



A Summary of the Research Base for FOUNTAS & PINNELL CLASSROOM™



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In this paper, we review the research base for *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™*, a cohesive, multi-text approach to literacy instruction for all students in grades PreK–6.

◆ Definition

Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™ (FPC) is designed to support whole-group, small-group, and independent learning opportunities including: interactive read-aloud, reading minilessons, shared reading, phonics, spelling, and word study, guided reading, book clubs, and independent reading. *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* is rich with authentic texts, lessons or conferring cards, minilessons, and professional learning tools for a systematic, transformative approach to literacy instruction.

◆ Development

The development of *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* rests on more than 25 years of classroom experience and incorporates leading thinking around literacy instruction, as well as the authors' own research about how literacy develops in children over time. FPC is deeply rooted in decades of research-based professional books—a solid foundation of theory written in a practical voice for teachers and school leaders. All of Fountas and Pinnell's curriculum systems were developed from this research and are intricately connected to and complement one another for true instructional coherence. Heinemann is THE ONLY publisher of Fountas and Pinnell's collective and comprehensive literacy work (complete and cohesive classroom literacy system, intervention systems, assessment systems, a professional book base, and professional learning opportunities). In addition, FPC incorporates teaching and learning approaches that are strongly supported by the research we describe in this summary.

◆ Underpinning Principles Supported by Research

After deep examination of the research on literacy learning, Fountas and Pinnell have identified six underpinning principles for effective classroom literacy instruction for all students in grades PreK–6. These essential principles inform and inhabit the design of *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™*. For each, we present a brief description of the FPC features and list supporting research.

1. **Instructional Coherence:** While the benefits of the whole are inherent in each of the parts, *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* is designed as a coherent system. Each instructional context in the system is reciprocally connected to the others, improving student outcomes and creating equitable literacy opportunities for all students.

FPC Features

FPC is a comprehensive classroom system built around *The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum* to help educators use lessons and texts that meet students where they are and move them forward toward proficiency. *The Literacy Continuum* serves as the curriculum, providing an instructional anchor for every lesson, goal, and book in FPC. When everyone in the school uses the same literacy tools/language as they move from observation to instruction, a common conversation occurs. Students' literacy progress becomes the shared responsibility of every teacher, coach, and administrator in the school community. Based on *The Literacy Continuum*, colleagues can discuss common expectations for student achievement, and all students benefit from coherent, efficient, and responsive instruction.

In addition, the instructional contexts within *FPC* are designed to work in concert with one another. *The Literacy Continuum* represents the shared measure of what proficiency looks like at each grade and text level. For example, Reading Minilessons focus on goals taken right from this document, using the *FPC* Interactive Read-Aloud and Shared Reading books as mentor texts.

Research Base

- Successful school systems have emerged by eliminating incoherence, mismatched goals, and competing cultures and creating a culture of reflective practice that fuels growth and collaboration, fosters capacity building, encourages collective responsibility, promotes collegial generosity, and nurtures a focused, cohesive direction that benefits everyone. A piecemeal approach to literacy education will not meet the needs of all students [Fullan and Quinn 2016].
- With common language and common goals . . . students believe they can learn, grow, and make their lives better [Dweck 2006].
- The greatest influence on student progression in learning is having highly expert, inspired and passionate teachers and school leaders working together to maximize the effect of their teaching on all students in their care” [Hattie 2015, p 2].

2. **Responsive Teaching:** The moment-to-moment instructional decisions that teachers make, based on their observations and analysis of students’ learning behaviors, are honored and supported by *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™*. In this system, you teach individual readers, not a program. Consider each lesson a blueprint for instruction to best support the learners in the classroom.

FPC Features

FPC is designed to build teacher expertise, providing opportunities for educators to get better at their craft by using the lesson resources and materials. As such, there is

no prescribed static scope and sequence in order to leave room for teachers to respond to the student’s individual needs, relying on *The Literacy Continuum*, which describes with precision the characteristics of texts and observable behaviors and understandings of proficient readers, writers, and language users that a teacher may choose to notice, teach, and support. Regular assessment is integrated into each context so teachers can meet students where they are and move them forward. In addition, there are opportunities for teachers to talk with students in every context in order to evaluate their fluency and comprehension of the text.

Research Base

- Teachers must continuously observe and assess reading behaviors to identify areas of difficulty and tailor instruction for individuals, groups, and whole classes [Bell and Dolainski 2012; IES 2016; NCTE 2013; Denton (nd)].
- Continuous monitoring enables teachers to guide in-the-moment teaching as well as plan teaching activities and select materials, such as reading level books [Hougen 2014; ILA 2017; Clarke, Paul, Smith, Snowling and Hulme 2017].
- Researchers also recommend matching readers with texts of an appropriate difficulty level that allow for fluent reading while presenting areas of challenge [Allington 2013; Toyama, Hiebert, and Pearson 2017].
- Teachers must carefully assess and monitor reading behaviors to (a) identify areas of strength and difficulty and (b) differentiate instruction to meet areas of challenge [Bell and Dolainski 2012; Institute of Education Sciences (IES) 2010; IES 2016; National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) 2013].
- In the equitable classroom, students need culturally proficient teachers [Saphier 2017].

- Although students increase their array of competencies over time, they take “different paths to common outcomes” (Clay 2001, p 6).
- A homogenous curriculum leads to heterogeneous outcomes, and if education systems want homogeneous outcomes, they will need to provide heterogeneous opportunities to learn (Katz and Chard 1989)
- “I know of no evidence that suggests that any curriculum plan that had all children working in the same books all day, all week, all year, ever produced high achievement in all children, or even in most children” (Allington 2001).

3. **Multi-Text Approach:** Books, lots of authentic books, are at the heart of *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™*: exciting books to stir imagination; challenging books to lift every reader; and diverse books to expand readers' knowledge of the world. Every title is carefully crafted or selected to support an instructional context. Every title has a purpose. *FPC* contains five text-based instructional contexts to engage students in reading, writing, thinking, and talking with varied levels of teacher support.

FPC Features

Hundreds of brand-new original books were created exclusively for *FPC* by a team of talented children's authors and illustrators under the direction of Fountas and Pinnell. Each book was carefully written and calibrated to match the text characteristics for Levels A–Z on the F&P Text Level Gradient™ and to support efficient processing and successful comprehension. The very best age-appropriate, grade-appropriate trade books have been hand-selected by Fountas and Pinnell to promote the joy of reading, expand vocabulary and content knowledge, and nurture the ability to think, talk, and write about texts. In total, *FPC* features nearly 4,000 titles across grades PreK–6.

Research Base

- Exposing students to varied texts plays a key role in motivating students to read (Bell and Dolainski 2012; Hougen 2014; NCTE 2012; Fixsen 2012).
- Scholars recommend teachers allow students some level of choice in selecting texts as they are more likely to read when interested in certain topics and genres (e.g., magazines and social media articles) (IRA (now ILA) 2012; Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman 2011; ILA 2016).
- Reading a variety of genres helps students understand text structure and other patterns in ways that increase comprehension (Donovan and Smolkin 2002).
- Readers are diverse in their learning; they vary in the attention they give to different kinds of information. Their reading is shaped by the texts that they experience day after day, and it also depends on the funds of knowledge they bring to those texts (Moll 1992).
- “Text sets” (Harste, Short, and Burke 1998) are a way of organizing and connecting books that help students build understanding from book to book.
- The more successful readers are and the more texts they read, the better readers they become (Stanovich 1986).
- “I study books with students so that they are able to stand on the shoulders of writers, to learn directly from them when I am not around. . . . The texts are just full of curriculum potential” (Ray 2007, p 147).
- Studies that expand the volume of reading have demonstrated general comprehension improvements (Allington and McGill-Franzen 2009).

4. **Student Inquiry:** Children are curious. *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* allows children's intellectual curiosity to propel authentic learning and discovery. As children think across texts, they pursue lines of inquiry that interest and engage them as learners and build knowledge of different topics and themes across a range of disciplines.

FPC Features

Student choice is at the center of *FPC*. There are so many different kinds of books and so many diverse topics for students to get curious about, and *FPC* provides ample opportunity for children to pursue those interests. High-quality Independent Reading libraries allow students to choose books they are interested in based on topic, genre, author, or illustrator. Book Clubs allow children the opportunity to discuss engaging books with their peers. Shared Reading and Interactive Read-Aloud build shared literary knowledge and offer a chance for students to work together to pursue understanding. Reading Minilessons put students in a context of natural collaboration within which they are learning to be citizens of the classroom. Minilessons also engage students in inquiry that leads to the discovery and understanding of a general principle they can apply to their own reading or writing about reading. Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study lessons allow students to perceive working with words as *word play*, creating deeper interest in and engagement with language and how it works. Books are strongly related by topic, theme, or author/illustrator in Interactive Read-Aloud and Book Clubs, making it possible for students to look across several texts and construct deeper understandings than they would by encountering one text after another in a random way.

Research Base

- Best practice reading research advocates the use of dynamic and collaborative literacy practices to motivate students and facilitate actions to enhance reading skills and build knowledge [NCTE 2013; NCTE 2012].
- Activities where students work collaboratively, with texts of different

genres, or discuss texts with teachers are particularly important for increasing student interest in reading and building reading competencies needed to learn from texts [Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO] & National Governors Association [NGA] [nd]; Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman 2011].

- “The fluent reader is demonstrating comprehension, taking cues from the text, and taking pleasure in finding the right tempo for the text” [Newkirk 2011, p 1].
- Children have to have a chance to engage in meaningful work that they can feel is a genuine contribution. “Creating community means giving children the power to care” [Charney 2002, p 22].
- Children, just like adults, learn better in a supportive environment in which they can risk trying out new strategies and concepts and stretching themselves intellectually [Johnston 2004, p 65].
- “Inquiry also requires a change in how we teach: If we now see children’s learning differently, then we must see ourselves, these children’s teachers, differently as well. If the child is not the receiver of delivered curriculum, then we cannot be the deliverers of it. . . . Above all, the teacher is the inquirer, inevitably providing—living—a demonstration of inquiry’s way of turning toward puzzling phenomena and toward one another in exploring them” [Lindfors 1999, p 117].
- “A sense of agency empowers learners. It is the notion that gives children the mindset that if they act and act strategically, they can accomplish their goals” [Johnston 2004, p 29].

5. **Language-Based:** When children talk, they communicate and refine their ideas, reveal their understandings and perspectives, and make meaning from texts and experiences. Reading is thinking grounded in text. Students’ talk reflects their thinking.

FPC Features

Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™ is rich with robust opportunities for varied talk structures within each instructional context. You'll find students turning and talking to a peer during Interactive Read-Aloud, Reading Minilessons, Guided Reading, Book Clubs, Shared Reading, and lessons in any of the disciplines. This kind of talk structure allows students to share their thinking, to learn the thinking of others, and to refine and sharpen their ideas, which in turn enriches whole-class discussion. Independent Reading conferences provide an opportunity for teachers to have genuine conversations with students about their work and identity as readers. Book Clubs provide an authentic opportunity for students to apply many of the literacy behaviors and understandings that they have learned through other instructional contexts. The experience of exchanging ideas with peers and co-constructing richer, deeper understandings of texts is genuinely rewarding for students.

Research Base

- Research indicates that collaborative, talk-based reading practices, such as teacher-led and small-group discussions, serve to enhance students' reading abilities, as well as provide feedback to teachers about areas of strengths and weaknesses in students' reading [NCTE 2013; NCTE 2012].
- Scholars document that student talk indicates simultaneous, conscious, and unconscious processes that take place during reading associated with thinking within, beyond, and about the text [IES 2008].
- Student talk is particularly important for facilitating and enhancing metacognitive and deep level comprehension processes needed for understanding. Talk-based activities are optimal for having students self-explain texts, as well as activating prior knowledge, making predictions, generating questions, and summarizing text contents [CCSSO and NGA [nd]; National Reading Technical Assistance Center 2010; Denton [nd]; Bunce, Gillispie, and Wegner 2011].
- The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts [Common Core State Standards Initiative 2010] require that students be able to comprehend as well as critique and cite specific evidence when interpreting a text. They also require students to demonstrate independence.
- Through activities such as discussions, readers engage more deeply with texts and use higher-level text-processing practices [e.g., predicting and making connections with prior knowledge] needed to read successfully and learn effectively in content areas [CCSSO and NGA 2010; Denton [nd]; International Dyslexia Association 2010].
- "People who know everything are silent; people who know nothing are silent. In between, there is talk. Literacy floats on a sea of talk" [Britton 1970].
- "Effective teaching-learning activities were ones in which students had to engage in social interaction and cognitive collaboration" [Cambourne 2001, p 132].
- Students do need to engage in reflection, which can be a solitary activity, but they also need to share their thinking and learning with other students. Learning is social and meaningful and engages students' intellect [Fountas and Pinnell 2017]
- If we harness the established power of children's oral language to literacy from the beginning, so that literacy knowledge and oral language processing power move forward together, linked and patterned from the start, that will surely be more effective [Clay 2001, p 95].

6. **Teacher Expertise:** Whether you are a new teacher or one with years of experience, *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* both relies upon and contributes to your expertise as a teacher. Your knowledge of your students informs responsive teaching. The extensive professional learning tools woven into the system help you to develop your craft, strengthen instructional decision-making, and deliver high-impact literacy instruction.

FPC Features

Transformative professional learning underpins *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™*—essential instructional tools, practical professional books, motivational professional development, and insightful assessment—for high-impact literacy teaching. The FPC system is designed to create a sense of community among teachers who are concerned not only about what students learn but also about how and why they learn. There are numerous professional learning opportunities to further develop the teaching craft and foster a climate of collegiality and community, including school-based seminars with Fountas & Pinnell-trained consultants, multi-day institutes designed and delivered by Fountas and Pinnell, and recorded webinar series that include chat, video demonstrations, and additional resources to support learning.

Research Base

- Teachers must be equipped with respect to assessing reading behaviors, identifying and monitoring struggling readers, and implementing best practice approaches to a wide range of students (Lovejoy, Szekely, and Wat 2013; ILA 2017; ILA and NCTE 2017), including English language learners and students with chronic and/or severe reading difficulties (Hatcher, Hulme, Miles, Carrol, Hatcher, Gibbs, Smith, Bowyer-Crane, and Snowling 2006; Clarke, Paul, Smith, Snowling, & Hulme 2017; Allor, Mathes, Roberts, Cheatham, and Otaiba 2014).
- Investigations associated with reading program efficacy suggest that those providing teachers with extensive professional learning tools and development in best practice reading instruction have substantially greater research support than those focused on curriculum or technology alone (Slavin, Cheung, Groff, and Lake 2008).
- Converging evidence also indicates that teachers benefit from extensive, ongoing professional learning (NCTE 2013; Lovejoy, Szekely, and Wat 2013).
- A culture of reflective practice fuels mutual energy, fosters teacher agency, encourages acts of leadership by individuals, and promotes the kind of generous teamwork that benefits everyone (Fullan and Quinn 2016).
- The work of Bryk et al. (2015) on learning to improve has presented a learning process in which schools get better at getting better. As teacher expertise increases and success within the school/system occurs, student learning accelerates.
- Reaching our high goals will require thinking about how the school functions as an interdependent system of initiatives that operates within a culture that supports continuous study and improvement (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu 2015).
- You don't have to be a bad teacher to get better (McKay 2012).
- Your language is also a critical area of your expertise. Through precise language, you facilitate readers' problem-solving power and their ability to initiate effective actions as they become self-regulating readers (Clay 2001).

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