

5

Micro Modeling

As the teachers gathered in the school library for the last staff meeting of the year, most were thinking about packing up their classrooms and getting started with their summer plans. But the principal wanted to share some exciting news before she sent them on their way. Thanks to a new district initiative, a staff developer from Denver would be coming to work with the teachers on reading comprehension over the upcoming school year. It was 1998, and teaching students to better comprehend texts was making a significant impact on how we approached teaching reading. Gone were the dittos, thankfully replaced by rich conversation about interesting text. And since Prairie View Elementary didn't have funding for a school-based coach, the principal wasn't about to turn down this offer. As a fifth-grade teacher, David was also thrilled to hear the news. He had been working on the very same thing with his students and welcomed the idea of coaching. He even volunteered his classroom to host the observations that would be part of the project.

Diane also looked forward to working with the teachers at Prairie View. She had recently left her own fifth-grade classroom and was new to coaching. In the past, she had benefited from observing lessons, so she suggested that they design a coaching plan that would begin with her modeling a few lessons in different teachers' classrooms. Both she and the principal felt that modeling would be a good way to paint a picture of what it looked like to teach reading comprehension.

David's fifth graders craned their necks as the teachers filed in for the first model lesson. They weren't used to seeing other teachers in their room, and as Diane settled in on the rocking chair at the front of the room, Sammy couldn't resist raising her hand and saying, "So, who are you anyway?" Diane smiled and explained that she was a literacy coach who was working with the teachers at Prairie View. That's why they would have observers during reading time. Then she added, "Today we are going to

think about what good readers do while they are reading. I will introduce a few strategies that you can use to better understand what you read.”

As the teachers observed, Diane proceeded to model how readers stop and think across a text. The students raised their hands enthusiastically and loved the book that Diane had chosen. She felt great and couldn’t wait to debrief with the team of teachers to talk over what they noticed during the lesson.

While they walked down the hallway to the library, David mentioned in an almost apologetic tone, “That was a great lesson. But I thought I’d let you know that I taught the same lesson a few days ago.” Diane was horrified. She couldn’t believe that she had modeled an entire lesson that had already been taught. She was supposed to be supporting teacher development, not wasting people’s time. Then David added reassuringly, “But I liked seeing how you approached it. And my kids loved it.” That’s when Diane thought, “No more dog-and-pony shows. There must be a better way.”

A lot has changed since then. Thankfully, now that we coach in cycles with a clear goal that leads to thoughtful plans for instruction, we no longer just swoop in to coach out of context. And our partnership approach to coaching means that our days of only modeling lessons have become a thing of the past, too.

THE MOVE—*MICRO MODELING*

Micro modeling is a strategy where a coach models a small portion of the instructional block rather than the whole thing. It serves the important role of providing visual examples for teachers while also allowing the coach and teacher to share ownership over what is taught, something that is often missing when a coach is up in front of the room and teaching her heart out for an entire lesson (like Diane did in David’s room).

As coaches, we love to teach. In fact, many of us miss having our own classroom and the connection that it provides with students. In some ways, this longing to teach may create the conditions that lead to too much modeling. When one person is sitting passively while the other does all of the teaching, we aren’t doing much to create a partnership. And if coaching is about co-constructing learning with teachers, then it’s worth thinking about how we use the strategy of modeling. We aren’t saying that modeling isn’t an important tool for coaching. We just think modeling can be done with more precision and purpose.

Micro modeling is an important tool to use not only during a lesson but also throughout a coaching cycle. It allows the coach and teacher to support each other to deliver instruction that meets the needs of students.

It is a flexible and dynamic process that includes the voice of the teacher and coach. There are times when it makes sense to demonstrate a particular instructional practice. For example, a coach may model how to provide feedback to students, may teach a portion of a lesson, or may lead a small group while a teacher observes. Providing a visual of what good instruction looks like is an essential component of how coaches work in classrooms. It's just not all that we do.

WHY MICRO MODELING IS IMPORTANT

Over the years, our thinking has changed when it comes to how the Gradual Release of Responsibility model applies to adult learners (Pearson and Gallagher, 1983). In *Student-Centered Coaching*, Diane (Sweeney, 2011) shared how Angie organized her coaching using this framework. "First, they planned a few days' worth of mini-lessons that Angie modeled while Paula observed and took notes. At the end of each week, they reflected on the student work and instruction to decide what to do next. The second stage came a few weeks into the cycle with Paula planning and co-teaching alongside Angie. With time, they shifted to Paula doing most of the teaching on her own, just as Angie had promised" (p. 93).

As we have become more student-centered in our coaching, we now realize that the idea of adult learners progressing neatly through the stages of "I do, we do, you do" seems a bit too tidy in the real world of coaching. Whereas we know how important the gradual release of responsibility is when working with kids and still advocate for planning using an "I do, we do, you do" structure, we just don't think it applies to adult learners. We are spending more time than ever in the "we do" stage, because this is where partnerships are built. This approach allows us to create a shared effort, no matter how many years of experience a teacher might have.

We limit our time in the "I do" stage because we avoid operating under the assumption that teachers have nothing to bring to the conversation unless we show them how to do it. We would never want to imply that the coach is the expert, and the teacher isn't. Too much time in the "I do" stage can erode the partnerships that we are trying to create. We also spend less time in the "you do" stage because we have found that observing teachers can feel evaluative. We make exceptions if teachers request to be observed in order to receive feedback on a specific instructional practice. Of course we will respond to these types of requests. But we really do believe that our power lies in the "we do" stage, and that's where we try to spend most of our time when we are in classrooms.

WHAT *MICRO MODELING* LOOKS LIKE

Micro modeling is one of the many ways we coach while in the classroom. We have both benefited from seeing great models of instruction, and the last thing we'd want to suggest is that modeling is not an effective coaching practice. Rather, our shift has been to model with intention and in a way that builds on, rather than dismantles, our partnerships with teachers. Here's what *micro modeling* looks like.

QR Code 5.1 Micro Modeling During a Third-Grade Reading Lesson



<http://qrs.ly/vz59nux>

Micro Model During Whole Group, Small Group, or One-On-One Instruction

The power of *micro modeling* isn't limited to whole group lessons. It can be equally as effective during small group and one-on-one instruction. In the essay *Content Coaching*, Lucy West (2008) writes, "In this coaching practice, we do not 'divide and conquer,' we 'stick together.' What I mean by this is a coach rarely works with one group of students while the teacher works with another. Instead, they travel from student to student or group to group as a team" (p. 138). What West is describing creates the perfect conditions for *micro modeling* to occur because modeling even a single conversation presents invaluable opportunities for teachers to construct meaning about teaching and learning. When a coach and teacher sit together during conferences, they are in a better position to grow in their practice. The coach may *micro model* the first conference, and then they can co-confer from there. The key is that this decision is shared, and modeling is presented as one of many options for how the coach and teacher may work together with students.

Micro modeling during small groups is also an effective strategy to build teacher capacity. Working side by side during small groups presents the opportunity for a coach to *micro model* what makes the most sense in the moment. While it may be tempting to fan out and cover more territory during conferences or small groups, we suggest using this time to learn and grow together.

Support Implementation . . . and Stay Student-Centered

Modeling is often a go-to strategy when a district is implementing a new program or curriculum. A district that is switching from basal reading instruction to reader's workshop may decide that teachers would benefit from seeing what it looks like. This makes a lot of sense. Modeling can be

an effective strategy to get started with implementation. But sooner or later, teachers need help implementing it themselves. This is where *micro modeling* can be an effective coaching move.

Let's take the example of Heather, who is featured later in this chapter. As a brand-new coach in a district that recently adopted a rigorous math program, Heather is responsible for helping teachers understand the math content and program materials, while keeping the focus on what the students are learning. Effectively, Heather coaches the implementation of a math program while also being student-centered.

Micro modeling is one of the moves that Heather uses while coaching in the classroom. As she and teachers work through their math lessons, they continually question, "How are the students doing, and what should we do next?" In a single lesson, they hand the instructional baton back and forth. Each handoff involves transitions where Heather may *micro model* or where the teacher may take the lead. It is a dynamic process that merges her role as a student-centered coach and program implementer.

Plan With (Not for) the Teacher

It is difficult to *micro model* if a coach and teacher aren't on the same page regarding a lesson. And since coaching in the classroom is based on partnerships with teachers, it is best to avoid planning lessons for them. Some coaches put in countless hours planning gorgeous lessons that they will turn around and model for teachers. In *The Literacy Coach's Game Plan*, Sadler and Nidus (2009) write, "The role of the coach is not to show an airbrushed version of a lesson but rather to roll up her sleeves and demonstrate the gritty aspects of teaching a lesson, including planning, teaching, preparing, and reflecting. So, too, the teacher's role moves from being an adoring or critical audience member to an active participant in the demonstration" (p. 106).

We'd argue that when a coach plans lessons without the teacher, precious learning is lost. Questions like "How will the learning target be introduced? What will the students do to engage with new learning? What will be modeled? How will student dialogue be supported? What kinds of problems or tasks will make the students' learning visible?" are important to work through together. When we plan together, the decisions (and ownership) are shared. And when decisions are shared, it is easier for the coach and teacher to determine if *micro modeling* is the right strategy.

If a coach makes instructional decisions in isolation, there is also a decreased likelihood that teachers will follow through when the coach is gone. The reason for this is simple; we have a hard time following through

on something that we didn't have a hand in creating. When coaches ask, "Why aren't teachers owning it? I feel like when I leave, they'll stop doing whatever we've been working on," our answer usually comes back to the matter of shared ownership. If we co-plan, then we are more likely to see teachers following through because the learning was co-constructed from the beginning.

Define Who Will Do What

Diane and Leanna both have teenagers at home, and one of their favorite words is "*Awkward!*" While our kids are usually talking about the embarrassing things we do as middle-aged parents, it can also apply to coaching in someone else's classroom.

We find that the easiest way to handle this uncertainty is to face it head on. Before a lesson even begins, it can be helpful to ask the teacher, "What would you like to do?" and "What would you like me to do?" The goal is to establish a shared effort throughout the lesson, no matter what level of skill the teacher may have. Even the newest teachers have something to bring to the table when we are working alongside them in their classrooms. If things feel "*Awkward,*" then it might make sense to establish clarity regarding how the next lesson will be shared.

We accomplish this by segmenting lessons so that we can plan logical transitions throughout. In this way, the coach and teacher can determine who will take on each section. *Micro modeling* can then fit within the part of the lesson that makes the most sense based what the teacher is working on. The following coaching log is designed for this purpose (see Figure 5.1).

QR Code 5.2

**Micro Modeling
During a Middle
School Math
Lesson**



<http://qrs.ly/6859nuy>

Stay Focused on What the Teacher Is Working On

While we frame coaching cycles around a goal for student learning, teachers may also identify instructional goals that they would like to work on. A good rule of thumb for *micro modeling* is to stay focused on the instructional practice that was identified by the teacher. In today's era of teacher evaluation, there is no shortage of instructional goals floating around in teachers' heads. The common refrain of "I'm supposed to be . . ." is always hanging in the air and can be an easy place for coaches to decide where to suggest *micro modeling* as a support for teacher learning. The key is that we model based on areas that have been named by the teacher, not by us. Breaking this rule leads to a shift from coaching that is a partnership to one that is about fixing teachers.

Figure 5.1 Planner for Sharing Lessons

Eighth-Grade Reading With James (the teacher) and Lisa (the coach)

What's Happening	What It Will Look Like	Who Will Take the Lead? What Will the Other "Teacher" Do?
Reflect on the Learning Target	Students will reflect on the learning target with a partner. <i>Learning Target: I can analyze how the form or structure of a text contributes to its meaning and style.</i>	Lisa <i>micro models</i> this part of the lesson. James has set this as a goal for his teaching and would like Lisa to demonstrate what it looks like to have students self-assess against a learning target. As Lisa <i>micro models</i> , she will <i>think aloud</i> so that James gets a sense of what she is thinking throughout this portion of the lesson.
Mini Lesson	In the lesson, James will remind the students of the following elements of fiction: plot, character, setting, and conflict. This will be review. Then, he will use examples of familiar literature to illustrate how fiction writers create structure around these elements. James will think aloud using a book that he is currently reading where each chapter is written in the voice of a different character. He will explain how this lends itself to a character-based plot structure. Lastly, he will think aloud about how the structure supports the overall meaning of the book.	James teaches the mini lesson. He requests that Lisa clarify and add on if she notices any confusion. She may also redirect any students who aren't engaged.
Discussion Groups	Students work in small groups to discuss the texts they are reading. Their prompt is, <i>Which is the most dominant feature of your book: plot, character, setting, or conflict? How does this contribute to the overall meaning of the book?</i>	Lisa and James work with small groups. Their plan is to stick together so they can hear the same conversations. This way they will be able to take what they hear into account when they co-plan.
Reflect	After the small groups, the students reflect on the learning target one more time. This is done on an index card and is turned in at the end of the class period.	Lisa and James collect student evidence by listening to what the students say and how they explain their thinking. They also review the index cards during their co-planning session.

Imagine a teacher who would like to focus on students selecting “just right” books. But while the coach is in the classroom, she notices that the reading lessons are stretching on, and the students are losing focus and becoming disengaged. A coach’s first instinct is to suggest modeling a more focused lesson and then hoping that the teacher will realize that she should have been doing this all along. This shortcut often leads nowhere, however, except to frustration and loss of trust among teachers.

Take a Strengths-Based Approach

If we hope to create coaching relationships that are built on trust and respect, then we are best served by believing in teachers. Believing that they are competent, that they care about their students, and that they are able to learn and grow is an essential component of creating relationships where teachers will feel comfortable taking the risks that learning demands. With almost thirty years of coaching experience between the two of us, we know that this can be challenging. We have been in situations when we were worried about kids, or when we felt uneasy about what we were seeing in terms of instruction. In these situations, it is tempting to slip into a mentality of “Move over, I’ll take it from here.” This approach can then lead to more modeling than we intended to do. We must continually remind ourselves that what we are asking teachers to do is complex and challenging, so honoring this is essential if we are going to build trusting relationships where coaching will thrive.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Earlier in this chapter, we introduced Heather, an elementary math coach. Part of the reason Heather was hired to be a coach was because of her incredible content knowledge in mathematics. In fact, on her summers off, Heather works as a staff developer for the company who created the math curriculum that is used in her district. She is a true expert, which is often tricky territory for a school-based coach. It is territory that might be ripe for an approach that includes model, model, and model some more. But rather than parachuting into classrooms and teaching fantastic lessons, Heather views her role as being about building teacher ownership and capacity. She knows that this won’t happen if she does all of the thinking for teachers.

It was early in the school year when Diane visited Heather’s school in O’Fallon, Missouri. The district was in the beginning stages

of implementing coaching, and when they sat down together, Heather asked a familiar question “I want to know if I’m doing this right. Does it look like coaching?” As a former classroom teacher, Heather knew how to approach her work, but coaching felt less defined, and she wanted feedback.

Diane spent the morning shadowing Heather as she worked with Robyn, a fourth-grade teacher. Robyn was new to the profession and had an energetic class of students. Heather and Robyn had planned the lesson on the day prior and knew what they wanted to accomplish (see Figure 5.2).

First and foremost, they were hoping to see if the students were using the methods they had been teaching for composing and decomposing numbers. They began the lesson with a two-digit multiplication problem that would serve as a formative assessment. Robyn wrote the problem on the board and prompted the students to find a solution using one of the methods that they had learned over the past few days. Heather passed out half sheets of paper and reminded the students to show their work. As the students finished up, Heather and Robyn took the student work to the back counter and quickly sorted it into three piles (got it, getting there, needs more support). Then they spent a few minutes talking through what they noticed. Heather asked, “Based on what you see here, do you feel like we are ready to move on to three digit numbers, or do you think we should stick with two-digit problems for a while longer?” Robyn said, “I think they should stick with two digit numbers.” Heather nodded and probed, “What are you noticing that makes you feel that way?” Robyn responded, “I see that some of the students have the idea of what they’re doing, but they aren’t finishing out the part where they find the sums.” “Ok,” said Heather, “so how about if we throw out another two-digit problem and then we can scaffold into some three-digit problems after that?” Robyn agreed, “Ok, that sounds good to me.”

In just a few minutes, Heather and Robyn had formatively assessed, analyzed the student work, and adjusted their instruction. Their next step would be for Heather to *micro model* during the guided practice stage of instruction. In the planning session, they had decided that the students would solve a series of problems on whiteboards so that they could continue to formatively assess. At one moment when the students were hard at work, Heather said, “Let’s take a walk” and

(Continued)

(Continued)

Figure 5.2 Fourth Grade Mathematics Lesson With Heather and Robyn

What's Happening?	What Will It Look Like?	Who Will Take the Lead? What Will the Other "Teacher" Do?
Formative Assessment	Students will solve the following problem to assess the strategies they are using when they encounter two-digit multiplication. The problem is 57×33 . The students will solve the problem on half sheets so that the coach and teacher can quickly sort them before the reteach.	Robyn will get the students started with the problem. Then they will collect and sort the student evidence.
Guided Practice	Students solve more problems that are determined based on how they did with the formative assessment. This time they will work on whiteboards. Showing how they solved the problem will be emphasized. An anchor chart will be used to capture the different methods that the students are using.	Heather will <i>micro model</i> how she assesses problem-solving strategies. Robyn and Heather will monitor student learning and check in with each other to determine how to scaffold students' learning.
Share	Students share how they went about solving the problems. As they share, they will be asked if this is the most efficient strategy and if they got the correct answer.	Heather and Robyn will teach this in tandem.

led Robyn from table to table so they could look for the methods students were using to solve the problems. This helped Robyn understand some of the students' errors and misconceptions and went a long way in building her capacity as a teacher of mathematics. With this new insight, Robyn led the students through a few more problems

while Heather looked on. Her confidence was noticeably building, and Heather was right there to make sure she was successful.

As Diane observed, she wondered how in the world Heather could be wondering if she was an effective coach. When they sat down after the lesson, their first matter of business was to celebrate the students' learning. A math curriculum specialist had also observed the lesson and asked how long they had been working on composing and decomposing numbers. When she learned that this was the first week, she was speechless. This group of fourth graders was moving further and faster than she had ever seen, and they had a first year teacher at the helm. There was no question that Heather's partnership in the classroom was impacting student learning.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

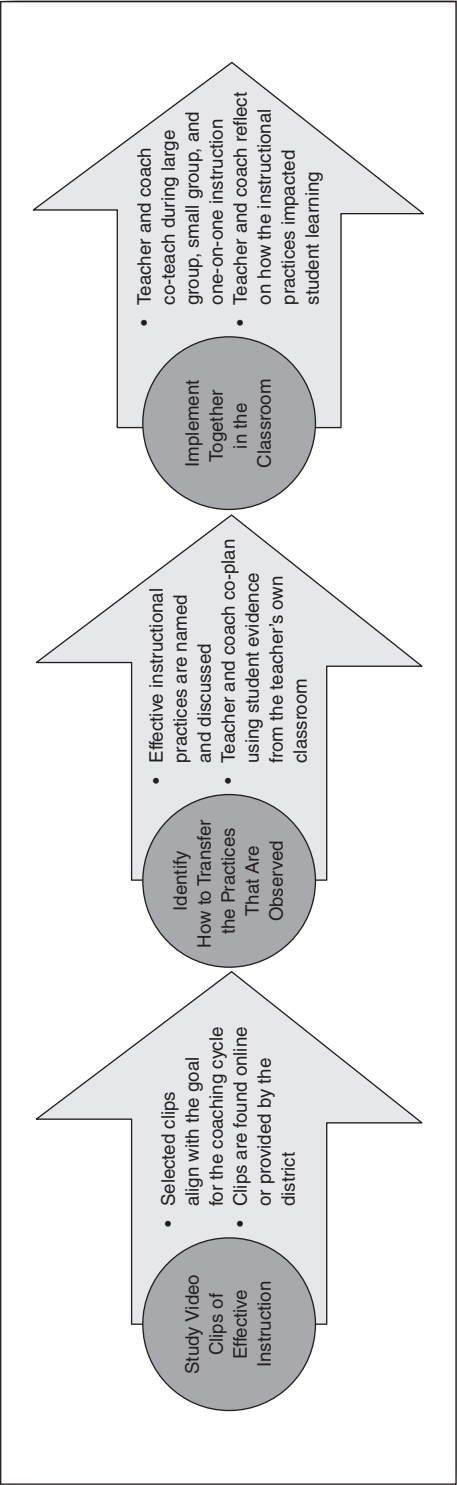
Troubleshooting Conversations About Modeling

Many teachers expect coaching to consist mostly of modeling. Others may resist coaching because they aren't interested in modeling. Moving past these existing perceptions may take some time and intentional conversations about the role of a coach and the practices that a coach may use while in the classroom. Figure 5.3 provides an if/then chart to help coaches troubleshoot conversations about modeling.

Figure 5.3 Language for Micro Modeling

If I hear . . .	Then I can use the following language . . .
Can you model another lesson? You are such a great math teacher, and I don't feel like I know what I'm doing.	I'd be more than happy to <i>micro model</i> a certain part of the lesson. Which part would you feel would be most beneficial to have modeled?
[A principal says] I'd like you to show our teachers what it looks like. It is a new program and they need help getting started.	We can provide a few opportunities for teachers to observe what it looks like. But then I'd like to start helping them implement on their own. This will involve some targeted <i>micro modeling</i> but probably not a whole lesson because I'd like to create ownership to build their capacity.
I'm not really interested in coaching. I've observed plenty of lessons and I know what I'm doing.	I understand. I don't do a lot of modeling, but when I do, it is something specific that you ask for. Otherwise, we work as partners while in your classroom.

Figure 5.4 *Micro Modeling Using Video*



Video and Micro Modeling

Video is an effective tool for *micro modeling*. Many districts are creating libraries of lessons that align with their expectations for the delivery of instruction. For example, Liberty School District in Missouri is currently implementing readers' and writers' workshop across grades K–12. Their district website includes short video clips of what it looks like to teach using the workshop model. While teachers may choose to use these resources on their own, an even more powerful practice is to embed these resources right into a coaching cycle. In this way, the coach can scaffold the teachers' thinking in a way that transfers what they see in the video clip to their own work with students.

Engaging in the use of videos also alleviates the pressure of the coach as expert. Rather than modeling the teaching yourself, it can be beneficial to study others as they teach. There are many opportunities throughout a coaching cycle to dip into video clips in this way. For example, a teacher may be interested in learning strategies for conferring with students. The coach may select a few clips of effective conferences to analyze and then practice with students. This simple protocol goes a long way in building the instructional practices within a student-centered coaching cycle. Figure 5.4 provides a vision for what it looks like to *micro model* using video.

Taking Micro Modeling to a Place of Reflection and Application

Micro modeling is most effective when it is coupled with dialogue and reflection. The questions in Figure 5.5 steer modeling toward teacher ownership and transfer to daily practice

Figure 5.5 Guiding Questions to Reflect on *Micro Modeling*

Questions to Ask Before *Micro Modeling*

1. What have you tried already? How did it go?
2. What impact has this had on your students?
3. Where are you feeling more or less comfortable? Why?

Questions to Ask After *Micro Modeling*

1. What did you notice about your students and their learning during the *micro modeling*?
2. What are some ways we may extend the student learning even further?
3. How did you see the students' thinking being scaffolded through dialogue and discussion?
4. How were the needs of different learners addressed (special education, English language learners, advanced learners)?

A FINAL THOUGHT

We understand that this chapter upsets the status quo in terms of recommended practices for instructional coaching. Most every coaching model advocates for modeling as the primary strategy for coaches to use when working in classrooms. Usually the Gradual Release of Responsibility is identified as the rationale for taking this approach. While we agree in theory, we find that modeling has gone too far in a lot of cases. If we overscaffold, handhold, or do the thinking for people, then we eliminate opportunities for them to learn and grow. This is true for both adults and our students. We hope that the idea of *micro modeling* creates a new vision for modeling without throwing out a commonly used practice that may make sense in certain situations.

We are finding that we aren't alone in this thinking. In fact, when we introduce the idea of *micro modeling* to coaches, it isn't uncommon to see a lot of nodding heads. After a recent presentation at a literacy conference, a coach approached Diane and said, "I'm so grateful to have come to your session. When I was hired, I never received any help with how to be a coach. I modeled lessons because I didn't know what else to do. Now I have a vision for coaching that will feel a lot more comfortable." We've all been there. Diane was mortified to realize her misstep when she took over David's class. Without intending to do so, she set up David to be a passive bystander who was expected to watch and learn.

Taking a more active approach with modeling also has the potential to dramatically impact the teacher and coach relationship. Most coaches aren't interested in being perceived as the expert, yet they so often depend on a coaching move that puts them in an expert role. We can take coaching to a more purposeful level with the simple step of being more intentional about how we use this important coaching move.