

WHAT F&P HAVE “CLARIFIED” AND WHAT THEY HAVEN’T

The Fountas and Pinnell leveling system is designed to help teachers match students with books they can read. Period. Whether or not it actually does that will be covered in the [next blog](#), but first...

Districts across the country use Fountas and Pinnell materials in ways contrary to the creators’ intent, which is a problem separate from the materials themselves.

“It is our belief that levels have no place in classroom libraries, in school libraries, in public libraries, or on report cards. That was certainly not our intention that levels be used in these ways.” - Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

“Telling students to choose by ‘level’ is not an authentic way to select books to read independently.” - Fountas and Pinnell



“In our view, the level of a text has no place on a report card. Although parents do need to know their child’s progress in relation to grade-level expectations, text levels are too narrow to measure.” - Fountas and Pinnell

Habits of Work					4
Completes Homework					
Completes Classwork					
Seeks Help and Uses Feedback to Improve Work					
Organizes Materials					

End of Year Reading Level Expectations					
K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
A B C D	E F G H I J	K L M	N O P	Q R S	T U V W

READING			T1	T2	T3
Reading Assessment Level			T	U	V

On-Demand W
Narrative, In
Writing Struc
Writing Devel

Fountas and Pinnell have spoken out against these practices because they are so widespread.

They also say:

“Most administrators we’ve worked with understand the harmful effects of sorting children into groups based on their abilities—labeling children in this way is detrimental to their self-esteem, their engagement, and, ultimately, their progress.” - Fountas and Pinnell

If this is true, Fountas and Pinnell have worked with very few administrators; [many principals require teachers](#) to ensure their students “know their level” and select “just right books” from labeled book bins. Fountas and Pinnell attempt to explain the problems of practice are not due to the way their materials are marketed (books sold with pre-labeled plastic book bins) or their assessment system (which assigns students levels), but rather people’s failure to see the complexity of their leveling system.

“Often, district leaders who mandate labeling books by level make those requirements because they may not understand the complexity behind a reading level. The truth is that children can read books on a wide variety of levels, and in fact, they experience many different levels of books across the day.” - Fountas and Pinnell

We don’t presume to know whether Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell have changed their minds about their own leveling system and its use or if, all along, their publishers have been marketing materials with their names in a way that runs contrary to their intentions. No matter the reason, what’s important is that schools that label reader and book bins and sort children into groups based on F&P levels are, according to Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell themselves, engaging in practices that are “detrimental to [children’s] self-esteem, their engagement and, ultimately, their progress.”

Recommended Reading:

[Fountas and Pinnell Say Librarians Should Guide Readers by Interest, Not Level](#)

And if you have a copy of: *Leveled Books K-8: Matching Texts to Readers for Effective Teaching*, Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, 2006

You may want to reference this section:

Much more...
gies across a greater variety of genres are required
of advanced readers. Again, the point is not simply
to move up the gradient but to expand the stu-
dents' breadth of experience with different types
of texts and a range of content, authors, formats,
and genres.

You will want to be cautious about using texts
at levels that are more than about a year beyond
the student's present grade level. Texts at grade lev-

In our view, the level of a text has no place on a
report card. Although parents do need to know their
child's progress in relation to grade-level expecta-
tions, text levels are too narrow a measure. Parents
have not been taught to understand the complexities
involved in analyzing and selecting texts for different
purposes and may see a text level too simplistically.
We advise you to help parents understand whether

THE TEXT GRADIENT IS . . .	THE TEXT GRADIENT IS NOT . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ A tool for matching books to readers◆ A guide for making good instructional decisions◆ A tool to consider in relation to readers' abilities and experience◆ A support for teachers as they work with readers◆ A support for teachers in analyzing the demands of a text on readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ A complete "reading program"◆ A set of books that every student must read◆ A rigid sequence that defines reading progress◆ A way of labeling readers◆ A label or grade on a report card◆ A list to send to parents◆ A way to organize a school or classroom library from which students choose books

Figure 2-2. What the Text Gradient Is and Is Not

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There's no denying it; Fountas and Pinnell have taken a strong stand against the use of visibly A-Z-leveled classroom libraries.

Here's what they haven't done:

Changed their position on the three-cueing system.

