

# THE GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN LITERACY RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

## Edited by

Mary B. McVee, Evan Ortlieb,  
Jennifer Reichenberg and P. David Pearson

LITERACY RESEARCH,  
PRACTICE AND EVALUATION

**VOLUME 10**

THE GRADUAL RELEASE OF  
RESPONSIBILITY IN LITERACY  
RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

# LITERACY RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND EVALUATION

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LITERACY RESEARCH, PRACTICE  
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# FOREWORD

In 1983, P. David Pearson and Margaret Gallagher published *The Instruction of Reading Comprehension* Technical Report No. 297 through the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. This report formed the basis for the article by the same title published in the journal of *Contemporary Educational Psychology* the same year. Neither David or Meg (as they were known by colleagues) could have predicted how the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction would have such staying power over the coming decades. Given its ongoing relevancy, it is surprising that, until now, no volume has been devoted exclusively to the gradual release model, its history, and its future. This edited volume addresses this oversight and, for the first time, brings a specific examination and exploration of the gradual release of responsibility as a model applied to research and practice across a multitude of areas related to literacy instruction.

Now, many decades after publication, the model continues to appeal to researchers, teachers, teacher educators, curriculum specialists, and literacy specialists alike. It has been used, as originally intended, to consider the scaffolding necessary as children and teachers engage in reading comprehension tasks, but use of the model has spread to other developmental age groups and levels of instruction and to other content areas. From the genesis of the model to the present, the gradual release framework has been employed to explain numerous literacy practices from reading and writing with young children to reading and writing with adolescents. But the model has also been applied to the work of teachers who, as adult learners, are exploring how to teach reading, writing, and other content areas. Numerous curriculum specialists, literacy coaches, and school districts have adopted the model to help explain their instructional philosophy and approach to literacy instruction, and teacher education programs have employed the model as a general instructional framework for reflection or in ways as specific as a guide for lesson planning.

A brief Internet image search for the gradual release of responsibility returns numerous visual iterations of the models ranging from published models to hand-made teacher posters to commercial style graphic posters. There are even cartoon versions of the gradual release (two of which we share in Chap. 1). Clearly, the model depicting how teachers help aid in explicit instruction by gradually releasing responsibility over time resonates deeply with literacy practitioners and scholars alike. The chapters in this volume articulate the history, multiple iterations, applications, and staying power of the model and its conceptual origins across varied content and contexts.

The first chapter authored by P. David Pearson (with a little help from colleagues McVee and Shanahan) begins with a retrospective on the genesis of the

model and the context of reading research that prompted Pearson and Gallagher to attempt to map out a model of instruction that included both explicit strategy instruction alongside the idea of fading that explicitness or scaffolding over time. Contextualizing the model historically and conceptually, Pearson et al. present multiple iterations of the model as it has been presented by various scholars and teachers and also describe some essential elements of the gradual release. The 14 chapters that follow revisit the gradual release framework applying it to considerations of explicit teaching and scaffolding for emerging readers and adolescents, bilingual learners, and students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Authors consider the socially and culturally diverse context within which the gradual release of responsibility model can be used and its applications for adults, namely teachers, literacy coaches, and school leaders. Across the chapters, the authors explore not only reading but literacy as a social practice – and socially just practice – and literacy as inclusive of writing and vocabulary development, two areas where the model has been applied less often. In addition to reading, writing, and comprehension, research chapters in the volume explore how the model can be applied to understand school change, teacher reflection and coaching, and disciplinary literacies. The volume closes with a look back by Dole, Duffy, and Pearson who consider the historical evolution of instructional research on reading and how the model has evolved as reading/literacy research itself has changed. This final chapter also considers some common misuses or misinterpretations of the model and what can be done to avoid them. In sum, this text has something to offer those who first became aware of the model decades ago and those who are discovering it for the first time – a feat that speaks to the longevity and flexibility of this particular model.