

# Expand Your Reach

*New-world role combines coaching teachers and teaching students*

by ROMAIN BERTRAND

In the old world, a great teacher had two choices: stay in the classroom at relatively low pay or leave to become an administrator. There was no way to advance your career or expand your reach while working as a classroom teacher. But traditional school leaders have only an indirect impact on instruction. Their work may include designing processes, planning use of resources, leading professional development, providing observation and feedback, and offering instructional coaching, but they are not teachers. Here at Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Ranson IB Middle School, there's a third option: become a multi-classroom leader (MCL). The new-world role of MCL combines planning, coaching, and direct teaching. It is my dream job.

At Ranson, innovative staffing, a flexible teaching schedule, and strategic use of technology combine to create personalized learning for 1,100 students in grades 6–8. This year, as the first MCL at Ranson, I lead two pods of three teachers and one learning coach (or teaching assistant) each, and I am responsible for the learning outcomes of 800 6th and 7th graders. Our blended-learning rotation model for math incorporates up to 40 percent online instruction in 6th and 7th grade (8th grade to follow next year). Sixth graders move in groups of 15 to 17 between face-to-face instruction with their teacher and online instruction in the computer lab, under the supervision of a learning coach and their MCL. In the lab, students work on activities created, assigned, and tracked by the teaching team. The model is similar for 7th grade, but the students stay in their classroom, which incorporates a Chromebook learning lab. A learning coach and I float between the different classes.

A few entries from my journal show what the daily life of an MCL looks like:

## Monday

5:45 p.m.: Sixth-grade math teachers Courtney and Clarissa have come for help with a surface area lesson we will co-teach the next day. We find 3-D shapes around the room. "They need to touch all the faces and edges first," says Courtney. I ask them what part of the lesson the students will need support with. They agree it will be the independent practice. I adjust



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

my schedule. Courtney walks out, uttering her ritual "I feel better now." I feel better, too.

## Tuesday

7:00 a.m.: I check my e-mail and find messages from several young scholars on Edmodo (the social learning network we use).

Yesterday, my 6th graders worked on an online review activity I created with Educreations (an iPad-based interactive whiteboard for creating instructional videos). I sent each of them feedback on their work. Their messages this morning are just to say thank-you. It makes the hour I spent doing this yesterday completely worth it.

9:15 a.m.: Off to the 6th-grade computer lab to pull out six to eight scholars to work with me for 30 minutes in what we call the Math Genius Bar. We start the lesson with a problem they struggled with last week. Keaun blurts out, "How did you know we needed this?" I smile and reply that his teacher and I are always talking. He seems both satisfied and worried.

9:55 a.m.: Working in class with Courtney while she finishes her mini-lesson on finding surface area. She did a good job modeling the task (called a Think Aloud), but I feel the need to add a Check for Understanding before they start practicing. I look over at her, she nods, and I start cold-calling students.

11:00 a.m.: Sixth-grade planning period. Clarissa asks, "What could be a highly rigorous problem with surface area?" We create one together and add it to the lesson plan. It involves painting my bedroom but not the floor, the ceiling, or the windows.

11:50 a.m.: I have some planning time before the next Genius Bar pullout at 12:35 p.m. With iPad and stylus in hand, I start responding to students' Edmodo posts from the morning. I glance at my computer clock; it is already time for the next block and I forgot to eat lunch. When a Frenchman forgets about eating, this is a sign that he loves what he does.

Being an MCL is a great job. I hope more teachers around the country will soon have the opportunity to break down the walls between classrooms and expand their reach as I have.

*Romain Bertrand blogs about his work as a multi-classroom leader at Ranson IB Middle School at [expandingthereach.wordpress.com/](http://expandingthereach.wordpress.com/).*