

— Introduction —



Have you ever tried to learn something by having someone tell you or quickly show you how to do it, only to discover that you can't remember what they said or did? That's exactly what happened to me when I tried to learn how to make my mother's amazing fudge.

I had the recipe—my mother allegedly wrote down what to do. But, in my kitchen, 2,000 miles from hers, it just wasn't working the way the recipe said it should. So I called her and she explained what to do. But, sure enough, as soon as I got off the phone, her verbal advice did not make as much sense as it had when I'd been listening. And it didn't help my fudge.

Then, when I visited with my mom a few months later, I asked her to show me how to make her fudge. Perhaps because she had made it hundreds of times before, she whipped together the ingredients and spouted off directions so quickly that my head was spinning. Back home, I tried again, but I still could not get my fudge to come out the way hers did. To this day, my mother's fudge remains elusive to me.

So what would it really take for me to learn how to make that great fudge? I wish my mother and I could make it side by side. Yes, she would have to slow down to teach me—and be there to coach me when I tried to copy her. But I think that through a combination of her demonstrating and my trying things out while she coached me, I could do it. (If only I could get my mother to agree to this. Secretly, I think she doesn't want me to be able to make her fudge so that hers will always be best. But that's another story!)

After all my failures with the fudge, I couldn't help but think of how similar my experience was to students' experiences in many classrooms, especially when it comes to learning new routines and skills. No matter

how often we teachers repeat directions, students seem to miss some steps. That's because they tend to tune out more and pay attention less when we just repeat the same directions over and over again.

Perhaps more problematically, repeating how to do things again and again feels very negative to teachers and students. Teachers' frustration reveals itself in our tone, demeanor, and words as we nag, cajole, or plead with students to remember how to do even basic tasks. Naturally, students *feel* nagged, cajoled, or annoyed. That was how my students and I felt before I learned about Interactive Modeling, an essential practice of the *Responsive Classroom*® approach to teaching.

A Step-by-Step Approach

Interactive Modeling is a straightforward, seven-step technique that's very effective for teaching procedures and routines, such as walking safely in the hallway, and social and academic skills, such as listening respectfully and highlighting important ideas in a text. Parents and coaches can also use this technique to teach children skills, from putting dishes away carefully to running the bases safely. In brief, Interactive Modeling is a great way to teach any routine or skill that needs to be done in one specific way (for safety, efficiency, or other reasons).

Instead of assuming that if we tell children how to do something enough times they'll "get it," Interactive Modeling *shows* students exactly how to do what we expect. It has built-in steps that help students notice for themselves the details of how a behavior looks and sounds. And it has built-in steps for practicing and for receiving teacher feedback during this practice. This powerful combination of noticing and practice enables students to engage more deeply with their learning and remember more.

On the next page, you can read about a seven-step Interactive Modeling session I did with second graders after I learned this technique. My goal was to teach the children how to sit and show they were listening at circle time—something they had been struggling with since the start of school.

1 Say what you will model and why.

I tell the class: “To learn and show how much we care for each other, we all need to listen when someone else is talking. I’m going to show you what listening looks like on the rug. Watch what I do.”

2 Model the behavior.

Without talking, I sit down at a spot on the rug, legs crossed, hands in lap, and back straight. I face my empty teacher chair and lean slightly toward it. Then I nod a little.

3 Ask students what they noticed.

“What did you notice me doing?” I ask. “You were nodding your head” and “Your mouth was closed,” they say. “What else was I doing?” I prompt, until all the key elements of my demonstration are named.

4 Invite one or more students to model.

“Who can show us how to listen the way I showed you?” I ask. Angela volunteers. She carefully folds her legs and puts her hands in her lap. And just as I did, she leans forward and nods.

5 Again, ask students what they noticed.

“How did Angela sit and listen?” The children report that she was looking at the teacher chair, sitting with her legs crossed, and nodding. One student says, “She did it just like you!”

6 Have all students practice.

“Now, let’s see if we all can show how to sit and listen the way you just saw it done,” I say. The students all demonstrate careful sitting and listening.

7 Provide feedback.

“That’s it! You all did exactly what you saw demonstrated. You sat up straight with legs crossed. Hands were in laps and eyes on the teacher chair. Lots of you were nodding. It looks like we are ready to learn. Let’s read a mystery book and see how we do at listening.”

Soon after, I noticed the difference Interactive Modeling made to the children's behavior and to our classroom climate at circle time. But I also saw how this improvement carried over to all the other times that children needed to listen—and that's when I grasped the power of this technique. Since then, many teachers have told me that once they tried Interactive Modeling, they couldn't imagine teaching without it.

For instance, my friend and colleague Lara told me about her experience with cafeteria trays. Year after year, she had instructed students to clear



their trays off into the trash can and then stack them up neatly. On most days, however, what Lara saw as her class rushed out of the cafeteria were trays with trash still on them, stacked in a heap. Sometimes, Lara would inwardly groan at the extra work she and her students were leaving for the cafeteria staff. Other times, she would “fuss” at students about doing it again or

doing it better. Either way, the end of lunch was often soured and the transition back to classroom learning strained.

Then, Lara decided to use Interactive Modeling. And, at last, her students “got it.” On most days, all the trays were now cleared off and neatly stacked. The cafeteria staff noticed, too. As is typical in many schools, they assumed that Lara had a “really good class” that year. But “good” classes don't happen by chance! After years of struggling with this routine, Lara knew that it was her new teaching practice—Interactive Modeling—that had made all the difference.

More Time for Learning

Interactive Modeling's seven-step format makes these lessons fast-paced and easy to teach. The shortest might take just a few minutes, and a complex Interactive Modeling lesson might take twenty minutes or so. If you

were modeling for younger students how to put the top on a marker, you could teach the entire modeling lesson within three to four minutes. If you were teaching older students how to partner chat about a shared reading, including time for students to discuss a selection, the entire lesson might take fifteen or twenty minutes.

From experience, I know that even a small investment of time in doing Interactive Modeling is worth it. You'll actually *gain* time by doing Interactive Modeling. Students will spend more time on task, focused on their learning. You'll have more time for academics and teaching because students will ask fewer procedural questions. Think about how many times you're interrupted each day, how many times you have to repeat directions—and how draining that can be. Yes, it does take a leap of faith to start using Interactive Modeling as one of your main teaching practices. But when you do, you'll see a big difference in the life of your classroom and in the amount of teaching and learning that takes place.

For All Teachers

Interactive Modeling works for younger and older students. So, any classroom teacher can use Interactive Modeling, as can teachers of special education, teachers of English language learners, and special area teachers, including art, music, foreign languages, PE, technology, and library. Administrators and other school leaders can also use the practice to teach expected behaviors in whole-school settings, such as what to do at an assembly.

For Teaching Many Skills

You can use Interactive Modeling to teach a wide range of routines and skills that students need to use repeatedly throughout the school year. This technique is especially useful at the beginning of the year, when you're establishing expectations and helping students learn new skills, but you can rely on it all year long. Parents and coaches can also use this technique to reinforce skills children learn at school and to teach new ones. Once you start to use this technique, you can use it to teach which - ever routines and skills are essential for your students.

INTERACTIVE MODELING CAN HELP YOU TEACH:**Procedures and Routines**

- Cleaning up and putting away math manipulatives
- Lunch skills and routines
- Moving chairs and desks
- Recess skills and routines
- Responding to signals for quiet attention
- Schoolwide assembly routines
- Shelving classroom library books
- Snack procedures
- Start-of-day and end-of-day routines
- Storing backpacks and other items in cubbies or lockers
- Storing playground equipment
- Using art supplies, such as glue sticks and scissors
- Transitioning from one area of the classroom to another
- Transitioning from one classroom to another
- Using the bathroom
- Using the pencil sharpener
- Walking in the hallway

Social and Academic Skills

- Asking and responding to questions
- Completing work and getting ready for the next lesson
- Following a math algorithm
- Greeting people
- Heading one's paper (name, date)
- Listening
- Making and responding to comments
- Proofreading a piece of writing
- Reading and following test directions
- Recording results or observations in a science class or on a form
- Signaling readiness to participate in a classroom activity
- Sounding out words
- Taking part in a whole-group discussion
- Turning and talking with a partner
- Using and organizing notebooks
- Using technology resources
- Working in a small group
- Working with a partner
- Working with a cross-grade reading buddy

Why Interactive Modeling Works

Interactive Modeling works because it combines critical elements of effective teaching—modeling positive behaviors, engaging students in active learning, and assessing their understanding throughout the lesson. These elements help students achieve greater, faster, and longer-lasting success in meeting expectations and mastering skills. Here's more on why Interactive Modeling works:

Students learn why the routine or skill is important. The teacher briefly states why doing a routine or procedure as taught connects to the classroom rules and is essential to their learning. She then reinforces the reasons throughout the Interactive Modeling lesson. Knowing why a routine or skill matters increases students' motivation to become experts at it.

Students create a clear mental image of what's expected. Interactive Modeling intentionally builds in opportunities for children to see several accurate models of the desired behavior. These multiple opportunities enable students to develop one clear picture of what to do. In traditional modeling approaches, teachers often show students what to do just once, leaving many students with incomplete mental images. Worse, if the teacher uses negative modeling (showing students what *not* to do), students form a competing mental picture that is often more powerful than the positive image the teacher intended to create. In Interactive Modeling, only the positive (what *to* do) is modeled.

Students do the noticing. In Interactive Modeling, it's not the teacher who points out what students need to know; it's the students themselves. They're responsible for noticing the details as they observe the demonstrations given by the teacher and student volunteer(s). Throughout the modeling, students have multiple opportunities to watch, listen, and analyze. They get the message that they are important, that their observations matter. This sense of importance, combined with opportunities to talk, listen, and practice, naturally leads children to be fully engaged every step of the way and to retain their learning. As an additional benefit, the more that students experience Interactive Modeling, the better they become at very careful and skillful observing—and this carries over to other areas of their learning. For example, the second graders I described on pages 3–4 became more skilled at noticing and pointing out positive aspects

of each other's work and key details in books they were reading after I started using Interactive Modeling regularly.



Students have a chance to practice and gain expertise. As many researchers have noted, practice is necessary to master any skill (see a sample of this research in Appendix C). The Interactive Modeling structure builds in time for all students to practice the behavior they just saw mod-

eled. Such practice dramatically increases the likelihood that students will succeed in meeting the expectation for the behavior or skill.

Students receive immediate feedback. To truly learn, students need positive feedback about what they're doing well and what's leading to their success. They also need feedback about what they need to change or adjust. With Interactive Modeling, such feedback is built in. When student volunteers demonstrate the behavior (Step 4) and all students practice it (Step 6), the teacher provides meaningful feedback in the moment. This clear and immediate feedback helps cement the learning of the lesson.

Students who experience Interactive Modeling gain a much richer and deeper understanding of expectations than from conventional modeling. They encounter more success in meeting and even exceeding expectations and in developing positive behaviors and key academic and social skills. Classroom routines and procedures become automatic much more quickly, freeing up more time for learning. With Interactive Modeling, students gain foundational social and academic skills needed for school success.

How to Use This Book

In this book, you'll learn how to use Interactive Modeling effectively—what to teach, how to teach it, and what to avoid. Throughout the book, you'll find many practical examples, tips, and tools to make this powerful practice come alive.

You can use the book in different ways to best suit your needs. For example, if you have been struggling with a particular area (maybe students need to take better care of classroom materials), you can read the pertinent chapter (in this case, Chapter 4). Or, if you're getting ready to teach a particular skill, such as how to respond to the signal for quiet attention, you can zero in on a lesson covering that or a very similar skill. This book contains several sample lessons in each chapter, plus additional sample scripts in Appendix B.

Also, be sure to read Chapter 1. Its valuable global strategies and practical tips will help you succeed in using Interactive Modeling for any procedure, routine, or skill.

Regardless of whether you read straight through or skip around, I encourage you to use the Planning Guide and Timelines in Appendix A. These tools will help you prepare for and succeed with Interactive Modeling.

→ Go to www.responsiveclassroom.org/interactive-modeling to see video clips of Interactive Modeling in action in real classrooms, or scan the code to go there now.



———— A Closing Thought ————

If you're a teacher, parent, coach, or anyone else who works with children, I hope you read on and give Interactive Modeling a try. I'm confident that you'll discover how powerful this technique can be for both you and the children you teach.