

Just released from Teachers College Press –

“FirstSchool: Transforming PreK-3rd Grade for African American, Latino, and Low-Income Children”



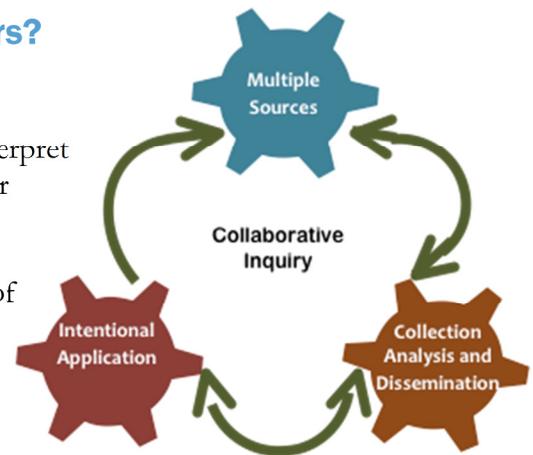
What is the FirstSchool book about?

Our book provides a frame for school and district leaders, professional development personnel, and teacher educators to transform PreK-3 education in collaboration with teachers and other school community members. FirstSchool’s goal is to help schools close the achievement gap by strengthening and enriching the learning, development, and early school experiences of African American, Latino and low-income (AALLI) children and their families. Our work is grounded in lessons learned during partnerships with eight elementary schools whose leadership and staff worked hard to make sustainable changes in their professional culture, relationships with families and children, instructional practices, and curricular choices. The book shows how the authors and our partners in schools used the lens of education research and data to support AALLI children to be successful in a PreK-3 environment.

What are some specific highlights from book chapters?

#1) Using Data to Create a Culture of Collaborative Inquiry:

Data can be powerful when educators have the time and ability to interpret and respond to them in ways that promote positive changes in teacher practices and classroom/program environments. At the heart of the process lies the need for a school-wide *culture of collaborative inquiry* that fosters open and honest dialogue. Making effective use of data includes a thoughtful selection from *multiple sources* of information, systematic data *collection, analysis and dissemination*, and the *intentional application* of findings to ongoing changes to instructional practice and policy.



The book provides examples of how teachers and school leaders use data to inform adjustments to curriculum and instruction to better serve their students. These experiences have shaped our suggestions for structuring collaborative inquiry that asks teachers to 1) analyze a typical day in their classroom (using observational measures like Snapshot or CLASS), 2) consider a wide variety of relevant sources that might inform next steps, and 3) connect their own professional learning to concrete action. We believe that while the effective use of data is at the center of improving school for AALLI students, teachers need more guidance in this area. In addition, if teachers trust that data will be used as a tool for growth, rather than as a tool for judgment, they will be more likely to honestly share their challenges with others and problem-solve together.

#2: Designing High-Quality Curriculum & Instruction

FirstSchool helps teachers think deeply about how they will ensure the success of the students they have right here, right now, by considering how their **curriculum** will be *aligned, balanced, integrated, relevant, and developmental*. In addition, we have identified **research-based instructional practices** that support learning and development for African American, Latino, and low-income children and have deleterious effects when they are not present. These practices are designed to foster classroom cultures of caring, competence, and

excellence. A *culture of caring* needs to be in place before substantive learning can occur. It is foundational to children's success, as it ensures that they feel safe, valued, and accepted by adults and classmates. A *culture of competence* ensures each child is a productive, successful, and contributing member of the classroom team, and a *culture of excellence* enables each learner to excel beyond minimal competencies.

The FirstSchool approach supports teachers' efforts to meet the expectations within the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). We believe that the CCSS, if used appropriately, have the potential to elevate children's classroom experiences, particularly in areas where students have been traditionally underserved. However, our approach encourages teachers to think about how to enrich these standards to reflect the particular needs of their student population, as well as their own creativity and professional expertise.

#3: Home-School Partnerships

FirstSchool believes that **meaningful home-school partnerships** that foster two-way communication between families and educators are essential to enriching curriculum and instruction. Our approach encourages school personnel to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their existing home-school partnerships to determine if families are truly treated as partners in their children's education, with their own knowledge, skills and resources to offer. Families have valuable information to share about their children's behavior, learning preferences, and cultural background. The book offers concrete steps school leaders can take to transform the relationships between families and educators.

What do experienced educators & scholars have to say about this resource?

"FirstSchool provides us with a workable approach that can be employed by school districts, principals, families and professional educators. If we fail to do so, despite the robust evidence from early childhood science that high quality early childhood education, represented by FirstSchool, especially benefits poor children, we will risk failing another generation of American children. We can greatly benefit from applying the knowledge, experience, and wisdom of the authors of this important book to reforming early schooling, teaching and learning for our most vulnerable children and thereby keep the promise of American democracy, namely a level playing field and a chance to succeed fully on one's merits. As a nation we cannot continue to tolerate failure or make excuses when examples, such as FirstSchool suggest a proven way forward." —**Aisha Ray** (Ph.D. Erikson Center. Chicago, Illinois)

"FirstSchool is one of the few volumes that provides the details of this important educational innovation—a redesign of the pathway through which children enter public education. Given the formative importance of these early years of schooling and child development, this volume should be on the agenda of every school board meeting." —**Robert Pianta** (Dean, Curry School of Education & Director, Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, University of Virginia)

Feedback from FirstSchool teachers:

- "You shared the actual data with us. Looking through a different perspective has really allowed me to be a better educator. You definitely opened my eyes to pieces I didn't realize I was missing. We didn't feel like we were being evaluated, so I allowed myself to be open."
- "I haven't changed my practice in 20 years, but the things you help me think about make sense."
- "You trust us with the actual research. You've given us what we need so we can give our children the best. Now when I talk about research, I know what it says!"
- "You don't collect data and give it back to us as an 'I gotcha'; you give it back to us as support."

For more info, visit: <http://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu>, www.tpress.com, or <https://twitter.com/firstschoolfpg>