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Learning to Flip the Framework: A Multigenre, Autoethnographic Account of One Student's Experience with Gradual Release of Responsibility

Julie Theresa Saltisiak
Syracuse University

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Learning to Flip the Framework: A Multigenre, Autoethnographic Account of One Student's Experience with Gradual Release of Responsibility

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Julie Saltisiak
Candidate for BA Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in English Education

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
Prof. Kelly Chandler-Olcott

Capstone Project Reader: _____
Prof. Patricia A. Moody

Honors Director: _____
Stephen Kuusisto, Director

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Abstract

For this Capstone project, the success of using gradual release of responsibility as an everyday instructional framework is examined, using one Syracuse University English Education major's experience as evidence. This project acts as an explanation for the learning that has occurred surrounding gradual release of responsibility in this student's college experience. Using an autoethnographic approach allows for this student's personal experiences to be regarded as strong data in order to better understand the larger experience of all Education majors working with the gradual release of responsibility framework in the School of Education at Syracuse University. This project also uses multiple genres in order to include artifacts and excerpts from the student's various classes and teaching experiences in order to encourage readers to construct the message along with the student as she learns over the course of her college career.

This project concludes, after allowing the evidence and data to make the argument, with the student's realization that gradual release of responsibility does not always work in the order that it was intended to. Sometimes, one must consider other teaching frameworks or simply rearrange the steps of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework in order to create a lesson that will best work for the students and their learning needs. Simply put, one must learn to be flexible in their teaching and open to different approaches and manipulating instructional frameworks in order to best reach their students trying to learn a new skill.

Executive Summary

This Capstone project is a synthesis of my understanding of a specific instructional framework for use in education after four years as an English Education student at Syracuse University's School of Education. It focuses on my experience with gradual release of responsibility, an instructional framework that teachers use to teach students new skills. When a teacher uses this framework, they begin a lesson by modeling the new skill for students, then they ask students to try the skill while being supported by the teacher and each other, and then finally they ask students to perform the new skill independently. This instructional framework was first developed by P. David Pearson and Margaret C. Gallagher in their article "The Instruction of Reading Comprehension." Pearson and Gallagher (1983) concluded that "explicit instruction associated with guided practice, lots of opportunity to practice and apply strategies independently, and some attention to monitoring the application of such strategies seems to help students perform better on a variety of comprehension measures" (p. 336). More specifically, this Capstone project is about the way I first understood gradual release of responsibility and how my understanding has grown as time has passed and as I have learned more and experienced more as a teacher.

I used two research approaches to convey my experiences with gradual release: multigenre and autoethnography. I use the multigenre approach to writing in order to incorporate various excerpts from my classes and my field placement experiences and to recreate moments and memories that I do not have a physically representation of. As Tom Romano (2000) points out in *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers*, using multiple genres, such as journal entries, internal monologues, and reimagined dramatic scenes, "sets characters in motion… (and) appeals to our sense of visual imagery, especially visual imagery that moves" (p.

71). Rather than just tell you about how my understanding of gradual release of responsibility has changed and grown over the years, I use multiple genres in order to bring you directly into my thinking about gradual release of responsibility at any given moment throughout my college experience.

While multigenre allows me to authentically show my learning over four years, autoethnography allows this project to focus specifically on my own experience with gradual release of responsibility. Autoethnography is a form of research writing that allows for personal experiences to be regarded as strong data in order to better understand a larger social or cultural experience. Many who choose to use autoethnography as a research method "wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience … to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us" (Ellis & Bochner, 2010, n. p.).

The combination of multigenre and autoethnography immerses readers in my experience as an English Education major at Syracuse University, and shows how my use of gradual release has changed and developed. This project is significant because it shows my initial success at using the framework in my sophomore year tutoring placement, followed by multiple failures during my junior year student teaching placement, and finally, a few more successes at learning to manipulate and flip the framework, in addition to simply using the framework, in my senior year, full-time student teaching placement. This project represents and proves my conclusion that gradual release of responsibility is an extremely useful instructional framework for all Education majors to learn to use, but also one that all Educational majors must learn when not to use it or when to manipulate it.

Acknowledgments

This Capstone would not have been possible without the support of many wonderful people.

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Kelly Chandler-Olcott. There is no better way to describe her motivation style than as intense, and I am thankful for her intensity. She pushed me when I did not think I could be pushed any further with this project, and that has truly made all the difference. I'm so lucky to have had such an inspiring professor, advisor, and person to work with and look up to throughout my undergraduate experience.

Next, I would like to thank my reader, Professor Patricia Moody. Since I was a freshman, she has supported me and helped me along any roadblocks that have come up. Our long talks in her office, in a way, led me to my Capstone project topic. I'm thankful to have had her in my corner, not only throughout this process, but also throughout my college career. She is yet another amazing human being that I have been lucky enough to encounter and learn from on this adventure.

Stephanie D'Ulisse, my roommate and dear friend, is another person I must thank. She has read numerous drafts of this project, and she has come through with brilliant breakthroughs right when I needed them. This project would have looked very different without her input. I thank her for her patience, her advice, and her friendship.

Caitlin Hunter, my partner in crime when it comes to this Capstone project, also deserves some thanks. I'm so grateful to have had another person in the same position as me tackling this project. Without her motivation and positive attitude, I do not know if this project would have ended up the way that it did.

I would also like to thank Marcelle Haddix and the Honors faculty for revamping the Education Capstone project. I am extremely proud of the work I have done, and it is because of Marcelle and Honors that I was even able to do it.

Joshua Cesario is yet another person I must thank. I would have given up on this project a long time ago if it weren't for his insistence that I would create something great. Also, I owe him for helping me think of a title at the last minute. Thank you for always seeing the best in me.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for believing in me, encouraging me to do all that I could, and for helping me attend this amazing university. It is because of them that I realize my potential on a daily basis.

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Introduction

Introduction:

This Capstone project is a culmination of my four years as a student at Syracuse University, both metaphorically and quite literally. It focuses on my experience with gradual release of responsibility, an instructional framework that teachers use every day to teach their students new skills. More specifically, it is about the way I first understood this framework and how my understanding has grown as time has passed and as I have learned more and experienced more as a teacher. I use the multigenre approach to writing in order to incorporate various excerpts from my classes and my field placement experiences and to recreate moments and memories for which I do not have a physical representation. While multigenre allows me to authentically show my learning over four years, autoethnography allows this project to focus specifically on my own experience with gradual release of responsibility. The combination of multigenre and autoethnography immerses readers in my experience as an English Education major at Syracuse University, and shows how my use of gradual release has changed and developed.

Background and Methodology:

In order for you, the readers, to better understand this Capstone, I have included this section to tell you more about what it means to be an Education major and how the current state of New York State teacher certification affected my experience as an Education major. I also provide an explanation of what gradual release is and why multigenre and autoethnography are the best research methods to use in order to tell about my experiences with gradual release. This section will provide you with the prior knowledge you need in order to understand the body of this project.

Like some other Syracuse university undergraduates, I am enrolled in a dual program, meaning that I complete two different majors, in my case in two different colleges. Unlike many other students who are duals within the public communications or business school, I am a member of a smaller dual program in the School of Education: Secondary English Education. This means that not only do I complete a number of courses in the School of Education, as well as a number of observation, tutoring, and teaching placements in nearby public schools, in order to earn an Education degree, but I also complete an entire English and Textual Studies degree through The College of Arts and Sciences. In addition to these degree requirements, Education students are required to take a number of classes required by New York State for all future teachers. These classes include public speaking, history of art or music, mathematics, and foreign languages. Between these extra classes and major requirements, there is little room for electives in an Education major's schedule. Throw in the Honors requirements for students like me, and there really is a lot to juggle when creating a class schedule.

While I have been at work earning a dual degree in English and English Education, New York State has been busy changing the face of education. During my sophomore year at

Syracuse, the state adopted the Common Core State Standards as their learning goals for students in public schools. The Common Core was created "to ensure all students graduate high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed" (Common Core website, n. d., n. p.). The Common Core are a set of standards focused on building upon knowledge as one progresses through each grade level and develops higher-order thinking skills in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA). As an English Education major, I quickly became acquainted with these standards (specifically, the ELA standards for 7th-12th grade) as I worked with them at first in various classes and eventually, as I wrote lesson plans and prepared for teacher certification.

In addition to the adoption of the Common Core, New York State officials also announced their new plan for teacher certification. This includes revamping existing tests and adding new ones for teachers to complete. Not only are there more tests, but the new assessments are also more challenging, resulting in what has been reported as an intentional decline of passing rates while I have been in college. One of the new assessments, called the edTPA, evaluates a teacher candidate's ability to effectively plan, teach, and assess a weeklong learning segment that is meant to teach students a new skill. This assessment is high stakes, and was put into practice during my junior year, along with two new computer-based tests, the Educating All Students Test and Academic Literacy Skills Test. This meant that as a senior submitting my own edTPA, I was among only the second round of Education students from Syracuse University to do so.

Throughout my various courses at Syracuse, I have been exposed to these new challenges and have been prepared to deal with the new certification tests and changing state standards. For instance, I have been working with the Common Core State Standards since sophomore year, and

they have quickly become a necessity for planning lessons. The constant exposure to these

Standards has made them easy to work with in my actual teaching practice. Also, I have

practiced for the edTPA during my Junior and Senior years by learning the ins and outs of unit

planning and creating multiple drafts of "mock" edTPA segments before finally submitting my

real one for certification. Along the way, I have received useful feedback from professors and

my peers in order to improve my understanding of educational practice and pedagogy. In courses

on Special Education and Literacy, I have been introduced to multiple approaches to teaching

and learning that have proved essential to succeeding on the other certification tests. Overall, I

have been able to adopt the approaches and instructional frameworks that work for me, and have

confidently moved forward in my own learning and future teaching.

     For example, at Syracuse University's School of Education, education majors are

introduced to a way of lesson planning that allows for students to be supported as they

experience new learning, especially for learning skills related to literacy. This instructional

framework is called gradual release of responsibility. As a teacher introduces a new skill, he or

she begins with modeling a new strategy before moving to guided instruction. During guided

instruction, a teacher works with students, or a student works with other students, to use the new

strategy. Then, after sufficient guided practice and experience with the strategy, the students

perform the new skill independently. At this point, the hope is that the students have confidently

learned the skill and will be able to transfer their learning to future experiences or assessments.

     Gradual release of responsibility was first developed by P. David Pearson and Margaret

C. Gallagher in their article "The Instruction of Reading Comprehension." After evaluating a

number of case studies, Pearson and Gallagher (1983) concluded that "explicit instruction

associated with guided practice, lots of opportunity to practice and apply strategies

independently, and some attention to monitoring the application of such strategies seems to help students perform better on a variety of comprehension measures" (p. 336). Pearson and Gallagher (1983) go on to name the "guided practice" stage of their framework, in which the teacher scaffolds an activity but gives more and more responsibility to the students to accurately complete the task, as the "most critical" stage of the entire model.

Many literacy educators have taken up this instructional framework in their own research. In their book *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching*, Fisher and Frey (2008) build on gradual release of responsibility by adding an additional component to it: "learning through collaboration with peers" (p. 3). They suggest that peer collaboration follows the "guided practice" step of the original framework proposed by Pearson and Gallagher. This results in the framework moving from teacher-led (modeling and guided practice) to student-led (peer collaboration and independent practice) with more built-in support. In addition to Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey, Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis (2000) recommend using gradual release to teach reading comprehension strategies in their book, *Strategies that Work*. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) write that we as teachers should move on to another strategy only when we "find repeated evidence that our students are using the strategy to help them understand what they read" after sufficient modeling and guided practice with that strategy (p.14). It is clear that this instructional framework is regarded as both effective and purposeful in an English classroom, so it only makes sense that I was introduced to it early on in my own teacher education program.

Gradual release of responsibility has greatly influenced the way I educated my students throughout my various field placements and also the way I have been taught in my various Education classes. I believe that being taught in this way has prepared me for my future profession because it has provided me with a concrete way to organize my lessons, but I also

believe gradual release of responsibility is related and important to literacy development for all students as it also provides them with structure and support in their learning. On the other hand, it is evident to me, after trial and error, that there are times that this instructional framework for teaching literacy skills and reading comprehension must be reconfigured, and at times even completely flipped on its head, in order to best teach students.

In order to better understand the complex nature of teaching students new skills using gradual release of responsibility, I decided to look back on my own personal development as an undergraduate in order to track the patterns by which my own experiences began to shape my understanding of this pedagogical method. After shuffling through notebooks and papers from old classes, I started to notice how gradual release of responsibility acted as a common thread that I continuously weaved into my own education, whether I was required to or not. I recognized this way of teaching as one of the main themes that resonated in my class work at Syracuse as a student and in my lesson planning as a student teacher. Because of this realization, I began to further investigate my experience with gradual release, and found that the more artifacts and data from my past work as a student that I dug up, the more I was able to see how my understanding of this method developed. It was not simply one class or one lesson plan that demonstrated my thoughts on gradual release (though they did demonstrate significant points on their own), but a combination of the many different texts I have produced. By reflecting on my past class notes, lesson plans, essays, journal entries, and even my memories, I am able to see a clear connection and development of gradual release of responsibility as I transition from a student, to a student teacher, to an eligible teacher candidate. In a sense, I use my own evolution to tell the story of how gradual release works in practice.

To invite you in to my personal experience with gradual release of responsibility, I have decided to blend two different research styles: autoethnography and multigenre. Autoethnography is a form of research writing that allows for personal experiences to be regarded as strong data in order to better understand a larger social or cultural experience. Many who choose to use autoethnography as a research method "wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience … to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us" (Ellis & Bochner, 2010, n. p.). As someone in a major at Syracuse that most people do not know much about, I wanted an authentic way to expose my educational experience, using hindsight in order to examine specific moments of learning that have affected my understanding of and ability to implement an instructional framework. First, I attempt to use field notes and artifacts to demonstrate patterns in my learning, and then describe these patterns using "facets of story telling, showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice" (Ellis & Bochner, 2010, n. p.). I am able to analyze the whirlwind college experience of an education student by looking at my own journey through my dual program, and centering that journey on my own use of gradual release of responsibility. Autoethnography allows me, as an "insider" of my major, to provide "outsiders" with an understanding of some of what we learn and do during our time at Syracuse.

Using multiple genres to tell my story makes this autoethnographic project come alive. As Tom Romano (2000) points out in *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers*, using multiple genres, such as journal entries, internal monologues, and reimagined dramatic scenes, "sets characters in motion… (and) appeals to our sense of visual imagery, especially visual imagery that moves" (p. 71). Rather than simply tell you about my growth as an

education student using gradual release and regurgitate information I previously wrote about for class papers or in lesson plans, I thought it would be much more interesting for you, the reader, to have the opportunity to investigate and make sense of these documents, just as I did to find a theme for this Capstone. While most of the artifacts I have included are original and directly pulled from my past work, some have been reconstructed in order to fill the gap for the originals I no longer possess or have access to. At times, I recreate a scene or represent information in a genre that differs from the original in order to make it easier to follow, or frankly, to add some variation and to make this project more intriguing to read. Also, in a few instances, I do include work other than my own, including course syllabi, student work samples, and written correspondences with my professors. Each document presented can stand alone, but when read together, sometimes with brief explanation or connective text in-between (in this same font), to create a new whole, these artifacts present a complex picture of what teaching and learning with gradual release looks like. I aim through this synthesis to help you connect the dots about gradual release of responsibility. A multi-genre approach puts you all the way back into my mindset as a freshman, and lets you grow up and learn alongside me, rather than simply watching it from afar.

By blending the styles of autoethnography and multigenre papers, I am able to intersect the qualitative research approach that is so common in Education with the literary ways of understanding the world in the humanities that influences so much of what I do. Through this creative approach, I hope to let you in on the secret life of a dual major, a student teacher, and a practitioner/manipulator of gradual release.

<div align="center">***</div>

So, where do I begin? I think I will start with where I was when I was trying to figure out what I really wanted to do with the rest of my life. What better place to do that then my own college application?

> 9/13/10
> Excerpt from my college admissions essay, *Should I?:*
> In seventh grade, you learn to diagram sentences. Fall in love with the activity. Consider it an art form. Become fascinated by the sound of the chalk on the board as your teacher paints yet another creation. You diagram not only in English class, but also in Math and Science class. Decide afterwards maybe it's not the best idea and save it for English.
> …
> Try different styles when writing, like changing your voice and mood, and begin to feel confident about your essays. One day, your teacher hands back one of your latest essays. Inside she writes, "Great essay. Don't forget me when you're a famous author someday. Maybe you should consider going to college for something with English or writing."
> **Yes, maybe I should.**

<div align="center">***</div>

I decided to apply to a variety of schools for journalism and for English, depending on what program was better at the specific school. At this time in my life, I assumed I would eventually become an English teacher after a long writing career, so applying to Education programs never crossed my mind. After going through the grueling college application process, and receiving acceptance letters from a number of great schools, I decided to attend Syracuse University as a dual major in The Newhouse School of Public Communications as a Newspaper and Online Journalism major and in The College of Arts and Sciences as an English and Textual studies major.

Fall 2011

All freshman students enrolled in The Newhouse School of Public Communications take COM 100, which is a seminar taken in the first semester of one's college career. In this weekly seminar, freshmen students meet with a peer advisor, who is an upperclassmen in Newhouse. During these meetings, I had the opportunity to get to know other classmates, to learn time management skills, and to compare class experiences in order to create future class schedules. Essentially, it helps a student to transition to college life, and to life as a Newhouse student.

8/28/11
Introductory Survey for COM 100: Newhouse First Year Seminar:
1. What caused you to choose to come to the Newhouse School of Public Communications and Syracuse University?
I was immediately drawn to Newhouse's reputation for journalism. I struggled between choosing NYU or Newhouse, but eventually chose Newhouse because I didn't feel prepared to be alone in a huge city. Also, I liked the dual enrollment program that Newhouse has with The College of Arts and Sciences, which left me with the chance to be a Journalism major in Newhouse while also being an English major in Arts & Sciences. I knew Syracuse was an ideal location because I'm only two hours away from home and it was one of my top college choices.

***

All Newhouse students also take COM 107: Communications and Society during their freshmen year. COM 107 surveys the different majors that Newhouse offers, and provides background knowledge and the history behind them. For instance, there is a chapter on advertising, a chapter on newspaper journalism, a chapter on public relations, etc. This class is especially helpful for Newhouse students who have not yet declared an official major, but it also gives students who came in with a declared major, like me, an understanding of the multiple fields that represent public communications.

12/11/11
Thoughts after leaving final exam for COM 107: Communications and Society:
I did it. I just finished my first semester at Syracuse; at Newhouse! And better yet, I think I aced that final! I proved that I can actually do this, but do I really want to?

***

I ended my first semester at Syracuse University feeling extremely confident. I loved this university, I loved my friends, I even loved my silly work-study job. I actually could not wait to get back to school to start a new semester. . .

Spring 2012

Then, COM 114: Media Narratives* happened. Another required class for all freshmen, COM 114 exposed students to various computer programs and equipment that are used daily in broadcasting and in film editing. This class definitely appealed more to people in majors like Broadcast Journalism or Television, Radio, & Film (TRF), rather than Newspaper journalism majors, like me.

3/5/12
Conversation after a class of COM 114: Media Narratives*:
Julie: That was rough.
Hanna: What do you mean?
Julie: I hate that class.
Hanna: Really? It's a lot of work, but not that bad.
Julie: It is a lot of work, but that's not why I don't like it. Something about Professor Smith* just really bugs me.
Hanna: Well, she is a little rough around the edges.
Julie: Yeah, but it's also just her teaching style, or lack there of. She doesn't model anything that she wants us to do. In fact, she seems to bask in our failures.
Hanna: Hah! That's for sure. I think she would get joy out of failing us all.
Julie: Definitely. It's sad that I rely on my roommate to teach me how to edit my videos for this class. Thank goodness for TRF majors!
Hanna: I am a TRF major, and even I don't know how to do everything she expects us to do!
Julie: Ugh. I just want to write! I loved the script-writing part of the class, but this video stuff is just too much without any support. It's really making me question my decision to

go here. Like, if this is what the next four years is going to be like, I don't want to do this anymore. I can't just "wing" my way through Newhouse. I came here for the guidance of experts, not for Smith* and her bitter revenge on us. This isn't what I signed up for.
Hanna: I hear ya. And Smith* really just makes the class painful to sit through.
Julie: I could teach better than her!
Hanna: Yeah, you definitely could.

3/24/12
Excerpt from my journal:
What is wrong with me lately? I haven't been enjoying my classes at all. I keep wondering if I made a mistake going to school for journalism. I mean, I don't even want to live in the city! What kind of newspaper job will I get if I don't go to the city? I love writing, but I keep picturing myself in a cubicle writing articles of no interest to me and it makes me so sad. I keep considering the idea of transferring out of Newhouse and maybe becoming a dual major with the School of Education. I could picture myself as an English teacher, and I don't entirely hate that image as much as I hate the cubicle image. I suggested the idea to my mom on the phone today and she just said I was letting the stress get to me and that leaving Newhouse would be a mistake. But what if staying in a major I'm realizing isn't for me is the bigger mistake?

5/1/12
Excerpt from Course Evaluation for COM 114: Media Narratives*:
5. What, if anything, would you change about the course?
This course was clearly designed for Television, Radio, Film majors and Broadcast Journalism majors, as it focuses heavily on film and video editing. However, this course is required for all Newhouse majors, including Newspaper Journalism majors like myself. Before this class, I had never worked with Final Cut or used any of the other video editing software we were expected to just magically understand. When I went to Professor Smith* for help, she suggested I consider transferring if I can't handle the workload. She completely disregarded the fact that this is completely new information for me and instead of helping me, she showed me the door.

***

Towards the end of the Spring 2012 semester, I contacted the School of Education to ask about an intra-university transfer. It seemed like a good option for me, considering I was already an English major, so I would not be behind in coursework. After meeting with Dr. Marcelle Haddix, a Reading & Language Arts faculty member, to learn more about the English Education program, I also recognized being a teacher was something I actually wanted to do for my entire life, as opposed to after my journalism career, like I planned. After this meeting, I decided to

apply for the transfer. Then, finals came and went, I moved out of my dorm room, and headed

home, with one year of college under my belt. Then one day. . . .

> 5/29/12
> Excerpt from Acceptance Letter to Syracuse University's School of Education:
> Dear Julie,
> Congratulations! Your grades for last semester are posted and you have attained the required cumulative grade point average to be admitted into the English Education program in the School of Education.

<div align="center">***</div>

You know those moments in life when it feels like the beginning of a new chapter? This

was one of them. I completed the intra-university transfer process despite initial reservations

from my parents ("What do you mean you're leaving Newhouse? Do you realize how much

teachers make?"). After convincing them life in a classroom was much more appealing than life

in a cubicle, I got them on board, and I anxiously awaited the start of a new school year. I sort of

felt like a freshman all over again. I would have to adjust to a new advisor, a new curriculum,

and physically, a new school. What if this whole thing turned out to be a huge mistake? Or, what

if this actually worked out?

<div align="center">

Fall 2012

</div>

Excerpts from Professor Jonathan Damiani's EDU 204: Teachers as Builders of Theory and Practice, Fall 2012 Syllabus:
> *"For many of you, this course serves at the start of your professional preparation sequence and, as such, it sets the stage for much of what follows in campus study and field experiences. This course is designed with the assumption that all of you are committed to learning about core issues of the work of teaching and are beginning to develop knowledge, values, and skills of the profession. . . ."*
> *". . ..For your field placement, you will be placed in a school in the Syracuse City School District. You are <u>required to visit the classroom over at least a ten-week span</u> according to the schedule you plan with your host teacher. During your visits you <u>must log at least 25 hours in the classroom and school</u>. A part of each visit should be given to observation and part to participation in the classroom in a variety of ways. You should also be gathering the data needed for the Learner Profile Project by interviewing one student about how they learn. In the campus*

class, we will raise topics or issues that should be the focus for your data collection during a subsequent school visit. These discussions will prepare you to complete the Learner Profile Project and your final paper, your Emerging Practical Theory of Learning."

10/7/12
Excerpts from Learner Profile Project for EDU 204:
I asked Kobe a few things he has learned from football specifically. He gave me a very specific example about how his footing was off during a play, so his coach pulled him aside and showed him the correct way to do it. He tried it a few times, messed up a bit, but then finally got the hang of the correct steps and was able to do it without watching the coach.
…
I asked Kobe if he could try to define learning in his own words for me based on his successes and struggles inside and outside of school, and he thought for a moment before responding: "Learning is getting new information that you have not completely processed yet, then taking that information and using it when you have to perform in life or on a test, which then completes the learning process." I then asked how he knew for sure he had learned something, such as his correct footing in football or his lab symbols in Biology. He said he knew he had learned something when he could very easily put it to use. He said his good test grades directly reflected his learning, and he said through mimicking his coach's steps, then finally doing them on his own, he knew he had learned the correct footing in football.

10/14/12
Excerpt from class notes for EDU 204:
Moral Reasoning:
From a Constructivist point of view, students construct knowledge through experience and reflection. According to Piaget, all development emerges from action and interactions with the environment.

12/3/12
Excerpt from Emerging Practical Theory (Final Paper) for EDU 204:
A supportive social environment is also the key to developing and maximizing my definition of learning. For example, in the field I saw a student receive extra help writing an essay. He stayed after class during his lunch period in order to work with his writing teacher. The teacher then provided different examples and guided the student to figure out the paper himself. The teacher's scaffolding and support ultimately enhanced the student's learning and he received a good grade on his paper. This sort of social interaction with the teacher in the classroom is extremely important to learning.

***

EDU 204 was much like COM 107, but for Education majors. It was a class that all

Education majors took, and it gave a broad overview of educational theories and practices. It also

provided actual experience in real classrooms in the Syracuse City School District. After taking

this class, I felt good about my decision to transfer into the School of Education, and I was

excited to learn more about teaching.

Spring 2013

Excerpt from Introduction of Dr. Kelly Chandler-Olcott's RED 326/625: Literacy Across The Curriculum, Spring 2013 Syllabus:
"This course provides opportunities for you and other education students to construct concepts, acquire skills, and explore issues related to language acquisition and literacy development for a wide range of learners in inclusive settings. Using cognitive and sociocultural lenses, the class focuses on instructional approaches, materials, and assessment techniques that foster young people's abilities to use academic language and literacy, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and other representations, as tools for thinking and communicating in the content areas. In addition to the on-campus component, a weekly field placement will require you to tutor a literacy learner and assist with literacy in a middle-level classroom."

***

RED 326 has a variety of course components. This class meets once a week over the

course of the semester, as well as includes a field placement in a Syracuse City middle school.

Unlike EDU 204's field placement where observation and interviewing were the main

components of the field experience, RED 326's field placement involved creating lesson plans to

meet the literacy needs of a particular student and tutoring that student one-on-one. For most

education students, these are the first lesson plans they will write. I had the pleasure of writing

lesson plans for a 6th grade student, Anna*.

In addition to the lesson plans and reflections that go with the field placement, RED 326

also has two major projects: the Discipline Specific Inquiry Project and the final project, a Unit

Plan. The Discipline Specific Inquiry project asks students to investigate literacy practices for

their specific discipline (in my case, English), and reflect on how these findings will influence

their future teaching of literacy. The Final Unit Plan asks students to synthesize all that they have

learned about literacy teaching during the semester in order to produce a five-lesson unit plan for

their discipline.

Most importantly, RED 326 is where I was first formally introduced to the idea of

Gradual Release of Responsibility.

1/22/13
Excerpt from class notes for RED 326: Literacy Across the Curriculum:
Roles: 1. Model - a literate person in general and in discipline
   2. How do you help kids take on that same identity?
-      If you want kids to write, you have to write in front of them.
-      If you want kids to paint, you have to paint in front of them.
-      <u>MODELING IS KEY!</u>

2/5/13
Rationale from First RED 326 Tutoring Lesson Plan framed using Gradual Release:
<u>2. Rationale for Lesson (explain why it makes sense for your tutee at this time and connect your ideas to readings and activities from class)</u>
   Last week, Anna* and I spent our short amount of time together getting to know one another. During our time together, she told me all about her wide range of interests, her talents, and even some of her shortcomings. I decided to center our first "focused" tutoring lesson on one of the simpler academic language functions in order to ease her into how our tutoring sessions will ultimately run. I am starting with something easier, comparing and contrasting, rather than something she has said is quite a challenge for her, persuading, in order to build up tools that she can use when working on the more challenging lessons. I am hoping that by working with Anna* on comparing and contrasting, she can get really accustomed and use that tool in order to eventually build the two sides of an argument and be able to persuade one side over the other when we reach that future lesson on persuading.
   I plan to work with Anna* on completing a Venn diagram, a useful tool for comparing and contrasting. We will first watch a Youtube video clip of the character Rumpelstiltskin from *Shrek Forever After,* Anna*'s favorite movie, and then read the actual Brothers Grimm tale of Rumpelstiltskin. After that, I will assist Anna* in completing a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the two versions. Then, I am hoping to have Anna* write a short paragraph based on what she put in the Venn diagram. According to *Tutoring Adolescent Literacy Learners*, "A student who writes regularly about what she reads, for instance, will usually improve her ability to include details in her writing while

simultaneously learning how to make personal connections to her reading" (Chandler-Olcott & Hinchman, 2005, p. 17). I am hoping by having her rework her Venn diagram into a written piece, Anna* will recognize how useful that kind of tool is for prewriting and organizational purposes, as well as remembering important details from the reading. Comparing and Contrasting is an important skill that Anna* will be able to use in any subject area when trying to distinguish between two new terms, two new rules, or two new characters, and will be an important part of the work we do with Persuading in our later lessons.

2/12/13
Excerpt from class notes for RED 326: Literacy Across the Curriculum:

How a Tutoring Lesson Plan Flows with Gradual Release:

Gradual Release Model	VS.	Tutoring Framework
Modeling/Demonstration		Reading/Think Alouds
Guided Practice		Guided/Shared Use of Strategy
Independent Practice		Independent Reading/Writing
Application/Transfer to new Contexts		Oral/Written Reflection
• When could they use what you just taught them?		

2/26/13
Excerpt from RED 326 Trade Book Memo for Discipline Specific Inquiry Project:

I would use *Persepolis* in my teaching in three ways: to give students something different to read than just the standard texts they are used to in order to broaden their experience with different genres, to show students how imagery and visual literacy can be just as strong, or stronger, than the words in a text to communicate to readers, and to provide students with a way to relate to people of Middle Eastern descent, who are often their classmates, and recognize them as real human beings, rather than just "terrorists." I would have students read *Persepolis* and have in-class discussions about the simple language and illustrations in relation to the heavy context of the text, as well as discuss how the novel impacted their view of Middle Eastern people and culture. I would have students keep a journal as they read in order to track any questions, thoughts, or opinions that appear and change as they read. I believe a text like *Persepolis* can not only expose students to a different genre, but can also change their perspective on often gray situations.

3/4/13
Excerpt from Mid-Semester Reflection on Tutoring Experience for RED 326:

One thing Anna* openly admitted she would like to work on is writing a persuasive essay. Because of this, I have been using these first few tutoring sessions as building blocks towards learning how to persuade well. I began with comparing and contrasting, then moved to working with evaluating, discussing, and explaining details so that she will better be able to pick out details to support her claim once we begin working on persuading. In my future sessions with Anna*, I plan to keep building up Anna*'s tools that she needs to persuade for another lesson or two, and then begin working on persuading.

4/1/13
Excerpt from notes on Fisher and Frey article, "Writing instruction for struggling adolescent readers: A gradual release model"

Fisher and Frey Article Notes

- writing achievement follows writing instruction
- read aloud → writing instruction → independent reading/writing
- Scribe - build off class generated sentences
- students don't want to write in front of class so teacher does
- Writing Models: "I Am" Poems
- Generative Sentences: in class, write a topic sentence; for homework, students extend to paragraph (gradual release)
- Independent Writing - prompts with background knowledge (ex. Harry Potter)
- Best Writing = after Discussion; Best Readings = prior experience

4/16/13
Preview of Unit Plan (Culminating Project, or "Final") for RED 326:

Name: Julie Saltisiak

<div align="center">RED 326-625 Unit Plan Preview</div>

<u>Target Audience:</u>

My Unit Plan is aimed towards a 7th grade general English & Language Arts classroom that includes native speakers and ELL students, as well as my tutee, Anna* (currently a 6th grader).

<u>Topic and Central Focus of Learning Segment:</u>

My topic for this Unit Plan is *Heroes and Heroines.* My central question for the unit that students will be exploring through various texts, discussions, and activities is: *What qualities make a person a hero or a heroine?*

<u>Key Learning Task linked to Central Focus:</u>

In order to answer the central question of the lesson, I plan to begin my unit with a classroom think aloud about what qualities they think makes a person a hero or a heroine, and record these qualities on chart-paper that I will display for everyone to see and refer to throughout the week. We will then read a variety of texts (some read by the entire class while others are individual selections by students) so that everyone has

something to contribute to the overall discussion. As the unit progresses, we will constantly refer back to our list of qualities and edit/add to them. *At the end of the Unit, my goal is to have students, as a culminating project, be able to identify their own hero in their personal reading/life experiences that they can compare to one of the heroes/heroines that we read and learned about in class.*

<u>Academic Language Function linked to your Key Learning Task:</u>

Throughout my Unit Plan, students will be *analyzing* different texts in order to establish what makes a person a hero or heroine, then, in their culminating projects, they will *compare and/or contrast* a hero of their choice with a hero we have analyzed in class.

5/4/13

Hero Definition Essay for RED 326 Unit Plan Culminating Project:

<p align="center"><u>ELA 7: Heroes & Heroines Unit</u></p>

<p align="center"><u>Hero Definition Essay</u></p>

This is the final culminating project of our Heroes & Heroines Unit. The key task throughout this week is to take the broad definition of a hero that we develop together as a class, and <u>to use that definition as the starting point to create your own personal, narrowed definition of a hero</u>. Throughout the week, we will read a variety of different texts about people considered to be heroes, and it will be your job during class time to prove those people are heroes by justifying your conclusions with details from your reading by using a Double Entry Journal. For your hero definition essay, you will state your hero definition, and then you will choose one (or two, if you wish) of the heroes we read about in class, as well as a personal hero from your own life, to back up your hero definition and prove that it is correct by mentioning the qualities each of those heroes possess that correspond with your definition.

<u>Your Final Hero Definition Essay should include all of the following:</u>

- Your own personal <u>definition of a hero</u> based on the work you do throughout the week.
    - This definition CANNOT be the class generated one, but must instead stem from that one and be your own <u>original </u>definition.
- <u>Two</u> examples: one from your personal life and one from class readings that will back up your hero definition and prove it to be correct.
    - At least one example must be from a class reading. (In other words, you can use two class examples, or one class example and one personal example, but NOT two personal examples.) You must mention the title of the reading in your essay.
- At least <u>four</u> qualities (two qualities per example) that your two examples possess that supports your hero definition.
- The t<u>wo double entry journals</u> you completed during class about your two examples must be attached to the back of the essay.

5/5/13
Excerpt from Heroes & Heroines Unit Plan Rationale (part of RED 326 Final):
In order to move all my students to the point that they can work independently to justify conclusions, I plan to use Gradual Release of Responsibility and to include two of Gibbons' intellectual practices from Chapter 2 of *English Learners Academic Literacy and Thinking* in my unit plan. Throughout my entire unit, as well as during each individual lesson, I plan to introduce each assignment with modeling and/or whole class participation so each student can see how the assignment should be completed. Students will also have the opportunity to practice using their Double Entry Journals and writing Hero Definition Essays in which they support their own definition of a hero while working in both pairs and small groups throughout the week. This will give them guided practice before they actually have to produce and write like that on their own. This gradual release process will also assist in the application of Gibbons' third intellectual practice: "Students make links between concrete knowledge and abstract theoretical knowledge" (23). Throughout the modeling and guide practice in the first few lessons, students will use a class-generated, broad definition of a hero as a starting place for developing their own definitions. They will then view and read a variety of materials about heroes in order to build more concrete knowledge about heroes before they have to create their own personal, narrowed definition of a hero (which is more abstract).

5/6/13
Excerpts from Final Reflection on Tutoring Experience for RED 326:
More recently, I also recognized the importance of showing Anna* how to "mark up" readings using a variety of different methods. I did not realize something this simple would not be automatic for most students, so when Anna* did not seem to want to highlight the reading at first and instead just wing it, I recognized I needed to step in and not only show her how to do it, but also to explain and show her why it is worth it to do it. Once I was able to model for Anna* and prove to her that marking up readings *as you read* actually helps you when it comes time to recall information, fill out diagrams or charts, and use details in writing, Anna* actually started to follow my lead and mark up our readings. This experience made me realize that if I want students to use the tools and methods that I will supply them with in order to develop their own academic literacy, I need to actually prove to them that it is not just meaningless work, but actually a process that will help them on things like papers and future state tests….
….In my future teaching, when it comes to teaching how to write a persuasive essay, I will spend ample time teaching other academic language functions that help to make persuasion easier and stronger, modeling how to use certain tools for prewriting and also how to read and write persuasively, and then, when it comes time for students to actually persuade, I will make sure it is about a topic that they are extremely interested in, just as I did with Anna* during our tutoring session on persuading. If there is one thing Anna* taught me to realize and develop in my lessons, it is that teaching and learning academic literacy does not have to be boring; there are a variety of ways to approach introducing, modeling, and using each academic language function.

***

After my first year as an education student, I felt I had an understanding of the importance of gradual release. I knew the framework well and recognized how it could work in a one-on-one setting after my time with Anna*. However, I did not yet have any whole-class experience with it, besides some model examples of units following the gradual release framework and my professor using it on us in class. I hoped that in the fall of my junior year I would observe the use of gradual release in a classroom of a local school. This hope stemmed from the fact that student teaching was in my near future and I wanted all the exposure I could get to actually teaching using gradual release.

Fall 2013

Excerpt from Course Overview of Dr. Benjamin Dotger's EDU 304: The Study of Teaching, Fall 2013 Syllabus:
"While the course will almost certainly help you begin to acquire practical instructional skill, its basic purpose is not to teach you how to teach. Rather, it is to help you define the questions that you need to be asking - of yourself, of instructors in subsequent methods courses, and of the coursework you take in your own subject areas - in order for you to make decisions for yourself, as a student of teaching, as well as a teacher and leader both inside and beyond the classroom."

***

EDU 304 is another class that all Secondary Education majors take. It has two major papers and a 30 hour field placement. The first major paper is the Educational Experiences paper, which requires students to reflect on their own learning experiences in order to figure out what is important to them as future educators.

9/10/13
Homework for EDU 304: The Study of Teaching:
Define 'good teaching' in one paragraph:
I believe good teaching begins with having empathy towards your students. You need to learn and recognize what makes them tick, what best helps them learn, and what they require to feel comfortable and at home in your classroom. Good teaching requires patience, order, organization, a professional attitude, and a true will to help students get

it, whatever "it" may be. Good teaching is being available and open while still focusing on the main task of presenting new information to a variety of different learners in ways they all will understand. Also, I believe good teaching requires following the old cliche "practice what you preach" as well as the Golden Rule in order to foster mutual respect.

9/16/13
Excerpt from Influential Educational Experiences Paper, EDU 304

I will do my best to incorporate modeling not just during my English lessons, but also at times when it is not expected, such as during lunch or before/after school when I can be a model of good behavior. I will plan my lessons and classroom activities with my students' own interests and capabilities in mind, and I will modify my plans when time does not allow for everything I planned. In my future classroom, I will remain in control while still being approachable and knowledgeable. I will do my best to always have a "different" way of presenting material, instead of continuously using the same method every unit. I will plan inclusive, fun activities that get the students actively involved instead of passively listening or observing. I will pull from all kinds of topics and resources to keep my class interested and exposed to all that literature and nonfiction resources have to offer.

***

As mentioned earlier, EDU 304, similar to EDU 204, has a once-a-week, observational field placement. The primary purpose of this placement is to observe the teacher and learn from his or her methodology. After each observation, a reflection is written. For this placement, I was lucky enough to observe Ms. Finn*, a veteran English Language Arts teacher who has multiple classes of seniors and one AP class of juniors. Ms. Finn* is an extremely effective teacher who knows when and how to use gradual release in order to advantage her students, and I knew I would learn a lot from her.

9/29/13
Excerpt from EDU 304 Week 1 Field Placement Reflection:

The prompt the students were asked to write on was, "How can literacy help you lead a powerful life?" This prompt was based on a reading about Frederick Douglass that the students completed. When Ms. Finn* allowed me to review the responses, I was surprised by how reflective some of the students' answers actually were. Although many said the same things regarding literacy, their examples ranged from general reading and writing to things like paying the bills and using social media. I was surprised that Ms.

Finn* was able to leave the class with a prompt that could bring about such a variety of responses, and I think that those responses probably led to an interesting discussion and something to build off of in future lessons.

10/11/13
Excerpt from EDU 304 Week 3 Field Placement Reflection:
In the class, she asked students to compile a list of all the cultural, political, and historical references and questions they did not quite understand while they were reading. Then, by compiling all the students' answers into one collective list, Ms. Finn* was able to address some of the questions asked by answering with similar situations in America, or simply by posing the question to the class in another way. Also, she left most of the questions unanswered, and encouraged students to research them or to use the text to determine what the answers might be.

10/20/13
Excerpt from EDU 304 Week 4 Field Placement Reflection:
Ms. Finn* wants her students to be able to form their own opinions and interpret what they read in order to **apply** their ideas about the books to other subjects that interest them.

11/2/13
Excerpt from EDU 304 Week 6 Field Placement Reflection:
Ms. Finn* also does not always plan precise modifications because she likes to let students try an assignment or activity first. Then, if most of the class is really lost, she will make modifications and offer more support and modeling so students get it.

11/16/13
Excerpt from EDU 304 Week 7 Field Placement Reflection:
In Ms. Finn*'s room, there are only tables, no desks. This is something she had to fight for in her classroom, but she believes these tables act as the biggest supports for students with special needs in her class. Tables allow for easy grouping and discussions, and Ms. Finn* believes having other students to work with support all students, but especially the ones with special needs. In addition, Ms. Finn* provides models of many of her assignments and scaffolds everything by working first as a large group, then at tables in smaller groups, before finally students are asked to complete something similar on their own.

***

My time with Ms. Finn* showed me many of the realities of being a good teacher. Most importantly, she modeled for me the manipulation of gradual release. Before observing in her classroom, I never considered that the usual pattern of gradual release might be rearranged to

better teach a specific skill. I knew that gradual release was a good starting point for lesson

planning, but I now knew it is not the only way to lesson plan. Ms. Finn, more than once while I

observed her, began by having her students work independently, either by reading or writing.

Then, she would build off those individual responses in order to clarify or model any information

that the students were unsure about. Often, her class ended in a whole-class discussion. As you

can see, rather than moving from modeling, to guided practice, to independent practice, Ms. Finn

started with independent practice in order to determine where her students would need modeling

and support. Also, it became clear to me that a lot of the times, an original plan needs to be

modified during the actual lesson, depending on what the students need at that time, which

cannot always be anticipated. These realizations would come in handy for me once I began

student teaching and planning for my own classes in the spring.

Spring of Junior year is where the life of an English Education major gets hectic. Student

teaching begins in what is referred to as the Candidacy semester. During the Candidacy semester,

Education majors continue to take a full course load while simultaneously completing a seven

week student teaching field placement. Student teachers teach for half a day in the morning and

then go to class on campus in the afternoon and at night. This is accomplished by enrolling in

two, intermingled classes: SED 413, a class for English Education majors that introduces many

of the methods used in teaching English, and EDU 508, which is the field experience itself.

Unlike previous semesters, the field experience is its own class with its own credits (EDU 508),

rather than just a part of an education class. This semester is called the Candidacy semester

because in a way, it tests Education majors to see who is prepared to take on full-time student

teaching in the fall of Senior year.

For my Candidacy semester student teaching placement, I was placed in a well-resourced, suburban high school. I worked with Mrs. M., an English Language Arts teacher who taught juniors and a multi-grade-level Creative Writing Class.

Spring 2014

Excerpt from Course Overview of Dr. Marcelle Haddix's SED 413/613: Methods and Materials in Teaching English, Spring 2014 Syllabus:
"This course… is organized around the following four Essential Questions… to be explored over the course of the semester:
1. *Who am I as a reader, writer, and communicator?*
2. *Why teach English language arts?*
3. *What kind of pedagogy should I construct given my goals and purposes for English language arts?*
4. *How does "best practice" in English language arts get constructed differently in different contexts?"*

1/13/14
Response to following Quick-Write Prompt: Who are you and why are you here today?
I don't know who I am, but I do know who I want to be. That is an English teacher. I'm here because I want to learn the skills that actually makes a teacher, a teacher. I want to make a difference in kids' lives in much the same way that my teachers have made in mine. I want to learn how to get through to all students in a way that they will understand and enjoy. I do know that I am driven and ready to learn, but who I am is constantly changing. I hope to better the person I am by becoming more grounded in my teaching practice. I'm here to <u>learn</u> to <u>teach</u>. I am excited and ready to develop as a person, a student, and a future teacher.

***

For SED 413, students read a number of important texts that discuss the various methods and approaches to teaching English Language Arts. The next few excerpts are my notes on a few of these readings. As you can see, aspects of Gradual Release of Responsibility, such as scaffolding, still remain prevalent…

1/20/14
Excerpt from notes on *Teaching the Neglected "R"*, Ch. 20: Boys & Writing by Michael Smith:
- From scaffolded to independent writing experiences
- teachers vs. "assign-ers": teachers assist and help students do assignments
- a model text tells you where to go, but not how to get there - that's where a teacher's modeling comes in
- responsive teaching coupled with anticipatory teaching
- like Gradual Release of Responsibility, but sometimes out of order

1/22/14
Excerpt from notes on *Teaching English by Design* (Smagorinsky) - Ch. 2: Providing Scaffolds for Student Learning:
- <u>Instructional scaffold</u>: experiences and capable people assist others in learning new knowledge and skills
- <u>Scaffolding Response Logs</u>: introduce, model expectations, work collaboratively, get feedback, work individually
- teacher modeling in whole group, then small group practice with immediate feedback, and then individual application of the procedure
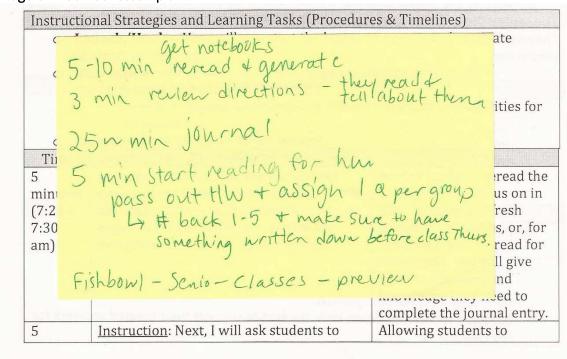- Writing to learn

1/23/14
Excerpt on notes on "Teaching to Transgress" by bell hooks:
p. 21 - any class with holistic model of learning will cause teachers to grow too
"I do not expect students to take risks that I would not take."

<div align="center">***</div>

During my student teaching placement, I tried my best to plan lessons using the gradual release of responsibility framework. However, I continually found myself trying the lesson out on my first period class and realizing it wasn't working the way I had planned. During my planning period, I would revise the lesson, and often, would re-sequence my plan. I would write down my new plan quickly on a Post-It note and physically place the note over the old plan. I found myself sometimes beginning with guided or independent practice before moving to a whole-class discussion or modeling, similar to the way I had seen Ms. Finn teach during my observational placement with her. At first, having to modify my plans in the moment made me feel like a failure because I could not adequately implement gradual release of responsibility. As

time went on, I realized having to modify and try different frameworks for teaching a specific

topic or skill is just a part of being a teacher…

3/19/14
Image of modified lesson plan:

Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks (Procedures & Timelines)		
		ate
		ities for
Ti		
5 min (7:2 7:30 am)		read the us on in resh s, or, for read for ll give nd ...ed to complete the journal entry.
5	Instruction: Next, I will ask students to	Allowing students to

Handwritten note (green):
Get notebooks
5-10 min reread & generate
3 min review directions – they read & tell about them
25~ min journal
5 min start reading for hw
pass out Hw & assign 1 a per group
↳ # back 1-5 & make sure to have something written down before class Thurs.
Fishbowl – Senio- Classes – preview

4/14/14
Image of Modified Lesson Plan:

Analysis of your teaching
• What worked? What did not? For whom? Why?
• Based on your planned assessment   ❖ Describe the varying levels of achievement i
o Needs work: Students did not participate in presenti ... their final poems.
o On target: Students participated in presenting the collage and handed in their completed poems.
o Exemplary: Students participated in presenting the collage and handed in their completed poems.

Handwritten note (blue):
4/4/14 – period 3:
- when asked how to teach 13 Reasons Why next year, they wanted Lit. circles & discussions b/c good to talk about hard topics & helped them as they read (turnaround from start)

4/27/14
Excerpt from EDU 508 Final Self Evaluation for Candidacy Student Teaching:
Candidate Self-Assessment: _Briefly summarize what you think were your most significant accomplishments during this placement. With the benefit of hindsight, comment and describe any of those things that you would have done differently._

     Through this placement, I think I truly began to develop my own identity as a teacher. With Mrs. M's help, I was able to establish a relationship with my students and to create a classroom environment that worked for both my students and for me. I learned how to manage a classroom while keeping track of time during a lesson, but I also really learned the importance of modifying instruction or a lesson when you can sense that the students need more time or support. I think my biggest accomplishment at this placement was how well I got to know my students, and then taking my knowledge of each student and using it to differentiate my instruction so that as time went on, my lessons became better for the group of students I was working with.

     I would have done a few things differently. First, I think back on my first day of teaching, I would have done a free write of sorts that asked my students basic questions so that I could have gotten to know more about them in a quicker way. Also, I think I would have planned my culminating project differently had I known my students better. Instead of creating it based on what I thought would work, and then subsequently changing it due to where my students were at, I should have either let my students give me suggestions on how they would have preferred to be assessed, or, I should have waited until later in the unit to create their final assessment, and base that project off of what I saw my students learning and gaining while reading the novel.

<div align="center">***</div>

Junior year ended, and I was excited for my upcoming senior year. Senior year Fall semester is similar to Junior year Spring, except it is more intense. Secondary Education majors like myself are enrolled in a full-time student teaching placement that lasts for twelve weeks. In addition to student teaching, Education majors take a senior seminar, SED 415, that supports student teachers as they encounter assessment and prepare to submit their own teacher certification assessment, the edTPA. The seminars are discipline specific, so I was in a class with only my English Education cohort.

For my full-time student teaching placement during Fall 2014, I was placed in an urban/suburban school district located right outside Syracuse city. My host teacher, Mrs. Cooling*, teaches 7th grade English Language Arts in the middle school. Having only taught

high-schoolers, I was apprehensive about this new placement and how I would do with middle-schoolers. After my Candidacy student-teaching experience with juniors and realizing that I sometimes needed to adapt my instruction mid-lesson to fit their needs, I assumed I would have to do that much more often and work much harder to create lessons tailored to my new students' needs. I thought back to my experience with Anna*, a 6th grader, and how keeping her engaged could be challenging at times. How was I supposed to keep 120 students engaged in what I was trying to teach them?

In addition, my apprehension connected back to my experiences using gradual release. I assumed that because my new students were much younger than students I previously worked with (besides Anna*) that they would need much more modeling and scaffolding as I taught new skills. I was worried my students would never reach the "transfer" part of the framework because they would need constant support and reminding of the skills I was hoping they would learn. Essentially, I was afraid I would not be able to get through to these students using the gradual release of responsibility framework.

Fall 2014

Excerpt from Course Overview of Dr. Kelly Chandler-Olcott's SED 415: Teacher Development: Assessment and Data-Driven Instruction, Fall 2014 Syllabus:
*"SED 415 is a seminar designed to continue the work you began in SED 413, as well as to complement your work in EDU 508, Student Teaching in English. The course is built on the belief that effective teachers of English language arts are knowledgable and literate teacher-researchers who develop classroom communities in which **they and their students learn together**."*

9/23/14
Thoughts and notes during an SED 415 class meeting:
"Kelly just said to ask yourself, 'Where's the new instruction? What's the information they don't know yet?' and that those questions would help you develop an assessment. Does that mean I should be assessing what I am originally modeling for students? I mean, after they are able to do it on their own? That makes sense, considering the point of gradual release is to have student be able to use a skill on their own and apply it to new contexts…. such as an end-of-unit assessment. I better write this down before I forget…."

- Where's the new instruction? - the info they don't know yet (even in a review)
- you should be modeling, and then eventually assessing the new piece

9/25/14
Excerpt from SED 415 Class Entry Ticket:
Prompt: Write about a lesson you are particularly proud of.

During our <u>Never Fall Down</u> learning segment, I had students answer 3 questions following the excerpt. They worked in pairs. Next, I grouped up pairs into 3 groups - 1 group for each question. Pairs shared their answers and groups made a new answer that combined all the pair responses. Then, students shared answers to each question and I recorded the answers on Microsoft Word for students to copy down and compare to and add to their own responses. Based on the information students volunteered, I noticed that a lot of students were struggling with the figurative language and imagery question, so we spent the next few minutes of class discussing and adding to our answer. The next day, a Ticket Out the Door asked for an example of a simile or metaphor and most students were able to correctly write down an answer.

9/30/14
Excerpt from SED 415 class notes:
- Think-Pair-Share - getting down individual thoughts on paper then sharing with partner, then sharing combined thoughts with whole class (twist on Gradual Release)
- "What's another way to say that?" "I'm going to push you a little bit further." - Stretch student answers to help them think through what they are saying and learning.

9/30/14
Excerpt from SED 415 Open-Ended Quickwrite:
I'm still trying to get down the UbD model. If I'm planning backwards by creating an Essential Question or Questions, do I then think like a funnel, and go from what I want students to "get" or "do", back to them "getting" or "doing" it together, then back to how I plan to introduce and model ways to answer the Questions?
- Professor's written response to me on this question: *"Yes, mostly - but sometimes, it's not so linear. Sometimes it's messier - recursive or with a different starting point."*

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The UbD Model, or Understanding by Design, is a way of unit planning that is often referred to as "backward design." It was developed by Wiggins and McTigue (2005) and is a three-stage approach that starts with identifying what one wants students to be able to do independently by the end of the unit. Then, one must consider what kind of assessment he or she

will use to accurately determine if students have learned the skill you are teaching them. Finally, based on the end result one wishes to attain, one plans daily lesson plans that build up to the final assessment so that students will be supported on their way to learning a new skill (p. 17-18).

As you can see from the previous excerpt, the Understanding by Design model was confusing to me, as I saw it as a backwards way to think about guided release of responsibility. However, I soon realized that using this way of unit planning made it easier to determine when gradual release was the appropriate way to teach a specific skill, or if there was a better way to approach it.

10/7/14
Excerpt from Lesson Plan from The Westing Game Unit:

Instructional Context
• *What do I know about my students that will inform this lesson? Are there any particular student strengths, interests, background, needs related to the lesson?* Students are excited to finish *The Westing Game*. We have spent time reading this novel in different ways, including listening and following along with the audiobook, whole class reading, silent reading, and small group reading. Students have developed strong listening skills from these various reading situations and are able to discuss what they read easily. However, students are still struggling to use textual evidence. For example, students will refer back to something that happened in the novel, but will not be able to provide a page number for their answer. As we finish the novel this week, I will move toward asking more evidence-based questions to get students to use their novels for more than simply reading.
• *How does this lesson connect with and build on the previous lessons?* Students have previously worked in small groups to read and answer questions about *The Westing Game*. Yesterday, we listened to the audiobook and paused to discuss key plot points. Today, small groups will self-guide to read and discuss the novel before students are asked to produce writing that uses and cites textual evidence, without prior modeling from me. I will review students' written responses, and tomorrow I will display a few that appropriately answer the question and cites textual evidence so students can see models for how to improve their responses and their ability to use textual evidence in the future.

10/8/14
Excerpt from my journal:

Today was the day we finished _The Westing Game_. Kids were actually sad for it to end and a lot asked for a sequel. Made me happy to see how attached they got to certain characters ☺

I'm worried about their letter writing assignment. I feel like I suck at giving directions and my kids struggle to figure things out on their own. Tomorrow, I plan to give a ton of guidance (Just realized I still need to make a model letter for them. Oops).

When I "really" teach 7th grade, I will try to work in "extra days" so there is wiggle room if unit runs over or reteaching needs to happen… (often times students need more guided practice time than I originally plan for). I'm realizing that lessons never look how they do on paper; they are always changing and evolving to fit what the students need.

- AKA be flexible (A la Mrs. C [host teacher])

11/1/14
Excerpt from SED 415 Open-Ended Quickwrite:

I feel good about where I am at this point. I am learning and accepting that I am a preservice teacher and therefore do not know how to do everything perfectly. However, I think I am meeting the expectations of a student teacher and working hard. Honestly, I'm focusing on seeing the positive, not the negative. I know I will learn and grow, but I know I will make mistakes and need to adjust my lessons/units/materials/rubrics/edTPA/etc. I will keep on keeping on!

- Professor's written response to this quickwrite: _J- That's a key realization…. and you need to give yourself similar license to learn (and sometimes to fail) for the early years of your career, not just student teaching. Very healthy…_

11/14/14
Excerpt from my journal:

The last day of student teaching. I finally realize just how much these kids taught me. I think I've become much more flexible and open to presenting new material in a variety of ways. I wonder what I will do without them…I think that because of them, I'm almost ready… maybe. Maybe I'm still learning. Maybe I always will be.

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Afterword

After looking back at all of this, it is quite clear that not only am I in a different major from the one I started at the beginning of my college experience, but I am also a different Education major than the one I once was. I used to think that gradual release of responsibility was a teacher's one-way ticket to helping students learn. In the beginning of my lesson-planning, I relied on this instructional framework to support my teaching. It was my crutch. If I deviated from the organization of gradual release, I assumed the lesson would not be as successful as it could be because students would not be adequately supported.

I now know this is not the case. Gradual release is indeed a great framework to use most of the time, especially when introducing a skill that is brand new to students or when students are especially struggling to use a skill independently, but it is also great to manipulate and re-arrange the framework in order to suit students' needs as they learn. To quote Fisher and Frey (2008), gradual release of responsibility "is not a script that teachers follow." It is meant to "help teachers increase their precision in their teaching" (p. 16). It definitely took various experiences in my field placements for me to learn this, but it is evident from the artifacts that I have included that I did learn how and when to use gradual release, although it took me even longer to realize it.

I started out only strictly following the gradual release format, much like the "script" idea mentioned above. However, after observing Ms. Finn's strong teaching that deviated from the common procedures of gradual release, learning more ways to unit plan from my professors and my mentor teachers, and then witnessing perfectly-structured gradual release lessons fail and others that did not follow the framework succeed in my own student teaching, I now know gradual release is a great tool to have in my toolbox, but it is not the only tool I can use. I learned

that I must get to know my students and their needs, and then tailor my teaching to those needs. For some classes and skills, gradual release will work. For others, it may require teaching in a different sequence.

Many teachers, in different countries and in different disciplines, are flipping frameworks to reach their students so that the students can best understand and learn. In the book, *Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (and How to Teach It to Everyone)*, Elizabeth Green (2014) refers to the pattern in which American teachers teach as "I, We, You" (p. 119). Although she does not call it gradual release, her description is consistent with Pearson and Gallagher (1983). For example, during mathematics class, the teacher first models the procedure (I), then has the whole class try a few problems with her (We), and then finally, the teacher asks student to try a problem on their own using the procedure that was just modeled and practiced (You). Green then moves her discussion to Japanese teachers who use a different approach to mathematics teaching, which she calls, "You, Y'all, We." In this method, the teachers ask students to first try a math problem on their own (You), then discuss their approaches to the problem in small groups (Y'all), and then finally, the teacher leads a class discussion in which the whole class comes to the same conclusion on how best to solve a problem (Green, 2014). This example shows how students can sometimes be more successful at learning a skill when gradual release is not used, or is manipulated and reworked. In terms of international achievement testing, Japanese students are much more successful at mathematics than U.S. students, and approaching the discipline in a different way may be the explanation for that success. Based on this one example, it is clear I am not the only person wrestling with when and how to use gradual release of responsibility.

I can say now that I see the importance of gradual release, not just for use in lesson planning, but also for developing and changing during the actual teaching of the lesson. Teaching is messy, and sometimes, even though I struggle to admit it, sticking to one structure does not fit the ever-changing world of an ELA classroom. Also, it's just kind of boring. Changing the ways I approach teaching is part of what makes it an exciting challenge, both for the students, and for me as their teacher. The state of education is rapidly shifting, and I know that I will be able to support my students during this reform by adapting the way I teach using multiple instructional frameworks.

As I reflect on my work, this paper is one of the most important projects I have ever developed. Originally, I settled on the theme of gradual release of responsibility because it continuously popped up in my notes and lesson plans. I just assumed developing a paper about it would be easy. Although I would no longer call it easy, I will call my process of gathering these artifacts, sorting through the pieces, and putting together the puzzle that is this multi-genre, autoethnography one of the most eye-opening things I have done. Not only did I discover a clear development of how I use gradual release, but I also easily see my progression of learning throughout this paper, and I hope you can see it, too.

I am looking forward to my future as a graduate student studying Literacy Education at Syracuse, and eventually becoming a classroom ELA teacher. I think my understanding of and realizations about gradual release of responsibility throughout my experience at Syracuse University's School of Education has prepared me to develop future lessons and units that are structured, varied, and tailored to my students' needs. It has prepared me to support my students in different ways as they develop and acquire new literacy skills and strategies. This project has also allowed me to enter my graduate study with a mind that is open to even more learning about

instructional frameworks like gradual release. Isn't that what gradual release is all about, preparing students to transfer their knowledge to new contexts and apply it adequately? I think it's safe to say I am ready for independent practice with my use of gradual release in my graduate study and in my future teaching, but as I have learned, I won't mind a little modeling and guided practice along the way.

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