



Fountas & Pinnell
Classroom™

Q+A with Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell bring their unrivaled expertise, harnessing more than thirty years of research on effective teaching in literacy education and professional learning, to *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* (FPC). This groundbreaking, first-of-its-kind, classroom-based literacy system for PreK through grade 6 is changing the landscape of literacy education.

As new areas of emphasis continue to emerge and then fade in literacy education, one thing remains constant: effective, high-quality teaching is the most influential contributor to improving literacy outcomes for students. A literate life is the right of every child. In anticipation of the full release of FPC grades PreK through grade 3, Irene and Gay sat down for a Q&A about this transformative instructional approach.

1. What are the most important characteristics to look at when implementing a new literacy system?

We recommend that you begin with your vision and values. A literacy system should align with your vision for literacy education and the values you hold for the children and educators in your school. Look for a system that provides authentic literacy experiences for every child in both reading and writing, a system that is grounded in how literacy develops in children over time, and a system that leaves space for teachers to expand their craft and make decisions based on their observation and assessment of each child in their classroom. We also believe it is essential that a literacy system honors student choice and provides robust opportunities for children to see themselves reflected in the books they read and think about.

2. What led you to develop this system? Tell us about your vision for Fountas & Pinnell Classroom.™

We have been working toward the development of FPC since the inception of *The Literacy Continuum*. Our work comes full circle with FPC because it is *The Literacy Continuum* in action. Our vision has always been that schools recognize every child's right to grow up literate in a dynamic learning community that values the richness of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Members of the school community are treated and treat others with empathy, kindness, and respect. Children investigate new ideas that fuel intellectual curiosity and act as powerful agents in their own learning. FPC was built on this vision. The system offers invaluable professional tools and authentic books that propel children's understanding of their physical, social, and emotional world and their roles as informed global citizens.

3. Why do you consciously use the word **system** instead of **program** when describing Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™?

Children do not all learn in the same sequence or at the same rate. A literacy system is built on a coherent theory of literacy learning. *FPC* is anchored in *The Literacy Continuum*—the articulation of the detailed reading and writing behaviors that children develop over time. *FPC* is a system that supports educators in making responsive teaching decisions, where all parts of the literacy curriculum are thoughtfully connected to best support the learning needs of each child. In this system, you teach individual readers, not a book and not a program. Each *FPC* lesson is an instructional menu from which you select and tailor teaching points to best support the learners in your classroom based on your observation and assessment of their literacy learning.



4. Talk about what you mean by a **multi-text approach** to literacy instruction.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” in literacy instruction and certainly not in the books used in our classrooms to promote the joy of reading. A multi-text approach includes a variety of books—both short and long texts, leveled and not leveled—used for different purposes. All children deserve access to a massive amount of books for different purposes—books that provide extensive and intensive opportunities to support efficient processing and successful comprehension and that nurture the ability to think, talk, and write about texts that fully engage students’ interests. High-quality books are at the heart of the whole-group, small-group, and independent learning opportunities that inhabit *FPC*—books that stir the imagination, reflect the diversity of our world, spark discussion, and motivate children to want to read more.

A MULTI-TEXT APPROACH

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXT	TYPE OF TEXT	LEVELED TEXT?
INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short texts, usually picture books and occasional novels (organized in text sets) • Teacher-selected, age-appropriate, grade-appropriate complex texts that expand language, knowledge, and thinking 	No
SHARED READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short texts (enlarged) and occasional novels or segment of a novel • Teacher-selected, age-appropriate, grade-appropriate texts that expand competencies and lead guided reading forward 	No
GUIDED READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short texts and occasional longer texts • Teacher-selected texts that expand thinking within, beyond, and about a text 	Yes
BOOK CLUBS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short texts and some novels • Student-selected, age-appropriate, grade-appropriate, complex texts that expand thinking within, beyond, and about a text 	No
INDEPENDENT READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short texts and novels • Student-selected books, magazines, and digital texts that expand thinking within, beyond, and about a text 	No

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5. How can educators develop school-wide coherence and a culture of collaboration?

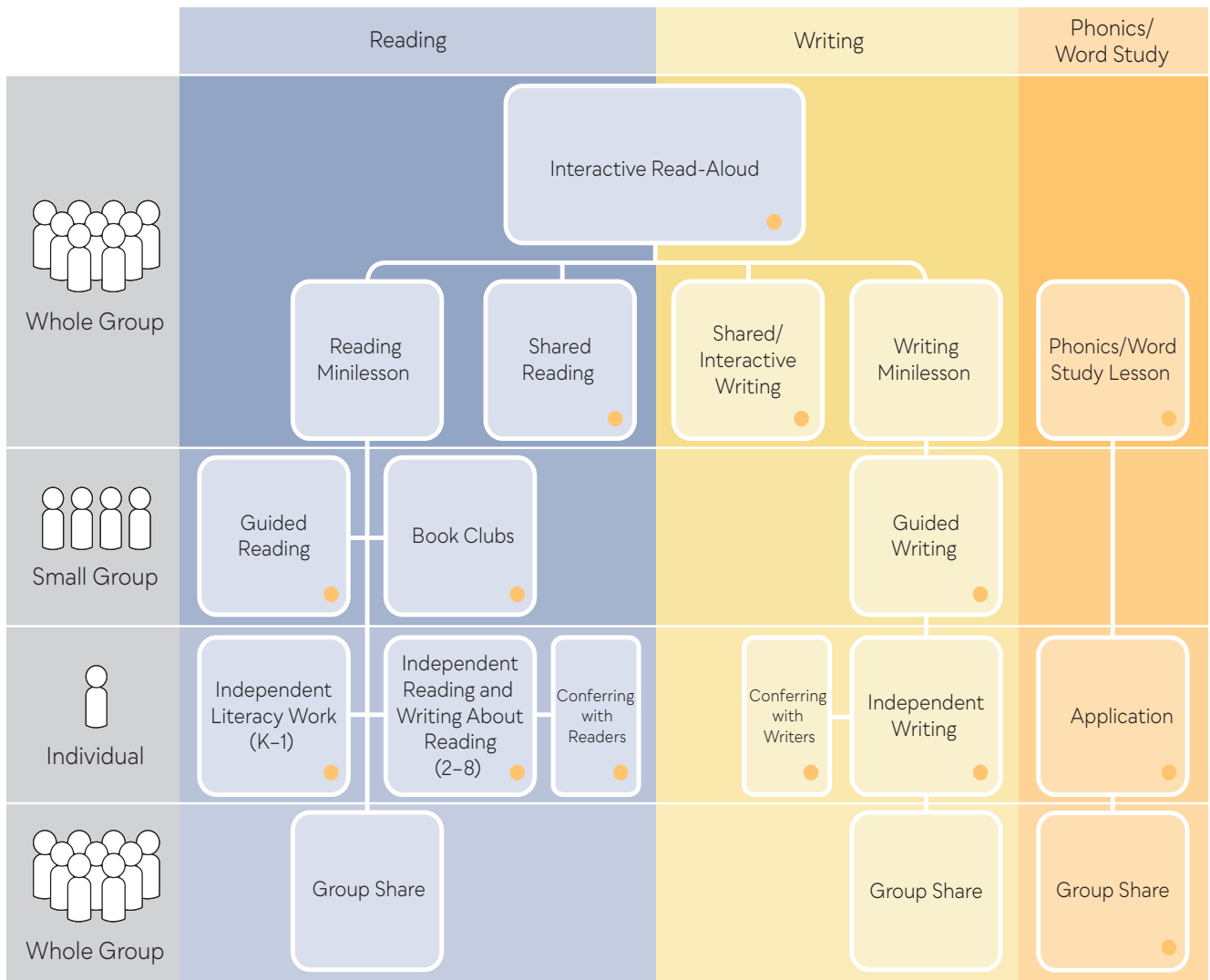
Educators should articulate and actively pursue their values. Establish common understandings and language that bring clarity and coherence to the teaching and learning of literacy throughout the school. They should align assessments, curriculum, instructional practices and materials, intervention, and professional learning to achieve their literacy goals. They should ground literacy learning in a common understanding of how literacy develops in children over time to ensure equitable literacy opportunities for every child in the school. A culture of collaboration is established when educators view themselves as members of a collaborative professional community with common expectations for themselves, their colleagues, and their students. When teachers work in a culture of clarity, transparency, respect, and collegiality, student outcomes improve dramatically.

6. How can schools prepare for a systematic approach to literacy education?

A systems approach requires educators to get on the same page. This does not mean that every teacher is literally on the same page of a textbook at the same time, but rather that every teacher makes instructional decisions based on a shared vision and a set of core values. Let your values form the backbone of your decisions as a school community, and set instructional goals for all children that reinforce these values.

A successful, coherent approach to language and literacy learning is built on an understanding of how children develop as readers, writers, and language users. A systems approach is reflected in the instructional design and in each setting of responsive literacy teaching—whole group, small group, and individual—across different instructional contexts.

A DESIGN FOR RESPONSIVE LITERACY TEACHING



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7. *There are certainly many to talk about, but what are the most critical elements of literacy instruction that every school leader needs to know?*

The quality of literacy education in a school depends on educators' collective responsibility for ensuring high literacy outcomes for every child and teachers' stance toward continuous professional learning.

“Achieving substantial school-wide growth is possible if a community of educators is willing to undertake the journey together.”

— Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

There are many areas of teacher expertise every school leader needs to know, but we believe these four are essential in achieving coherence in a school's design for literacy learning:

1. An understanding of the reading process and a clear vision of proficiency in reading, writing, and talking about texts
2. A repertoire of techniques for ongoing observation and assessment to capture the precise literacy behaviors of children
3. A deep knowledge of texts and their demands on readers as they develop a reading processing system
4. A solid expertise in implementing a range of research-based instructional practices for whole-group, small-group, and individual learning opportunities

We encourage school leaders to take the temperature of the culture in their school. The expansion of professional capacity through fostering teacher leadership and teamwork within the school will directly enhance the instructional excellence provided to each child. Professional learning must be a part of the fabric of the school culture, and the materials used must serve the vision, not drive the teaching.

8. *As the tides of literacy education continue to shift, how do schools maintain their equilibrium?*

As educators, we will continue to see mandates and areas of emphasis come and go. Remain steadfast to your vision and values.

Rely on evidence from observable reading and writing behaviors to guide your moment-to-moment teaching decisions and ground your literacy instruction in a common understanding of how literacy develops in children over time. Doing so will enable you not only to maintain equilibrium, but to build professional capacity and expertise, and to be equipped to navigate shifting literacy mandates without compromise to your vision and values.



Irene C. Fountas is Professor at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts where she directs the Center for Reading Recovery and Literacy Collaborative. As a former classroom teacher and literacy

specialist, she works with a team to conduct field-based research and provide professional development to school leaders, literacy coaches, classroom teachers, and interventionists. She is the recipient of the Greater Boston Council and the International Reading Association's Celebrate Literacy Award and was named the first recipient of the Marie M. Clay Endowed Chair. She publishes resources for comprehensive literacy programs that quickly become staples for literacy instruction across the country.



Gay Su Pinnell is Professor Emeritus in the School of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. She has extensive experience in classroom teaching and field-based research and in developing comprehensive approaches to literacy education. She received

the International Reading Association's Albert J. Harris Award for research in reading difficulties, the Ohio Governor's Award, and the Charles A. Dana Foundation Award for her contributions to the field of literacy education, and most recently, she was awarded The Ohio State University Alumni Association's Alumni Medalist Award. She is a member of the Reading Hall of Fame.