

Case Study 2: Designing Accessible Core Instruction

As the school year progresses, mentors and their mentees engage in both reflective and planning oriented conversations, as well debriefing classroom observations. Observation tools may be followed up by looking at lesson planning templates and formative assessment practices. Classroom observations serve as a springboard for reflecting on and adjusting teaching practice.

Typical mentoring questions surrounding the use of these tools may include:

In what ways are students expected to engage with and participate in the class?

How would students describe feeling in your classroom?

How do you go about knowing what students know during class?

In what ways is your teaching language-focused?

Where can students see themselves in the classroom?

Tell me more about how do you decide what you are teaching on any given day?

In what ways do you adjust instruction throughout the course of a day or week?

An example from the field:

Simone is a white, bilingual female, raised in and living in suburban Madison with her family. She's in her first year of teaching 7th grade math, science and social studies. Of the 50 students she teaches throughout the day, 45% are White, 25% are African American, and 30% are Latino. She has 10 students with IEPs and 15 students who are English Language Learners.

In beginning mentoring conversations as first quarter has gotten underway, she's grown concerned over students not focusing at the beginning of class and the fact they've begun wandering around the classroom and even leaving throughout the period. She's started receiving e-mails about the classroom environment from concerned parents, and increasingly more student-teacher interactions result in a power struggle. Echoing collegial resignation to these realities, she often says you can lead a horse to water but can't make him drink.

In addition to student engagement, she's been fairly overwhelmed planning for 3 different courses, only one of which she's taught before. She keeps a notebook with her at all times where she writes down ideas for each of the 3 preps. She is part of a teaching team comprised of veteran educators who are regularly willing to share materials with her. After multiple selective scripting classroom observations from her mentor, she begins to question the instructional routines and practices she has in place,

recognizing that a lack of predictability, questioning techniques and visual supports may be impeding students' ability and desire to engage in the classroom. Through some targeted and structured [lesson planning based on templates](#) embedded within a Gradual Release of Responsibility framework, class runs more smoothly as students respond with more confidence, and interest in the class.

She notices though that despite the general class running more smoothly, there are still several students not participating in ways she thought they would. Delving into their status as English Language Learners, she learns about [WIDA's Essential Actions](#) and how even in her math class, instruction needs to be language and content intensive. She begins to assess her classroom environment for how students can access the language of her classroom visually. Through observation focused on teacher language, her mentor notices the types of questions she poses are focused on singular answer and that *she* typically raises most of the questions in class. Together, Simone and her mentor explore both the types of questions she asks to encourage student thinking and how to support students in raising their own level of questioning during class. [\(Questioning Stems/Math Practices\)](#) Coupled with an increase in the formative assessments she uses, her understanding of where students are at and how to move them forward increases.

Next her attention turns to a different one of her classes where disruptions and outbursts have become the norm. Through a [seating chart observation](#), her mentor identifies a small set of students regularly being called upon while others, mainly African American students, remain disengaged. Disturbed by that data, she reviews where she is at in using culturally and linguistically relevant practices and identifies a need to create equitable opportunities for successful participation in class activities, including what she needs to do to foster trust with students of color. She begins to increase the frequency, nature, and location of conversations she has with specific students appreciating the assets each brings to the classroom. As well, she increases her knowledge of where students are at in their understanding by using more frequent [formative assessments](#).