful professional learning opportunity for beginning and pre-service teachers. The program aims to build the bridge between university experiences and the practical day-to-day application of teaching and learning theory. Supporting beginning teachers is imperative as schools and classrooms transform into 21st century learning environments. This program allows for tangible and timely support not only at a school level but also at a district level. This paper also looks at how the development of social networks and professional capital in new teachers can lead to powerful learning outcomes not only for the teachers themselves but also for the students they teach.

Introduction

Whenever you ask an educator about the level of support they received in their first few years of teaching, many say that there was little to none. Often, teachers in their formative years were left alone to struggle with the complexities of the classroom. As educators, we intuitively know that without a collaborative and supportive network, beginning teachers are often overwhelmed and frustrated. As Bower (2012) suggests, “Teachers eat their young”. (Bower, *Teachers eat their young*, <http://www.joebower.org/2012/05/teachers-eat-their-young.html>, May 8, 2012) We tend to give the beginning teachers a challenging timetable, challenging students, and make them ‘sink or swim’ with little to no support. Bower comments, “A teacher who is responsible for more than 100 students in a day isn’t really teaching anymore – they’re doing crowd control” (Bower, *Teachers eat their young*, <http://www.joebower.org/2012/05/teachers-eat-their-young.html>, May 8, 2012) These beginning teachers often lose their initial love for teaching and for children. As a result of this neglect, between one third and one half of the teachers, who begin teaching, leave the profession within five years. Granted, there ~~potentially~~ could be other factors that influence the decision to leave like higher paying opportunities elsewhere but how many potentially good teachers are leaving because they were simply left to struggle on their own?

Intuitively, as educators, we know there is a problem in continuing with this lack of support for beginning teachers. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest, “Teaching is at a crossroads: a crossroads at the top of the world. Never before have teachers, teaching, and the future of teaching had such elevated importance. There is widespread agreement now that of all the factors that affect children’s learning and achievement, the most important is the teacher – not standards, assessments, resources, or even the school’s leadership, but the quality of the teacher.” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, Teachers College, Columbia University, p. xii) It only stands to reason then, that the support we give to teachers will transform student learning: the stronger the teacher, the stronger student learning.

Rocky View Schools (RVS) has been a leader in supporting teachers’ and administrators’ professional learning. In 2010, Springbank Community High School set about supporting the beginning teachers within the school with direct mentoring from various staff members including teachers and administration. As a result of this effort the Beginning Teachers Initiative was founded in 2011, where school-based mentoring and division-wide coaching was centralized into one Community of Practice. This Community of Practice was created informally initially to provide a space where beginning teachers could collaborate and commiserate in an evaluation-free environment. Guided by a veteran teacher, the beginning teachers began to make sense of their classroom experience and offer greater learning opportunities for their students. A [Beginning Teachers](#) website was created as a one-stop-shop for a variety of resources allowing the beginning teachers a quick reference guide to many of the ideas that are discussed in their schools and classrooms. As well, through the course of the year, this group quickly bonded into a tight knit cohort and have been providing support to each other through their second year.

In 2012-2013, the program developed further. Beyond the regular three Community of Practice days set by the school jurisdiction, we expanded the program to seven sessions in total. This allowed the beginning teachers to meet on a more regular basis, typically once a month following the school calendar. Not only is the initiative structured to provide beginning teachers with the foundational knowledge of teaching in the 21st century and Rocky View Schools but we also had two dedicated teacher coaches,

one with an elementary focus and one with a middle/high school focus. These coaches met the teachers at their schools and in their classrooms on an on-going basis. These coaches were not in an evaluative role. They provided support and coaching to the new teachers in their classrooms.

The goal of the Beginning Teachers Initiative research is to provide tangible support to the new teachers in Rocky View Schools. The objective is to measure whether supporting new teachers, through learning and coaching, can create the conditions where the beginning teacher feels supported, where the retention rate of beginning teachers is high, and where beginning teachers create positive learning environments. One thing is for certain; happy teachers make happy students and with that comes greater student learning. Ultimately as educators, this is our goal.

1. Research Questions

- What is the best practice in supporting beginning teachers?
- How will we know if the Beginning Teachers Initiative has added value to the teacher, student, and Rocky View Schools?

2. Beginning Teachers Initiative Program and Process

Seven collaborative sessions were planned for the 2012-2013 school year. RVS supported the beginning teachers by providing substitute teachers for the sessions outside the regular Community of Practice professional learning days. Figure 1 outlines the agenda for this Community of Practice.

Date/Time	Location	Agenda Items
Friday Sept. 14: 9:00-2:00	Springbank Community High School (Learning Commons)	Orientation: - Introduction to Beginning Teachers website (www.beginningteachers.net), twitter #rvsnewteacher, RVS blog, discussion board, Remind 101 - Professional Code of Conduct - RVS Learning Model Speakers: Human Resources (Pat), Learning (Manny), 21 st Century in RVS (Dave), Literacy Coach (Melanie)
Fri. Oct. 5: 8:30-2:00	Springbank Community High School (Rm 312)	Marzano's Protocol Planning: UbD Action Research: teacher as researcher
Mon. Nov. 12: 4:30-7:00	Springbank Community High School (Rm 312)	Learning Support (Greg/Rob) Social/Emotional Support (Chris P.)
Mon. Dec. 3: 8:30-3:30	Springbank Community High School (Rm 312)	UbD planning Finding Evidence
Thurs. Mar. 14: 1:00-4:00	Rocky View Education Centre (Airdire)	Inquiry (Barry/Josh)
Mon Apr. 8: 8:30-3:30	Springbank Community High School (Rm 312)	Emotional Intelligence/ Personality Dimensions (Tracy) Administration (Leslie)
Thurs. May 16: 4:30-7:00	Rocky View Education Centre (Airdrie)	Diversity (Theresa Cardinal) Celebrating Success Final Reflections

Figure 1: Agenda for Beginning Teachers' Initiative 2012-2013

Through each of these sessions, we aimed to build the capacity of these beginning teachers. All of the fears and anxieties of organizing, managing, designing, implementing and evaluating their respective teaching programs, we talked about together. We collaborated, worked through problems, gave each other the support needed. Each session added to the learning of the previous and in turn, added to the teaching and learning in their various classrooms. The Beginning Teachers' Initiative was carefully designed so each piece built on the last and was timely in the cycle of a school year.

3. Background Information

As we begin to develop schools with a 21st century focus on collaboration, one of the important areas is networking. With new teachers to a school division or beginning teachers, many lack the social network that supports their professional growth. In many

cases, this lack of support creates tension and isolation. Teaching (and learning for that matter) is collaborative in nature and without these social ties, can be an overwhelming task. In part, this can be linked to social network theory and the development of human and social capital. Essentially, a beginning teacher will have strong social ties to some colleagues and weaker social ties to others.

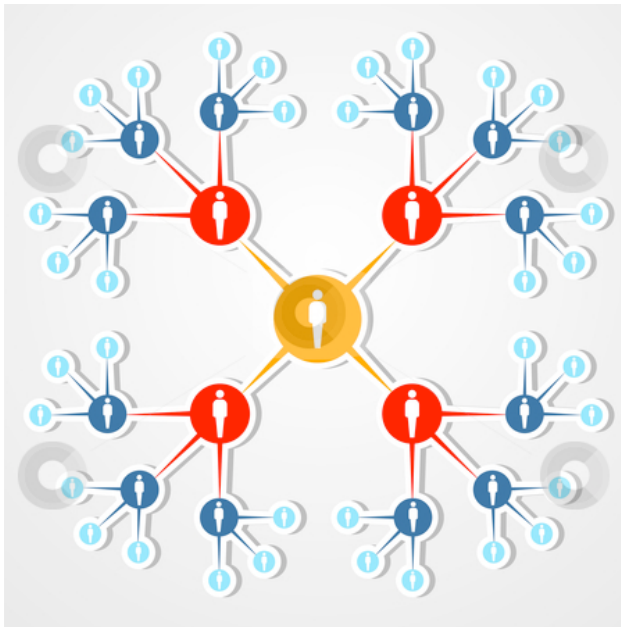


Figure 2: Picture retrieved July 13, 2013 from <http://cutcaster.com/photo/801073107-Social-web-network-marketing-diagram/>

If we look at Figure 2, we can see the power of social networks in teaching and learning. In the centre, lies the student. Student learning indeed, must be the centre of all that we do in education. Circling the student is the beginning teachers. Each serves to support student learning. But the key to this idea is that not only each beginning teacher is also supported by each other, but also mentors, coaches, peers and administrators. If we can create a strong network or web of support, where all work together collaboratively increased student learning will be achieved.

In another way, Figure 2 could be viewed with the beginning teacher at the centre of the network. The close ties are with other beginning teachers, and colleagues. The next layer would consist of other teachers in departments or grade level teams and the third layer consisting of mentors, coaches and/or other educational professionals like administrators or learning specialists at a divisional level. Whichever way you look at the

interactive and supportive web, each teacher or student is supported in their learning at a variety of levels and through a variety of means.

This also can be linked to the development of what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest is professional capital. The investment in developing and supporting teachers will reap the benefit of increased student learning and greater capacity among all teachers. This is not isolated however to just between teachers or between teachers and students. “If we need much more social capital within our schools – colleague to colleague, peer to peer – we need this just as much across and between our schools. Professional capital as human capital plus social capital is therefore a personal thing, a within-school thing, and a whole system thing.” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 5)

It is vital for new and beginning teachers to start strong. They therefore then must be provided the opportunity to create these strong and weak social ties early in their first year. By creating a formal supportive network in a school and school division, these ties are more easily produced.

Beginning teachers come to the profession from a variety of backgrounds and experiences with their own schooling. Some have entered teaching with an idyllic view of classroom practice. They may have been inspired by a teacher in their own childhood, a Hollywood movie, or simply because they feel they can make a difference. However, when they face the reality of their own classroom with their own students, they can become quickly overwhelmed. In *Workplaces That Support High-Performing Teaching and Learning: Insights from Generation Y Teachers*, the authors suggest there are five facets to a high-performing workplace. They include: Frequent feedback on effectiveness, high quality evaluation, effective instruction technology, differentiated support, and collaborative and shared practice. (Coggshall, J.G., et al, April 2011, *Workplaces That Support High-Performing Teaching and Learning: Insights from Generation Y Teachers: A Report from the American Federation of Teachers and American Institutes for Research*, p. 3) By creating a learning space where beginning teachers can come together to collaborate and share their practice is vital to building their teaching capacity. They note, “...[this is] the most powerful thing that policymakers and others can do is to support teachers’ ability to be effective with their students.” (Coggshall et al, 2009, p.19 as cited in Coggshall, J.G., et.al, April 2011, *Workplaces That Support High-Performing*

Teaching and Learning: Insights from Generation Y Teachers: A Report from the American Federation of Teachers and American Institutes for Research, p. 7) If we can create, as school leaders, the conditions for beginning teachers to feel supported in their own professional learning and practice, student learning will benefit, as will the profession itself.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Through the year, data was collected using a variety of methodologies. The quantitative data was gathered through attendance at the various sessions, the number of visits to the Beginning Teachers Initiative website, and retention levels through the Rocky View Schools Human Resources department. Also qualitative data was collected regularly through participants' reflections on each of the seven sessions and a final reflection for the 2012-2013 school year.

Attendance at each of the sessions was good. For each of the Community of Practice days, attendance was 100%. For those days outside the formal professional learning days, attendance was lower yet still acceptable at between 70 and 100%. This was designed as a voluntary program as there are variances in readiness levels for beginning teachers. Some of the beginning teachers stayed within their school community for their professional learning while others chose to become part of this cohort. In the 2010-2011 school year, we had four participants all in their first year of teaching. In the 2011-2012 school year, we had twelve participants, again all in their first year. By the 2012-2013 school year, we had twenty participants, some in their first year and some that continued with the program into their second year of teaching. We also provided support for pre-service teachers while they were completing their practicum within the school division.

Rocky View Schools is one of the fastest growing school divisions in the province of Alberta and as such, the growth of the number of participants in the program can be attributed to Divisional growth but also to the success and support achieved from this program. We are expecting in the 2013-2014 school year that the participant level will double again.

The [Beginning Teachers website](#) offered the participants a quick reference guide for much of the latest research and promising practices. The website was developed in 2011-2012 using as its base and with permission from Robert Marzano (2007), *The Art and Science of Teaching*. From there, the website has developed into an interactive tool where beginning teachers can connect and discuss relevant issues. It has also been the storage house for the agenda and reflections of each session. The website is maintained regularly. From the data gathered, there has been at least one visitor to the website on a daily basis, and on many days we are getting 30 to 50 “hits”.

The Human Resources department for Rocky View Schools collects data for the acquisition and retention of new and beginning teachers. In 2010-2011, all of the four participants retained their positions with the school division and continue to teach for the school division. In the 2011-2012 school year, all twelve participants also retained their teaching positions. In 2012-2013, of the twenty beginning teachers participating in the Beginning Teachers Initiative, all but one retained a teaching position. One teacher resigned her position by the middle of the year.

The qualitative data reflects the success of the program and the individual and collective learning of the group. Each session provided the participants an opportunity to reflect on their own learning and how that could be transferred into their own practice. As well, a final reflection provided data that spoke to a variety of questions. Each question reflected the desired outcomes of the program itself. It gave the beginning teachers an opportunity to reflect on their own learning and the journey through the first few years of their teaching career. Each of the questions is discussed below along with the reflections from the beginning teachers themselves.

I. Describe one accomplishment you are proud of and why?

Since the first few years of teaching are daunting at best, learning curriculum, program design, evaluation tools, and classroom organization and management, the initial question served as a place for these beginning teachers to reflect on what had really gone right in their first experiences as a teacher. They are insightful in their reflections and

overwhelmingly keyed in on the importance of the relationships they built with their students and their colleagues.

I am proud of the relationships that I developed with my students, and how I was able to use this to connect with them with their learning as well. I have one student in my classroom especially that was a challenge to 'get through to'. He went from not even talking to me or coming into the classroom to playing games, talking and participating in the class. (First year teacher)

I am proud of the deep relationships I have been able to build with my students. It is my hope that when students come into my class that they know that they have at least one person who cares and has their best interest in mind. I have a particular grade nine student who has a "spare" during my grade nine English class and he comes just to hang out. Although you may think he is coming simply to hang out with his friends, which he might, I know that he is having severe problems at home and if he feels comfortable and safe "hanging out" in my class, I feel like I am doing a good thing." (Second year teacher)

After my first year as a substitute participating in the Beginning Teacher Community of Practice I witnessed my peers fears and anxiety facing their first year of teaching. I sat back and nervously waited for my opportunity to have my own class, slightly apprehensive of what I was getting into and worried that my "dream job" may not be what I had expected. Now that I am a year into my own classroom and have experienced some of those same fears and anxieties, I am most proud of the positive outlook and attitude I have been able to maintain. I am still in love with my profession and am grateful for every day I am able to walk into my class of 24 willing and eager faces and explore our learning and their interests together. I think I have accomplished a great feat in the education profession of continuing to be a lifelong learner and not be discouraged by all of the responsibilities it entails." (Second year teacher)

"I am most proud of my work on using inquiry in my classes this year. I was able to participate in developing two inquiry projects through the division. I am proud of the outcome of these projects as I believe they have had, and will have, a great impact on student learning as they require many 21st century learning skills. While working through the process, I feel I have developed professionally and now use inquiry on a more daily basis with my students and not just in a project based setting. I believe I was also able to develop new and stronger working relationships with my colleagues through these projects." (First year teacher)

II. *How have you used Understanding by Design in planning and designing learning experiences for your students?*

One of our focuses for instructional design in Rockyview Schools is using the *Understanding by Design* model. (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005). As a cohort, we were able to help these beginning teachers understand this model and to help them use it in their own practice. Because our beginning teachers come to us from a variety of teacher education programs, we cannot as a school division, be assured that all have the required background and theory we wish to promote. What the Beginning Teachers' Initiative has done is created a common understanding, knowledge, and language of 21st century learning and teaching for all teachers in our school division.

I used Understanding by Design in all my planning, but especially in unit planning. It is helpful to have an idea of what you want the end outcome in knowledge or understanding for students to be. Planning the learning experiences needed to reach that point becomes much easier and really focuses what is happening in the classroom. (First year teacher)

Luckily in the first year of this CofP we had the opportunity to play with the UbD concept and collaborate and design lessons with it. I found that using the UbD concept broke down the curriculum into manageable bits and made my planning more thorough and specific. This year I used it in a couple math units (multiplication, geometry and fractions), all of my science units and a few language arts units (poetry and a novel study). An end project and goal was established and then from there I worked backwards [sic] to plan the mini lessons that would give them the skills to accomplish the end goal. Looking back those are the units my students enjoyed the most and obtained the most from. (Second year teacher)

I have used Understanding by Design to develop inquiry and project based learning activities for my students in all core curricular units. The Understanding by Design framework helps me to develop deeper essential questions that focus and guide critical thinking within my classroom. The Understanding by Design framework helps me ensure I provide multiple ways of representing, engaging, and presenting knowledge to meet the diverse learners in my class. (First year teacher)

Understanding by Design has helped me develop unique learning opportunities for my students that are centered and driven by essential questions. By ensuring

my students have opportunities to learn in flexible learning environments, with different opportunities, my students have had the ability to engage in projects that allow for student choice and a broad range of direction. (Second year teacher)

III. How have you used Universal Learning Environments in planning and designing learning experiences for your students?

Another area of focus for teacher development and professional learning through Rocky View Schools is the idea of Universal Learning Environments. Here all students receive the individualized and personal support from their teacher. Again, the Beginning Teachers' Initiative created a space for learning and collaboration to take place. We explored such questions such as: How do we support all learners in a classroom? How can we individualize a program for each student making sure that all learning outcomes are met? Again, the responses from the participants were insightful. Some talked about the ability of on-line technologies to assist in this differentiation and others talked about differentiation in assignments and assessments.

By having an online presence for all of my classes, my students have the flexibility to access my classroom at anytime and any where. This learning environment, which is supplemented in accordance to my daily classroom interaction, provides students with access to multiple learning avenues so that they have different options when students are acquiring information. I have also created discussion boards that allow students to make meaning of the issue questions they are examining--this is a great place for students to engage in discussion, ask questions, and have a voice. My online presence has also served as a great place for my students to showcase their learning when they are at the "transfer" stage. (Second year teacher)

I have a wide variety of students ranging in levels and abilities. I will often plan a lesson, using various methods to present the material. The students then have various methods to demonstrate their learning. If a student suggests a wild project idea, I will often say yes because I know they are enthusiastic about it and will often be more motivated in accomplishing the task. (Second year teacher)

By providing a variety of ways that they learn, practice and show their growth I have tried to provide a learning environment that meets all the students needs. Incorporating music into math, drama into LA, and providing opportunities for students to learn outside are all things I have tried to do. Presenting information

with audio, visuals, movement, music and words I try to get all the students engaged and understanding. While assessing I try to keep in mind that students need to show their learning in a form that they are comfortable with, and have the best chance of being successful in. (Second year teacher)

Universal Learning Environments are essential to student engagement of learning. Providing multiple ways for students to interact with material and have material accessible to all learners is critical. One form of this was to use a graphic novel in my grade 7 Language Arts class. The students of a variety of reading levels and abilities including ELLs [English Language Learners] were able to interact with the content. The critical challenges surrounding the content were then tailored to their individual learning needs or literacy goals. ULE's are a constant focus in my instructional design in order to target all the learners in my classroom and so that they may be successful with content, meeting learning outcomes and to have a sense of accomplishment in their experiences at school. (Second year teacher)

IV. How have you used Balanced Assessment in planning and designing learning experiences for your students?

Another area of focus for Rocky View Schools is the idea of balanced assessment. As a teacher, it is important to use both summative and formative assessment along with metacognition to increase student learning. Again, as a cohort, the beginning teachers clarified their understanding of balanced assessment and what that actually means in their classroom and teaching practice.

I have used formative assessments constantly to check in with students to where we were at. These exit cards, quick checks etc. informed my planning and how I delivered/changed my teaching. Constant communication with the students enabled them to know what they had to do to succeed, and their parents were there to support them in this. Summative assessments showed me how the learners understood the material after I had taught and they had practiced/interacted with it. This will help me in years to come! (First year teacher)

Through the development of daily activities and projects, one of my main focuses is to ensure that students have multiple opportunities to practice the essential skills needed in Social Studies. As one example, it is common practice for my students to engage in discussion boards where they are asked to reflect on the essential questions in class, while defending and establishing a position on a topic that has multiple perspectives associated with it. When designing projects, my

department has implemented a "chunking process" which includes student critiques and feedback (allowing for formative assessment) while integrating a skill associated with each element of the project. By looking at the "big picture" in planning it has allowed me to focus on essential questions and ensure that students are inquiring into these questions both through formative and summative assessment; at the same time they are continuously practicing the skills they need to be critical thinkers, analytical writers and 21st century learners. When it gets to the point of a summative assessment, my students have practiced in risk free environments along the way, which allows for greater student success.” (Second year teacher)

Balanced Assessment has been incorporated into my planning and designing for students by multiple methods. I have utilized literacy assessments to find target areas of growth for my students. Once learning the target areas I was able to design my instruction around the needs of my learners in the lessons and activities for them. Further, ongoing assessment with one on one conferencing, small group conferencing allows for check points and check ins with students to tailor instruction based on assessing how they are managing the material and their level of engagement. From these conferences I am able to provide instruction in areas where students are missing key concepts or struggling with information or strategies through mini lessons or targeted instruction. Utilizing student self evaluations assist with my designing as well to tailor to their needs, positive experiences and areas of interest. (First year teacher)

As noted, many of their responses are quite insightful and complex. They demonstrate their understanding of some of the most complicated aspects of teaching practice. However, they not only understand but also can put these ideas into effective and strong teaching practice as evidenced by their descriptions.

V. How have you used feedback in planning and designing learning experiences for your students?

Another area we are trying to develop in our teachers in Rocky View Schools is the notion of feedback, particularly feedback for students both informally and formally. This question allowed the beginning teachers to reflect on their practice regarding their use of feedback in the classroom. However, most interpreted the question through the lens of increasing the effectiveness of individual lessons, assignments, or projects.

After trying a new, engaging lesson, I always ask my students for direct feedback on what went well and how they would improve upon it. The students are usually very candid and honest. I use this information to tweak my lessons going forward. (Second year teacher)

I have used Google forms as a formative self-assessment tool to measure student engagement. I have also used flex time in the classroom as an opportunity to touch base with students about general classroom feedback as well as the skill they are currently working on. (Second year teacher)

Feedback is important to assist students in guiding them to achieving the purpose of the learning goal. Feedback assists me in providing the appropriate instruction for their learning needs. (First year teacher)

I use Google Drive to provide continuous feedback to my students on the projects and assignments they are working. My students and I set goals for learning to help them improve. The feedback guides my students' goal setting and together we set a plan of how to achieve their goal. (First year teacher)

VI. How have you used Inquiry in planning and designing learning experiences for your students?

Last, one of the additional foci for Rocky View Schools is to build in the Inquiry model into teacher practice and instructional design. The Inquiry model, along with *Understanding by Design*, works simultaneously to create an engaging learning environment. These beginning teachers understand the power of inquiry as they plan and design their classes.

I often give students a question on the board that they must solve by planning and carrying out their own experiment. ie. In Chemistry 20 - How much Co₂ is in a package of poprocks? (Third year teacher)

I have involved inquiry to try and engage the students, get them asking questions and thinking critically, and create a project that not only carries into other subjects but into their real lives. Through this process students have been able to create projects/plays/songs/displays that they connect with and show their learning in a meaningful way. (First year teacher)

Inquiry planning in all of my social studies classes is centered around essential questions. These questions are posted clearly in my classroom and clearly incorporated into daily lessons as well as project design. (First year teacher)

Inquiry is an area that is ongoing for myself in terms of how to support students with being successful. I have attempted very broad open inquiry projects learning quickly the scaffolding and supports that are needed to assist students in their strategies for working towards the goals and essential questions. Inquiry is an area that I provide opportunities within projects or material allowing for guided inquiry to be a foundation for my instructional practice. For example, some of my grade 7 students have created murals to represent Confederation in Canada. A student was able to take it from the perspective of Indigenous people and create a mural based on that lens. Allowing for students to have a voice in their learning is essential to their engagement and success. (First year teacher)

VII. Were the speakers helpful in providing timely information and suggestions for your practice?

The next few questions asked offered insight into the Beginning Teachers' Initiative. Tapping into the resources both human and knowledge that work for Rocky View Schools added an additional element to the professional learning of the beginning teachers. The speakers were experts in their own fields and provided the beginning teachers with support and advice. They came to understand that they were supported by a much larger network than just their colleagues and administrators in their respective schools but also by experts in a wider divisional setting.

The speakers provided information that was relevant and practical to my instruction and pedagogy. Guest Speakers focused on topics such as Diversity, Emotional Intelligence and Inquiry to name a few. These speakers expertise in their field was exceptional to have shared with us. To have access to so many experts within a small span of time facilitated excellent opportunities for trying new things and to reflect on pedagogical practices. (First year teacher)

I enjoyed every speaker that came in to speak and found them all to be relevant and applicable to my work. I do feel that the inquiry speakers could have occurred earlier on so as to inspire work in the early stages of development. I enjoyed having multiple points of view displayed and provided an avenue for professional development that otherwise would have been hard to find in the first couple of years of teaching. (Second year teacher)

I found the speakers helpful in providing information and suggestions for my practice, sometimes answering question I didn't even know I had! (First year teacher)

Definitely! I felt it was very valuable to get this information from professionals at Rocky View who are experts, was very helpful in learning about the direction of RVS and what I should be striving for. (First year teacher)

VIII. What were two or three valuable experiences this year regarding your own professional learning?

Professional learning takes many forms. Sometimes it is a conversation with colleagues, sometimes through a cohort model and sometimes through collaborative settings designed specifically to maximize professional learning. Building professional networks like the beginning teachers provides career-long support. Sometimes though, particularly beginning teachers have either so many questions or simply do not even know what questions to start asking. The beginning teachers' own professional learning journey should be designed individually, by them and for them.

Having a mentor to come in and observe/teach/provide support was invaluable for me [or] the time we were provided with to brainstorm and find connections with other curriculums helped generate ideas. (First year teacher)

To have access to the experts led to essential questions of my own growth and practice. Reflecting on action research and balanced assessment I utilized specialists at my school board to work with me in the classroom and with my instructional design. Collaborating with colleagues in my C of P provided me the courage and inspiration to collaborate with others in my school, and school board. These opportunities to share knowledge and practice strengthened my confidence in the classroom as a new teacher and allowed me to take risks such as the Daily 5 in a middle school classroom. (First year teacher)

I found the time to plan collaboratively with the support of the learning coaches during our discussion of UbD to be very helpful. It was nice to work through the process with other teachers and have your questions answered right away if needed. I also enjoyed the discussion of Emotional Intelligence, as I have never heard about student differences presented in that way. It was wonderful to go back to my class the next day and have somewhat of a greater understanding of how I could support those students. (First year teacher)

IX. Was the access to direct coaching/mentoring helpful to you? If so, how? If not, why not?

As the Beginning Teachers' Initiative evolved, Rocky View Schools provided direct coaching to the beginning teachers. These two coaches along with the facilitator, all experienced educators, offered direct support. The learning coaches would travel to the various schools to observe, discuss, plan and support the beginning teachers. They would help the beginning teachers make sense of what was going on in their classrooms. This formal support was in addition to the support available at each respective school through grade level or department teams and administration.

Yes, it was great to have experienced teachers on hand to help with my Action Research project, making UBD unit plans, and thinking about inquiry projects. (First year teacher)

Yes. It was nice to know I had a place and person to ask questions to, and that I would get help relevant to RVS and my grade level. (First year teacher)

I did utilize the coaching through email. They provided timely and relevant advice and resources. (First year teacher)

I thoroughly enjoyed the access to a coach this year. I was given resources, guidance and most importantly time from someone who I didn't feel guilty taking it from! Teachers within the school are realistically too busy to mentor beginning teachers so to have someone with ample experience at many levels who are transitioning from the teaching profession was extremely valuable. (Second year teacher)

The important piece to take out of this is that the beginning teachers' chose who to access and what level of support they wanted. Their professional learning became their own, making connections and judgments as they saw fit. This gave them the autonomy they needed and the safety net to explore.

X. In your opinion, what was the most valuable part of the Beginning Teachers' Community of Practice?

As an over-arching question, the value of the Beginning Teachers' Initiative in the beginning teachers' practice resulted in enthusiastic support for the program. They commented on the professional and social network created and the relationships they forged with not only each other but with their coaches and facilitators as well. They commented that their feelings of isolation were diminished and that they knew they had support if they needed it.

Meeting new teachers across the board and learning about things they do in their classrooms, regardless of the age group they teach. (Third year teacher)

Getting connected with my mentor/coach and being able to connect and share with other first year teachers who were going through the same things as I was! (First year teacher)

The most valuable part of the Community of Practice was having a support system comprised not only of the veteran teachers running the CofP but more importantly my peers; teachers just like me. It was great to have people to talk to, to vent to, and to share experiences with. It was great to realize I am not alone, and that the experiences I am having are happening to others as well. (Second year teacher)

Creating relationships with colleagues around the division and also having a time and place to discuss some of the experiences we were all having. Knowing there is a support system out there helps because when you are in a workplace surrounded by teachers who have been in the career a few more years than you, it definitely makes for different experiences. Having a place where we were all just "starting out" provides an alternative perspective. (Second year teacher)

*XI. Would you be willing to participate in the Beginning Teachers' CofP next year?
Would you recommend that Beginning Teachers participate in the future?*

Overwhelmingly, the support for this Beginning Teachers' Initiative by the participants is strong. It was designed as a two year process so as teachers move into their third year of teaching, they can expand their own professional learning networks and move on to learning about their own passions in teaching and learning. Having the

program consist of first and second year teachers adds a dimension of experience to the conversations. Including pre-service teachers also allows for additional depth to the professional learning. Those in their first and second years offer insight into their experiences for those coming up the ranks. The support is reciprocal and generative.

Absolutely I would be willing to participate in the C of P next year. I would absolutely recommend the C of P to new teachers in the future. This experience has given me knowledge of my school board and the specialists that exist. As a new teacher to the province and a beginning teacher the C of P gave me the bridge between University and beginning my profession. Further, it provided me a great structure to continue my continued life long learning. The C of P was facilitated in a way that gave a model for how a C of P should be experienced and organized for when I am able to lead my own. (First year teacher)

I am greatly appreciative of the experience I had with the Community of Practice. While I feel that I am ready to explore other community of practice opportunities I would love to continue with coaching for one more year as a sort of transition piece to the program. I think it could look at expanding my professional portfolio and be exposed to a greater network of opportunities that would be available as I move from being a 'beginning teacher' to a 'developing professional'. I would HIGHLY recommend every beginning teacher be a part of this community. You could not ask for more willing leaders to guide you through the beginning stages of your career and an avenue such as this to break down the process and keep you grounded. It is with a heavy heart that I move on from this C of P but I firmly believe it has strengthened my foundation in this wonderful yet complex profession. (Second year teacher)

This was a great experience! I was pleasantly surprised with the amount of support I received in my first year of teaching - and it was influenced much by this C of P! (First year teacher)

I just want to thank Rocky View for this opportunity as well as Dr. Fansher. I moved here from another province and speaking to my colleagues back home, they see the value of this community of practice. The opportunity and support this has provided me in my first two years of teaching has allowed me to transition into my teaching career with the mentorship I needed. As well, the coaches offered some insight into the program as did school and district administrators. This data was collected in verbal conversations but each person was enthusiastic about the success of the program and the level of support each new teacher received. The success of the program rests on the success of the beginning teachers and the students in their classrooms. (Second year teacher)

Thank you! Thank you for the inspiration, engagement, time and encouragement that you have all given us. Thank you! (First year teacher)

5. Recommendations for Further Action

As we move into the next phase of the Beginning Teachers' Initiative, changes will occur to strengthen and broaden the scope of the program. We asked the beginning teachers a question in their final reflection giving us some direction in the path to follow. Their comments suggest a greater awareness of this opportunity must be presented to all beginning teachers in Rocky View Schools. Hence, what we must do is advertise with not only the beginning teachers but also to schools' administration to promote the program. Also, we should consider having a dedicated mentor in each school, specifically not in an administrative role where these teachers could ask the seemingly innocuous questions.

What could we do to ensure that Beginning Teachers in Rocky View receive the support they need?

Make it known to all the beginning teachers that the coaching/mentoring and C of P is available. If I would not have been involved with the school I was at I don't think I would have been able to benefit from this amazing opportunity Rocky View provides. An email from the mentor, or a quick visit even would be beneficial in my opinion.

I think there should be someone on staff at every school that is responsible for "orienting" new teachers. Although I naturally made connections with teachers, there were still questions that I had that I was slightly anxious asking. Just having a "go-to" person would be nice.

Continue to ask what teachers need and allow them to have a voice. Provide opportunities for collaboration and time to do so.

It would be great to have new teachers paired up with a mentor. The mentor wouldn't need to be at the same school but within the board. A person that new teacher could ask those silly questions to but also to provide guidance. As new teachers are adjusting to new schools and have not developed professional relationships yet the beginning part of transition to the school is the most crucial. Further to ensure that the C of P for new teachers is provided and upon hiring it is

advised/recommended to join this C of P. Administration should also provide access to the information that the C of P exists.

I highly recommend continuing to have the coaching element. My first year with the C of P largely focused on theory, understanding and application. As I moved into my second year with the C of P I feel that the coaching provided another viewpoint and a refreshing approach to the C of P. This is an aspect that should not be lost and continue to be offered to teachers in this C of P as they transition from being a beginning teacher.

I think just providing information to first year teachers about the resources available through the division for support, including the learning specialists, would be a huge help. Perhaps holding an information session for those that are not part of the C of P would be helpful.

Make sure new teachers are aware of all the resources that are available. There is a lot of technology use in the class, but sometimes it is hard to know what we have at our disposal at RVS.

The Initiative has grown in numbers and as such, the Beginning Teachers' Initiative has split into two distinct parts for the coming 2013-2014 school year. The four Community of Practice days, lead by two veteran teachers and administrators, will continue focusing on the goals of bridging the beginning teachers experience from university to daily practice. The second part, *Vistas*, will offer the beginning teachers mentoring and coaching from a divisional level through the Organizational Learning department, along with introducing them to the resources available. In this way, we hope to continue the success of previous years, yet offer even greater support to our growing cohort of beginning teachers.

Where this will evolve, no one can know for sure. Beyond continuing the practice that has already been established, there are still groups of teachers who would benefit from this type of wrap-around service. Potentially, experienced teachers within Rocky View Schools may find this program beneficial to their teaching practice. Administrators may want to recommend this program to some who are struggling. Also, those experienced teachers who are new to Rocky View Schools may be included in this program. It lays the foundation for what is important in the school division and creates a culture of what it means to teach within Rocky View Schools. Additionally, one group we need to be aware of is the pre-service teachers. Each year, teachers invite pre-service

teachers in to their classrooms to do their practice teaching. These pre-service teachers could potentially be the new employees for the school division and would therefore already be aware of the culture and expectations of Rocky View Schools.

Building the bridge between theory and practice is important as we support and encourage new and beginning teachers. Making sense of what is going on in their own classrooms and working collaboratively only strengthens a new teacher's practice. If we can ensure that their foundation is strong, we can strengthen the profession, the division and most importantly, student learning.

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