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Using Role Play to Rehearse Problems of Practice

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Abstract

In this article, we share a professional development tool for use with mathematics coaches. We describe a protocol we created, inspired by research around Rehearsals in pre-service mathematics instruction, that supports coaches to practice addressing challenges they are likely to confront in their work. After introducing the research that has guided our thinking, we describe our Role Play Protocol and share data collected from coaches and administrators with whom we worked about the usefulness of this form of professional learning. We then outline modifications we have made and continue to make to the Role Play Protocol and discuss implications and future work needed to better understand how effective this tool is at supporting coaches' learning and practice in the field.

Introduction

In 2014 the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) published *Principles to Actions* in which the authors identified eight research-based teaching principles. When used in mathematics classrooms, these practices support student learning. Thus, those who provide professional learning to classroom teachers can draw upon a shared set of practices that, when well implemented, increase student achievement. However, a similar set of research-based practices does not currently exist to guide the work of coaches. That is, we do not yet know which, if

any, coaching practices best support teachers with their work. Nor do those who provide professional learning to coaches know which coaching practices are most critical for the coaches to learn and use.

Gibbons and Cobb (2017) have begun to address this gap in research. The authors examined research related to the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers to identify activities that are commonly used to support teacher learning. After aligning these activities to the indicators associated with high quality professional development, the authors were left with ten potentially productive coaching practices. Gibbons and Cobb further reduced their set of potentially productive coaching practices by looking at the literature to identify which of the ten practices had significant empirical evidence to support their use as a professional development tool. This left a list of six practices that may be productive for coaches to engage in with teachers to support teachers with their practice (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017).

We, the authors of this paper, were struck by one of the practices that was on the intermediary list of ten potential practices: Rehearsing Aspects of Practice (or “Rehearsals”). While not enough research exists to enable the inclusion of Rehearsals on the smaller list of six potentially productive coaching practices, we had been engaging in our own examination of the work being done using Rehearsals with pre-service teachers and were intrigued by its application to mathematics coaching. We, thus, began to consider how we might use Rehearsals to support the professional learning of coaches with whom we worked. We note here that, while Gibbons and Cobb (2017) focused their research on

identifying professional activities that coaches might use to effectively support classroom teachers, our examination of Rehearsals shifted to help us think about professional activities that we could use to support mathematics coaches in their work.

Lampert, Franke, Kazemi, Ghouseini, Chan Turrou, Beasley, H., Cunard, and Crowe (2013) describe Rehearsals in pre-service teacher education as a cyclical pedagogical approach that helps a novice teacher enact ambitious instruction. Researchers at Teacher Education by Design, a project hosted by the University of Washington that aims to provide support for educators, define Rehearsals as:

An opportunity for novice teachers and teacher educators to figure out how an instructional episode may play out and to use what they learned in analyzing and unpacking practice to aim towards productive enactment of their instructional plan. (<http://tedd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Leading-Rehearsals-Primer.pdf>)

In order to engage in Rehearsals, a novice teacher first learns a particular instructional activity. This activity is one that can be routinized or repeated in classroom instruction, for example a quick images activity. Once the routine has been learned, the pre-service teacher plans and then teaches this routine to her pre-service teacher peers and their instructor. During the enactment of the routine, the pre-service teacher might interrupt her teaching to ask a question of her classmates or instructor about the work she is presenting. Likewise, a classmate or the instructor might interrupt the instruction in order to ask a question or make a suggestion to the student presenting the routine (Lampert, Franke, Kazemi, Ghouseini, Chan Turrou, Beasley, H., Cunard, and Crowe, 2013).

While there is no set of agreed upon instructional activities that coaches use in their work and therefore need to learn to facilitate, the idea that novice educators might practice their approach to activities or situations that commonly occur was compelling and encouraged us to think more carefully about if and how we might adapt this tool to support our work with novice coaches.

We recognized that the work we would be doing would have to differ significantly from that done with pre-service teachers. For example, our work with coaches would not be geared towards routines in elementary mathematics classrooms, nor would we be working with inexperienced

educators. Despite these differences, there are still aspects of the original work in Rehearsals that remain central to our work with role play. Chief among them is the idea that our participants are novice in their work, not as teachers but as mathematics coaches, and that our goal is to give our students an opportunity to practice a scenario that is likely to occur in their setting. Importantly, our participants also receive feedback about the enactment of the role play and can hear from others who are engaged in the same learning. Our role play design focused on creating a professional development experience that provided participants with an opportunity to try out approaches to a common situation, to support one another through problem-solving in complex situations, and to analyze decision making along with the impacts of those decisions. We revised Teacher Education by Design's description of Rehearsals for pre-service teachers to align with our purpose and arrived at the following working definition for our role play work with coaches:

An opportunity for novice coaches and their administrators to figure out how a coaching interaction may play out and to use what they learned in analyzing and unpacking the practice to aim towards productive enactment of coaching practices in the field.

Role Play Design

We are both involved in the elementary mathematics coaching program in our state. This program incorporates multiple components and begins with graduate coursework in mathematics, coaching, and leadership. Coaches involved in the program also have observations of their coaching conducted by field staff, attend learning labs in which coaches watch a lesson and coaching exchange in real-time and then debrief their observation, participate in ongoing networking opportunities with other coaches and administrators across the state in professional development forums, and attend a two-day summer institute. When we were planning for the 2016 summer institute, we began discussing more explicitly the research around Rehearsals and how we might incorporate aspects of this work into the professional learning of the coaches.

We determined that we might use a selection of role playing scenarios through which the coaches might practice their responses to problems that mathematics specialists commonly face in their work. We drew upon our own experiences as mathematics coaches and on research about

mathematics coaching for the three cases we used in the first round of implementation. The challenges addressed in these first cases included a teacher making a mathematical error during instruction, a principal asking the coach to formally evaluate a new teacher, and a teacher using a pedagogical approach not supported by the district philosophy (in this case, the teacher used the majority of class time to correct homework). After our first summer institute, we solicited examples of challenges our coaches had experienced in their own work which they felt would be useful as role play scenarios. Our scenarios now include examples of a coach being asked to use her time with a teacher to sort and store materials, of a principal asking coaches to work with underperforming teachers only, of a teacher sharing a “trick” she learned from Pinterest with her students, of coaches being asked to substitute for a period, and of difficult relationships between stakeholders in a coaching program. See Appendix A for a sample of two different role play scenarios we have used.

When we use our Role Play Protocol with our coaches, we ask them to work in triads, in small groups of two to three triads, and in the whole group. One round of role play is organized as follows:

- 1) Each member of the triad reads the scenario to him or herself.
- 2) Triad members discuss the case to ensure they understand the problem that is being raised.
- 3) Triad members choose a role to play. In each role play there is one person playing a coach, one person playing an “other” (for example, a principal or a teacher), and one person who is observing the role play and keeping notes.
- 4) The person who is playing the “other” receives an envelope with an additional set of information. This information typically describes in slightly more detail why an act might have occurred, how the person might be feeling in a given situation, the support he or she may want, and how he or she might react to the coach.
- 5) Participants are asked to act out the scenario for five minutes. We make sure to highlight for our participants that the goal is not necessarily to find a solution or to be the first to find a solution, but to engage with a potential approach to the problem to see how that might play out.
- 6) After the role play is over, the observer shares what he or she saw in the role play, and the triad discusses the role play.
- 7) Small groups meet to give an overview of how they each addressed the problem and to identify what the immediate outcome or implications might be, what the long term implications might be, and how the work might move forward between the people involved if this were a real situation.
- 8) Each group shares an important take-away from their work with the whole group.
- 9) The above steps are repeated with a different scenario. Participants must take on a different role for each role play done in a professional development session.

In addition to its use at our summer institute, we have found the Role Play Protocol to be a beneficial pedagogical tool in other formats and with other audiences. After originally using the role plays with coaches, we felt it could be useful to engage the coaches’ administrators in this work as well. Now, administrators and coaches participate in the role play work at professional development sessions and at our more recent summer institutes. We do, however, ask that administrators and coaches from the same district work in different triads. We have also used role plays at conferences and workshops over the last two years.

Findings

At the 2017 and 2018 summer institutes we asked our participants to complete a survey about their engagement in the role play activity. Participants were first asked to respond to a series of questions about the role play session using a five-level Likert scale response. Participants were invited to explain their responses if they wished. At the end of the survey, we asked all participants to respond to three short answer questions: i) Which role playing scenario was the most useful to you and why? ii) Which role playing scenario was the least useful to you and why? and iii) What problem of practice have you confronted that you believe would make a good scenario and why?

Participants included both administrators and coaches. They were not asked to indicate their names or the school/districts in which they worked so that the responses remained confidential. We had a total of 40 participants

return the surveys to us in 2017. This included 11 identified administrators, 20 coaches, and 9 who did not indicate their role. In 2018, 48 participants made up of 31 coaches and 17 administrators agreed to participate. Forty-seven of the 48 people returned the survey. We did not capture if the missing survey was from an administrator or a coach. We do know that some of the 2018 participants also responded to our 2017 survey.

Overall, our participant feedback was positive about the Role Play Protocol as shown in Table 1 and Table 2. In each of the questions soliciting a numerical response, the mean score was over 4 on a scale of 1 to 5. Responses show that participants found the Role Play Protocol to be useful to their work with mean scores ranging between 4.2 and 4.7. Participants also indicated that of the various activities, engaging in the scenarios themselves was most useful. These results suggest that participants found this professional development worthwhile, relevant, and beneficial.

Table 1: Participant Rating of Role Play Protocol

<i>Please respond to the following statements using a scale of 1 - 5 (1 = Do Not Agree, 5 = Very Much Agree).</i>	Mean (2017)	Mean (2018)
Today's session was professionally relevant and useful to my practice.	4.7	4.5
Today's role play scenarios were realistic.	4.7	4.7
Today's activities prepared me for work in my own coaching context.	4.6	4.2
The design of the session facilitated my own learning and reflecting about coaching.	4.6	4.4

Table 2: Participant Rating of Usefulness of Activities

<i>Please rate how useful the following activities were on a scale of 1 - 5 (1 = Not at All Useful, 5 = Very Useful).</i>	Mean (2017)	Mean (2018)
Today's session was professionally relevant and useful to my practice.	4.7	4.5
Role Plays	4.7	4.7
Small Group Debriefs	4.5	4.5
Whole Group Discussions	4.1	4.1
Considering Alternate Solutions to Scenarios	4.3	4.2

In their written feedback, our participant findings centered on six themes. The first idea that emerged suggested that the Role Play Protocol helped participants engage in *perspective taking*. Participants indicated that playing the role of the “other” in a situation helped them to recognize that everyone with whom they interact carries their own background knowledge, experiences, and beliefs into any given situation. Respondents also said that the role plays helped them to recognize that putting themselves in the position of the other person might help them approach a problem. This tool reminded participants that people experience situations in different ways and that one of their jobs, as a coach, is to understand the perspectives of those around them.

Similarly, the Role Play Protocol helped coaches to *consider a variety of approaches to a problem situation*. By taking into account the perspective of others involved in the interaction, those role playing the coach began to recognize different motivations for actions and, thus, different solutions. When they saw that the root cause of an issue might have been different from what they originally thought, our participants could take a different approach to their work. Coaches also heard from other small groups about how they addressed a given situation, which increased the options they might take into a similar situation in the future. Participants came to see that as a coach, they do not need to know the one “correct” solution to a problem they face in their practice, but that there can be many successful ways to approach a problem.

Those involved in the work had the opportunity to hear from others confronting the same situation since all were enacting the same scenario. This provided them with *insight into the work of others*. When triads shared their methods for solving the problem with one another, both new and more experienced coaches were able to add more potential approaches to their toolkit. Through the role play enactments and subsequent conversations, participants also learned about how coaching programs were organized in different districts throughout the state. This information could be used to refine the structure of the coaches’ work in their own district, should they have wished to do so.

Both administrators and coaches told us that they *better understand the actual role of a coach and the challenges inherent in that role*. During our summer institutes, many of the coaches were not yet working as full time coaches.

Their districts planned for them to begin coaching at the beginning of the school year following the summer institute or, in some cases, a year or two into the future. Thus, many of the discussions and readings we had done through class work remained theoretical. Role playing gave these coaches the chance to actually embody a coaching exchange. Administrators also felt the role play helped them understand more precisely the work that a coach actually does. This theme from the summer institute was further exemplified at a later professional development session when an administrator told us that the scenario he was engaged in would never happen. Through discussions with the groups, he changed his opinion and found that the situation was common, and indeed even occurred in his district. Administrators also began to recognize some of the skills a coach might need to draw on, such as relationship building and mathematical content knowledge, in order to navigate these types of interactions.

The Role Play Protocol itself prompted *useful communication techniques*. When observing the coaches in their field placement, our coaching supervisors noticed and reported back a reluctance among the coaches to engage in more difficult conversations. When engaged in the Role Play Protocol, the coaches were forced to talk about challenging, and sometimes uncomfortable, situations. The role play environment gave them a safer space to try to address these situations than they might face in their actual school buildings. Essentially, the stakes were much lower, and thus, the consequences of a misstep were less stressful. Through enacting and observing problems of practice, the coaches developed a nascent repertoire of ways to address challenging situations in a productive and professional manner.

Ultimately, the themes listed above all contributed to the participants having *increased confidence about their practice*. As they navigated their way through each role play, they recognized the role they play in a coaching situation and the perspectives and needs of the people around them. They gathered various methods for approaching a challenge and techniques to address such a challenge face-to-face. This left them feeling empowered.

Overall, our participants expressed that listening to others work through the challenges allowed them to think about their work, that it was beneficial to get into another person's head and to brainstorm possible solutions, and that this professional learning helped them to think about the work they might do in the future. When considering the relevance

of the work, many participants suggested that the scenarios in which they engaged were realistic. They told us that they could imagine exactly which teachers they might be having this conversation with, that these types of scenarios occur in the schools in which the coaches work, that the scenarios were both "accurate" and "realistic," and that many of them have dealt with similar cases in their practice.

While the feedback we received was almost universally positive, with few individual ratings below a 4 and none below a 3, the most frequent negative response that was reported was that there was not enough time for the whole group discussion. This is evident in both the mean score of 4.1 for that activity as well as in the qualitative data. We believe that the relatively low mean score for "Considering Alternate Solutions to Scenarios" is also, in large part, attributable to the lack of time provided for whole group discussion. We certainly agree that we did not provide enough time for our participants to discuss their role plays in the summer of 2017. As is often the case in professional development, we tried to do too much in too short a period and, as a result, the time allocated for whole group sharing was cut short. We tried to remedy this in the summer of 2018 by engaging participants in two, instead of three, role plays during the same amount of time. Despite the fact that more time was given for whole group discussion, preliminary analysis of that data suggests that participants would appreciate even more time. This is something we are considering as we continue to adapt and refine our work for future implementation.

Modifications

Since our first implementation of role plays in the summer of 2016, we have made multiple adjustments to our protocol based upon observation and feedback from our participants. When we first used role plays with our coaches, we did not set a timeframe for the role play. We found that many of our participants felt that they needed to come to a resolution as quickly as possible and our triads were frequently done in less than one minute. Because of this, we began setting a timeframe for the role plays and indicated that our expectation was that the role play would last the entire time, so that there was no need to get to a solution quickly, if at all. We tried setting a three-minute timeframe and more recently have extended this to five minutes. We believe that this extended time encourages our participants to consider multiple ways to approach a challenging situation, not just the quickest approach, and that it allows the

participants to engage in more nuanced discussions related to identifying underlying issues at the root of the scenarios presented.

Our participants indicated that they felt that the “secret information” received was, at times, too limiting for their role play. Sometimes they wanted to respond in one direction but felt that they could not because of the secret information. Therefore, we have begun to edit our original scenarios so that at least two options are available in the secret information. This allows our participants more flexibility and choice in how they might respond as well as the freedom to be more responsive and adaptive to what the other person in the role play is doing.

More recently, we presented our work at a conference and were interested to see a triad engage in a move like what Gibbons, Kazemi, Hintz, and Harmann (2017) describe as a “Teacher Time Out.” In a Teacher Time Out, a classroom teacher might interrupt her own instruction to ask a question or to solicit advice about instruction from observing educators in the middle of instruction. Similarly, one of the observing educators might signal (with a time out hand signal) a Teacher Time Out to ask a question or make a suggestion to the teacher leading the lesson. At our conference presentation, the observer of the role play asked us if she could interrupt the role play that she was watching because she had a suggestion for the person playing the role of the coach. The person playing the coach welcomed this suggestion as he found himself stuck in the scenario. After the suggestion was given, the triad returned to the role play and the coach could move the conversation he was having with the teacher forward. We have now integrated the “Coach Time Out” into our role plays and encourage either the observer or the person playing the coach to pause the role play at any moment to share ideas, solicit advice, or ask questions. We imagine that as we continue to engage math coaches with this work, we will continue to make more adjustments to refine our protocol further.

Discussion and Moving Forward

The fact that the coaches and administrators with whom we have worked report such positive responses to the Role Play Protocol suggests that using this type of activity to support the professional learning of coaches can be beneficial. Moreover, we have shared scenarios with close to a dozen other math educators, including university faculty, teacher leaders, curriculum directors, and researchers who

offer professional development to coaches across the United States. They have used the scenarios in graduate coursework, as professional development, and in workshops with up to 60 participants. Regardless of the way the role plays have been used and with whom, all of the math educators have reported back to us similarly positive feedback.

Engaging in role play is difficult, but doing so around commonly occurring problems of practice appears to help coaches feel more prepared for their work and more confident about the professional choices they are making. A coach in our program informed us in an email that:

When I first heard the words “role play,” I dreaded the experience. It wasn’t something that I looked forward to. It certainly placed me outside of my comfort zone. However, the more time I spent engaged in the experience, I found value in the process. I now look forward to role playing scenarios and find it a useful tool in learning and preparing for math coaching situations.

Role plays helped new coaches prepare for situations they might face. More experienced coaches identified alternate solutions, beyond their usual responses, to challenges that occur in their practice. Coaches also reported that this activity helped to remind them that there is always something they don’t know about the other people with whom they work and that they need to keep the experiences and perspectives of others in mind. Finally, and importantly, administrators reported that this work was useful for them. During a whole group conversation, one administrator told us that he had a deeper appreciation of why and how content knowledge is critical for a coach. Other administrators told us that the role plays helped them to both better understand the work a coach might typically engage with and to have a clearer sense of the challenges the coaches face in their day-to-day practice. However, we are far from being able to claim that this type of professional learning is a high-leverage tool for coaches as there is much we still do not know about its impact. For example, while participants report positive responses to the activity in the moment, we do not know if or how they transfer what they have rehearsed to their actual practice. When a coach is working with a teacher who makes a mathematical error, does the coach reflect and draw upon the role play activities? Does she think back to the different solutions that were shared and consider the implications of each of those ideas before responding in real time? Or, when coaches are struggling to approach a problem with

their administrators, do they reflect upon the options presented during the role play work to decide upon an approach? If they do not, why not? And, if they do, how have the role plays supported or not supported the actual interactions they have? These are but a few of the questions we still have about our work.

We also do not know how the design of the professional development influences the outcome of the work done using the Role Play Protocol. Each time we have used this form of professional learning we have interacted face-to-face with participants organized in triads and small groups. We do know that some educators have used the Role Play Protocol as a part of their graduate coursework. In some cases, they have used a fishbowl approach in which a large group of coaches watch a small group engage in the role play. In other instances, instructors have used the scenarios in breakout groups in online learning environments. Finally, we are interested in knowing which types of scenarios are more useful. Do coaches need more practice engaging in difficult conversations with administration? Do they need more opportunities to practice how to support teachers in implementing pedagogical approaches that are new? Are they more confident in dealing with relationship building than with content errors? Knowing the answers to these questions would help us to design more useful scenarios to better serve the coaches with whom we work.

While we still have much to investigate in order to optimize our use of the Role Play Protocol, we believe this approach can be a strong tool that contributes to the professional learning and growth of mathematics coaches and the administrators who support them. When examining what we have learned thus far, participant feedback tells us that, while uncomfortable at times, engaging in the Role Play Protocol helps coaches (and administrators) to approach their role holistically. They see that they are not the only ones facing a given challenge. They come to recognize that there may be many ways to approach a problem of practice and that they can take the time to slow down and analyze or assess these approaches. They see that the people with whom they work face their own challenges and that it is important for them, as coaches, to recognize what each person might bring to an interaction intellectually, emotionally, and professionally. The participants also consider different ways to communicate their concerns effectively. All of this, in turn, provides them with a greater confidence about the work they do as a coach and their ability to navigate the role successfully. As we move forward and continue investigating and refining the use of role plays, we invite those of you who work with coaches and are interested to also engage with the work. We would welcome any questions, comments, or feedback you might have. 🌟

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Appendix A: Role Play Scenario Sample

Scenario 1

Background

Prior to becoming a math coach, you spent one year teaching third grade, one year teaching sixth grade, and five years teaching fifth-grade. This is your second year as a math coach. In your first year, you focused on relationship building at both of the schools in which you are working. In one school the coaching work has felt easy to navigate. However, at the other school, you have only been invited into the three Kindergarten and three first-grade classrooms and have only been able to engage in formal coaching cycles once with each of those teachers. You have worked with the rest of the teachers during their planning meetings. In the fall, two of the fourth grade teachers invited you to observe a lesson in their class. It is now November, and Mrs. A, the other fourth grade teacher has asked you to come into her classroom. Mrs. A has been teaching fourth-grade at this school for 15 years. You did not have a pre-conference with Mrs. A because it was difficult to find coverage and you have no official debrief planned for after the observation. Mrs. A did send you an email that identified the lesson she will be teaching and you read it over beforehand. The topic is median and the lesson comes directly from the textbook that the district uses. This is the students' first exposure to the concept.

Observation:

As Mrs. A is teaching the students how to calculate median, she is using the examples provided in the text, all of which have an odd number of values in the set. She then places her own set of data on the board, seemingly off the top of her head, and there is even number of values in the set. The students work as a class to identify the median and find that there are two numbers left in the middle. They ask Mrs. A what to do. You are sitting in the back of the room observing, and she looks up at you with an expression that seems both fearful and surprised. She turns back to the students and says, "you just pick one of them to be the median." Because you have never been in Mrs. A's class before and your relationship with her is just emerging, you decide not to interrupt the lesson. Instead, you plan to try to talk to her at lunch or after school that day. You do not see her at lunch, so you drop by her room after school.

Post-Lesson Discussion

YOU: "Thank you so much for having me in your class today. I love to see the work you are doing, fourth grade is so much fun. How do you think it went?"

MRS. A: "I think it went well. The students enjoyed the lesson and are excited that we are going to continue working with data over the next few days."

Scenario 1: Secret Information for "Mrs. A"

When the coach brings up your mistake, you are apologetic and keep referring to how embarrassed you are. You stop doing so if the coach brings up mistakes he or she has made or ideas related to risk taking and how mistakes are an important part of the learning process.

Scenario 9

Background

You are in your first year coaching at a new school having replaced another coach who had been in the position for 2 years. The principal has asked you to maintain the current coaching schedule for one year before making changes. The schedule involves working with grade level teams of K-1, 2-3 and 4-5 teachers and special educators in one month cycles. It is now November and you are working with the grade 4-5 teachers. The fourth graders are currently working on the meaning of division. At the 1-hour grade level unit planning meeting you focused on using rectangular arrays and area models which is core to the lessons in the math program. Prior to visiting

Mrs. K's math class, you touch base with her the day before to find out which lesson will be taught. You also have a brief conversation about student successes and challenges with connecting arrays to equations.

Observation:

The lesson is moving along well with Mrs. K making explicit connections, through use of color coding, between the arrays and the equations as was brainstormed in the preconference. After the second example and discussion in which many students had the numbers in the equations reversed, Mrs. K asks students to check the reasonableness of the answer. She says to the class, "Remember our choral response from yesterday? Everyone say it with me again. Multiplication makes bigger. Division makes smaller. [repeats 3 times]. Now let's look at our equation. Do we have the smaller number as the quotient?" A student suggests how to change to equation and the teacher moves on to the next example.

Post-Lesson Discussion

You start the conversation with asking Mrs. K about general observations of successes and challenges before prompting specifically about division ideas.

YOU: "You incorporated many of the ideas we brainstormed yesterday about using color to connect parts of the equation with parts of the array. How did this impact student understanding?"

MRS. K replies.....

Scenario 9: Mrs. K Reply and Secret Information

Mrs. K Reply

"Using color in the discussion following Example 1 seemed really helpful but I was disappointed more students didn't create the correct equation for Example 2. This is why I did the choral response activity which seems to help as a reminder. I found the idea of using choral responses for math rules on Pinterest. I use the approach in ELA but hadn't tried it in mathematics before. What did you think?"

Secret Information:

If the coach explains this is as not always true, ask why and show me type questions.

OR

Take a stance of understanding that it isn't always true but not being sure why that is an issue (for example, "can't we just add whole numbers to the rule now and explain in 5th grade that a new rule applies when working with fractions and decimals between 0 and 1?").