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What Makes this TEAM Reflection Paper Successful?

Some specific examples/evidence that <u>contributed</u> to the success of this paper are provided below.

Module Three: Instruction   Grade: 8   Subject: Social Studies

Criteria I: Development of New Learning (*How the teacher developed new learning and what was learned*)
How the teacher developed new learning:
● Read "Modeling and the Gradual Release of Responsibility" by Maynes & Julien- Schultz, *Teach Like a Champion* by Lemov and *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age* by Rose & Meyer
● Observation of 8th grade math teacher
What the teacher learned:
● "The researchers [Mayne & Julien-Schultz] provided a schematic diagram showing how to progress from direct instruction teacher modeling to scaffolded practice to inform and guide students to independent learning … I surmised that using the schematic diagram would be an approach to help me guide students to be more instrumental in their own learning."
● "I learned that great teachers consistently sample their students for understanding. I realized that like many teachers, I was better at 'checking for' than 'acting on' gaps in students' mastery of concepts and skills."
● "Starting at the beginning of the year, she [8th grade math teacher] made it a daily routine that her students would be comfortable with independent and differentiated work. This made me realize how important it was to give students repeated practice with independent work. I needed to provide more opportunities for students to take ownership over their learning."

Criteria II: Impact on Practice (*How the teacher's practice is different*)

● "I made a decision to introduce a task quickly to activate what they had seen in the modeled activity. After modeling how to edit and revise, I immediately assigned a second paragraph for students to edit … I had students first complete this task independently and they were only allowed to ask for help if they did not know a word."
● "In my next unit, I designed a certain portion of class time for practicing writing skills … After each writing session, I grouped my students so that they could gain additional experience by reading and revising another student's work in our new organized routine."
● "I incorporated my own ongoing feedback and self-monitoring … I assigned students to exchange drafts of their propaganda for peer review … and encouraged students to use e-mail for further review. I located a text-to-speech program for students to listen to how their essay sounded when read aloud."

Criteria III: Impact on students *(How student performance/learning improved as a result of changes in practice*)

• "Students partnered to discuss what they had found, and I heard them asking each other the modeled questions, such as 'Is the title capitalized correctly?' and 'Is the language clear and concise?' … As a result, I found the students' ability to identify errors and sentence revisions with accuracy improved. Moreover, the number of comments and questions written in margins soared and created stronger discussion among peers."

• "Seventeen of the 19 students reported making at least one improvement to their writing as a result of using the text-to-speech program. One student reported that listening to his paper made him realize that he only had two pieces of evidence, and he needed more. This strategy allowed students to be more successful making independent revisions to their writing."

Module Three: Instruction   Grade: 8   Subject: Social Studies

Indicator 5: Teachers implement instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by: Varying the student and <u>teacher roles</u> in ways that develop independence and interdependence of learners with the gradual release of responsibility to students.

Goal:

 I will learn and apply strategies to gradually release responsibility to students to enable them to develop cooperative and independent research techniques. As a result, this will facilitate the development of collaborative and individual research skills and enable them to more clearly demonstrate their understanding of American history concepts.

Initial Summary:

I have come to the realization that I take the majority of responsibility for student learning in my classroom. Typically, learning is instructor centered and discussions are driven by my questions and comments. I have begun providing students opportunities to question their readings and I am currently experimenting with students comparing their written responses in small groups that grade one another's work through a rubric. My students are often passive listeners. However, when I ask questions they can answer reliably. They respond to peers with relevant suggestions when given the opportunity. I believe that if I develop my differentiation and scaffolding skills, I will be able to better support my goal of moving my students towards greater independence as well.

Reflection Paper:

I began the module by deciding on Indicator 5 of the CCT Performance Profile, learning and applying strategies to gradually release responsibility to students in order to develop their cooperative and independent research techniques. My mentor and I discussed my self-analysis as well as my concerns that I am not promoting and fostering student independence, the gradual independence required to master academic skills. In my class, I feel that I dominate all aspects of learning. It is common to find me in the middle of lecture or modeling a skill as my students dutifully take notes. If we are completing an activity, I find myself surrounded by students who ask, "Can you look this over for me? I want to know if it's right." This influx of questions limits my time with any one student. As a result, I find myself giving students answers rather than helping them to determine their own conclusions. By choosing Indicator 5, I believe my learning from research, observations, and discussions will inspire changes and improvements in my practice that will encourage students to become more independent in their learning.

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My mentor suggested that I begin by researching and developing a deeper understanding on the topic of **gradual release theory**. After scanning through a number of sources, I was drawn to an electronic article written by Nancy Maynes and Lynn Julien-Schultz, "Modeling and the Gradual Release of Responsibility: What Does It Look Like in the Classroom?" In it, they provide results of a study to determine if modeling, followed by structured and scaffolded practice and the gradual release of responsibility approach, was being used in classrooms and if this sequence of instruction was an effective methodology leading to mastery. I learned that, in fact, nearly 20% of instructional time was used for modeling in a variety of subject areas: brainstorming using semantic webs, analyzing components of a magazine cover, or deconstructing music lyrics. However, Maynes and Julien- Schultz found that, although teachers appeared to be intentional and confident in the modeling phase of instruction, they became inconsistent when relating the *purpose* of their modeling. When questioned about this inconsistency, the observed teachers explained that they did not have a clear understanding of how to transition their students into independence with structured practice. In response, the researchers provided <u>a schematic diagram showing how to progress from direct instruction teacher modeling to scaffolded practice to inform and guide students toward independent learning</u>. The results proved positive, as teachers found the transition from modeling to practice easier to see and pace. I surmised that using the schematic diagram would be an approach to help me guide students to be more instrumental in their own learning.

As suggested by the article, I applied this same concept in my own classroom by focusing on the initial scaffolding phase. Maynes and Julien-Schultz emphasized that the first attempts of students during the practice phase should always succeed with teacher support. This requires examples that are nearly identical to the skill modeled by the instructor. I immediately thought of using this procedure on our editing and revising techniques. Typically, students followed either one of two paths through this phase of writing. They would either (1) rush through it, limiting their edits to the occasional spelling correction or added apostrophe or (2) immediately come to me, asking what they should fix. I made a decision to introduce a task quickly to activate what they had seen in the modeled activity. After modeling how to edit and revise a paragraph, I immediately assigned a second piece of writing for students to edit. This paragraph was on the same topic, roughly the same length, and had the same grammatical and needs for revision discussed during our modeling. I had students first complete this task independently and they were only allowed to ask for help if they did not know a word. For all other comments, I had them write remarks in the margins of the page. Subsequently, students partnered to discuss what they had found, and I heard them asking each other the modeled questions, such as "Is the title capitalized correctly?" and "Is the language clear and concise?" After this partner work we came back for a whole class discussion. As a result, I found the students' ability to identify errors and sentence revisions with accuracy improved. Moreover, the number of comments and questions written in margins soared and created stronger discussions among peers. This was especially true for students of lower reading and writing levels, as it more readily allowed them to come back to important sections of the reading that required revisions. As students became more familiar with this procedure,

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I found that their confidence in correcting their own grammatical errors has increased and the quality of their work continues to improve."

Another avenue my mentor suggested I should look into is our school's book for essential teaching tools, *Teach Like a Champion* by Doug Lemov. This book offers a vast array of teaching strategies for developing a student's ability to learn. Browsing over the 49 different techniques, I was immediately drawn to Number 18, "Check for Understanding." I felt that, on selecting this technique, if I were to strengthen my own ability to gradually release students into independence, it would require the familiarity of employing strong observational data collection. I learned that great teachers consistently sample their students for understanding. Throughout the learning process, the teacher should ask a number of similar questions focused on the topic being measured. Furthermore, these questions should sample knowledge of students from across the spectrum and should be followed up with why and how questions to ascertain a reliable data collection.

Although I was familiar with this aspect of the Check for Understanding, I learned that it hid a second, if not more vital, part of the data -driven equation: *Doing Something about It Right Away*. Teachers need to act immediately if intervention, and thus learning, is to be effective. I realized that, like many teachers, I was better at "checking for" than "acting on" gaps in students' mastery of concepts and skills. Misunderstanding, as Lemov puts it, becomes compounded if they are not addressed quickly. Delay of intervention makes their resolutions complex and timely, sometimes taking full lessons to reteach. By acting immediately, a teacher saves time and moves students one step closer to independence. This newly learned technique so inspired me that I immediately implemented a new daily requirement for my lesson plans: a short verbal quiz. After any point of significant instruction or modeling, I sampled a wide range of my own students, asking similar questions about the basic uses of propaganda to gauge the level of mastery of the class. I determined a greater understanding of the concept of propaganda. Through this questioning technique, I also discovered that students in my lower level class did not understand the difference between two similar propaganda techniques: Bandwagon (when everyone does it, so should you) and Plain Folk (if you're a regular person, you should do it too). In the next day's lesson, I was able to provide a mini-activity using commercials that demonstrate each. As a class, we broke down the identifiable marks of each technique before taking a quick "quiz" (another commercial that needed to be identified). All students passed. Further evidence of their understanding was when many students were able to apply their clearer understanding of the differences between the techniques in the unit's final project: creating a piece of propaganda about our middle school.

Another aspect in gradually releasing responsibility, my mentor suggested to me, was self-monitoring. As such, I immediately found a book, *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age*, that fostered such a skill for the 21st century student. On reading this book, I quickly realized why I had clung so fervently to instructor- centered activities and teacher-led discussions; my materials lacked the differentiation required to meet the divergent needs, skills, and interests

of my students. I needed to vary my approaches and tools if I expected all my students to meet the same goals. One of the best ways, I learned, to ensuring this was through ongoing feedback during practice. To achieve this, *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age* suggests the incorporation of *quick and easy-to-learn software tools and digital networks* . Regardless of the choice, it is essential that the instructor continually assemble a collection of content, multimedia software, and resources that allows differentiation or monitoring cannot become individualized or "self"-related.

As such, I incorporated my own ongoing feedback and self-monitoring capabilities in the previously mentioned project, propaganda about our school. In order to generate self-monitoring, I assigned students to exchange drafts of their propaganda for peer review with a rubric that includes revision suggestions. I also encouraged students to use e-mail for further review and additional examples by offering extra credit to those who supplied an e-mail chain at the end of the project. Finally, in addition to the actual propaganda piece, students were required to write an essay that would explain to viewers how their image was a product of propaganda. As mentioned by *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age*, I located a text-to-speech program that enabled students to hear how their writing sounded when read aloud while they were revising their essay. Seventeen of the 19 students reported that they made at least one improvement to their writing as a result of using the text-to-speech program. One student reported that listening to his paper made him realize that he only had two pieces of evidence, and he needed more. This strategy allowed students to be more successful making independent revisions to their writing. As a result, it became quickly evident that final projects were of a contained more evidence from research than in previous years. The essays were highly focused on the subtle nature of propaganda and demonstrated a strong understanding of how propaganda influences the viewer's opinions and actions. Few students struggled to incorporate one or more of the techniques discussed into their poster illustrating their essay.

The last avenue my mentor suggested was to observe and meet with a master teacher. She recommended a meeting with our school's eighth grade math teacher to discuss how she utilizes the <u>gradual release methodology</u> with her students. I recalled seeing how well her students worked independently each time I entered her classroom. This visit was no different as I witnessed students engaged in a number of small group and independent activities throughout her classroom. For instance, on entering the 8th grade class, four computers were being used by students. Each had earned this reward for a good day's work, playing their own math-skills game adjusted to their skill level. While in the center of the class, a number of students were silently working on the day's math problems. When completed they would, of their own volition, take them to a machine that scored and updated them on their progress. The 8th grade math teacher sat at a large U-shaped table assisting five students who required her help.

After the lesson, I asked how she created such a level of productivity; she merely shrugged and answered, "I make a big deal of the small stuff early on." Starting at the beginning of the year, she made it a daily routine that her students would be comfortable with independent and differentiated work. This made me realize how important it was to give students repeated practice with independent work. I needed to provide more opportunities for students to take ownership over their learning.

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As students went about completing work throughout the year, she would monitor their progress by pointing out those who stayed on task, completed a routine successfully, or came over to her to ask a question. Then, as students became accustomed to this, she began inviting those who needed re-teaching or additional scaffolding to conference with her. Never did she allow for a free minute. When a student completed a problem, there was always another or, if they completed a goal, there was a reward for doing so. Her methodology worked. Last year, 96% of grade 8 students achieved proficiency on benchmark assessments.

After speaking with her and learning the practicalities of self- responsibility in instruction and in a classroom, I immediately set about incorporating this high-level student success environment into my practice. In my next unit, I designated a certain portion of class time for practicing writing skills, which in this unit centered on persuasive techniques. I then set the expectations for each level of writer (beginning, intermediate, advanced) with a rubric before providing a certain amount of time to complete it. After each writing session, I grouped my students so that they could gain additional experience by reading and revising another student's work in our new organized routine. During such periods, I continually monitored student performance and success by reading responses from across the spectrum of students and provided verbal help through identifying strong uses of persuasive writing. I believe this became a highly effective writing workshop in my class as long as the expectations were differentiated appropriately. Each student had a purpose for their work and used time wisely in order to accomplish their mini-goal. I also felt as if this finally allowed me the opportunity to utilize the small group help sessions that I first saw in 8th grade math.

Through electronic articles, print sources, suggestions from my mentor and a focused observation of a colleague, I learned strategies that encourage students to seek individual paths to learning. I feel that making intentional changes in my practice better equipped me to release the responsibility of independent and interdependent research techniques to my students. With the proper pacing, appropriate differentiation, and continual progress monitoring, I know students have a deeper understanding of social studies and literacy skills. I will, however, be mindful that no matter what, success in the gradual release of responsibility is built around the vigilance of the instructor and the ability to reach the wide learning differences of students.