2007

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Millis, Barbara J. and Samojlowicz, Gosia, "Microteaching to Maximize Feedback, Peer Engagement, and Teaching Enhancement" (2007). *Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education: Archives*. 101.
https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/podarchives/101

Microteaching to Maximize Feedback, Peer Engagement, and Teaching Enhancement

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Microteaching has been defined as "a scaled down realistic classroom training context in which teachers, both experienced and inexperienced, may acquire new teaching skills and refine old ones" (McKnight, 1980, p. 214). Developed at Stanford in the early and mid 1960's for elementary school teachers, the original model emphasized a "teach, review and reflect, re-teach" approach, using elementary school students as authentic audiences. Videotaping a mini-lesson, with an emphasis on narrowly described skill sets, was a key component.

Subsequent modifications in higher education settings typically rely on faculty or teaching assistant (TA) peers rather than actual students to provide feedback. But the model's positive attributes as a method for introducing neophyte instructors to the experience of classroom teaching are multiple:

    (a) Microteaching is real teaching;
    (b) It lessens the complexities of normal classroom teaching in that class size, scope, and content are reduced;
    (c) It focuses on accomplishing specific tasks;
    (d) It organizes controlled, structured practice sessions;

(e) It allows for immediate, focused feedback; and,

(f) It promotes reflection on teaching approaches and on constructive feedback. (Hertel, Milis, & Noyd, 2002, pp. 275-276)

 In most microteaching models, the workshop leader along with the peer audience (comprising 5-7 instructors) will review the tape of the five-minute segments together. This can be a laborious process since these models require their audiences to sit through the microteaching sessions twice: once 'actually' (when the sessions are videotaped) and once 'virtually' (when the entire videotape is reviewed by the group). In a more efficient model, Keesing and Daston (1979) eliminated the repetition by having the mini-lesson presenter and the workshop facilitator review the tape *at the same time* the peer audience prepares feedback. This essay will describe and evaluate an adaptation of this latest version of the model used for TA and faculty training at the University of Nevada, Reno and elsewhere.

A Highly Structured Model
The Excellence in Teaching Program (ETP) staff at University of Nevada, Reno divides the teaching assistants enrolled in a required course, GRAD 701: College Teaching, into heterogeneous groups of 5-7 students, making certain there is a mix of disciplines, genders, and nationalities. The course begins with three days of interactive face-to-face seminars. After this three-day period, the graduate students complete the course by working individually to earn a total of 16 points by producing assignments on a variety of pedagogical tasks, which are submitted electronically (via WebCT) for credit in the course.

Microteaching occurs on the third and final day of the face-to-face portion of the course with carefully trained Mentor TAs guiding each group through the 30-minute-per-presenter microteaching sequence. Each thirty minute segment is divided into the following three parts:

1.) The Individual Presentation: 10 Minutes
Each TA provides 10 copies of his/her completed Planning and Feedback Sheet for the group. The top portion contains information about the student and his/her topic and one area in which s/he wants feedback. (e.g., pacing, clarity of presentation, etc). The bottom half

of this sheet provides a space for feedback in response to the following questions and prompts: What did you like most about the presentation? What constructive suggestions can you make about the designated area of feedback? Did the speaker involve the listeners? Give examples of the speaker's interactions with the class. Describe the speaker's use of the blackboard and other visual aids. Do you have any suggestions about how to make the lesson more effective or understandable?

After distributing these forms, each TA presenter delivers his or her mini-lesson while the Mentor TA keeps time. A camera operator, selected from the TA participants, records the presentation.

2.) One-on-One Feedback (A) and Group Feedback Preparation (B): 10 Minutes
The Mentor TA (or Workshop Leader) and the TA mini-presenter run the tape while discussing the presentation. The Mentor TA references the videotape whenever appropriate, but we emphasize the value of the discussion between the TA and the Mentor, not the viewing, with opening questions such as, "How do you think it went?" "What was the best thing about your presentation?" "What would you change if you could?" This private discussion allows the TAs to reduce their anxiety, to "vent" their concerns, and to receive reassuring positive feedback as well as constructive ideas for improvement.

During this same ten minute period, the remaining TA participants, working in two separate groups, discuss the presentation and prepare constructive feedback for the TA presenter. Participants assume one of three roles, which rotate with each presentation: discussion leader, recorder, and spokesperson.
In all cases, the emphasis is on constructive feedback. For example, the instructions for the discussion leader are: When guiding the discussion, be certain that the group focuses initially on the two specific skills the instructor wants feedback on. Keep the tone positive and constructive, perhaps asking questions such as, 'How can we provide X with the most help?' 'Do we really want to tell X that if she cannot do anything to change this behavior?' 'How can we phrase these comments to get X to reflect on possible changes?'

3.) Group Feedback: 10 Minutes
The TA presenter then receives constructive feedback from the two subgroups. The Mentor TA facilitates this feedback session by calling on the spokespersons in the two groups to offer constructive criticism in at least three areas: the feedback requested by the presenter, the positive aspects of the presentation, and the areas that need improvement.

During the closing activity for the all-day microteaching session, all TAs within their heterogeneous groups reflect on their own performance, by summarizing in a plenary session, what they learned from the feedback and from watching fellow TAs present mini-lessons. Then, with a partner, they discuss what they would do differently—and why.

Selecting and Training the Mentor TAs
Each semester ETP selects new Mentor TAs from exemplary GRAD 701 students who exhibit strong interpersonal and teaching skills. During an hour-and-a-half training session, the Mentor TAs learn how to give constructive feedback to peer instructors and to assemble and run the equipment. Mentor TAs receive a packet with the materials needed for their all-day sessions.

Preparation for the Microteaching Participants

The TAs attending GRAD 701 receive written instructions on the microteaching process and a list of sample topics. Additionally, on the first day, everyone participates in a 45-minute interactive planning module, which emphasizes the importance of active learning and visual aids.

Assessment
We use two types of assessment instruments. All graduate students attending the three-day seminar portion of GRAD 701 complete an evaluation form. Microteaching consistently receives very high ratings. The Mentor TAs, who complete a Follow-up Report, are equally laudatory. Their useful reports offer suggestions for improvement and provide detailed descriptions of the microteaching sessions.

Benefits of this Structured Model

Participants report the following:

· They value the rehearsal time and minimal preparation time required by the sessions. In other words, TAs have an opportunity to present in front of a group under low-threat conditions.

· They value the feedback from both an expert (the Mentor TA) and from peers. This process allows TAs to see themselves as their students might see them.

· TAs benefit from seeing the presentations of other TAs. All participants learn from each other (and we find these observations of peer performance particularly useful for international students).

· Viewing the tape one-on-one with a facilitator has important benefits. The Mentor TA provides a wide range of feedback, including insights into presentation mechanics captured on the tape. The TAs take the videotape with them for further viewing and self assessment.

· The group feedback helps not only the presenters, but also the TA sub-group members. We deliberately mix TAs so they do not have similar content knowledge, making them more like actual students unable, like experts, to "fill in the blanks." Different perspectives emerge from the two groups, causing one group to react one way while another group reacts differently. These occasions highlight the fact that a technique may produce similarly mixed reactions in students. Most importantly, the members of the subgroups work conscientiously to offer constructive feedback, which doubles as a valuable classroom skill.

Conclusion
Virtually any institution can adopt this microteaching model because of its flexibility and efficiency. It is effective not only because it focuses on good teaching practices, but also because it promotes collegiality. For a set of microteaching materials, including the

planning sheets, please contact Barbara Millis at millis@unr.edu.

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