

Instructional Strategies: Modeling

Learn about Teacher Modeling

How do students know what is expected of them? Through explicit teacher modeling, the teacher provides students with a clear example of a skill or strategy. The teacher provides a structure to guide students by:

- Describing the skill or strategy
- Clearly describing features of the strategy or steps in performing the skill
- Breaking the skill into learnable parts
- Describing/modeling using a variety of techniques
- Engaging students in learning through showing enthusiasm, keeping a steady pace, asking good questions, and checking for student understanding

The teacher makes sure to clearly describe the concept, then models the desired outcome by using visual, auditory, tactile, and/or kinesthetic instructional techniques while thinking aloud. The teacher can provide examples and non-examples to show students the expectations and stop frequently to get student input or ask questions. This technique of modeling provides high levels of student-teacher interaction.

Make it Happen in Your Classroom

Explicit teacher modeling should happen at every grade level and with every subject area. In order for the modeling to be successful, teachers need to plan the modeling experience carefully. The following steps are important for good modeling:

1. Make sure students have the appropriate background knowledge and prerequisite skills to perform the task.
2. Break down the skill into small learnable segments.
3. Make sure the context of the skill is grade appropriate.
4. Provide visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile ways to illustrate important pieces of the concept/skill.
5. Think aloud as you show each step.
6. Make the important connections between steps.
7. Check for student understanding along the way and re-model the steps that might be causing confusion.
8. Make sure the timing is at a pace where students can follow along but not become bored and lose focus.
9. Model the concept/skills as many times needed to make sure all students are ready to do it on their own.
10. Allow many opportunities for students to ask questions and get clarification.

The time it takes to model a concept or skill is dependent on the size of the task students are being required to do. Modeling some skills may take just a few minutes while other, more complex skills, may take extended teaching time. It's important that the teacher know ahead of time what she wants students to know as a result of the modeling, so when students are set out to work on their own they know expectations and requirements. Specifying the desired behaviors before modeling them also makes assessment more constructive and accurate.

Teacher Modeling in Action

Think Alouds

Doing think alouds is a way for teachers to make their thinking “visible” to students. The teacher models the skill or strategy by verbalizing their thinking at each step. Posing questions and ideas along the way to get students to think about their ideas is another piece of think alouds. Think alouds are an effective way to model thinking skills for students so they can “see” what goes on in the teacher’s mind as they are listening to a story, learning a new skill, or developing understanding of a new concept.

Think Aloud Example:

Teacher: As I read this story about immigrants coming over to America I can’t believe what they had to go through on the ships. I would be so scared to leave my family and home. I think you have to be really brave to do that. I would also be excited about coming to a New World and seeing a new place. I predict that the little boy in this story will make it to America and meet his uncle. I think he will like it once he gets there. When I write in my journal today, I am going to write about the rats and how we have to eat stale bread and water while on the ship. Yeah. I’m also going to write about how I miss my family so much and how it’s been hard to sleep with the ship rocking back and forth. I wonder if I will make it to America? I know some ships never do. (The teacher could actually write this while thinking aloud on a piece of chart paper for students to follow along.)

Teacher directions to the students: After modeling has occurred, have students ask questions and give their ideas. Give clear directions for the reading and journal writing, check for understanding by having one or two students restate the directions in their own words, and then set students out to work independently.