In 2002, the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education recommended that children with disabilities should first be considered general education students and that a model of prevention, as opposed to a model of failure, be utilized to rectify a number of long-standing problems. For example, using the discrepancy model as a qualification for some specialized services prompted a wait for documented failure before providing the essential services that learners needed. In addition, a disproportionate number of minority students as well as English language learners were identified as learning disabled (Reading Today, International Reading Association).

Response to Intervention (RTI) builds on the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education by providing for strong classroom teaching combined with defined levels of intervention at every grade level that are carefully planned and monitored. The basic intent of RTI is to provide the intensive instruction that struggling readers need to catch up with their grade-level achieving peers before they are referred for special education services.

In 2004, with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), federal funding became available to support RTI. As a result of this reauthorization, educators are no longer required to apply the discrepancy model as a qualification for specialized services. Instead, educators can engage the creation of the layers of intervention that provide support immediately when struggling readers need it. Local education agencies (LEAs) are now authorized to use alternative models of identification to identify children who need more help, and they can address difficulties immediately using research based interventions.

Although schools design their own unique plans for RTI, they generally use instructional support in several layers or tiers. Tier 1 consists of effective classroom instruction with differentiated teaching to meet student needs. Tier 2 consists of a range of short term interventions—small group and sometimes individual—that take place in the classroom or as pull-out programs. Tier 3 consists of highly intensive longer term interventions by specialist teachers. Often, plans include even more than three tiers of instruction at each grade level.

Now, work from Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, long known for their lifetime of research and descriptions of excellent practice, provides powerful tools for meeting the challenges of RTI: (1) The Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) designed to identify students who need more intensive intervention both in the classroom and from specialist teachers; and (2) a carefully designed intervention system to support struggling readers called Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI). LLI is usually implemented as a Tier 2 intervention but its flexible design allows for it to be used as part of a Tier 3 intervention or to be used for short periods of time as part of the Tier 1 design.

The combination of LLI with BAS is a perfect fit for your RTI plan for many reasons:

- High-quality classroom programs have been and continue to be supported by Fountas and Pinnell professional development books and seminars.

- BAS, including The Continuum of Literacy Learning, enables teachers to closely monitor students’ reading growth and to plan an instructional program as well. The continuum is the framework for both excellent classroom teaching and tiers of intervention.

- Utilizing The Continuum of Literacy Learning as a common assessment and planning tool enables all members of the RTI team to work in coordinated manner. Classroom teaching and layers of intervention can be aligned using this comprehensive description of language and literacy learning from school entry at preschool or kindergarten through grade eight.

- LLI was designed by Fountas and Pinnell to provide the systematic, sequenced, intensive instruction to help struggling readers make the accelerated progress they need.
Some important aspects of RTI are: (1) universal screening and progress monitoring; (2) alignment of instructional approaches; (3) selecting reading texts at appropriate levels to provide opportunities for learning; and (4) providing coordinated tiers of instruction and intervention that includes small group intervention to address reading difficulties. Heinemann’s *LLI* and *BAS* address each of these important factors.

[1] **Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring**

An RTI approach demands assessment that can inform language and literacy instruction meaningfully. In addition, there must be a “comprehensive, systemic approach to language and literacy assessment and instruction.” (International Reading Association)

Using an established gradient of text (A to Z), *BAS* involves a reliable and rigorously applied tool to determine reliable instructional and independent readings levels for students. The assessment yields detailed records of students’ behavior while reading levels of texts as well as a range of additional assessments that address critical areas such as phonemic awareness, letter identification, word reading, and vocabulary.

*BAS* enables school systems to ensure that they have done a thorough job of screening for children who need intervention. It can be used three or four times during the school year to determine appropriate reading levels and it serves as both formative and summative assessment. As part of *LLI*, teachers conduct regularly scheduled ongoing assessment assuring data to monitor progress. For districts that use another screening device, such as a standardized test, *BAS* can be used for more in-depth analysis of student reading behaviors.

The next step in the process is to match students’ progress with the comprehensive and detailed layout of descriptions of behaviors and understandings in *The Continuum of Literacy Learning*. This document describes expectations for progress that provide a foundation for the monitoring system in classroom and intervention instruction.

[2] **Alignment of Instructional Approaches**

A hallmark of high quality RTI plans is alignment of goals. Research on pull-out programs suggests that one reason why things haven’t always worked well is a lack of sufficient coordination. (Allington, 1994; Davis & Wilson, 1999 in Shanahan in Fuchs, Fuchs & Vaughn).

Fountas and Pinnell professional books and seminars, *BAS*, *The Continuum of Literacy Learning*, and *LLI* are designed to work together so alignment of precise instructional goals is possible. When all teachers are using the same instructional goals, they are able to implement mutually targeted instruction and avoid the potential confusion for the most vulnerable learners.

*BAS* enables teams to use the evidence data in order to provide the “best and most appropriate response to the students’ needs.” (NASDSE, 2005). For example:

1. In well-designed classroom instruction, teachers use assessment information and *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* to differentiate instruction in a way that meets all students’ needs. (Tier 1)

2. *LLI* provides intensive short-term small group intervention aligned with the essential behaviors and understandings for each level of text A to N. *LLI* also provides intensive, sequenced and structured lessons based on *The Continuum*. These lessons include regular, systematic assessments that provide information for progress monitoring. This short term intervention system can be used in different intensities and/or tiers, depending upon student need.
Fluency Scoring Key

0 | Reads primarily word-by-word with occasional but infrequent or inappropriate phrasing; no smooth or expressive interpretation, irregular pausing, and no attention to author’s meaning or punctuation; no stress or inappropriate stress, and slow rate.

1 | Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- and four-word groups and some word-by-word reading; almost no smooth, expressive interpretation or pausing guided by author’s meaning and punctuation; almost no stress or inappropriate stress, with slow rate most of the time.

2 | Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups; some smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author’s meaning and punctuation; mostly appropriate stress and rate with some slowdowns.

3 | Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrases or word groups; mostly smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author’s meaning and punctuation; appropriate stress and rate with only a few slowdowns.

Reading the Text

- As the children read, prompt for expressive reading of the dialogue and the use of punctuation to guide meaning.
- You may also need to prompt for using word parts to solve words, e.g., “Do you see a part you know?”

Maintaining Fluency

- Demonstrate phrased, fluent oral reading
- Reflect language, syntax, and meaning through phrasing and expression
- Reflect punctuation through appropriate pausing and intonation while reading orally
- Demonstrate appropriate stress on words to reflect the meaning.

Lesson Guide

LLI Green System Lesson Guide, Volume 2

Teach

Listen to me read this. Can you hear my voice go down at the end?
Listen to me read this. Can you hear my voice go up at the question mark?
Listen to me read this. Can you hear how excited my voice sounds?
Listen to me read this. Can you hear how I sound like the characters who are talking?

p. 256, The Continuum of Literacy Learning K-8

p. 471, LLI Green System Lesson Guide, Volume 2

p. 19, Prompting Guide 1

p. 87, Benchmark Assessment Forms Book
Whenever we design an intervention for struggling readers, the single-most critical factor that will determine the success of the effort is matching struggling readers with texts they can actually read with a high level of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Allington, 2009, p.45). O’Connor and colleagues demonstrated that using appropriately difficult texts, books at the students’ reading level, produced substantive reading growth. (Allington, 2009, p.31). If students are working in materials that are too hard for them, it is impossible for them to develop effective strategic processing behaviors. Students need to be operating at an appropriate instructional level in order to make maximum progress.

The sequence of LLI instruction is built on systematic use of a gradient of texts, with specific instructional goals for each level. LLI intervention lessons provide for a unique combination of two kinds of texts:

• Instructional level texts that students can read with strong teacher support help them expand their strategies.

• Independent level texts that students can read easily help them develop fluency and use strategies in a smoothly orchestrated way.

Note how this is demonstrated in the alternating frameworks for LLI lessons.

### Figure 21-10 Alternating Frameworks for Intervention Lessons in Leveled Literacy Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LESSON COMPONENT</th>
<th>APPROXIMATE TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Framework 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Rereading Books</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children reread the two books that have been read in the previous lesson.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Phonics/Word Work</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You teach a phonics principle based on children’s needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reading a New Book</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children read a new book at their <strong>instructional level</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Letter/Word Work</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children work with letters, sounds, or words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Connection</strong></td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You introduce a reading or writing task children can perform independently in the classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home Connection</strong></td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children take home something they can do with a family member: their classroom connection task, another similar task, word cards, etc. They also take home a previously read book.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Framework 2 |                  |
| 1. Rereading Books and Assessment | 5 minutes |
| Children reread the two books that have been read in the previous lesson. You take a Reading Record of one child’s reading of the instructional level text read the day before. |
| 2. Phonics/Word Work | 5 minutes |
| You teach a phonics principle based on children’s needs. The lesson may build on the principle studied the previous day or explore a new one. |
| 3. Writing About Reading | 15 minutes |
| With your support, children write to extend their understanding of the instructional level text they read the day before. |
| 4. Reading a New Book | 5 minutes |
| Children read a new book at an **independent level** (slightly easier than the previous day’s book). |
| **Extra Letter/Word Work** | As time permits. |
| Children work with letters, sounds, or words. |
| **Classroom Connection** | Variable |
| You introduce a reading or writing task children can perform independently in the classroom. |
| **Home Connection** | Variable |
| Children take home something they can do with a family member: their classroom connection task, another similar task, word cards, etc. They also take home a previously read book. |

When Readers Struggle: Teaching That Works, p. 510

Educators can rely on Fountas and Pinnell, the researchers who gave the field the A – Z text gradient that has become the standard for ensuring that texts are appropriate for supporting learning.
Coordinated Tiers of Instruction and Intervention

“The further a student’s reading development falls below the average reading development of students his or her age, the greater the intensity and expertness of reading instruction that will be required to move his or her reading performance into the average range. The only way to create fewer students with limited reading proficiency is to provide those students with more and better reading instruction than that provided to the other students.” (Allington, 2009, p.11) RTI addresses this issue through carefully designed layers of intervention. Heinemann is uniquely positioned to help you construct and implement an RTI plan that is tailored to the needs of your district.

The first tier of RTI is characterized by high quality classroom instruction. For years classroom teachers have systematically designed effective instruction based upon the following Fountas and Pinnell professional books:

- *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing About Reading, K-8*
- *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*
- *Guiding Readers and Writers: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*
- *Interactive Writing: How Language & Literacy Come Together, K-2*
- *The Primary Literacy Video Collection Series of DVDs:*
  - *Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading/Writing Classroom*
  - *Phonics Lessons: Letters, Words, and How They Work, K – 2*
  - *Word Study Lessons: Letters, Words, and How They Work, Gr. 3*

These volumes describe a systematic framework for classroom instruction that addresses instructional goals in a coordinated way. Across contexts, for example, teachers are working towards the development of systems of strategic actions that include efficient word solving as well as active and deep comprehension of texts.

The next three Fountas and Pinnell books provide for the alignment across classroom and intervention instruction.

- *When Readers Struggle: Teaching that Works*
- *The Continuum of Literacy Learning: A Guide to Teaching, K-8*
- *Fountas & Pinnell Prompting Guide 1*

*When Readers Struggle* provides very specific descriptions of ways to help struggling readers within classrooms and in small group intervention teaching. Intervention teachers are also provided professional development, which is built into the *LLI* system and based on *The Continuum of Literacy Learning*.

Finally, the *Fountas & Pinnell Prompting Guide 1* promotes close alignment in teaching by providing teachers with very specific instructional language to support the use of effective reading and writing strategies. Across classroom instruction and *LLI* experiences, students experience this common language that guides cognitive processing. With small group sequenced lessons, *LLI* provides the intensity and expert instruction that highly at-risk students need.

The second tier of RTI provides for small group intensive teaching. “When we examine the most successful interventions available in the research, we find that virtually every study used either one-to-one tutorial or very small group (1 to 3 students)” Allington 2009. Vaughn and colleagues (2002) noted that very small group (n=3) instruction led by an expert teacher had the largest impact on improvement of reading achievement.

Small group instruction has the potential to reduce distractions for many students. The instructional design also enables teachers to assess more frequently and increase the intensity of the instruction and remediate identified needs, as identified by data. With small group, sequenced lessons, *LLI* provides the intensity and expert instruction that highly at-risk students need.
Some Fundamental Principles of RTI and Their Relationship to Fountas and Pinnell’s Research-based Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental Principles of Response to Intervention (RTI)</th>
<th>How LLI, BAS, and The Continuum of Literacy Learning Support RTI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevent language and literacy problems (International Reading Association)</td>
<td>BAS is used at the earliest levels of literacy, enabling teachers to identify the neediest students and begin intervention early. Early intervention prevents a widening of the gap and can be most effective in preventing longer-term literacy difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments that can inform language and literacy instruction meaningfully (International Reading Association)</td>
<td>BAS provides a systematic, research-based set of assessments of a wide range of literacy tasks, including reading level, phonemic awareness, fluency, letter/sound knowledge, and vocabulary. During daily LLI lessons, teachers observe behaviors from The Continuum of Literacy Learning. Every lesson includes a section that provides suggestions for observational assessment across the lesson or additional assessment tips, as needed. Every other day, teachers administer a standardized reading record assessment that parallels BAS in administration, scoring, and analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective, intensive, evidence-based early intervention</td>
<td>Research evidence based on the LLI lesson design indicates effectiveness of intervention enabling most students to reach grade level competencies in 14 – 20 weeks. Lessons are 30 minutes, daily, and intensive. Lessons are highly effective because of the seamless implementation of BAS, The Continuum of Literacy Learning, and LLI. The support provided by The Continuum of Literacy Learning enables teachers to become more analytic of reading strengths and needs and more reflective about the effects of the teaching on student competencies, thus enabling them to be highly effective in improving student achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data-based documentation used to monitor student progress</td>
<td>Data-based documentation is accomplished daily by utilizing observational assessment and reading records. Small groups of three or less enable teachers to do more effective observation and responsive teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated reading growth, utilizing AYP criteria</td>
<td>Accelerated reading growth is documented through the LLI Data Management System which facilitates data entry and regular monitoring, reporting and graphing of both group and student progress according to AYP criteria. Expectation charts are also part of the LLI Data Management System.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fundamental Principles of Response to Intervention (RTI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>How LLI, BAS, and The Continuum of Literacy Learning Support RTI</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High-quality professional development for teachers of low-performing students</strong></td>
<td><em>LLI</em> includes two Professional Development DVDs that feature step-by-step tutorials on coding, scoring, and analyzing reading behaviors from reading records and sample lessons that model instructional practices.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Professional development links at the end of each <em>LLI</em> lesson refer teachers to professional readings and/or the DVD in order to expand their understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>When Readers Struggle: Teaching that Works</em> provides the theoretical rationale and precise teaching support and is included in each <em>LLI</em> system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The <em>Prompting Guide 1</em>, included in each <em>LLI</em> system, enables teachers to develop the effectiveness of their teaching interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heinemann offers several levels of onsite and offsite professional development services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dynamic, positive, and productive collaboration among professionals with relevant expertise in language and literacy (International Reading Association)</strong></td>
<td>The universal nature of Fountas &amp; Pinnell professional books enables all members of team to participate in professional development and problem-solving. With a common assessment, <em>BAS</em>, it is possible to have a conference about which strategies students are using and neglecting, thus supporting a well-coordinated approach to teaching.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~

“As educators, we have the ability to educate all children well.”

~

*Fountas and Pinnell (2009)*

Using Fountas and Pinnell materials from Heinemann within your RTI plans makes all this possible.


Reading Today, International Reading Association (Feb/March 2009, IRA Commission on RTI: Working draft of guiding principles.