Original Paper

The Impact of Teacher and Peer Modeling on Student Learning

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Abstract

There are many types of modeling that can be seen throughout the school day. These modeling types include teacher to student modeling, student to student modeling, teacher to teacher modeling, and student to teacher modeling. Each of these types is vital for teachers to help students be successful in the classroom. When students observe different behaviors, they are likely to mirror those behaviors back. It is crucial that teachers identify desired behaviors in students and foster these behaviors in other students.

The Impact of Modeling on Student Behavior and Skill Development

In teaching, modeling takes on many different meanings. There is teacher to student modeling, student to student modeling, teacher to teacher modeling, and student to teacher modeling. Each modeling type is important in creating a classroom environment in which students can succeed. Every time a teacher interacts with their students, they model behavior for their students whether they know it or not. Students spend a large part of their lives in school. With all this time spent in the classroom, the behaviors, opinions, and attitudes of the teachers can be expressed by the students (Löper & Hellmich, 2024). Throughout the school day, the only people that students interact with more than their teachers are other students. Students develop relationships with each other. Teachers can use those relationships to model "desired behaviors" in students ("The Impact of Peer Modeling," 2025). In some classrooms, students are lucky enough to have co-teachers. For teachers working in a co-teaching environment, they learn from each other professionally for instructional strategies; for students, they are able to observe the behavior expected of them in professional environments (Stortenbecker, 2021). After observing teachers, peers, and co-teachers, students should then be able to model back to the teacher. This can be known as reciprocal learning, in which students are encouraged to share information that they learned from diving into content on their own (Mafarja et al., 2023). All of these modeling types are important for teachers and students to be successful in the classroom.

This literature review will investigate why modeling is beneficial in the classroom for student behavior and increasing skill development. Students are able to benefit from observing and modeling how teachers conduct themselves, while also modeling how their peers conduct themselves. Teachers also benefit from modeling by being able to model behaviors of other teachers, have students model desired behaviors, and by having students model back to the teacher in order to show mastery of content.

Teacher to Student Modeling

When looking at teacher to student modeling, it is important to remember just how much time students spend in the classroom with their teachers. Throughout the school day, teachers wear many hats for students. This includes but is not limited to "primary caregivers, main contacts, and role models" (Löper & Hellmich, 2024, para. 7). When students spend this much time with teachers, they are going to pick up on their behaviors and personalities. Even so, they are not going to pick up behaviors from all their teachers. Instead, they tend to choose the teachers that they look up to the most. When a student respects a teacher, they are more likely to want to act like that teacher or model their behavior. This is especially true and important in classrooms with students that have special needs.

In classrooms that are considered to be inclusion classrooms, or classrooms that have regular education students with special needs students mixed in, behavior is one of the biggest problems that teachers face. When a student is different than their peers, they are more likely to be made fun of and left out. In a classroom environment where teachers want all of their students to succeed, this behavior is something

that needs to be avoided. Löper and Hellmich (2024) performed a study that looked at students' attitudes toward other students that had special needs. What they found is that the students' attitudes toward the student with special needs were tied almost directly to the attitude of their teacher. In the study, it was discovered that student's attitudes toward other students that had special needs were "significantly affected by their perceptions of teacher behavior" toward those students (Löper & Hellmich, 2024). What this means is that if the teacher had a bad attitude toward special needs students in their classroom, students would reciprocate that attitude. This causes students with special needs to feel like they do not belong. When students feel like they do not belong, they tend to struggle in the learning environment.

On the other hand, it was also discovered that when teachers had a positive attitude toward students with special needs, students in the class modeled that with the teacher. There is, however, an important distinction that needs to be made from the study. The other aspect from the study that was found to have big impact on how students behaved toward others with special needs was the "quality of the student-teacher relationship in the classroom" (Löper & Hellmich, 2024). When teachers have a positive relationship with their students, they are more likely to model the behavior that is desired by the teacher. Teachers need to strive to build positive relationships in their classrooms to create a learning environment in which every student can be successful.

When looking at teacher to student modeling for skill development, it is an effective way to help students develop skills and master content. In 2020, an analysis was done by Loutsch (2020) on the effectiveness of peer modeling vs teacher modeling in special needs students. While peer modeling proved to be slightly more effective, teacher modeling proved to be just as important in the classroom. With teacher modeling, it was found that students "increased in 10 out of 12 categories" that were tested in the analysis (Loutsch, 2020). With this information in mind, it is important to be able to use teacher modeling to give a framework for students to be able to follow. One of the best ways to implement this teacher modeling is the Gradual Release of Responsibility model, or GRR. In GRR, teachers begin by modeling content by "giving examples or showing the steps" that students are going to follow (Cox, 2024). This allows students to model the teacher's actions as the responsibility shifts from the teacher performing the action to students performing the action. One of the biggest benefits for students in the GRR model is the increase in involvement students have in class. After watching the teacher, it is then their turn. Reciprocal teaching forces students to become "active participants in their learning" (Cox, 2024). This creates a sense of ownership in the student which can increase their learning in the classroom.

Student to student Modeling

When looking at modeling in students, another important relationship is student to student modeling. In this type of modeling, students observe the behavior of their peers and often copy that behavior. An important aspect of this modeling that teachers need to consider is who students are likely to want to model their behavior after. Students tend to model their behavior after classmates that are socially competent, popular, exhibit behavior that benefits others, and that are confident in themselves. Through student to student modeling, students are able to learn social skills, desired behaviors, and academic skills that are needed to succeed in the learning environment.

Student behavior is largely going to be influenced by which student is the most qualified socially to make an impact. When a student is socially competent, other students are more likely to want to model their behavior. The socially competent student and their ability to "engage positively" with their classmates makes them very influential ("The Impact of Peer Modeling," 2025). These students become very effective models for teachers in classrooms. When a teacher is able to identify which of their students exhibits the correct social skills, they can point out to the other students the desired behaviors which in turn influence other students to want to exhibit that same behavior. The next trait that makes a student an effective model in the classroom is popularity. When a student is popular, they tend to have influence over the largest number of their classmates. With this following of other classmates, their peers are more likely to "observe and emulate their actions" ("The Impact of Peer Modeling," 2025). When teachers are able to use these students, they are able to have students model the desired behaviors of popular students.

Another trait that is beneficial for student to student modeling is prosocial behavior. This is one of the

most important aspects of student to student modeling for teachers to take advantage of. Students who exhibit prosocial behavior are able to "serve as positive role models for kindness and collaboration" ("The Impact of Peer Modeling," 2025). When students feel comfortable enough to collaborate in the classroom, it creates a learning environment in which students can be confident in themselves and in their ability to learn. Students tend to model their behavior after other students who are self-confident. This is another trait in students that teachers need to look for to help influence student to student modeling. If teachers are able to have self-confident students model that behavior, it creates a learning environment that "can motivate peers to try new behaviors and skills" ("The Impact of Peer Modeling," 2025). An important part of the learning process is failing. When a student does not have very much self-confidence, they are much more worried about how they are perceived when they fail. That is why it is so important for students to observe other students with self-confidence. If they see that it is okay to try and fail, they are more likely to model the same behavior.

Especially when looking at inclusion classrooms, one of the best resources that teachers have is the students themselves. The analysis by Loutsch (2020) on the effectiveness of peer modeling versus teacher modeling on students with special needs showed just how important this is. What was found is that in social development and language development, student to student modeling showed a greater increase for students than just teacher modeling. (Loutsch, 2020). For inclusion classrooms, the opportunities for special needs students to be able to interact with is incredibly important. What these interactions create is valuable opportunities "for learning or gaining a new skill" (Loutsch, 2020). While these interactions are important for special needs students, they are also just as valuable for the general education student. When a student is given responsibility of modeling for a peer with special needs, they tend to become more accepting of their peers. When this happens, an environment for learning is created where all students are able to feel confident and accepted. Through this, social skills are developed that would not have been able to without student to student modeling in inclusion classrooms (Loutsch, 2020). One aspect of student to student modeling that is beneficial to teachers is the one-on-one time that is gained with students. When students are working with each other and modeling for each other, teachers are able to "spend more time teaching and supporting students" (Loutsch, 2020). This added time allows teachers to provide more individualized instruction to a larger number of students.

Teacher to Teacher Modeling

Another modeling type that is important for students to be able to observe is teacher to teacher modeling. Teachers need to be able to model for students the right way to behave professionally, and how to treat other people. When students are able to observe behaviors exhibited by teachers toward other teachers, they are more likely to model that behavior toward other students. When looking at skill development, teacher to teacher modeling is also important. One of the ways that the teacher to teacher modeling can be effective is through co-teaching. Co-teaching normally occurs in an inclusion classroom setting. When teachers are lucky enough to have a co-teacher, they can show students teacher to teacher modeling much easier. Through lessons they are able to show students how interactions should look, how to cooperate in a group or paired setting, and teachers are able to have more one-on-one interactions throughout the class.

Stortenbecker (2021), did an analysis which dove into how effective co-teaching is for students and teachers. Co-teaching is when there are two teachers in a classroom helping students to learn content. This is most common in inclusion classrooms where special needs students are included with general education students. There are many different methods that can be used in co-teaching that are effective for student learning. The first of these is one teaching, one observing. In this method, one teacher goes over the content while the other observes and helps students who they identify as falling behind (Stortenbecker, 2021). This allows students to receive instruction with different strategies without taking away from the whole class instructions. This is effective for students to be able to learn the content in the way that is best for them.

Another method that is commonly used is one teaching, one assisting. This method is similar to observing, but in this instance the second teacher takes a more hands-on approach. The assisting teacher will move around the room and assist any student that they identify to need additional help than

just what is being presented by the leading teacher (Stortenbecker, 2021). This is an effective method because students receive more hands-on help that they need and are able to see information modeled in more than one way.

A third method for co-teaching is parallel teaching. In parallel teaching, the class is split up into two groups, and the content is taught by both teachers simultaneously. The most important thing that this allows for is small group instruction for all the students. This allows for maximum success among the students as the teachers are able to present material for the students more individually (Stortenbecker, 2021). In smaller groups, students are also able to see the behavior of their teachers and model that behavior back to them.

There are also several methods of co-teaching that would be considered less traditional. One of those methods is station teaching. In station teaching, students rotate around the room with teachers leading different stations. There can also be a station where students are working independently. This allows co-teachers to be able to model behavior to students, and then the students to work independently at different stations (Stortenbecker, 2021). What this allows for is co-teachers to facilitate instruction to students more independently than if there was only one teacher. Another method is called alternative teaching. In this method, there is a large group of students led by one teacher, and the other teacher takes a small group to provide specialized instruction that meets the needs of those students (Stortenbecker, 2021). Those students in the smaller group typically need behavior modeled more specifically than students in the large group. This co-teaching method allows for that.

One of the most effective co-teaching methods for teacher to teacher modeling for students is team teaching. In this method, the co-teachers take turns teaching the content to the students (Stortenbecker, 2021). Co-teachers trade off teaching the content and modeling for the students how cooperative learning should look. Effective team teaching requires both teachers to interact with each other and with the content. When co-teachers interact with each other for a lesson, they model desired behavior for the students. Team teaching allows lessons created by teachers to be more effective for students because of "the different perspectives and experiences" of both teachers (Stortenbecker, 2021). When a teacher is working alone, they only have their own experiences to use as a guide for creating lessons for students. Differing perspectives from a co-teacher allows for a lesson to be more effective for the students. Even though team teaching can be considered very effective, it can also be very difficult to implement. Team teaching takes time and trust for both teachers. Making sure that both teachers are prepared for the lesson and "have a mutual trust and commitment" to each other and to the content (Stortenbecker, 2021). This takes up a large amount of time for each teacher. Even so, the benefits that come from that time commitment outweigh the cost.

Teacher to teacher modeling is also beneficial for teachers in their career and in their classrooms. When teachers are involved in co-teaching, they are able to observe how other teachers conduct themselves. In co-teaching, teachers are encouraged to embrace the "various needs of students and promote excellence" within the classroom (O'Day, 2024). This is important for teachers to become the best teachers they can be. When teachers share ideas and work collaboratively, they create lessons that are more effective for skill development in students. Probably the biggest added benefit for students that comes from co-teaching is that students have the opportunity "benefit from the expertise of two educators" (O'Day, 2024). This collaboration between teachers creates a professional learning community that spills over into the classroom. Students are able to observe the collaboration between teachers, and model that behavior back with their classmates. When teachers can learn from each other, they become more effective teachers. When teachers are more effective, it creates a learning environment in which the greatest number of students will be able to succeed.

Another aspect of teacher to teacher modeling that is often overlooked is the role of administrators in the learning environment. For a school to have a strong environment for co-teaching and professional learning, a culture must be established that has high expectations for students and teachers. Administrators must instill the belief in teachers that they have a shared responsibility in the classroom and will need to use "their own unique set of skills" to educate students in the classroom (O'Day, 2024). This starts with the expectations of administrators for educators. Administrators must make sure that educators understand the shared responsibility goes beyond class time. The responsibility extends into

planning time, grading, and accommodations for special education students. When co-teachers understand the administrator's expectation on collaboration, they are able to have a professional learning community that brings out the best in everyone.

Student to Teacher Modeling

One aspect of modeling that is often overlooked is the modeling of the teacher's behavior or of the content back to the teacher. This is an effective way for teachers to measure whether a student understands the content that they are being modeled. One method for teachers to be able to gauge student understanding is reciprocal teaching. In this method, students are placed in charge of their own learning. Students must cooperate and model the behavior for the teacher and their fellow students. This type of modeling can help students gain knowledge of content but can also influence students' beliefs in their abilities.

In reciprocal teaching, the roles of teacher and student are essentially reversed. Instead of teacher lead learning in which the teacher gets in front of the class and tells students everything they need to know, students are put in charge of the content. The goal of reciprocal teaching is for students to be able to join their ideas and "encourages the sharing of information" between students (Mafarja et al., 2023). As a student performs reciprocal teaching, they are modeling desired behavior that the teacher is attempting to show the rest of the class. One thing that this accomplishes is taking the duty of learning out of the teacher's hands and putting that duty into the hands of the students. In a study by Mafrja et al (2023), it was discovered that the approach of reciprocal teaching showed student improvement in motivation, comprehension, active learning, and creating an effective learning environment. This is done through helping students develop an "active involvement in the learning process" (Mafarja et al., 2023). Students being active in the learning process creates a classroom environment that is beneficial for all students. Students being comfortable in the learning environment is a very important aspect of the learning process.

One aspect that the reciprocal teaching method allows students to benefit from is an increase in self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is how much confidence a student has in themselves and in their ability to succeed. When students observe their peers in reciprocal teaching, they see other students who are like them hopefully succeeding in the task that the teacher would like modeled. When a student sees another student succeeding in front of the class, they begin to believe that they can succeed also. This "motivates children to try new skills and persist despite challenges" that they face in the learning process ("The Impact of Peer Modeling," 2025). In the learning process, the fear of failure can be one of the biggest obstacles that students face. In reciprocal teaching, students model behaviors to the teacher and to other students that help other students overcome this fear and be successful in the classroom.

Conclusion

Modeling occurs in classrooms every single day. As a teacher shows students a lesson in front of the class, they are modeling content, behavior, and skills that are desired. One of the most important aspects of teacher to student modeling is the relationship between the teacher and their students. If the relationship is seen to be positive, students are more likely to trust and model the behavior back to the teacher. Another important modeling that occurs in the classroom is student to student modeling. Students tend to mirror the behavior of those around them. This is especially true when the student is popular, socially competent, prosocial, and self-confident. When teachers are able to identify which students exhibit these traits, they can praise these behaviors and have other students model the same behaviors. Teacher to teacher modeling is also important for students to be able to observe. When teachers are able to work together, content for students improves, teaching effectiveness improves, and the classroom environment improves. Finally, student to teacher modeling allows the teacher to gauge student learning. Through reciprocal teaching, students are able to take control of their learning and gain self-confidence. Modeling is a teaching method that is very effective in making the classroom successful.

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