

## Appendix A

# *Case Studies in High Expectations Teaching and Attribution Retraining*

**T**his appendix contains two sets of case studies. The first were carried out by teachers in our courses on high expectations teaching. Each teacher picked an underperforming, low-confidence student and put to work all the tools the teacher could muster to get that student to change his or her stereotype of self as a student who was “too dumb” to learn.

The second set were carried out by administrators who picked a teacher to work with and coached that teacher to do a case study like the first set. Many of the administrators built themselves into the case study by having regular interactions with the selected student. The potency of this set of case studies is that in many cases the teacher did not think the student could actually improve. So the administrators had to change both the teacher’s mind and the student’s attributions. These are success stories, and they shine a bright light on the possibilities for courageous and committed supervisors.

First read Case Study 1. Then read a case study for the grade you interact with most and then comment on what was significant about it. What could you transfer from this case into your own practice?

## TEACHER CASE STUDIES

### Teacher Case Study 1—Eighth Grade

It was already mid-September, and I was sorry I ever told my principal that I wanted a change and a challenge in my teaching assignment. After teaching sixth-grade English for years, I was assigned two classes of eighth graders who seemed destined to fail the Maryland Writing Test (an assessment of functional writing skills, the passing of which is a requirement for graduation in Maryland). I had until November to prepare these eighth graders for the test. By the end of the first day of class, I knew that the task was going to be a greater challenge than I had anticipated. The students in my two writing classes took one look at each other and knew immediately that the class was a remedial class for *dummies*. How could I convince these kids that they were capable of passing the test? I had the perfect situation for my Expectations Case Study.

Although I could easily have chosen any student from either of my classes as a subject for the case study, I picked K from seventh period. Her informal reading assessments from the spring semester showed K reading at a fifth-grade level. Her criterion-referenced test scores from the spring for reading/language arts indicated that her performance was slightly below standard. (I had not given any other tests to assess students' current levels of writing proficiency.)

K had been turning in very little work in the Test Prep class, and what she did turn in was of low quality. She came late to class and looked for ways to escape. She wouldn't bring the materials she needed for class, wouldn't stay in her seat, and wouldn't stay on task—all behaviors that would indicate K had very little self-confidence in her ability as a learner. K often created situations that ensured that I would have to focus on her poor behavior rather than her academic performance. She would occasionally produce work when she was sent to the in-school-suspension room, but there seemed to be no way to get her to make much effort in class.

I knew enough about K's history to recognize that both her academic performance and behavior were in sharp decline. As a sixth grader, she had been eager to participate in all learning activities, especially enjoying those of a cooperative nature. She'd had a sunny temperament and was willing to try new things to please her teachers. I remembered reading about students who stop liking school and begin avoiding academic challenges after reaching middle school and wondered if K was a case in point. I felt that unless I could reach this student, she would surely fail the Maryland Writing Test as well as the Test Prep class and seem to tune out of school.

#### *Experiment 1: Communicating an Essential Belief*

Since the students in my Test Prep classes believed that they were placed in my class because they had little ability, I had to evaluate what I believed

about these students. If I thought they had little chance to pass the Maryland Writing Test, the class was doomed. So I actively read the chapter on expectations from *The Skillful Teacher* (Saphier, Haley-Speca, & Gower, 2008). I thought about the essential points and interesting details. I really did believe that all the students in my class could pass the writing test if only I could get them to work at it. I decided to test whether I had clearly communicated a “you can do it!” attitude to my students. The following day, in place of the regular warm-up activity, I asked my class to write down what they thought my expectations were for them and what they thought it would take to pass the Maryland Writing Test. The results were a real eye-opener.

### Reflection on Case Study Student

To the first question, K responded, “I think you expect [*sic*] us to act dumb because you don’t think we know how to write.” To the second she replied, “I could pass the test if they ask me to write about something I know or if we have practised [*sic*] writing the prompt in class.”

These responses were similar to those given by others in the class. Most thought I believed them to be incapable of becoming good writers. Like K, a few who thought they had a chance to pass the writing test attributed passing to luck. Most believed they could never pass it. I was appalled by the responses and at the beginning of the next class spent 20 minutes focusing on the positive—all the good writing skills the group already possessed. I told them that there was plenty of time for them to acquire the skills they still needed to pass the test. All they needed to do was put forth a little effort. “I know you can all do it!” was repeated again and again. That day, we accomplished more in the class than on any previous day, even though the first 20 minutes of class was spent in discussion. Even K turned in a couple of paragraphs at the end of the class!

### *Experiment 2: Setting Goals*

I was pleased with my initial efforts at more clearly communicating the “you can do it!” message to students and didn’t want to lose momentum. I would take the written work that students had turned in the previous class and use that as a baseline assessment from which students could set specific learning goals for themselves. I constructed a series of posters that outlined specific skills students needed to pass the test. I then marked the class papers identifying which skills individuals showed mastery of and which they still needed to practice. I also developed a chart that students could use to list the skills they had already mastered and to keep track of the ones they needed to work on.

### Reflection on Case Study Student

At the beginning of the next class, I had students list the skills they had already mastered on one side of their charts and pick just one skill that they

would like to master next. Students were comparing lists with one another and boasting about the skills they had already mastered. Better yet, I heard the beginnings of cooperation among the students. I overheard one student saying to K, “Oh, that’s easy. I can show you how to do that.” K had chosen to work on the skill of writing an introduction that incorporates words directly from the prompt. Although she wasn’t willing to let me work with her, K did allow the student who had said she could show K how to write an introduction to sit with her. Together the girls wrote introductions to three different prompts. When I spoke to K near the end of class, she seemed pleased with her own work. She told me that it was easier to work on getting one thing right than to try to keep “everything I’m supposed to do right in my mind.” I’d say that the strategy of having K focus on one small but attainable goal was a good match between learner and strategy.

### *Experiment 3: Proving Detailed Feedback*

I no longer dread seventh period. I think that after saying, “You can do it!” so many times to my class, I now truly believe it too! Yet of all the students in the class, I feel I’ve made the least progress with K, who is still reluctant to let me work with her. Since building a personal relationship with some students is a long process, I tried not to give up on K. Instead I began to work on the type of feedback I give to my students, making the feedback more detailed and having it focus on skills performed well, in addition to providing specific guidelines on how to improve those areas where further efforts were still needed. Also, rather than just handing back papers with feedback to students, I decided to set up in-class appointments with students to discuss their efforts.

### **Reflection on Case Study Student**

Two weeks ago, in-class conferences would have been impossible because much of my time was spent dealing with inappropriate behaviors and complaining students. Now during seventh period, students are on task *most* of the time—they are still eighth graders after all—but the class climate seems much more positive. Students know that when they sit down with me they will hear about what they have done right as well as what they still need to work on. K still needs to be redirected more often than others, but she is producing more work, and that work is of a higher quality. She now allows me to sit down next to her and discuss her work, and for the first time she is coming over to ask me a question about her work. K has added writing introductions to her list of mastered skills and is now working on supporting her opinions with details and examples.

### *Final Reflection*

Although for the purpose of this assignment I focused on the performance of one student, K, I knew I needed help with the whole class. Because all

of the students in my Test Prep class were low-confidence learners, the strategies I selected were chosen to benefit all the class, not just K.

I know that when (not if!) I teach this class again, I will begin with a baseline assessment of my students' writing skills, which I will use to help them set small, attainable goals for their own learning. Once I did that with my seventh period, students began to see the task of passing the Maryland Writing Test as achievable. I felt that students responded well to more direct feedback from me and that I would continue to discuss that feedback personally with them. I sensed that students began to perceive me as more of a guide than "the enemy" when my feedback included positive comments as well as specific steps they could take to improve the skills they were trying to hone. Finally, I hope never again to have to ask students to write down what they think my expectations are for them and what they think it would take to pass the Maryland Writing Test. I hope to communicate my expectations for them so clearly and so frequently that that particular experiment would never have to be repeated. I believe that the mistake I made with my Test Prep classes was in communicating the *importance* of passing the test without clearly communicating that I thought they were all *capable* of passing it. And to make matters worse, I realized until I broke the tasks down into different skills that they were able to master one at a time, passing the writing test must have seemed like a hopeless task to them.

Although K has not become a model student, I have not once had to refer her to the office for poor behavior since our experiments began. I now keep supplies in class for when K doesn't bring her own, and I'm employing the sort of "persevere and return" tenacity that is necessary to motivate K to make more of an effort in class. My tenacity has paid off to the extent that K seems much less defensive now about her writing and is beginning to accept help from me and other students in the class. I will continue to wear down K's resistance with repeated "I won't give up on you!" messages. In November, when the test is given, I'll see how successful my experiments have been.

### Teacher Case Study 2—Fifth Grade

Amhad is a fifth-grade male student who is attending Maple Avenue as his fourth elementary school. Recently, I have noticed that Amhad is spending most of his academic and recess time in the office working alone—if you can call it working. He travels with a large group of boys, all of whom have difficulty with English. They are often seen in the hallways at inappropriate times, coming out of the bathrooms together and causing a variety of problems for lunchroom and playground aides. When these students are asked about the incidents they cause, the blame consistently comes back to Amhad. I am a new teacher to the district and am working hard to learn objectives, outcomes, and standards. I am involved in planning for

instruction and consider specific behaviors important to classroom management. I believe in class meetings and give student feedback, especially when there is a change in performance. I admit that I find Amhad unmanageable and feel he should be accomplishing more both in and outside the classroom after 3 months of school. The principal and his parents and I are all concerned about him and want to look at underlying causes for his inappropriate behaviors and relationships with peers.

Amhad is clearly not meeting school discipline standards, evidenced by behaviors such as throwing food in the cafeteria, talking back to the teachers, not handing in assignments, failing tests given as review in spelling and mathematics, and fighting in class. The standards of behavior, classroom and schoolwide, have been discussed with Amhad and his parents (brought in for support), and Amhad is able to relate behaviors that he knows are inappropriate. However, he does not allow himself to take the blame. It is always someone else's fault, and his parents often back him up. He understands that cursing at teachers and fighting in the classroom are offenses that have resulted in him getting suspended from school; however, he continues to behave in this manner. One to one, Amhad is often a very verbal student, interested in a variety of topics that are beyond a fifth-grade understanding. He is often frustrated by assignments that involve writing and therefore does not hand in assignments. He does not participate during class discussions after silently reading a passage that he would otherwise be excited about. Considering his passion for talking and his interest in topics that are widely covered in *Time for Kids* (a *Time* magazine subscription service for youngsters), such as space exploration and underwater adventures, it is often a surprise that he is not attending in class or participating with a lot of teacher intervention.

Amhad seems to learn best in small-group settings where he can take on a leadership role. He often is more comfortable when an adult is present and seems to be more participatory when my focus is directed at him. He is attentive for long periods of time when passages are read to him, rather than when reading himself, and is often more successful when given opportunities to self-direct his study methods. Options such as dramatizing, listening to tapes, and drawing often give Amhad more successful scores on classroom tests and keep his behavior in check for longer periods of time.

Amhad is a very loving, caring individual who is extremely compassionate and is often the leader of the school's service corps, which assists our special education students. He is truthful and righteous and is a born leader. His strengths far outweigh his faults/weaknesses in terms of affect, and he seems to draw others in with his sense of humor and friendly attitude. Unfortunately for Amhad, when trouble finds him, his friends run for the hills. He is motivated by kind words and adult praise.

Amhad exhibits many behaviors that indicate his own feelings of inadequacies and low confidence as a learner. He does not participate in school discussions; he is constantly putting himself down as stupid, dumb, and a loser. He attributes his failures to the teacher, his parents, himself at times,



and even the other students. He often curses at the teachers and other students when he is lost or misunderstands directions, and often I am frustrated and impatient with him as well. This turns Amhad off to any interaction that would assist him in feeling successful. Amhad has become the class clown, which is often indicative of feelings of inadequacy. When other students laugh at inappropriate comments, he feels a part of the group without having to spend any extra effort. This behavior has become automatic and is causing him to react more frequently to his poor performance in academic areas.

### *Journal Entry 1*

Amhad will often answer a question with a silly answer or in some way try to take my focus away from the question and redirect it onto his behavior. Often, I would leave him, ignoring the behavior, and move on to another student, expressing nonverbally my dissatisfaction with Amhad's behavior. The first strategy I explored to focus on the attribution retraining efforts was to stick with the student. I did not move on when he deliberately tried to shift direction from my question to his inappropriate behavior. I expressed to him that I was willing to wait for him to attend to my question and that I would help him participate appropriately. I encouraged him to think aloud and often modeled think-alouds for all students. Amhad seemed a bit surprised by my confidence in his ability to answer, and the students seemed to play along, noting that I was not going to move on until progress was made with the specific question asked. Therefore, it helped the situation if the students did not laugh at Amhad, and when he realized he did not have an audience, he seemed to focus on coming up with an answer that the rest of his class could discuss.

### *Journal Entry 2*

To assist Amhad in learning how to use his leadership skills to help himself through lunch and recess, I gave him a role to play in helping younger students. He was motivated by the fact that because I told the class that I was choosing students based on their "people skills" to help others, Amhad was immediately seen as superior! He was unbelievably excited by the prospect that I thought he was capable of being responsible for other students, and it was easy to note that this was an immediate confidence builder. The message that I gave him was that I had positive expectations for him and that he was capable of following through on his job.

### *Journal Entry 3*

Amhad was constantly feeling the pressure of having the lowest score on all his tests. Most of his tests in fifth grade were written evaluations, and Amhad had extreme difficulty staying focused long enough to complete

this task. I decided to assess Amhad through verbal evaluations and rubrics so that he would know exactly what he needed to say in order to successfully complete the test. Using the rubric gave Amhad the specific parameters of what he must do to earn an acceptable score. For the first week, Amhad and I designed the rubrics together so that he would feel a sense of ownership of his success. Once the written piece was eliminated, I was surprised to find out how much this student knew. By communicating expectations and standards for the tests and evaluations, Amhad had an opportunity to use his strengths to indicate his knowledge.

### *Final Reflection*

This experience has helped me focus on individualized instruction as it was meant to be. Rather than teach five different levels, I began to think about individualizing in terms of what each student learns and how I need to develop the lessons so that each student has the possibility and probability of success. In 25 years of teaching, how often have I heard "That test was too hard!" Often, I questioned the test itself but did not always recognize that it was the child's belief about his or her own learning that I was missing.

The study of attribution theory and how it relates to a teacher's own repertoire of strategies for teaching is vital to the success of students in our classrooms. Through the experiment with Amhad, my own views of his behaviors and why he does what he does have changed. Rather than attributing his inappropriate behavior and low grades to his constant moving around or language barriers, I began to look at how he was expected to learn. Amhad's learning style depended on multiple intelligence opportunities. His biggest weakness was writing, and that was what most teachers expected from him for evaluative purposes. He could not help but fail. By assisting Amhad with appropriate learning tools to fit his learning style and by sticking with him and not using the ignoring strategy, I enabled him to participate more fully in instructional lessons and actually go to recess occasionally. Some aides were not expecting his behavior to improve and did not alter their own behavior to accommodate Amhad's. It became evident that their expectations were exactly the level at which he performed. I always felt sad when I would see him in the office because of discipline issue in the cafeteria. He was out of control when the adult in charge did not focus on his ability to lead and rather gave him lots of opportunities to fail.

I am amazed at the improvements this student made in a very short period of time. We have developed a good relationship as evidenced by the absence of cursing and limited statements of "I'm stupid" or "I can't do it." His peer relationships have been developing, and I have noticed that he is taking the blame more frequently when deserved. Amhad still continues to have issues when reading silently and is not learning the pre-reading strategies as we had hoped. We have decided that he should be



screened for specific learning disabilities and perhaps work in small groups with the resource teacher when using prereading strategies.

### Teacher Case Study 3—Kindergarten

As I administered the writing vocabulary assessment to Sean, his first words were, “I don’t like to write. I can read, but can’t write very well.” This sounded familiar. The year before I’d had Sean’s older brother in my third-grade class. Sean’s brother was also an above-average reader with messy handwriting and an aversion to written tasks. When I asked Sean to write all the words he knew, he could barely write his name. This was a child who had a high level of vocabulary and could read on a first-grade level. He exhibited poor fine motor control. This was also evident during other tasks like cutting, coloring, and gluing. I noticed that he would avoid all fine motor tasks by going to the bathroom or transitioning to another area of the classroom. I had to determine how to best encourage Sean. If I put pressure on him to finish a difficult task, he would often break down. From my experiences with his older brother, I knew that if not carefully guided Sean could experience confidence issues similar to his older brother. I had to develop ways to boost his confidence while maintaining the high standards of the curriculum.

#### *Experiment 1: Help Beginning a Task (Personal Contact and Expectancy)*

I noticed Sean would often wander from a task that involved lots of fine motor work. He tended to give up. I experimented with giving him a lot of personal contact in the beginning of a task, and I could also assess any material modifications that would increase his success. I would be sure to take advantage of teachable moments during and after the task to help Sean realize that effort yields success. I would not allow Sean to simply not finish a difficult task, but help guide him through it.

#### Reflection on Case Study Student

During one session, I helped the class make “color books.” They needed to cut up yellow pieces of paper and glue them onto an outline of a pear. Sean began saying, “I can’t do this.” I said, “Sure you can. Let me show you all a couple of different ways to make little yellow pieces. You can cut them or tear them like so.” He decided to tear them and successfully completed the task. When he finished the pear, I came by to recognize that he had really worked hard and had a beautiful product. He eagerly began the next page of his book. An important part for Sean was catching him before he became discouraged. Letting him know I thought he could do it and sharing several strategies really worked for him. I addressed his table when offering strategies and that seemed not to isolate his weaknesses. I have

tried this approach in the past, and it has yielded success. I need to continue using it. I also have to be aware of some potential pitfalls like dependence. I feel he needs this much support right now, and I will gradually release it as he becomes more comfortable.

### *Experiment 2: Recognizing Superior Performance*

One way to boost his confidence was to recognize the things he did really well, like reading and using computers. This may present an opportunity to talk about how effort yields success. I began by selecting a picture book to read about students in a primary class who each could do one thing really well. At the end of the story the main character discovers that he can use chopsticks better than the others because his family uses them daily. He begins to teach others.

### **Reflection on Case Study Student**

Later, when Sean was frustrated with a coloring task, I referenced the idea that time was needed for skills to develop. He still remained frustrated because he wanted his project to look just like my example and the work of the student next to him. I understood that it was natural to compare yourself with others. I realize that I will need to show Sean how he is improving. I want to explore the ideas of portfolios. During computer lab, I asked Sean to help a student with the computer. I explained to Sean that this student was not very comfortable with the computer yet, but since Sean had a lot of experience he could help out. Sean brimmed with confidence as he helped another.

### *Experiment 3: Positive Expectancy*

I had to be clear what my expectations were for Sean's writing this year. I expect all students to write their names "the kindergarten way" by the end of the year, with a capital letter at the beginning and lower case letters following. I also expect them to attempt writing each other's names and simple words. How could I modify this for Sean? I planned to talk to his occupational therapist to get some ideas for how to accommodate him. I need to keep expectations high and not lower standards. Sean's occupational therapist suggested that he use a smaller pencil to help his grip and that the process of learning to write his name should be a progression of small successes.

### **Reflection on Case Study Student**

I shared with the class how by the end of the year I expected all kids to write their name "the kindergarten way." When Sean finished a paper, I asked him to write just the first letter of his name using the modified pencil. I know writing is hard for him, but I will work with him to learn his name one letter

at a time. I told the class they had the whole year to work on it. He agreed to write his first initial after I modeled it for him. When asked later in the week, he knew how to write the first letter in his name. He wanted me to write the rest. I took the pressure of time off of him and set a clear expectation for the end of the year. I'm eager to see him write his name by next June.

### *Final Reflection*

I learned a lot about myself as a teacher in doing this project. Early on, I found myself falling into the habit of making suggestions that made things easier for the student. When working with Sean directly, I tended to lower my expectations so he could feel successful and also selfishly so we could move on. I needed to remind myself that it didn't matter if he missed one of his centers that day. In fact, he needed time to complete the project, and my expectations had to remain high. I found that Sean became more willing to participate if I anticipated some of his frustrations and supplied strategies to modify others. He had high standards too, and as teachers we would have to help him reach those goals. I would also need to help him see his own growth and the results of his effort. I will need to continue with the experiments I have tried. I will also need to have the goal in mind of gradual release of responsibility. In addition, I learned that students' confidence can begin to lower as early as kindergarten. Sean and others are already learning avoidance and giving up on certain tasks. It's never too early for attribution training or retraining. I learned that I need to examine my own belief system about what makes students smart. It's difficult to share some of the realizations I've made about high expectations and standards if I haven't made the journey myself. I realize every teacher needs to examine his or her own beliefs and expectations. As a classroom teacher I recognize the value of talking with another professional about your expectations for a child. Oftentimes I have been pointed in the right direction by another teacher who has listened to my frustrations. The most important thing for me to do is actively listen. This will help me understand and expand my repertoire of communication of "What we're doing is important. You can do it. I won't give up on you."

### **Teacher Case Study 4—Fourth Grade**

I have chosen this student, named B, for several reasons. Primarily, he has not been achieving in the classroom to the level of which I believe he is capable. He seldom finishes his work, even when given many different cues to get back on task. He demonstrates many task avoidance behaviors, such as misplacing papers, asking to use the bathroom, volunteering for any activity that would allow him to leave the room, and "performing" for his classmates. I believe he is capable of a higher level of achievement because he will engage in conversations that show he is learning, he will dictate high-level responses to comprehension questions, and he enjoys

coming to school. B learns best when he is standing, allowed to move about the room, and working one on one with an adult (ideally an adult who accepts his learning style).

His confidence level is low. This is evident by conversations he has during group activities. Rather than take a risk at being a leader or contributor, B will clown around, often sabotaging the group's progress. He easily accepts this role, because it is his belief that everyone is smarter than him, so why would they value what he has to say? Conversations he has had with a variety of adults in the school also demonstrate this low confidence concern. He frequently minimizes his achievements and will occasionally say, "I'm not smart," or will withdraw and not speak at all when asked if he needs help or simply wants to chat.

B will do anything for anybody. He is an excellent friend and gets along very well with adults. He is willing to do any organizational task (e.g., clean out the teacher's closet) and this is often used as a motivational tool.

The three areas that I felt needed immediate attention for B were low self-esteem, motivation, and underachieving. I conducted the following experiments to address these areas.

### *Experiment 1: Messages in Everyday Verbal Interactions to Increase B's Self-Esteem*

B's normal response to the statement "I know you can do it" would be to put his head down and respond that he can't. For 1 week I made greater effort to preface an assignment or task with "I know you are able to do this. I look forward to seeing your results" or "Look this over and see what areas you feel you will be successful in completing." When going over completed assignments, a similar interaction took place with any specific response that was completed: "This is a wonderful response," "I knew this was an area you would enjoy completing," or "What do you think of this response?"

### **Reflection on Case Study Student**

Initially, B accepted his encouragement with a blush, still with his head down. Toward the middle of the week, he showed more of a response by having his work on his desk before being asked to take it out. On the last day of the observation, B presented the work to me for evaluation before being asked for it! I believe with this continued encouragement B will eventually be self-motivated. I am concerned B might regress if this is not continued and also concerned about whether this constant reassurance is reasonable for a teacher in a class of 28 students.

### *Experiment 2: Attribution Retraining for Motivation*

B believes that everyone is smarter than he is and that's just the way things are. He doesn't believe that working hard and putting out effort

will help this situation. Acceptance by his peers would go a long way to improve his motivation. I created with B a Group Work Contract with the following goals:

- I will listen to others' opinions.
- I will tell and explain my opinions.
- I will accept when someone disagrees with me.
- I will write my opinion of my participation in the group.

### Reflection on Case Study Student

B's use of the contract became a focus in his group. He suggested that everyone in the group complete the same contract, and everyone agreed. In doing this, the others in the group encouraged each other to speak. At first B was more concerned with completing the contract than doing the group activity. I suggested that he glance over the goals at the beginning of the activity and review them again at the end of the activity. This shifted his focus, and he became a more active member of the group. His opinions were accepted, and the group members listened to his ideas. Part of the reason for this was that they wanted to be successful when evaluating the goals. But for whatever reason, B became much more comfortable and willing to participate.

### *Experiment 3: B's Lack of Focus and Difficulty With Fine Motor Skills*

B has so much difficulty getting his thoughts and ideas down on paper that he associates this with being "stupid" and not as smart as everyone else. The use of an Alpha Smart, a portable keyboard that can be used at the desk and then hooked up to a printer, provided B with the opportunity to present his thoughts and ideas.

### Reflection on Case Study Student

At first the Alpha Smart served as a toy for B, and there always seemed to be an issue that caused him not to be able to use the tool (it wouldn't print, what was typed got erased, etc.). Little reaction by me to these distractions allowed B to realize that this was his responsibility and that he would have no one else to blame if he wasn't able to use the Alpha Smart correctly (he had been trained on how to use the tool). By midweek he was asking permission to use the Alpha Smart in more and more classroom activities. One of the students in his group asked permission to use the tool, and B became his trainer. At the end of the week the class was given a writing assignment. I observed that B took out the Alpha Smart, created an appropriate outline, printed the outline, and turned it in. The outline was clear, was well thought out, and contained information from an expository reading that the class shared during the week. This outline represented B's ability,

without the barrier of having to write. His focus shifted from frustration with the fine motor skills to focusing on using the Alpha Smart appropriately.

### *Final Reflection*

I originally incorrectly interpreted B's classroom performance as being combative and resistant. For the first month of school he was underachieving and unhappy, causing a lot of others in the classroom to be unhappy because of his disruptive behavior. Taking the time to focus and being able to really observe B's actions, temperament, body language, and approaches to a task gave me an opportunity to better understand his limitations. I feel that the experiments conducted allowed B to perform better in the classroom, thereby raising his self-confidence and making him an active participant. I am concerned that because of the large class size B will eventually slip by and revert back to his old habits next year.

### **Teacher Case Study 5—Ninth Grade**

Juan is a Hispanic ninth grader in honors U.S. History. His grade for the first marking period was an E. Repeated attempts to contact his parents throughout the marking period were not successful. The interim mailed home halfway through the marking period was not returned with acknowledgment of receipt. He received interim warnings in other academic courses as well.

Juan's counselor has no specific information on either Juan or the family situation. A review of his file indicates a criterion-referenced test score of 538 in middle school, which is below the county average. He earned Cs in middle school in honors World Studies and also received multiple interims in middle school in several courses, including World Studies, but generally managed to pull his grades into the C range for each report card. I had had contact with Juan in the summer Freshman Orientation class; he had attended the class and did the minimal amount of work, which resulted in a passing grade of C.

Juan is not meeting the classroom standards in multiple ways: He does not complete most of the work either in class or for homework; he does not volunteer or contribute in class; he does not ask for help or acknowledge that he needs it when asked as part of the whole class or individually.

In the summer course, Juan was strongest at objective-type assignments and assessments—multiple choice versus writing. Strategies that have had little or no impact include moving his seat from between two talkative girls to a desk surrounded by hardworking, motivated students. He has repeatedly declined my offers of help.

Juan is polite and pleasant. He is respectful and courteous when spoken to.



*Journal Entry 1*

Because Juan appears reluctant to ask for help or acknowledge needing any help, attribution retraining seems appropriate. Juan does not seem to have a strong positive sense of himself as a capable, accomplished student. I was able to address unmet expectations when Juan received a unit test with the grade of E. As Juan left class after the tests had been returned and discussed, I spoke to him privately. I began by connecting to our summer work together in the Freshman Orientation class. Although he had not been a stellar student in the summer class, he had had some success. I reminded Juan that he had been successful in the summer course and told him that I knew he was capable of more and better quality work than he was currently producing.

I reminded Juan that he had chosen not to complete the 3 x 5 note cards that each student was expected to prepare as a test review strategy. I expressed disappointment in this choice and stated that for the next unit test I expected Juan to bring in his note cards prior to the class due date during a lunch period so we could look them over.

I told Juan I was confident that he could create the note cards and that I would help him when we met if he had any questions or concerns about them. I stressed that I wanted him to make the effort to complete the note cards and that they did not have to be “perfect” or even the same as other students’ cards but, more importantly, be useful to him. I also told Juan that I believed using the note cards as a study aid would ensure the kind of grades I believed he was capable of receiving on assessments. Juan agreed to meet with me and bring his note cards prior to the next review session. He appeared somewhat flattered by the personal attention and the repeated references to his potential ability.

The results of this attribution retraining appear positive. Juan has agreed to come in for help at lunch—a big step forward. He also has responded favorably, nonverbally, to the description of his past successes and to the belief that he will and can succeed in the future. This interaction could and probably should have taken place earlier in the year. The one-on-one pep talk seems to have stimulated a response where nothing else did.

*Journal Entry 2*

Now that Juan appears more amenable to my intervention, I have decided to tackle his writing skills. He tends to answer any essay questions with one or two sentences. He rarely uses supporting details or examples. This, of course, contributes to his low grades on many assignments.

I decided to try the concept of a graphic organizer to help Juan (and other students) identify the details and examples needed to write a coherent, detailed essay. As class work, the students had been given a one-page

handout of letters written to a newspaper during World War I by blacks discussing the rumor of job openings in the North. The students were asked to read the three letters and then respond to the following question in an essay format: "How do the letters reflect the dissatisfaction of blacks with life in the South and their hopes for a better future?"

When I read the responses, I found that some students, Juan included, had either misread the questions or had written very brief, unsupported statements for an answer. I returned the assignments to the class without having graded them. I then reviewed the essay questions with the class and asked for their input in creating a graphic organizer for possible answers. As the students brainstormed and contributed, I created a simple organizer on the board using their ideas. Once the students understood what I was doing, some of them offered suggestions for additional categories and details. I specifically asked Juan for a corroboration of another student's answer and was pleased to see that he responded (correctly).

I then asked each student to copy down the organizer that had been jointly created and look at his or her own answer to the essay question. Had the answer included some or all of the main points for the organizer? Students had the opportunity to rewrite the essay using the organizer as a guideline. The majority of the students, Juan included, chose to rewrite the assignment, which was subsequently graded.

I think my effort at providing the graphic organizer as a tool for eliciting details and support for essay writing was successful. It appears that students like Juan may have some good ideas but do not know how to organize them or group them for inclusion in an essay. Overall, the strategy was received positively; I plan to use it again but as a prewriting tool.

### *Journal Entry 3*

The next strategy I employed in an attempt to increase Juan's success in the class was the introduction of a mental imagery lesson. This was a departure from anything I had ever used before, but I was willing to try anything that might engage Juan in the learning process. I was preparing the introduction to a lesson on life in the city from newly arrived immigrants' viewpoint. Using the *Skillful Teacher* (Saphier, Haley-Speca, & Gower, 2008) as a guideline, I created a descriptive passage to share with my students. I then set the stage for the mental imagery exercise and presented it.

At the end of my description, I gave the students a few minutes to individually jot down ideas/images that had come to mind. I then assigned the students to groups of four and had them discuss with each other what they had envisioned. I reminded them that there were no right or wrong answers. While walking around the room, I was pleased to see that Juan was interacting with his group and contributing some of his ideas. As Juan left class at the end of the period, I quietly praised him for his active participation.

The mental imagery exercise appeared successful in engaging Juan in the introduction to the unit. It also gave him an opportunity to interact with his peers in a nonthreatening environment.

### *Final Reflection*

A student like Juan is a challenge—not much background information or parental support and a repeated pattern of failure on assessments. My ability to intervene on a personal, private level with Juan and provide him with attribution retraining to support his need for encouragement made all the difference. He gained the confidence he needed to attempt the course work and then was given specific strategies (the 3 x 5 note cards, the graphic organizer, and the mental imagery activity) to allow him to be successful.

I believe that as Juan continues to experience success in the U.S. History class, he will become more confident in his own abilities and will be more willing to take risks (for example, answering a question in class on his own initiative). Overall, I believe I was successful in making a difference in Juan's perception of himself and in his level of success at schoolwork.

## ADMINISTRATOR CASE STUDIES

### **Administrator Case Study 1—Sixth Grade, Special Education**

For the purpose of this case study I have selected a sixth-grade special education student who will be called Tamika.

Tamika visits a resource room for both reading and mathematics. I chose Tamika because while working with her teacher I heard her describe a student in her class as a “nonreader”; that student was Tamika. While working with Tamika's teacher and visiting the classroom frequently to observe, I started noticing how Tamika, the nonreader, was demonstrating some higher level cognitive ability. This was demonstrated in her responses to different questions her teacher asked after reading and discussing various literatures. Tamika's teacher is working on several areas of her instructional practice, but the one that inhibits Tamika's academic and cognitive development is her underlying belief that Tamika is not capable of handling higher level material. Here the teacher has predetermined that Tamika cannot function in a level much higher than first grade, yet my experiences and observations of Tamika's responses demonstrate a student who is quite capable of interpreting and formulating meaningful responses to various types of questions.

In this case, Tamika is not meeting my standards because although she is *not* a nonreader, she is reading four levels below her grade level. Her reading level was assessed using a developmental reading assessment that

indicated Grade 1 to be her independent reading level and Grade 2 her highest instructional reading level. Observation of her reading behaviors indicate that Tamika is still a “whisper” reader and still needs to track her reading with her finger. She demonstrates awareness of reading for meaning by self-correcting frequently as she reads. Tamika makes various attempts in reading unknown words by identifying beginning and ending sounds and some clusters. In addition, she uses picture and context clues to assist her in word analysis and meaning.

One of Tamika’s greatest assets is her attentiveness and hard work. This is a student who works hard and feels comfortable enough to take some risks. You can tell after a few minutes of visiting the classroom that Tamika also enjoys the relationship she has with her teacher. There is a sense of trust and safety as the children in this classroom, including Tamika, take risks by responding to questions even when uncertain. This is the culture that the teacher has developed in her classroom. Part of that is because the teacher shares a lot of her personal life and experiences with them and relates those experiences to course work and events that the children are reading/studying. What fails in this approach is that the teacher occasionally asks questions and then doesn’t take a long enough time to pause so that students can respond. It becomes a story time for the teacher to share her life and childhood. The result is that the teacher ends up answering her own questions or sharing her own experiences without listening to the responses of her students. So part of my work with this teacher is to get her to listen more to her students and to change her belief that her students, including with Tamika, can achieve at high levels even though they are special education students.

Tamika learns best when working in a small group. The class size in this classroom is approximately 15 students at any one time; this is a resource room where enrollment changes based on student individualized educational program requirements. Tamika’s small group consists of her and two other students. To observe the personal dynamics of this group is amazing. Tamika remains relatively quiet but is not afraid to speak up by sharing her viewpoint or to ask clarifying questions. The other two members of this group are totally different from Tamika. There is another girl who is the “recognized” leader because of her personality. When the group is given an assignment, the other group members look at her for clarification of the assignment and for any other questions they may have. Tamika has a good relationship with this student, and you can see that they feel comfortable working together and that they are accepting of each other’s strengths and weaknesses. The final member is a boy who for the most part is easily distracted and off task most of the time. When the group is given an assignment, this student usually is still daydreaming. After realizing that everyone is working, he turns to ask the girls about the assignment. In this group, everyone has adapted and has accepted the differences in each other’s learning style.

Tamika works very hard in the classroom but seems to lack confidence in her ability. I believe that this has developed over time because of her educational placement and her past teachers' perception of her capabilities. Tamika has become comfortable with just getting by and has lost the "love" of learning. This behavior has created a student who has lost confidence in her ability and has become satisfied with just the basics. It's time to shake things up and demonstrate for the teacher just what Tamika can do!

### *Journal Entry 1*

The first attribution retraining effort we were to demonstrate for this teacher was wait time. It became very clear from the start that if I were to help Tamika, I also had to address the teacher's belief about Tamika's capability. The way I did that was to have a direct conversation with the teacher about Tamika, my observations, and then a challenge. That challenge involved Tamika and my belief that she has the ability to respond to higher level questions. I spoke to the teacher about her wait time, and she was quite surprised by my comment. She really wasn't aware that she was cutting off the comments of the students and not allowing them to respond to her questions. So the first thing I set out to do was to demonstrate for her proper wait time while questioning.

I planned to come into class and demonstrate a guided reading lesson with Tamika's group. During the lesson, I asked the teacher to record my questions and make note of the wait time used. Before beginning our story, I began to tap the students' prior knowledge and to set a purpose for reading. As we began to discuss the theme of the story, one of the group members started sharing an experience she had that related to the story theme. Tamika perked up and started to connect her real-life experiences that were similar to the character's experience based on her story prediction. It was a wonderful experience watching Tamika and the other members of her group interact and connect to the story. This happened because I remained quiet and allowed them time to connect. After reading we talked about the character traits of the main character and connected them to people we have experienced in our own life. Tamika began the discussion, and she was eager to share with her friends stories about family members who reminded her of the character in the story.

After the lesson the teacher and I planned to get together to talk about what she just observed.

### *Journal Entry 2*

I met with Tamika's teacher during lunch the next day. She told me she was really surprised to see how Tamika responded to my questions and then discounted the event by saying that the subject was something Tamika connected to and that was why she was so engaged. I directed the

conversation back to her observations of my wait time use, and she noted that she felt that I asked fewer questions than she usually asks and that I listened more to student responses than spoke. The data helped to support what I wanted the teacher to see. We decided that I would now come in and observe her teaching, and this time I would record her questions and the student responses. But wait time wasn't the cure for what was going on in this classroom, and with this teacher and student we had to have another difficult conversation.

I spoke with the teacher about the comments she made about Tamika being a nonreader and how that belief affected how the teacher responded to her and perhaps other students in the classroom. We talked about the lessons that I observed and comments that the teacher made as I shared my literal notes with her. I think that the reason this conversation went as well as it did was because the teacher and I have developed a trust over the last few months. I have been visiting her for a while and have helped her through some difficult instructional situations. She was grateful that I was so direct, and we had further conversations on how she could improve her teaching.

### *Journal Entry 3*

This time it was my turn to observe the teacher, her exchange with Tamika, and her group. The teacher has learned to be more of a facilitator than the one in control of the conversation. All of the children have benefited from my demonstration and from me having a very direct and to-the-point conversation with this teacher.

### *Final Reflection*

One of the things that I realized from working on this case study is the importance of having those uncomfortable conversations with teachers, getting right to the point instead of dancing around a problem. In order for me to help Tamika, I had to change the teacher's perception of Tamika's ability, and there wasn't enough time to hope that the teacher would eventually get it. Tamika is a spirited child who in many conversations with me revealed a life with much turmoil. She is a survivor who has learned to adapt and push through many unhappy situations in her life. The spirit that drives Tamika is the spirit that we saw when she joined in conversations about her life experiences while connecting them to her learning. This ability to connect real-life experiences to her learning allowed her to begin to scaffold information into her metacognition. Tamika began thinking about her own thinking. She demonstrated the ability to monitor her own knowledge base and the factors that influenced her thinking.

I continue visiting the classroom and working on projects with them. Tamika has become one of the leaders in the classroom, something that has



had a tremendous impact on her self-confidence. She is starting to see herself differently as a reader, and so has her teacher. Tamika now takes an active role in her learning.

In this case study, in order to help Tamika we had to first cure the ailment of a teacher who didn't have high expectations for Tamika and her other special education students. I continue to have conversations with the teacher reflecting on her lessons and planning for upcoming activities. Tamika is still two grade levels behind in reading but now looks at herself *as a reader*. We all have confidence in Tamika, and what is more wonderful, Tamika now has confidence in herself!

### Administrator Case Study 2—Fourth Grade

I selected a fourth-grade boy for this case study. He will be referenced as T.

I chose T before I met him! T was referred to the Child Study Team to determine whether he needed to be assessed for a disability. The instructional associate, the classroom teacher, the special educator, the principal, and Ms. D, the ESOL teacher, spent about 45 minutes explaining to me why T could not succeed. Most of these reasons were rooted in his family, who apparently are a cold, miserable, uncaring, uneducated group of people. T does not speak English as a first language. T is unmotivated. (I said, "Well, everyone is motivated by something. Can you push yourself to think more about this?" The ESOL teacher replied, "Nothing motivates him.") T does not "know how to act." After listening for a good time, I challenged the team to think about what we could control, rather than what we could not. This did not go over very well! They began to tell me the sordid details of his family. Ms. D, the ESOL teacher, has known the family for years, as she instructed T's older brothers. I stopped her. "I don't want to know," I stated. Ms. D was surprised and frankly annoyed. She asked why and I told her that I wanted to be sure that I could expect the best of T before I even met him. I didn't know it at that moment, but my expectations case study had begun. The interesting thing here is that Ms. D cares deeply for T. She is nearly obsessed with his home life. She allows him to eat lunch with her daily. The underlying adaptive work is getting Ms. D to believe that what she does as a teacher (specifically around expectations) will actually impact T's performance!

T is not meeting standards in any way that is traditionally measured. His report card grades are unsatisfactory for quarters 1–3 in language arts and quarters 1 and 2 in math. T earned an S (satisfactory) in math for quarter 3! It is interesting to note that T has an I (incomplete) in ESOL for quarter 1 and no recorded grades for quarters 2 and 3. Although T has told me that he loves art, he has unsatisfactory scores in this area as well. Ms. D comments, "T is such a sweet child and he wants to learn; however, he has very low skills and seems to be getting frustrated." I think that frustration is understandable! She has also said, "T is having a hard time

grasping fourth-grade concepts. He will need more time at this level.” Interventions listed include only “afterschool academy offered but T did not attend” and “Ms. M’s class for reading.” Ms. M is a third-grade teacher. T does not meet school discipline standards as evidenced by behaviors such as leaving the classroom, wearing a hat in school constantly, not completing work, and roughhousing. However, he is rarely held accountable for these inappropriate behaviors. Most adults are hesitant to discipline T because everyone “feels so sorry for him.”

Ms. D and I have been focusing on spelling for T and have been keeping consistent data in this area. Coaching Ms. D was challenging; I soon discovered that I needed to narrow our instructional focus to one area to ensure small early victories. The data are as follows as measured by weekly spelling tests:

Week	Score
1	25
2	5
3	0
4	0
5	0
6	10
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	23
11	20
12	10
13	30
14	50
15	0
16	50
17	45
18	45
<b>*19 Case study begins</b>	<b>50</b>

Week	Score
20	70
21	50 (100 on retest!)
22	70
23	70
24	100

T, like most students, learns best when there is a clear objective. He enjoys adult attention and seems to learn better in a small-group setting. T has lots of energy that is best utilized in shorter lessons with lots of participation. T also likes to respond with art.

T is cheerful and has a pleasant disposition. He is easy to encourage and responds extremely well to praise. As mentioned, T gains the affection of adults quickly. He expresses himself well through art. He earned a passing score in math in quarter 3, the first all year. He attends school on time and daily.

Behavior that has led me to infer that T has low confidence as a learner is that he is hesitant to participate in class and rarely does. He does not attempt most assignments and is often out of the classroom. He depends on Ms. D to assist him with most work. (I know this is her responsibility to address.) T leaves the classroom frequently and often mutters that he “can’t do it.” He does not complete home assignments and did not attend the offered afterschool intervention because “it won’t make no difference.”

I do need to clarify, though, that T’s own behaviors led me to believe that he has low confidence as a learner. They have been overshadowed by adult statements, particularly Ms. D’s, that he is unable to achieve. Although masked by pity for T, Ms. D did not expect T to learn. These beliefs shaped her actions. As a principal, I want to coach teachers to recognize the power of expectations, rather than coach the students myself. This case study morphed into a study of Ms. D rather than T!

### *Experiment 1: Attribution Retraining*

T often eats lunch with Ms. D. I lunched with them one day, mentioning to Ms. D that I would facilitate a discussion about effort and expectation. I asked Ms. D to explain to T what behaviors she saw from him. She mentioned, “It seems like you don’t try.” T responded, quite honestly, that he doesn’t. Ms. D seemed surprised that he stated this so bluntly. She asked him why and he responded that it was because he didn’t care. Ms. D seemed unsure how to respond. I told T that I care and that Ms. D cares too. He smiled at this. Ms. D eventually told T that she thought he didn’t

try because he didn't think he could do it. T looked skeptical and sucked his teeth. Ms. D asked T what he liked best and he answered spelling. "Great!" Ms. D told him. (This is how Ms. D and I came to narrow our focus.) "You can get better at spelling and I can help you." I told T that spelling was an area where the harder you work, the better you get. "Other kids are smarter and can spell better," he replied. Ms. D told him that other kids in the class study spelling words every night for a week, but that T didn't study at all. T looked thoughtful and surprised. T and Ms. D decided to study spelling words at lunch every day.

### Reflection on Case Study Student and Teacher

I was actually rather impressed with Ms. D during this conversation. Our brief conversation seemed to really impact her and get her thinking. T and Ms. D did study together that week, and he passed his weekly spelling test. His classroom teacher was late one morning the next week and I held his class for a few minutes. There were no lesson plans available, so I held an informal spelling bee! T perked right up when I announced this, and he took his turn. He hid a smile when I announced that he was correct.

Ms. D and I had a conversation after the weekly spelling test that I was disappointed by. She mentioned that she helped him on the test and that she was happy she could support her ESOL students so much. I asked her to explain, and she stated that she helped T sound out words during the tests. "Ms. D," I asked, "don't we want to know what T can do on his own?" She responded with the litany of excuses mentioned earlier, mainly involving his family. "Our students don't need us to cheat for them," I eventually said firmly. Ms. D looked surprised. I asked her what she thought this "help" communicated to T, and she thought for a while. "I just want him to be successful." I explained that I wanted the same and that we needed to, again, maintain high expectations and communicate to him that his effort will make him successful. When I asked her if she thought T could pass without this help, she looked unsure. I gave her a big pep talk about his potential. She agreed to try again and not overdo the "help."

I felt terrible about this! I praised T so much for his passing test score, but it wasn't really his own work. I also thought Ms. D had understood, but changing beliefs takes time, so I continued to work.

### *Experiment 2: Providing Specific Feedback*

A week passed, during which Ms. D met with T at lunch to work on the spelling words. She reminded T, as did I, that the harder he worked, the better he would do. T took the weekly test. We were all a little taken aback that he scored only a 50. Ms. D and I discussed it before T heard the news. We were kind of panicked, both really believing that all this studying would result in a passing score! We decided that Ms. D would review the

test with T and give him feedback. Our mistake, in retrospect, was that it was too late. We should have given him an informal quiz and given immediate feedback before the class test. We planned this conversation with T carefully. Ms. D wanted to facilitate, which I was happy about. It showed me that she was starting to “get it.”

T and I waited in Ms. D’s office the next Monday. She burst in, holding T’s test. “T!” she exclaimed, “I found something out! You were so close on all these words but didn’t change the *y* to *i* before adding *s*!” T looked at Ms. D like she was crazy, and so did I. She quickly reviewed the rule with T, who was interested by her enthusiasm. They practiced a few words together and then Ms. D gave him the test again. He scored 100. Clearly, the feedback made a big difference in his performance. Ms. D mentioned that she never thought to look that carefully at a student’s errors and that she never thought about telling T specifically what to correct because she didn’t want to make him feel bad about his work. T scored a 70 on the next week’s test!

### Reflection on Case Study Student and Teacher

I can’t believe what a difference it made to help Ms. D give T specific feedback on his work. It was the most powerful of the experiments. Ms. D clearly communicated that she believed in T when she took the time to look at his work and tell him how to make it perfect. T seemed surprised and pleased that he scored perfectly. My regret here is that we waited until after the assessment to give him the feedback. After this, Ms. D gave T a quiz on Wednesday, 2 days before the classroom test. They worked together to find patterns of error. When I spoke to both about this, they lit up. It was like a fun little mystery for them to solve together.

### *Experiment 3: Modeling “Sticking With T”*

I observed Ms. D teach a small group that included T and noticed that when T did not immediately respond to an oral question, she did one of two things:

- Move on to another student: Ms. D often asked students who seemed unsure to call on another student to answer for them. T used this privilege freely and three times in one 45- minute lesson.
- Give the answer: Ms. D gave the correct answer to T and other students if they did not quickly respond.

I shared this with Ms. D in a post-observation conference and she was not surprised. She stated that she was never sure what to do when students did not give a correct answer. She said she worried about embarrassing students and felt a little embarrassed herself when she was being observed and students seemed unsure. I praised her for her

reflection and she perked up even more. We briefly discussed wait time, follow-up questions, acknowledgment, restating in fuller language, asking students to elaborate, and praise. She identified allowing wait time as an area of growth. I agreed to model a lesson with a small group. She would observe and then apply what she learned in her own lesson. I would observe that lesson and we would debrief.

### **Reflection on Case Study Student and Teacher**

Ms. D's implementation of wait time was moderately successful. It was interesting that students were uncomfortable with it. We ended up taking time from the lesson to talk with students about how important it is to stop and think. T became impatient and uncomfortable. Ms. D and I decided to continue to try to implement more time to think. We came up with a few cues to give students, like "No hands up until everyone has a chance to think" and "This will be a hard question or word, so let's all slow down a bit."

I observed T during spelling instruction the next day. He answered questions correctly when Ms. D gave him wait time, but scoffed at other students when they did not immediately answer. Ms. D noticed this and promised to talk to him. T passed the weekly spelling test with a 70. We were pleased when T said, "I passed, but I'll do even better next week."

### *Final Reflection*

Ms. D, T, and I celebrated every test with a "Lunchable" for each of us. (Clearly, this was T's choice of lunch!) Although T has grown and understands that effort yields achievement, I am most proud of Ms. D. She has begun to understand that her expectations of students are fulfilled, so they need to be high. She has begun to understand that pity does not yield success.

This case study was challenging for me. It was difficult to coach a teacher who used her caring as a defense. She could respond to many of my questions with "I just love T. His family is such a mess." I need to hone my skills in coaching a teacher like this. However, once Ms. D and I saw T succeed, our relationship strengthened, and it became more comfortable to have these difficult conversations. Furthermore, Ms. D was able to see her own efficacy. When she worked harder with T to encourage him to work harder, they were both successful. When I expected Ms. D to show me improved academic performance and set explicit goals with her, she rose to my expectations. It makes me wonder about how many teachers have failed to succeed because no one expected anything else from them. Clear and high expectations will impact an entire school. I must clearly communicate my high expectations to students, staff, and teachers. If I do so, I am confident they will meet them. This is the most important lesson of all. After all, T scored a 100 on this week's spelling test.



### Administrator Case Study 3—Seventh Grade

For my case study, I chose a student who had a unique situation. Joe is a seventh-grade scholar who entered the Academy at the beginning of the school year. Since most of the scholars at the Academy enter in the sixth grade, they are indoctrinated into a setting of high expectations before they enter the seventh grade. Due to low performance, Joe's previous school was closed over the summer and he was placed at the Academy without prior notice or preparation. Therefore, he had never experienced such an academically rigorous environment.

At his previous school, Joe was accustomed to success with mediocre work. Though he quickly became familiar with the school culture, he began to align himself with the underperforming scholars because they made him feel comfortable. There were occasions when he showed interest in class but became intimidated when other scholars understood concepts at a faster pace.

I had a discussion with Joe about his low mathematics grades. He averaged approximately 67% in the first three terms and scored at Level 2 (below proficiency) on the Citywide Mathematics Practice exam. Prior to my residence, I was the mathematics teacher at the school, so I knew all of the scholars. Since he was new to the school, I made sure that I extended my hand to him so that he would become familiar with the entire faculty.

I questioned him on his grades and his feelings about the Academy. Joe explained that he felt most comfortable in language arts but had difficulty comprehending and remembering the formulas and the rules in math. During testing, he would forget what he had been taught. Consequently, he stopped studying because, he said, "It was a waste of time." Joe also confessed that he did not participate in class because he thought that the other students knew more than he did. His lack of consistency significantly affected his grades.

The grading policy at the Academy consists of four equally weighted components: tests/quizzes, class work (including do-now assignments), projects, and homework. Joe was not meeting the standards because of incomplete assignments and failing test scores. Due to the upcoming standardized tests in mathematics, monthly assignments had been given, and the results were dismal.

After observing Joe in numerous classes, I found that he learns best with really animated teachers. He responds to teachers constantly moving while using various pictures, stories, and jokes to convey the lesson. He also becomes active with group work. Though he may not be the first to offer a suggestion, he does become an active participant. He is very articulate when he has confidence that he is correct, but he becomes withdrawn when the aim of the lesson is difficult to grasp. Lately, I have observed Joe becoming more withdrawn in mathematics class.

*Journal Entry 1*

Ms. F is the seventh-grade mathematics teacher. When I began writing the journal for this case study, she had begun teaching New York City Mathematics Performance Standard M6, which is mathematical skills and tools. By definition, it is using equations, formulas, and simple algebraic notation appropriately. I knew this might be an area of difficulty for Joe because it required memorizing and retaining various formulas.

I discussed Joe's performance with Ms. F, and she was also concerned by Joe's lack of success in her class. She described Joe as a child who was only interested in activities and never participated in class even when questions were directed at him. We decided to develop some methods to get Joe more involved in her class. Ms. F was already a lively, energetic teacher who was open to new ideas, so we worked together to create a new environment for Joe.

I focused on giving Ms. F the language to inspire and to motivate Joe. I instructed her to use the three following messages:

1. This is important.
2. You can do it.
3. I won't give up on you.

Along with these phrases, I introduced her to scripts from *The Skillful Teacher* (Saphier, Haley-Speca, & Gower, 2008) that showed how a teacher can respond to students who say "I can't do it" when responding to a question. We also discussed the use of wait time. At first, Ms. F was reluctant to use wait time because she said that it made the children feel like they were "on the spot." We focused on developing different methods of wait time so Joe would not feel pressured to "catch on" quickly. I directed Ms. F to devise a wait time system that would empower Joe and make both parties feel comfortable.

*Journal Entry 2*

Ms. F began to use various wait time techniques with the scholars and saw a significant change in many of the children. After observing how wait time affected Joe, Ms. F began using a wonderful technique she calls Helping Hands. When she asked a scholar a question, the entire class knew to put their hands down and remain quiet once someone was chosen. If the scholar she selected did not know the answer, it was his or her duty to ask for a Helping Hand. The student then had the opportunity to ask another student the same question. The scholar had to listen to the answer given, rephrase the answer, and ask for verification of whether the interpretation was correct. This minimized the pressure of seeing dozens of hands waving in the air.

Ms. F was very excited about the change in Joe's response. It was a good idea to give Ms. F some directions, but it was also good to give her the ability to test and to plan her own strategy. By this point we were very much on the same page, so Ms. F was open to continuing to use new strategies with Joe.

### *Journal Entry 3*

I asked Ms. F to have a meeting with Joe to discuss his performance. During their discussion, she told him that she was available after school for assistance. She also explained to Joe that she would not accept "less than the best" from him. During their conversation, she also realized that Joe was lacking study skills. Since Joe had not entered the school in the sixth grade, he had missed out on the first unit of a class called Whole Life Management, which focused on successful study habits. He didn't know how to study. Ms. F gave Joe the textbook for the class and promised to explain how to use it at a later date. After the conversation, Joe seemed even more motivated.

### *Journal Entry 4*

My next objective with Ms. F was more physical. I discussed the use of eye contact and nonverbal communication. This would let Joe know that she was there for him. In class, Ms. F would make sure he was on task by lightly tapping his desk when he was not taking notes. She would also give him a thumbs-up signal when he answered a question correctly on his paper. Another technique she would use would be to touch his shoulder to make him aware that she would be calling on him soon. I loved her rapport with Joe so much that I invited other teachers to observe their interactions and to use some of the techniques in their own classrooms.

### *Final Reflection*

What I have noticed about all children is the fact that they want to learn. Though some may have given up on the possibility to learn certain information, they all desire to have extensive knowledge about various subjects. The problem is that school creates an environment that forces children to learn at a prescribed pace and creates a pressure-filled environment. As educators, we have the daunting task of using one prescription to cure many ailments. This is difficult, but it is not impossible.

One of the first statements made by doctors is "Tell me where it hurts." If we take this approach, we can learn some important information about our students. Once they trust that we know where the "pain" is, they may be more receptive to our cure. They can believe us when we say, "This is important. You can do it. And I won't give up on you."

### Administrator Case Study 4—Ninth Grade

I worked on this case study with Mr. S, the same teacher with whom I did the mastery case study. Mr. S is in his second year of teaching, and his job is split between teaching math and technology. He and I co-taught a class last spring, and in many ways he sees me as a mentor.

For this project Mr. S selected J, a student in his second-year math class. J is a female ninth grader in a predominantly 10th-grade curriculum. At times, Mr. S has wondered if she is misplaced, but her previous performance in math—both on test scores and on report cards—indicates she is not. Her lack of belief in herself has held her back, and he thinks that she might develop more math esteem in the easier first-year curriculum. While that might be true, I worked to persuade Mr. S that J was where she should be and it was up to us to help her grow accordingly. Other teachers have also struggled with J, and in one case the teacher has essentially given up on her, resulting in J quitting the class in return. On several occasions, she's been sent to the office for "sleeping" in this teacher's class, which I interpret to be her defense mechanism against the teacher's treatment. Mr. S remains committed to helping her succeed.

My observation of J in class confirmed the traits Mr. S described in our pre-observation meeting. She spent the warm-up part of the class fixing her hair and preening in a mirror. Then, during guided work, she raised her hand incessantly. By my calculations, Mr. S spent 6 of his 20 minutes in this part of the period tending to J, which left the other 20 students minimal access to him. Her ability to rope him into helping her was masterful. Her normal move of calling his name while raising her hand was standard. Her ability to engage him from across the room, however, was impressive. In my post-observation meeting with Mr. S, I shared my view of J's behavior. He had no idea she was monopolizing his time that much, and he was clearly concerned. But he also felt that he allowed such indulgences because he wants J to know that he cares, and he doesn't want to send signals that he's given up on her. We agreed that the two aren't mutually exclusive and that there were some next steps he could take. I also gave him three chapters from Fred Jones's *Tools for Teaching* (2007) to read. They focus on weaning the hand-raisers and providing audio and visual cues to help scaffold students' learning.

#### *First Phase*

Mr. S and I discussed how he could approach the situation with J in their next class. First, I recommended that he be over-the-top positive in his interactions with her. By using the mantra "This is important. You can do it. I won't give up on you," he could help her get at her lack of math esteem. He was already living the mantra; now it was time to verbalize it to her.

Second, we discussed Jones's chapters and identified strategies from them to help wean J of her hand-raising addiction. Mr. S felt that he could

do a better job of only providing J with cues to the next step of a math problem, instead of getting suckered into completing the problem for her. He was most concerned with how she would react to him refusing to help her when she had a question. We discussed at great length the best strategy for a transition. Fearing that she would shut down if it just happened all of a sudden, we added an element to his overall plan. Students were going to be working in groups on a particularly challenging word problem. In order to direct the focus on having them help each other, he was going to announce that each group would only get two consultations, one written and one spoken. Additionally, he decided to rearrange J's group so that she had more collaborative partners. In this way, she wouldn't be able to rely on Mr. S in a way that didn't isolate her.

### *Second Phase*

In our next meeting, Mr. S reported that J had done well, though the class hadn't followed his script as he'd hoped. The do-now activity ended up taking more time than anticipated, so the group component was reconfigured to be an individual task. Students were asked to read through the problem and write down conceptually the steps they would need to take without plugging in numbers. J was one of the first to raise her hand, and Mr. S said he made a conscious effort to provide her with only the essential information. He felt that it had worked well and was encouraged.

We discussed additional steps that could be taken. In looking over the homework he was going to assign, he noted that in the sample problem he had included each step, as suggested in Jones's book. When I asked him if J would understand it all, he admitted that he didn't think so. We then talked about what additional information she would need and agreed that annotating the steps would help considerably. He also planned to continue the group work problem and would institute the "consultation" rule.

### *Third Phase*

We met again after the next class. Mr. S was excited to report that the group work had gone well. J had followed directions and had worked especially well with her team. In one instance, she started asking Mr. S a question, and he asked the group if it was their official consultation. They quickly said no and returned to the work at hand. Also, she had gotten a 4 out of 5 on her homework.

I asked him how he was doing with the mantra. Interestingly, his answer launched us into a complex discussion about classroom management and Mr. S's relationship with his students. He feels that kids like him because he's young and fun and he makes math enjoyable. But he is also frustrated that they take advantage of his kindness. In this instance, he was disappointed that J's friends didn't take the mantra more seriously. Instead, they tried to use it as a chance to get him off topic and engage in

lengthy philosophical discussions. They asked questions such as “Why is this important, Mr. S?” and “So if you won’t give up on me, does that mean you won’t fail me in the class?”

He took the bait and responded with long, careful answers. Ten minutes later, he found himself talking in circles with only a few kids, while the others dozed off or did other homework. I promised him that he could find the balance between making math fun and still running a tight ship, but that it was hard work and he would have to be willing to make changes, in both his curriculum development and his personal demeanor. We agreed to return to this topic early and often, and I let him borrow my copy of *Tools for Teaching*.

As far as J was concerned, we agreed that the next step was for him to discuss the situation with her directly. At this session he would need to be supportive but honest. First, he would need to convey the mantra in his own words, while providing examples from the year to remind her that she really could do it. He would then need to share with her the 6-out-of-20-minute data point and use that as an example of a broader dependence. Finally, he would identify the most recent group work as an example of her ability to not rely on Mr. S for all the answers.

### *Final Reflection*

This was a fantastic project. At first I was concerned that it would be far too time-consuming and possibly too limited in scope to help on a broad enough scale. I was wrong on both counts. First, the time commitment was minimal. Mr. S and I had six conversations about J, one of which lasted only 5 minutes. The long ones were excellent discussions about broader pedagogical issues and I think helped Mr. S grow as a practitioner. Others were quick updates that included facts about what happened with J and idea-swapping about next steps. Second, our discussions about J were certainly about her, but her issues pertained to other students as well. Furthermore, by searching for solutions to help J, Mr. S was adding to his toolkit a host of strategies for helping all his students.

Of course, I also felt limitations. Isolating J’s situation from the rest of the class was difficult to do. Getting her fully weaned from unnecessary hand-raising is a tremendous challenge, since it’s a behavior she’s developed through years of training. On its own, perhaps the problem could be addressed more directly. However, in a classroom where another 10 students have different issues of similar impact, Mr. S must pick and choose his battles. Additionally, since attribution retraining takes time, it’s still uncertain how J will turn out.

Regardless of J, though, Mr. S benefited tremendously from this project. He is a better teacher as a result, and I am a better supervisor. I will most certainly use this strategy again. It focused my efforts with Mr. S so that he and I both were thinking in small incremental steps while still



making large gains in his ability. It also kept our energies centered on what was best for J, which is a powerful way of connecting teacher development to student achievement.

### Administrator Case Study 5—Tenth Grade

I have been working with Mr. T for the entire year, coaching him while he adjusted to his new school. We have worked together on numerous components of teaching, especially classroom management, attempting to grow him into the best practitioner he could be. He has been an excellent study, truly listening to my recommendations and actually attempting to implement them. I commend his efforts; Mr. T sincerely wants to improve his teaching and classroom performance. He realizes there is ample room for improvement and is eager to please. For these reasons, I would choose no other individual but Mr. T for this assignment.

Mr. T is an 11-year veteran of the district, but a first-year teacher at our school. His previous appointments have been at institutions that were extremely challenging and had very low academic expectations. Mr. T primarily teaches geometry but is also capable of instructing other areas and/or levels. He is very rich in content knowledge but requires some refinement in delivery and implementation. His work ethic is commendable, as is his sincere desire to master his craft.

For the student aspect of the assignment, we chose to work with a young lady we will refer to as KC. She is a 15-year-old 10th grader. KC could be described as a disruptive student who sometimes creates problems for staff and students. However, KC has some great attributes. Once you get to know her, you find her very personable and respectful. But to have the privilege to be exposed to this side, you first must earn KC's admiration. Once you are "in," you will see an entirely different side to her. We selected KC mainly due to the relationship I have with her and especially because of the difficulties she gives Mr. T.

In Mr. T's geometry class, KC was extremely disruptive, completed minimal work, and exhibited an "I don't care" attitude. Mr. T and I decided that we would attack these three issues independently and consecutively. We did not want to further alienate KC by "jumping down her throat" for everything. We realized that one step at a time would probably be the right move. We also felt that coming at her from different directions would help.

The first initiative was to get the behavior under control. Mr. T had tried numerous times and various strategies but to no avail. I told Mr. T to write a "pink slip" the next time she acted out and to send it with her to me. He followed my directions explicitly. Two days later, KC came to my office with the pink slip in hand. As always, she was polite and respectful, even after I began my anticipated lecture. After that formality, she and I got down to business. Where was she going to go from here? She gave no

response. As planned, I informed her that Mr. T had requested that I not suspend her because he wanted to find a more productive consequence. Upon hearing that news, she perked up and was more attentive, saying, "What do you mean he doesn't want me suspended?" I restated what I had just said, but under the agreement that the three of us meet to discuss a new course of behavior. Still floored by Mr. T's request, she graciously agreed. KC and I continued to talk, as I set the stage for our conference. I shared my perspective of Mr. T, emphasizing his dedication and sincerity. I could see KC beginning to see him in a new light.

Class ended, and it was time for our conference. Mr. T and KC both had the same lunch period, so we were going to have a lunch conference. As devised, we had ordered lunch, a pizza, telling KC she could share with us. She was taken aback that we would share with her. Everything was going too well; I expected the whole thing to blow up shortly. Pleasantly, I was wrong. The KC I knew showed up in full force. Mr. T even joked, later, about whether it was the same girl. He asked what I did.

We began the conference, talking to KC about her behavior and how it disrupted not only the class's learning but also hers. We began exploring her actions, but more importantly the root causes. First, KC acknowledged her disruptive behavior. She even highlighted the causes. She went into detail about how her assigned seat had her sitting back-to-back with a young man she continually argued with. She went on, saying that she had nothing else to do but to play around. Usually, she argues with that boy, as he constantly annoys her. As usual, she gets caught and he gets away. This leads to further frustration and contempt for Mr. T as he "always corrects me and not him." Mr. T quickly interjected, explaining that unfortunately he does not see the other individual, but rather catches her reaction. After additional explanation, KC reluctantly saw our perspective.

So with some clarity on the behavior issue, we now moved on to discuss the minimal work. KC was right on target with the reasons. She said that when she falls behinds or has difficulty understanding, she just gives up. She then gets in trouble and gets removed from class, enabling her to further avoid the material. Also, due to her number of suspensions, she misses days of school. So she does the minimal because that is all she can do. She felt she would do more if she knew how. We explained to KC that she was allowing her behavior to interfere with her progress. We continued by highlighting that running away from a problem doesn't address the problem. She took some offense, like we were calling her a coward, but I did some tap dancing around it to sensitively show her what we meant. We began to discuss the importance of asking for help and seeking additional explanation when needed.

Finally, we addressed our last concern, the "I don't care" attitude. When we asked what that was about, she proclaimed it didn't matter what she did because she was being "thrown out" at the end of the year. This question was all mine. I quickly explained that students are only asked to

leave if they are not living up to the expectations for choosing to come to a magnet school. I expanded that only students who are not positively contributing are asked to leave. I wanted her to understand that it had taken time to get her to this place, and it would take time to get her out. Furthermore, I pointed out that no decisions are made until the end of the year, and if there is no reason then she cannot be forced to leave. However, the ball was in her court now. She had to decide to play ball or throw in the towel. Mr. T and I both committed to help her succeed if she chose to play. KC decided she wanted to fight to stay. We said that Mr. T's geometry class was the place to start. She said okay. I felt this was the turnaround. There was hope in her eyes, and determination.

Mr. T and I concluded that we were going to talk together to set up a plan for success in the class. We just needed KC to improve the three things we had discussed. We were going to discuss strategies to help her get there. KC left in a good mood, even apologizing to Mr. T for previous actions and grief. Mr. T and I wasted no time; we began to establish our action plan.

To address the disruptive behavior, Mr. T agreed to move her seat, preferably closer to the front. He also agreed to circulate throughout the room more, keeping all students focused and on task. But we agreed that checking in on KC with words of encouragement more frequently was a must. We did not want her to sink back into her old ways. Next, Mr. T agreed to sit her next to a peer who was on the ball. Hopefully, some peer modeling would prove beneficial. More importantly, Mr. T extended an opportunity for KC to come to their common lunchtime for help. (Little did he expect what he got!) Finally, we thought routine feedback would validate her efforts and eliminate the "I don't care" attitude. Mr. T would do it daily with one positive remark about class, while I would do it periodically when our paths crossed. We had a plan, and we were off.

About 2 weeks had passed, and I decided to check in with both Mr. T and KC for an update.

I strolled over to Mr. T's room at lunchtime, only to be greeted by KC doing some of her work. Not only was she there, but also she had brought a friend who is in the same geometry class. Both were completing extra work and having the time of their lives. Privately, Mr. T explained that it was like night and day. There had been no problems, she was completing her assignments, and she came to his room every day regardless of any difficulties. I then went in to congratulate KC, but she boldly beat me to the point. She was so excited to tell me how great she was doing. She proclaimed she had not gotten into any trouble, and she received an 86 on a test. I then asked how things with Mr. T were. Was she giving him any problems? She quickly responded, "No, Mr. T and I are cool." Indeed they were! There had not been anything but positive remarks from Mr. T. Not only was she behaving, she was making sure other students were behaving. A successful story!

*Final Reflection*

This was an enjoyable assignment, an opportunity to help a struggling student and teacher make a situation more productive. The surprising component was the little amount of time and effort necessary to make a drastic impact. Too often, the biggest complaint from teachers is that they don't have enough time. As seen with Mr. T and KC, time often isn't the problem. It is typically the willingness and expectations of those individuals. I have to commend the efforts of both Mr. T and KC, because they were the decisive factor that ensured success. Mr. T's caring manner and desire to improve laid the foundation to build upon. KC's ability and insight to see the error of her ways was monumental. But the willingness of both to adapt and change, to make accommodations, was pivotal. It was the expectations of each individual that made a difference. Mr. T's ability to help KC raise her personal expectations is what improved their relationship and each other's situation. As KC improved, Mr. T's life became a little easier. It goes to show you what a little love and care can do. In this situation, it made the difference for a teacher and his student. Hopefully, neither individual will stop here. There are many more opportunities. Seize the moment!

**Administrator Case Study 6—11th Grade**

River West, my internship school, was within a hair's breadth of being assigned to the SURR list (Schools Under Registration Review) due to low performance on math and English Regents exams when I began this project. Because most of my experience is in literacy, I wanted to work with math instructors to learn about math instruction. I was particularly interested in failing students, because for them math is the greatest obstacle to a high school diploma. All the students in the January Regents math preparation classes had either failed the test before or failed a prerequisite course and were slated to take the Regents in January. A minimum of 55% is required for a high school diploma.

Visits to the remedial classes (there were a total of five) filled me with dismay. The teachers seemed to go through the motions, expecting little response from the students, many of whom were doodling, socializing, or listening to music. When I talked with the teachers about student behavior, they all gave a variation on the same theme: "It's not fair to expect these kids to pass the Regents. It's too hard. This isn't Stuyvesant. They come here with a proficiency level of 1 or 2. They can't do it." The teachers seemed even more discouraged than the students.

After several visits to Mr. D's math classes, I decided to invite him to help me with my project on expectations. He shrugged his shoulders and told me that it is too late to help the students; preparation has to start in first grade, not 11th grade. Regardless, he was willing to do anything to try to help the students. I pointed out that despite the low class participation,

class attendance was actually very good. Perhaps that is a sign that they are interested, but do not want to show it. “Maybe,” he said.

We decided to focus attention on CW, who sits in the back paying little attention to the instruction. Radiating attitude, she is exactly the kind of student I am most resistant to approaching, which is precisely why I thought she would be a good candidate for our project. Mr. D agreed to speak with her about her lax attention and missing work to see if some individual attention would encourage her to focus on the work.

### *Experiment 1: Assessing CW's Beliefs*

At the end of class, Mr. D asked CW to stay for a few minutes. She said, “Make it fast because I don’t have time for this.” He asked her why she was taking the class and she said that she had failed the Regents twice so “they” keep making her take it. He pointed out that she had good attendance but was not doing much math. He asked her if she wanted to work to pass the Regents so she could graduate. “Me and math don’t get along,” was the reply. Mr. D told her that if she did the work, she and math might get along better. CW said that she did not think so. Mr. D pointed out that the Regents exam was not designed for rocket scientists, but for high school students. Perhaps if she looked at it that way, she would see that she could do it. “I don’t think so,” she said.

### **Reflection on Case Study Student and Teacher**

Although CW was dismissive, she was not as contemptuous as I had feared. She used evidence to explain her attitude: Because she had twice failed, any effort would be a bad investment on her part. I asked Mr. D what he thought about assessing her present strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. He thought it did not matter because he planned to cover everything anyway. I suggested that if CW had a clearer picture of what she already knew, she might see passing as a realistic goal. I pointed out that we had a perfect tool, the June Regents on which CW had scored 43%. She had not done too badly on the Part I multiple-choice questions, but received almost no credit on the long-answer parts, which are mostly more elaborate versions of Part I. We decided to show CW her results as a tool to help her acknowledge her strengths and focus on the skills she needed to improve.

### *Experiment 2: Helping CW View Success as Achievable*

After our first meeting with CW, she seemed to glance at the board occasionally. We told her we wanted to show her something after class. She gave us a “this better be good” look, but stayed. We explained that we had checked on her June exam and saw that she already knew about 70% of what she needed to pass the exam in January. This got her attention.

Mr. D suggested that instead of thinking about all the things that she had gotten wrong, it would be useful to look specifically at how many more problems she needed proficiency in to pass the exam. She recited the mantra: "But you never know what they will ask on the exam!" Mr. D explained that this is only partially true; we have a fairly good idea of the types of questions asked, and we can practice them. "If you had gotten 12 more points, you would not be in this predicament now." CW expressed interest in this view.

We explained that we wanted to do an experiment and handed her a question involving Venn diagrams that she had gotten wrong on the Regents. I had asked Mr. D not to jump in and help before she had a chance to wrestle with the problem. (All the math teachers seem unwilling to let students experiment with solutions and quickly rushed to the rescue.) CW drew the problem on the board and after a couple of minutes asked whether a number inscribed in two circles counted once or twice. "Once." After a few minutes, she said, "Oh, I get it." Mr. D told her that in less than 5 minutes she had learned enough to gain two additional points and, incidentally, understood something more clearly than she had before. He told her that if she put in the effort, he was confident that she could do far better than the minimum passing grade. "Oh," she said, "I gotta go. Thanks."

### Reflection on Case Study Student and Teacher

I was fascinated by how analytical CW was. She had dismissed math on the evidence, but was willing to look at it afresh. It was no longer an all-or-nothing proposition, but a movement along a continuum that she was already on. Suddenly, passing seemed like an achievable goal. Based on my original impressions, I had expected much more defeatism and negativity. Her quick understanding of the Venn diagram problem surprised me because a student capable of that intense focus should not have failed in the first place. I was eager to see what she would do with her perspective.

Mr. D and I decided that he would give Regents-style questions on his tests so that the class would feel comfortable with the format and learn how to get partial credit for problems that they could not completely solve. We also debated the merits of letting students try to work things out for themselves before showing them the "right way."

### *Experiment 3: Encouraging CW to Think About Her Thinking*

I showed Mr. D a chart I had made about categories of questions on the math Regents and asked if we could have the class fill them out. The chart asks students to rate their confidence and comfort level with questions ranging from trigonometry to graphing to solving quadratic equations. We asked CW to stay for a few minutes and told her about the upcoming exams and questionnaire. She looked at the form and said, "I don't know



all this stuff," but quickly grasped that this was a general outline of the class curriculum and that we wanted her to think about the things she is learning and what she still needs to learn. We also suggested that when she is stuck on homework or a test problem, she try to diagnose the obstacle and what she needs to learn to overcome it. As practice, Mr. D put a list of locus of points questions on the board. After some dialogue, CW cleared up a point of confusion (the locus of points could be in a circle, not just a point).

### Reflection on Case Study Student and Teacher

By this stage, CW was paying more attention in class. She even volunteered to put problems on the board and generally stopped wearing headphones. She was not, however, interested in coming to tutoring and resisted most efforts to get her to stay. Her tone became "I've got this under control, so don't hassle me about it." She asked clarifying questions but was not interested in a "most favored student" status and kept her distance. Interestingly, other students started getting more serious and asked for help after school. (Mr. D. was spreading the "you can do this" message fairly liberally.)

A few weeks before the Regents, I saw CW socializing in the hallway when she was supposed to be in math. She told me not to worry because she was going to pass. I wondered out loud why she was settling for "passing" when she could do very well. She shrugged.

On the day of the Regents, I checked and, sure enough, she scored 60%, enough to graduate. I was disappointed. When I saw her, she was relieved about passing but disappointed with herself. "I could have done much better."

### *Final Reflection*

"Low expectations" has become the trite explanation for so many failures, but in the case of CW it was accurate. I was fortunate to pair with a very conscientious teacher who worked hard, graded and returned tests promptly, and was more than patient and willing to help students and me. Further, he was open-minded. About a month before the Regents he told me that he had never thought these students could do the work, but now he believed that they could. He said that his own expectations had been raised as a result of our project. On the first of several practice Regents, the highest score had been a 37%, but by January, almost half of the class was passing the practice tests. (Although this is still disappointing, these students were all designated failures at the beginning of the term. Their passing rate far exceeded the math department's expectations.)

Mr. D was energized by the thoughts of widespread success and pointed out to the class that their scores were going up with each practice. He put model answers on the overhead projector (which he purchased

himself) to demonstrate how students gain partial credit on a question even if they could not finish it. He was reaching out to other students to come to tutoring, not just waiting for them to show up. He invited students to lunchtime tutoring during the week before the exam, and many came.

I had wanted to work with CW because her demeanor had signaled “challenge.” However, she was far easier to engage on a rational level than I had expected, so some of the strategies that worked with her would need modification for another student. For example, the external motivation, a graduation requirement, was quite compelling. Learning a set of skills had a big payoff. CW had recognized the value, but not her own potential. Once she saw that she could pass, she became motivated. CW was mature enough to do her own cost-benefit analysis and commit to success. Still, without Mr. D showing her a valid reason for her own commitment, she might never have invested in studying.

As a result of our investment in CW, the whole class benefited, and that is probably the intended result. Thinking about helping one student makes us see things from his or her perspective, which in turn provides a road map to issues others may have. Raising one student’s expectations for herself helped to raise the teacher’s expectations for the whole class and increased his subsequent disappointment that they did not all “make it.” When grades were posted, many “jaded” and “uninterested” students squealed with delight and did pirouettes down the hall to let everyone know they had passed. What affected me most was that several failing students told me they had been stupid not to take advantage of all the help Mr. D had offered them. “I saw other kids in the class who did the work and they passed. I want to pass, too. I know I am going to do better this time.”

Mr. D said that he was happy that we worked on this project; his increased optimism about student potential made him more interested in student understanding rather than in just “covering the curriculum.” We both agreed that the next time around we would try more classroom strategies to get an even better result.

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