PROGRAM RESEARCH

A Gradual Release of Responsibility
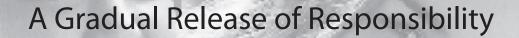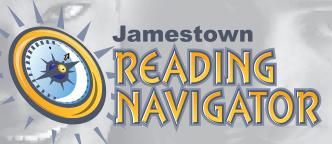
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Research and Development for

Jamestown
READING NAVIGATOR

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A Gradual Release of Responsibility
by Douglas Fisher

E ffective instruction for struggling adolescent readers is currently at the forefront of literacy studies. Research on what motivates and engages less-effective readers is accumulating rapidly. We know that struggling adolescents need purposeful instruction in reading skills and strategies, access to a wide variety of texts, motivation to read, and authentic opportunities to read and write both inside and outside of school (Alvermann, 2001; Ivey, 1999; Paterson & Elliott, 2006; Williams, 2001). We also know that there are a number of adolescents whose thinking outpaces their ability to read (Ivey & Fisher, 2006).

The evidence about struggling readers presents a challenge for many teachers and schools. To be effective, teachers have to engage students in purposeful instruction designed to meet the needs of both individuals and small student groups. Clearly, whole class instruction with whole class materials cannot provide a one-size-fits-all recipe for the academic achievement of today's adolescents.

The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model
One way teachers can provide more targeted, individualized instruction is to use the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). This instructional model requires that the teacher, by design, transition from assuming "all the responsibility for performing a task . . . to a situation in which the students assume all of the responsibility" (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 211). This gradual release may occur over a day, a week, or a semester. Stated another way, the gradual release of responsibility "emphasizes instruction that mentors students into becoming capable thinkers and learners when handling the tasks with which they have not yet developed expertise" (Buehl, 2005). This gradual release of responsibility model of instruction has been documented as an effective approach for improving writing achievement (Fisher & Frey, 2003), reading comprehension (Lloyd, 2004), and literacy outcomes for English language learners (Kong & Pearson, 2003).

Components of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model
The visual representation in Figure 1 (Frey & Fisher, 2006) shows the four interactive (or interrelated) components of the gradual release of responsibility model.
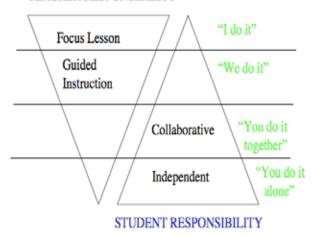
TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY

Focus Lesson — "I do it"

Guided Instruction — "We do it"

Collaborative — "You do it together"

Independent — "You do it alone"

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

Figure 1

- *Focus Lessons*. This component allows teachers to model their own metacognitive processes as active readers. Modeled strategies focus on increasing understanding of content-area texts. Usually brief in nature, focus lessons establish purposes for reading and clue students into important learning objectives.
- *Guided Instruction*. During guided instruction, teachers prompt, question, facilitate, or lead students through tasks that increase understanding of a particular text.
- *Collaborative Learning*. During the collaborative learning component in the gradual release of responsibility model, students consolidate their understanding of the content and explore opportunities to problem solve, discuss, negotiate, and think with their peers.
- *Independent Learning*. This component addresses the most important goal of good instruction— to provide students with practice in applying skills and information in new ways. As students transfer their learning to subsequent tasks, they synthesize information, transform ideas, and solidify their understanding. They become active readers and capable learners.

It is important to understand that the gradual release of responsibility model is not linear. Students move back and forth among each of the components as they master skills, strategies, and learning standards.

How is the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model Used in *Jamestown Reading Navigator?*

Implementing the gradual release of responsibility model requires time. Instructional planning can seem a daunting task. As teachers, we have to plan for a diverse group of learners—students learning English, students who find reading easy, and students whose level of engagement or special needs require strategic intervention for them to be successful. Our students do not have time to waste on skills and strategies they have already mastered. On the other hand, they can't afford to miss any instruction necessary to their success as effective learners.

The gradual release of responsibility model as implemented in *Jamestown Reading Navigator* provides teachers with an instructional framework for moving from teacher knowledge to student understanding and application. *Jamestown Reading Navigator* ensures that students in the intervention program are supported as they acquire the skills and strategies necessary for academic success. Following are some important ways *Jamestown Reading Navigator* implements the four interactive components in the gradual release of responsibility model.

- *Focus Lessons. Jamestown Reading Navigator's* online journeys provide extensive modeling of critical reading and vocabulary skills students use as they work through lessons. Offline, *Reteaching Skills* student blackline masters and teacher support materials provide further modeling that extends reading skill support.
- *Guided Instruction.* In *Jamestown Reading Navigator,* online activities with substantive feedback guide students as they read content-area selections. *InClass Readers* and *inTIME* magazines offer teachers additional opportunities to facilitate students' learning offline.
- *Collaborative Learning.* Collaborative learning opportunities such as *inClass Reader* group activities and *Reteaching Skills* blackline master small-group discussion opportunities ensure that students engaged in *Jamestown Reading Navigator* practice and apply what they have learned.
- *Independent Learning.* Students internalize new skills and strategies as they move through the journeys and treks in *Jamestown Reading Navigator.* Quest (unit) assessments test for transfer of important reading skills to unfamiliar texts, and *inClass Readers* and *inTIME* magazines offer students engaging opportunities to read independently.

Vertical Alignment in the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

As part of the gradual release of responsibility model, curriculum must be vertically aligned. Vertical alignment is both a process and an outcome, the result of which is a comprehensive curriculum that provides learners with a coherent sequence of content. Vertical alignment ensures that content standards and reading skills or strategies are introduced, reinforced, and assessed. Vertical alignment guarantees

that instruction is targeted at the intersection between student needs and instructional benchmarks. In a curriculum with strong vertical alignment, content redundancy is reduced and the curriculum is rigorous and challenging.

Why is Vertical Alignment Important?

First, strong vertical alignment accommodates a wide variety of developmental levels and is designed to increase the intellectual, personal, physical, social, and career development of all students. Vertical alignment allows teachers increased precision in their instruction because they are not teaching content that is covered elsewhere or that students have mastered previously. Vertical alignment also ensures that specific educational content is systematically addressed.

How is Vertical Alignment Accomplished in *Jamestown Reading Navigator?*

Jamestown Reading Navigator provides teachers with multiple sources of information from which to evaluate students' progress and on which to base additional instruction. As students complete instructional tasks, teachers receive detailed student reports in the Learner Management System. The *Teacher Resource Guide* offers professional development, teaching strategies, and student print materials to use for further intervention or extension. For example, if students fail to grasp a critical reading skill, the teacher and student reteaching materials provide the comprehensive support needed to reinforce all critical reading skills taught in *Jamestown Reading Navigator.* Extensive teacher support is offered through research-based professional development which outlines a wide range of strategies for teaching active reading skills. Offline student blackline masters provide reteaching opportunities to use flexibly as independent practice or as the basis for small or even whole group instruction.

We know that with strong vertical alignment and focused, strategic instruction, students grow as capable learners. As dedicated teachers, we believe that students who find literacy tasks difficult deserve increased attention, quality reading materials, and authentic opportunities to read and write. If we provide our students with these essentials, we can expect them ultimately to know themselves and the complex world in which they live. *Jamestown Reading Navigator* will help you accomplish these worthy goals in your classroom.

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