

## A TEACHER REFLECTS

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There was a student in my class, George, who was cooperative in working in the groups and frequently had an intuitive grasp of the problem the group was working on. He lacked confidence in himself, however, and so did not contribute as much to groups as he could have. When we were working on Lesson 5, he was partnered with Lindsey, a quiet student who usually needed a lot of experience to understand a new concept. It turned out to be a fortuitous partnering for both of them. They had made the net for their prism and measured its dimensions. George said, “Now we have to find the surface area,” and started multiplying the length times the width of each side. He wrote the surface area on each part of the net while Lindsey watched. Without glancing up, he started adding them. When he was finished, he wrote his answer but saw by Lindsey’s expression that she didn’t understand what had just happened. He went and got some square centimeter paper and told Lindsey to cut it to match each face of the net. Then he had her count the squares. This was something she had done many times before in a group but today she suddenly understood it. “That’s why we label surface area square centimeters!” She had known that she was supposed to label surface area  $\text{cm}^2$  but had never understood why before. Without realizing what he had done, George had made it safe for Lindsey to admit she didn’t understand and allow someone to explain something to her.

The next day they were partners again because I had decided to stick with pairs rather than making larger groups. We were going to work on finding the volume for the prism. Lindsey was looking at the prism and even from a distance it was apparent she didn’t know where to begin. George wrote out the formula, which he had already figured out. He took out a small spiral-bound notebook and asked Lindsey what the surface area of one page would be. He kept putting more pages on the same side, asking her to keep totaling the areas. Lindsey saw what he was getting at almost immediately. Later, when I wanted the class to discover the formula for volume of a prism, I had George come up and do his demonstration for this class. He was quite proud that he had come up with the demonstration on his own.

George really enjoyed giving his explanation to the class, especially because they reacted well to him. After that day, I watched George speak up more freely and confidently, both in small groups and in whole-class discussions. Lindsey had learned two new concepts in two days and would occasionally ask George for help if she wasn’t really understanding.