

# The Fountas and Pinnell Story

We share a long history of writing books and materials that are research-based and practical for teachers to use. We believe that teacher expertise is at the heart of student achievement and have always wanted teachers to be able to use our books as professional teaching guides, referring to them frequently as they work with children. We have worked hard to create resources that enable teachers to root instruction in rationales and to meet the needs of each child as a unique learner.

The publications of *The Continuum of Literacy Learning*, the *Benchmark Assessment Systems 1 and 2*, and the *Leveled Literacy Intervention Systems (K–12)* are the result of over two decades of our research and practical work with teachers. Our work is grounded in our own classroom teaching, but we have had the pleasure of working with many teachers, from kindergarten through high school, as well as to participate in research projects and to read the research of others.

In the early 1990s both of us had been working in *Reading Recovery*® (early intervention involving one-to-one tutoring) and also with comprehensive approaches that involved professional development and leadership training for classroom teachers and in-classroom literacy coaches, as well as small group interventions for helping struggling readers. We found that comprehensive plans lead to higher achievement when classroom and intervention teachers worked together as a coherent, cohesive team.

As we wrote for teachers at different grade levels, we thought about the developmental span of literacy and language development. Irene had already been working to create the *F & P Text Level Gradient*™, and we refined this tool and published it for the first time in *Guided Reading*. But we continued to explore just what made one book easier or harder for readers and what systems could guide the teaching that would lead each reader forward.

When we began writing *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency, K–8* we intended to include an appendix of developmental continua. We closely analyzed the text characteristics and detailed specific behaviors and understandings to notice, teach, and support for each level, A to Z. That led us to create our first continua, for guided reading. But if teachers and administrators were to create comprehensive systems, they would need more continua. This led us to create the fully elaborated *Continuum of Literacy Learning, K–8*.



Fountas & Pinnell  
LITERACY™

ELEVATING TEACHER EXPERTISE

“Our commitment  
is to develop the  
expertise of teachers.”

*Irene C. Fountas* is a professor at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She has been a classroom teacher, language arts specialist, and consultant in school districts across the nation and abroad. She is the recipient of the Greater Boston Council and the International Reading Association's Celebrate Literacy Award. Currently, she directs field-based literacy research projects and the Literacy Collaborative at Lesley University. She continues to publish 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. She is a member of the Reading Hall of Fame.

We then addressed the need for a reliable tool that would help teachers identify a student's development along our continuum. So we designed, produced, and tested our *Benchmark Assessment System 1* (Levels A–N) and 2 (Levels L–Z) which accurately assess independent and instructional level skills of students relative to the *F & P Text Level Gradient*™.

We thought constantly about those students who were having difficulty meeting the curriculum goals. What kind of—and what level of— instruction would they need? For many years, while we had been implementing a range of interrelated practices in classrooms, we also worked with teachers to provide supplementary small group interventions for those students who were struggling. We decided to systematize our supplementary work by designing a small group intervention that would be highly structured and sequenced, intensive, and highly engaging for students. We called it *Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI)* because it was based on the work we had done on the continuum and it allowed teachers to make highly intentional teaching moves based on the F&P Text Level Gradient™.

In developing *LLI*, we persuaded Heinemann to do something they had not attempted before—to create and publish original children's books. At the same time, we designed a researched-based framework for intervention lessons and began to try out our intervention with teachers and children. As we observed the high level of student success we knew we must make the intervention available to more teachers and children.

Once we started building the *LLI* system, we talked with teachers and tried to include everything they would need—beautiful full-color titles on nonfiction and fiction topics; high-quality take home books to support home reading; student folders; writing books; home and school materials to extend learning; ongoing professional development through the included video and the professional book *When Readers Struggle; a Prompting Guide*; a data management system, and resources conveniently accessible online that would allow teachers to quickly print out all the materials they would need for lessons. Today, the seven *LLI* systems spanning levels A–Z offer over 1000 effective, systematic lessons based on over 900 original, captivating books.

As we look at our work as a whole, we sometimes feel we were working on one long publication over many years. Our professional books, and our assessment and intervention systems make a cohesive and coherent set of resources that make teaching transformative. All our our thinking has come together in ways which we know will not only help teachers raise the literacy achievement of their students, but also elevate their own teaching expertise.