

In-Classroom Coach: An Addition to Mentor Teachers

By Paul Carney, Elizabeth Crilley,
John T. Fala, Kathryn Strouse,
Christopher Tully and
Thomas Viviano

“As you prepare for your first day and each day, when your students enter and you encounter their attitudes, ranging from eager, enthusiastic anticipation to uncomfortable, uncertain apathy, recall the powers you have within ... from poet to philosopher ... and present yourself to those students as a person worthy of the noble title ... Teacher.”—Trish Marcuzzo

There have been numerous studies done on the impact that mentor teachers and new teacher induction plans have on the new teacher’s success in the first couple of years of teaching. A lot of these studies were done in an attempt not only to determine how to attract good teachers, but also how to retain them. It is our hope in this article to also determine if by having a classroom coach and teacher mentors in place, we can mold these new teachers into a strong cultural fit. This article looks at the impact an in-classroom coach has in addition to the benefits previously obtained from having mentor teachers who teach their own classes.

Recently retired teachers and administrators serve as excellent untapped resources and have the time available to spend in the classroom, while the traditional mentor teachers have their own classroom responsibilities and are unable to give the new teachers their undivided attention for a longer period of time. The school in this study, the Middle Bucks Institute of Technology (MBIT), has a two-year induction plan, required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for new teachers, that uses the skills of three mentor teachers and one in-classroom coach to provide support to five

new teachers. Two of the mentor teachers are each assigned to mentor two new teachers, and one mentor teacher was assigned to mentor one new teacher. The new classroom coach circulated among the classroom of the five new teachers during instructional time to observe and advise.

Background

Teaching is one of the few professions that throws its new employees into the trenches with very little on-the-job training. Postsecondary institutions provide student teaching as pre-service teachers, but this provides little comfort when you are standing in front of 20 high school students waiting in anticipation. What does the teacher do first? Does he talk about how the class will be managed, get to know his students, assess where they are, begin chapter one or have them write what they did over their summer hiatus? Hopefully, with the help of a classroom coach, a mentor teacher and a caring supervisor, the new teacher will have a plan in place. There are many objectives stemming from a strong new teacher-induction plan to use as a road map, with the mentor teacher serving as the navigator. Danielson and McGreal define the responsibilities of mentors as helping new teachers to:



Photo © iStockphoto.com/Squaredpixels

- Meet the procedural demands of the school
- Receive moral and emotional support
- Receive access to other classrooms to observe different models
- Gain knowledge about new materials, planning, curriculum and teaching methods
- Obtain strong classroom-management and discipline procedures
- Develop an understanding of diverse classrooms
- Engage in self-assessment and reflection
- Experiment and develop new ideas and strategies¹

These are all very important tasks and strategies for a mentor teacher. Many of these can be addressed outside

the classroom environment, but at MBIT, we wanted to enhance this process by placing a classroom coach into the classroom during instructional time. This, of course, can only be done by using an instructor who is not currently committed to his or her own classroom. However, we needed to be sure that this instructor had the experience to mentor in real time. Before entering the school year we considered two options: a retired teacher or an administrator who has previously supervised teachers. MBIT was very fortunate to have the opportunity to hire its retired cosmetology teacher, Elizabeth Crilley, who started immediately upon the onset of the 2012–2013 school year as our classroom coach. Crilley taught at MBIT for over 30 years, and she served as both a mentor teacher

and a lead teacher for Temple University's Lead Teacher Program. Crilley was an adjunct professor for Temple's Program VITAL, where she taught new career and technical education (CTE) teachers. This classroom coach position was compensated from funds allocated in the Perkins grant slated for professional development.² In addition to our classroom coach, our mentor teachers were Paul Carney, welding program teacher; John Fala, public safety program teacher; and Christopher Tully, multimedia technology teacher. Fala and Tully are both lead teachers as well at MBIT and are instrumental in developing the new Career and Technology Advocacy Group initiative.³ Carney is a first-time mentor teacher who began his teaching career at MBIT in 1991.

It should not be the intention of any induction plan, mentor teacher or supervisor to punch out cookie cutter-type teachers who fit a certain mold, but it should be the goal to bring out the teaching personality particular to that new teacher's teaching style. In their book, *Straight Talk to Beginning Teachers*, Bruce and Miller state:

Every teacher who succeeds in teaching develops a mature teaching style unique to him or her. This style encompasses three major threads: a cognitive thread, which is the knowledge

base from which he/she works; a skill thread, which comprises the repertoire of skills the teacher develops; and an affective thread, which sums the outlook from which the teacher views what he/she does.⁴

Being a classroom mentor, watching, observing, listening, sharing and finding the best approach to assist a new, enthusiastic teacher is a great responsibility. The struggles and burdens they have with learning the standard operating procedures of the school, coupled with preparation of their daily lessons, can be likened

to childbirth. A teacher's classroom management style may either create an environment that will encourage growth and well being or possibly insecurity and dismay. At MBIT teachers engage students in meaningful industry-related activities for 2 hours and 45 minutes a day for 182 days a year over a three-year period. Due to the extended time teachers spend with the same population, it is extremely important that teachers establish environments that reflect those of our industries. New teachers should create a classroom culture with high expectations and encourage students to achieve at their personal best, and teachers have their own delivery systems to achieve these goals. Mentors can only open a "tool box" and give newer teachers strategies and ideas that have worked over time, and in a given situation, may work for them as well. For this reason, the first day of our induction plan focuses on modeling strategies that assist in creating a personalized environment.

Beginning the Journey

The initial meeting between the mentor teachers and the new teachers began by having the mentor teachers introduce themselves to the new teachers. Unlike a traditional introduction of name, content area and years in education, the mentor teachers described their passion for teaching, their reasons for leaving their trade to become an educator and the rewards they received (and receive) from being professional educators. This set the stage for the new teachers to reciprocate in telling their stories. As the new teachers described their time in the industry, their reasons for becoming an educator and the goals they hoped to achieve, the mentor teachers began the journey of personalizing a plan to assist the new teachers in reaching their maximum potential.

At the start of the school year the excitement among administrators, lead and mentor teachers, and the new staff was palpable. Both veteran and new teachers

Key Questions

We surveyed the new teachers with various questions regarding their in-class mentor and their regular mentor teacher and these were their responses:

- **In what ways was the classroom mentor helpful?**
 - They helped with classroom management
 - They were able to answer questions as they arose
 - I appreciated their encouragement along the way
- **In what ways was the outside-of-classroom mentor teacher helpful?**
 - Helped me to concentrate on what I needed to know now
 - Helped me with classroom setup and classroom management
- **What has worked well for you as a new teacher?**
 - The First Days of School*⁵
 - Support from all staff
- **What in the induction plan helped you most?**
 - Began building staff relationships
 - Gained knowledge about how the school operates
 - Feeling of support from everyone
 - Knowledge of school layout
 - Hearing from other first-year teachers
- **Are you comfortable with IEPs and support for your students with special needs?**
 - Yes, comfortable
 - Not comfortable in the beginning, worked with instructional assistant
 - I treat them like any other kids and handle needs as they arise with support
- **What did you need but did not receive?**
 - Student behavior referral procedures
 - How stuff was set up on my computer
 - I wanted to know more about policy and procedure
 - Daily grades and how to grade when students are absent
- **What are your suggestions for improvement?**
 - Program-specific instructions for the first week of school
 - More time spent with veteran teachers, preferably in my department
 - More time getting familiar with program tools and equipment
 - More planning and set-up time in the beginning of the year
 - Orientation needs to be longer, information overload in a short time
 - Have the in-class mentor in my class more during the first week

highly anticipated their first few minutes with their new classes. John Fala related this story soon after the conclusion of the first day:

As the buses were pulling up outside on the first day of school, I waited with one of our new teachers. I asked him, “Are you nervous?” He looked at me and answered, “What do you think?” I smiled, laughed and put my hand on his shoulder and responded, “How do you think they feel?” His concern suddenly changed from worrying about his first day to being concerned for his students on their first day. In the years that I have been teaching, the rules of the game may have changed from year to year, but the prize has always remained the same. We both shared a teaching moment!

We did not want to approach them with a “See what I can do” attitude, but instead with a “Let me help you see what you can do” attitude. We tried to work to their strengths instead of telling them about our own.

The Mentor Teacher’s Role

It is our opinion that the role of a mentor teacher has developed over the years. What was once a dissemination of ways to be successful, we now see the role as helping the new teachers find what works best for them on an individualized basis. We have found that the in-service days and meetings leading up to the new school year can create a feeling of polarization and, at times, incompetence. This is where teaming up with a positive role model is essential. Recalling our first

days as teachers when we sat and listened to others and heard stories about how they accomplished great things, we came to realize that we did not want to overwhelm our new teachers in the same way. We did not want to approach them with a “See what I can

do” attitude, but instead with a “Let me help you see what you can do” attitude. We tried to work to their strengths instead of telling them about our own.

Each mentor took a different approach to orienting the new teachers to their new

The only complete plasma cutting curriculum



Download a free chapter! Get a free poster!
www.plasmaeducation.com

“This is a turnkey teaching tool. Instructors can teach with little preparation and will appreciate the multi-media format.”

–Philip McNew CWI/CWE, Professor
 Pittsburg State University



Plasma Cutting Technology: Theory and Practice.
 Hypertherm part number 850730. Special educational pricing when purchased with a Hypertherm Powermax®.

Visit us at ACTE's CareerTech Expo, Booth #118



Hypertherm®
 Cut with confidence®

PLASMA | LASER | WATERJET | AUTOMATION | SOFTWARE | CONSUMABLES

environment, and respectfully, each new teacher took what they wanted from what the mentors shared. Several new teachers took advantage of their prep time to watch veteran teachers start their school year. Christopher Tully opened his classroom to those new teachers and reflected upon what they saw at the completion of each session. Tully explained in subsequent meetings that this reflection of his own teaching practices was not only beneficial for the new teachers, but was equally beneficial for him. “It’s not often that teachers can share and reflect on things that just happened in their classrooms—both positively and negatively. It was great to hear a fresh perspective on what I practiced in his classroom,” he explained. It was also beneficial that he was able to model to the new teachers how to receive criticism constructively, as this was the role of the classroom mentor.

A strong mentor program is especially crucial for CTE teachers who have not participated in an academic-preparation program designed for teacher instruction. New CTE teachers are typically tradespersons with substantial hands-on occupational work experience and a passion to teach. New CTE teachers need to rely greatly on their mentor teacher during the first year in the classroom.

One very effective tool that we kept in our “tool box,” from Blanchard and Spencer’s book, *The One Minute Manager*, was to make the effort to catch our new teachers doing something right. “We need to catch ‘em red-handed when we see or hear something positive that they are doing.”⁶ We strove to start their days on a good note and let it end on a better one! The game may be challenging but we tried to (and will continue to try to) make it fun to play.

stimulating than the efforts of one. Through discussions with other mentors we still find ourselves “stealing” good ideas. By using a team approach, the mentors also become better mentors and consequently better teachers. We all have concocted some home-brewed methods of dealing with adverse and rewarding situations that we need to share.

Seeing Success

Just as wonderful as it is to see the successful turnaround of a student who was defiant become a leader in the classroom, so is the feeling of seeing a new teacher successfully lead a classroom to success. This occurred with one of our new teachers who worked diligently, thoughtfully and patiently to bring about change and success. It was akin to watching a building being constructed from foundation to rooftop. The changes that took place were positive and the development of classroom-management skills built an atmosphere that was more conducive to learning. The teacher is the CEO and the treatment in the class is consistent, fair and respectful of them at all times.

The Benefits

Creating a community of support for new teachers was the primary intent of the mentoring program. We wanted to provide systematic and sustained psychological and instructional support

Results and Evaluation

Practical onsite strategies to enhance classroom management were provided by the classroom coach each week. When appropriate, eye contact was very often an effective communication tool to indicate a classroom need. Modeling with a student was effective as well. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words, and the effect it produces even more so. After-session mini-meetings or e-mails with pertinent information to address a situation were the most effective.

Regularly checking in with the classroom coach and other mentors helped to target areas that needed attention and could be applied for the coming school year. Part of the process included finding out that a mentor was not well-matched to his mentee. This is where a team approach is essential to working with new teachers. The combined efforts of the team are far more effective and thought-

intelitek Foundations of Advanced Manufacturing

LearnMate Skill Drill - Using a Socket Wrench

Skill Drill
Using a Socket Wrench

- 1 Identify a fastener that corresponds with each of the provided sockets.
- 2 Determine which socket corresponds with the fastener needed for your workpiece.
- 3 Align the square side of the socket with the male drive piece on the ratchet. Depress the round button on the opposite side of the ratchet and insert the male piece into the socket, release the button.

BECOME A CERTIFIED MANUFACTURING ASSOCIATE!

NRTC National Robotics Training Center

- A portable, industry-recognized certification!
- Validated learning outcomes and skills!
- Communication, safety, mathematics, measurement, power tools, lean and more!

www.intelitek.com/cma
1-800-221-2763

to new teachers through guidance and orientation intended to increase the confidence and effectiveness of the new teacher. The intent was also to lessen the high level of attrition among beginning teachers. A strong mentor program is especially crucial for CTE teachers who have not participated in an academic-preparation program designed for teacher instruction. New CTE teachers are typically tradespersons with substantial hands-on occupational work experience and a passion to teach. New CTE teachers need to rely greatly on their mentor teacher during the first year in the classroom. In the Ohio State University study, "Perceptions of CTE Teachers About Teacher Mentoring and Teacher Retention," one of the recommendations included "the need for mentors to be assigned during the first year, even to those teachers hired late and well-trained as [to] their role, expectations, listening ability and willingness to give time to the new teacher. A second recommendation from the study was that when at all possible, mentors for Route B (second career) career and technical education teachers need to match with their mentees in content knowledge to be most helpful to the new career and technical education teacher."⁷

Summary

All in all, having a classroom coach shared by our new teachers was a positive experience and seemed to be beneficial for the teachers that were lucky enough to have her. Crilley provided comfort and was a quick resource for those situations that came up that an experienced teacher would easily handle. All the new teachers that participated had many positive things to say about the experiences with the classroom coach, the traditional mentor teachers and the induction plan. These new teachers, without exception, are thriving, excited to be teaching, and they demonstrate that they really care about the students they teach. **I**

Paul J. Carney Jr. is a graduate of Temple University with a BA in Education. He is a mentor teacher at MBIT with over 20 years of teaching in CTE. He can be reached at pcarney@mbit.org.

Elizabeth Crilley has a bachelor's equivalency from the Pennsylvania Dept. of Education, is a former adjunct for Temple University, a former lead teacher for Temple University and mentor teacher at MBIT. She served as the in-class teacher mentor/coach for MBIT's new teachers in the fall of 2012.

John Fala is the public safety instructor at MBIT and a member of the adjunct faculty at Bucks County Community College. He is a past recipient of the PACTE Teacher of the Year Award and serves as a lead teacher at MBIT. He can be reached at jfala@mbit.org.

Kathryn Strouse is the administrative director at MBIT. She holds an M.Ed. in Educational Administration from Gwynedd-Mercy College. She has more than 13 years of educational administration experience. She can be reached at kstrouse@mbit.org.

Christopher Tully, M.Ed., is an award-winning instructor in the Multimedia Department at MBIT. Chris serves as a teacher leader, mentor teacher and member of the Apple Distinguished Educators USA and International Advisory Boards. He can be reached at ctully@mbit.org.

Thomas Viviano, Ph.D., is the executive director at Hazleton Area Career Center. Previously, he was the assistant director at MBIT. He is also a nationally board certified teacher in CTE. He can be reached at vivianot@hasdk12.org.

Endnotes

1. Danielson, C., & McGreal, T. L. (2000). *Teacher evaluation to enhance professional practice*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
2. Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act of 2006. (2010). www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/cte/10AprPerkinsPurchaseManual.pdf
3. CTAG—Career and Technical Advocacy Group. (2011). www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=4330835&trk=anet_ug_hm
4. Bruce, M. H., & Miller, H. B. (2007). *Straight talk to beginning teachers: An instant mentor in print for secondary teachers*. Willow Grove, PA: Journey Publications.
5. Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2005). *How to be an effective teacher: The first days of school*. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications.
6. Blanchard, K., & Johnson, S. (1982). *The one minute manager*. New York, NY: William Morrow & Company.
7. Briggs, J. E. (2005). Perceptions of career and technical education teachers about teacher mentoring and teacher retention. Retrieved from http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi?acc_num=osu1218574016

Industrial Distribution Careers

Industrial distributors supply the parts that help companies make every product you've ever used.



Photo courtesy Bishop Wisecarver Corporation

IDCareers.org

Help your students get ahead. Let them know about the *incredibly rewarding* careers in industrial distribution.

Visit our website for educator resources.



@IDCareersOrg
#Jobs