

## Case Study of Mentoring and Classroom Observation

### Mentor

Chris is a 42-year-old white woman who has been teaching ESOL for eleven years at a corrections facility.

### Inviting Teacher

Maria is a 50-year-old African-American woman who just began teaching GED at a community-based organization after having taught in the K-12 system for many years. Although she is new to adult education, she is a long-time community organizer.

### Pre-Observation Conference

During the first pre-observation conference, Maria told Chris that she wanted to try an activity where learners would learn a bit about MI theory and identify their strong intelligences. She explained to Chris that she was a bit nervous about trying out the activity, as the learners were very intent on getting their GEDs as quickly as possible. Up to this point, Maria explained, she had been working straight from the GED book with students. She was worried how the class would respond. Chris reassured her not to worry, as surely the group would be interested in talking about something as important to their own learning. Maria asked Chris to keep notes on how learners responded to the activity. Who was and was not engaged? How could she tell? At what points was the energy high or low? Maria also wanted to know what Chris considered to be critical moments for learning and how Maria handled them.

### Classroom Observation

Five of the nine learners turned up for class. Maria described MI theory briefly to students and said she would like them to try an activity where they would identify their own strengths. Learners were quiet as she talked. She handed out an AMI survey and asked students to work individually to complete the survey. She let them know that afterwards they would talk about it. When one learner, Pat, asked what this had to do with the GED, Maria responded that she thought it would be helpful for them to see the many ways in which they were smart. All the learners filled out the forms, but Pat did it very quickly, put her pen down with a bang, and then gazed out the window waiting for the others.



## Case Study of Mentoring and Classroom Observation (continued)

### Classroom Observation (continued)

Once everyone had finished, Maria asked them to describe their intelligences profile and what they had learned about themselves. Three of the students eagerly spoke up and shared their strengths. One described how, even when he was young, he was already drawing pictures, doodling wherever he could. When Maria called on Barbara, Barbara quietly said she liked to dance. Pat said she thought the activity was dumb and who cared if she liked music. She just needed to pass the test. Maria thanked the group for sharing and said now they would spend the rest of class in the math section of the GED.

### Post-Observation Conference

Maria felt discouraged about the class and told Chris that she did not feel that she had done a good job. Chris reassured her that she thought the class went fine and every class has some hard students. Chris pointed out how three of the students were engaged and even Barbara who was reticent to share, seemed absorbed in her work. "At least Barbara cooperated," Chris told Maria. Then Chris talked about how she always has students that are like the Pats in the world. Chris suggested that the best thing to have done would have been to let Pat work in the book while the others tried out the new activity.

Maria wondered what she would do the next time the class met. She told Chris that she knew the group just wanted to be in the books, but it just did not feel right to her to teach that way. Chris asked her what ideas she had for next steps. Maria said she wanted to go back to the profiles the students had created and try to build from there. Maybe she could do a writing activity based on the profiles. Chris said she thought that was a great idea. As Maria had to run off to teach another class, they ended the discussion here and thanked each other.

