

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District

Office Of Instruction

October | 2021



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10/4 to 10-15

MAP Growth PD

10/8 – Responsive Planning for
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8:30–10:30 grades K–3

12:15–2:15 grades 4–10

Reading Fluency K–2

10/25 – 11/5

BAS

9/27 – 10/15

K: 10/25 – 11/5

Literacy Collaborative PD

10/28

Parent Teacher Conference K–7

10/19 & 10/21

Holidays & Professional Days

10/8 – All Cape Professional day – No School

10/11 – Columbus Day – No School

10/31 – Halloween

Dr. Wornum Cultural Proficiency PD

10/13 4–5PM Keynote (All)

10/19 12–2PM grades 6–12



Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell Weigh In on the Literacy Debate

“Teachers, More Than Programs, Make for Great Reading Instruction” by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell in Education Week, September 8, 2021

In this article in Education Week, literacy gurus Irene Fountas (Lesley University) and Gay Su Pinnell (Ohio State University) say that over the decades, the pendulum has swung back and forth on the “right” way to teach reading. At one pole are rigidly scripted phonics programs that can take the interest and joy out of reading; at the other are romantic approaches that expect children to figure out reading for themselves while absorbed in pleasurable literacy experiences. “Any approach that overemphasizes one aspect of literacy over another,” say Fountas and Pinnell, “will likely neglect other important areas.”

They don’t argue with the data and research put forward in the current “science of reading” debate. Classroom and laboratory research have clearly established the importance of phonics and phonemic awareness. However, Fountas and Pinnell believe the research “has not identified any particular kind of phonics instruction to be better than others, nor has it identified a need to use a particular kind of text.” In the primary grades, they believe, phonics instruction needs to be part of a comprehensive set of related practices. Students should apply what they learn in reading and writing continuous text, with well-trained teachers differentiating to meet individual students’ needs. “The responsibility to the child belongs to the teacher and not a ‘program,’” they say.

On the issue of equity, Fountas and Pinnell say today’s educators serve “a highly diverse student population, including many children who come to school with disadvantages. Individuals have different needs and learn in different ways. There is no quick fix, nor is there one way that all children must learn. We do see patterns in children’s literacy development, but expert teachers tune in to individual needs and strengths and thoughtfully adapt the way they teach. This is responsive teaching. These small but constant instructional decisions make teaching powerful enough to make a difference.”

Over several decades, Fountas and Pinnell have developed – and passionately advocate for – a comprehensive approach that orchestrates all the key components of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, accuracy, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and student engagement. While this approach has been labeled “balanced literacy,” Fountas and Pinnell don’t believe the term is descriptive and urge educators to steer clear of labels. “We aim to provide instruction that is deeply connected,” they say, “so that school makes sense to children, and they learn how written language is connected to spoken language.”

Fountas and Pinnell believe there’s plenty of common ground even among those who disagree on instructional methods. They suggest these precepts:

Too many children aren’t reading proficiently in the early grades, with serious implications for their futures.

- Strong teaching of reading and writing is essential to equitable outcomes.
- Very few children can learn to read and write by themselves. “The great majority of students need good instruction,” say Fountas and Pinnell, “and all students can benefit from it.”
- A strong primary-grade literacy program must include daily, explicit phonics and word study, and teachers need solid mastery of how our language works – and how to teach it.
- The ultimate goal is students who are “competent, voluminous, voluntary readers who continue to learn from and use literacy all their lives.”

“Our message today,” conclude Fountas and Pinnell, “is that – especially at the start of another challenging school year – if we work together and not against each other, we stand a better chance of ensuring that all children have the chance to live a literate life.”

Helping Students Do Better with Mathematics Word Problems

“Making Word Problems Meaningful” by Melissa Gallagher, Laura Ellis, and Travis Weiland in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, August 2021 (Vol. 114, #8, pp. 580-590); the authors can be reached at magallagher2@uh.edu, lellis@capeelizabetschools.org, and tweiland@uh.edu.

In this article in *Teaching Mathematics: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, Melissa Gallagher and Travis Weiland (University of Houston) and math teacher Laura Ellis say that on math standardized tests, many students are proficient with the computation items but do less well with word problems. The authors believe this happens because:

- Students dive into word problems without understanding the situation presented.
- Students are taught to rely on key words to decide which operations to use.
- Students plug in the numbers and solve without making sense of the problem.



Another issue is that the word problems in tests tend to have low cognitive demand and don’t engage students in lively mathematical thinking. Gallagher, Ellis, and Weiland believe students learn reading comprehension strategies in their ELA classes and should be explicitly encouraged to apply those strategies to math problems: visualizing, retelling, making connections, and asking questions. One difference: the authors suggest initially presenting word problems without numbers and without the solve-the-problem question at the end, then having students work in pairs, introducing the full problems, and finally having a whole-class discussion of effective strategies. Here’s how the reading strategies are applied:

- Visualizing – Students create a mental image as they read the problem – a picture of what’s going on, and a schematic representation of the math involved. “When teaching students to use visualization in mathematics,” say the authors, “teachers should encourage students to make a movie in their minds and to draw either pictorial or schematic representations of the situation.”
- Retelling – Students recap the main ideas of the problem with a partner, in their own words, including as many details as possible (but not the numbers or the final question).
- Making connections – As they retell the word problem, students make personal and mathematical connections. An example of each: “My mom and I feed the ducks at the lake!” and “There are two types of ducks, but they’re both part of the whole group of ducks.” Making connections may be challenging if students lack personal connections to the math problem.
- Asking questions – Students use questions to clarify what’s going on and make connections before they start to do the math. “Inviting students to ask their own questions about the problem,” say Gallagher, Ellis, and Weiland, “positions them as problem posers and provides them more agency to solve the problem once the question is posed.” The goal of all this, they conclude, is “to get students talking about word problems and thinking about them deeply.” The authors don’t recommend having students memorize and recapitulate the steps; research has shown this to be an ineffective strategy. Rather, the process of visualizing, retelling, making connections, and asking questions should become part of the classroom culture, so students can tackle new word problems without the need for prompts.

Words of Wisdom for Rookie Teachers

“The Best Advice for New Teachers, in 5 Words or Less” by Hayley Hardison in Education Week, August 18, 2021

In this Education Week article, Hayley Hardison reports the responses to her outreach via Twitter for advice for beginning teachers in five words or less. A selection:

- Start smiling on day one.
- Relationships matter more than anything.
- Enjoy your students, be yourself.
- Make them believe they can.
- Find teammates that inspire you.
- Find a mentor to trust.
- Always ask for help.
- Classroom procedures are top priority!
- Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Direct, explicit instruction works best.
- Monitor and adjust.
- Protect your mental health/wellbeing.
- Get the vaccine!
- Have an identity beyond work.
- Leave no later than 6pm.
- It is all about balance!
- Give yourself grace every day.
- Embrace the chaos. Enjoy it.
- The first version isn't perfect.
- Embrace not knowing everything.
- Teachers are still students.
- You'll get better.
- Never forget why you began.

