

A TEACHER REFLECTS



I was concerned about Jane and Mark as we started this unit. Both had just recently moved to the school, and neither did much work in class or contributed much to small group or whole class discussions. Jane was rarely disruptive; she simply sat quietly looking down, while Mark was occasionally defiant and frequently disruptive in groups. I didn't have any records for them and found it difficult to determine what either of them understood of math.

As we began Lesson 1, I noticed that for some reason a popular and bright student, Meke, was casually talking to them as she worked on her anglemakers. The next thing I knew, she casually asked them if they needed help. Neither seemed to want to turn her down, so they set to work. As they began making and measuring angles, it was apparent that neither of them had much of a sense of the meaning of degrees. Now, however, Meke took things into her own hands and started showing them what a 90-degree angle was, then a 45-degree angle. She had them estimating from their knowledge of these few angles, and fairly accurately. I watched without commenting as Jane and Mark beamed; whether from the attention from Meke or from their success I wasn't sure. They gravitated together the next day as we began working on combining the angles into a circle. Both Mark and Jane were able to arrange the anglemaker to show different angles but grew frustrated when trying to label them. When the class ended, both students had sloppy but

recognizable circles, with the angles drawn but no labels. Jane and Mark had grown frustrated, and it was apparent that Meke was frustrated as well with their lack of understanding.

Meke had discovered the joy of teaching. She knew that both students had been much more successful in most of the previous days' lessons than they usually were and had been disappointed when they didn't complete the activity. The next day she showed up with various angles cut out of colored cardboard and labeled. She had taken each of the terms listed on the student page and made at least two examples to work with the next day. I was concerned about them having extra math time and didn't want to force them, but both Mark and Jane were willing participants. Whether Meke made cut-out versions instead of drawn versions from the instincts of a born teacher or just because she felt like cutting, I don't know. However, both Mark and Jane used the angles as a reference and seemed to like being able to pick them up or place them over an angle drawn on a piece of paper.

The opening days of this unit really marked the beginning of some changes for all three students. Jane and Mark had found a friend and developed confidence in their ability to succeed in math in this new environment, and Meke was proud of the change she knew she had made.

