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Flood Ensurance

When Children Have Books They Can and Want to Read

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DIANA: [Reading is] for when we're bored.
YOLANDA: Yeah.
DIANA: Like when our parents call us from our friends' house.
YOLANDA: And it would just be for a few minutes.
DIANA: Yeah, when I don't have nothing to do.

The preceding conversation took place during an interview with Diana and Yolanda, two fifth-grade bilingual students who were considered by their teacher to both be good and reasonably motivated students. The girls' explanations of when they read support a prevailing view that students lose their motivation to read as they move through school, such that by the intermediate grades, many could be considered reluctant readers. Research explanations for students' apathy toward reading implicate an array of contributing factors. These include various aspects of the classroom environment, such as limited access to interesting, appropriate reading materials (Worthy & McKool, 1996) and less-than-engaging instruction (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy, 2000). However, few studies have examined the interplay of efforts necessary for changing aspects of the classroom environment to sustain or reawaken the satisfaction from texts that beginning readers often register. The purpose of this investigation was to provide students in Diana and Yolanda's classroom with access to a broad array of reading materials—as well as choice, models, time, and appropriate instruction—and then to examine the influence of this complete "access" on the students' reading interests, purposes, and habits.

So, "over a year and in and out of weeks" (Sendak, 1970) until 8 months had gone by, we put trade books and magazines into children's hands in one urban bilingual fifth-grade classroom and stayed to observe, listen, and even to help guide the interactions. We are university "participant observers"—eager to understand more about what and how children

learning English choose to read when available books match their interests and abilities and when instruction supports their strengths. The classroom teacher, Rosemary Flores (her actual name), was a cultural and linguistic insider with whom we have been working and learning for several years. At the beginning of the school year, her 18 students were all literate in Spanish (reading from second- to fifth-grade levels) but varied widely in learning to speak, read, and write English. The dominant home language for all of the students was Spanish. In addition, they were all immigrants or the children of immigrants to the United States from Mexico. The school is located in a predominantly Mexican American community. Beginning-of-year interviews, confirmed by the teacher, indicated that most students reported reading for approximately 30 minutes per day—a homework requirement. Six students said they sometimes read more than the required time; of these, four said they read only when bored. Few students could name specific book titles or authors beyond those recently read aloud by the teacher.

In this year-long inquiry addressing "access" to books, we built on three contentions about book access that we drew from previous work:

1. Students must have books and other texts *appropriate* to their ages, interests, reading levels, culture, and language.
2. Texts (and other forms of print) must be of sufficient *quantity*, *variety*, and *appeal* such that they "flood" the classroom with broad invitations for reading.
3. Students must receive opportunities and *sufficient time* to read, as well as models of what readers do (read to themselves and others, recommend books, talk with others about text, find answers, grow ideas, and be instructed—in its broadest sense).

Using these three features of access—appropriate texts, appealing texts, and time with texts—we tell the story in this chapter of a year spent learning from children who were offered all three. Through attending to the interplay of their opportunities for tailored instruction, self-selection of titles, discussions, and other response opportunities and their use of language across the day, we attempted to make sense of the role that "access" came to play in these students' literate lives. But first, we sketch a background of informing research.

INFORMING STUDIES

For all students, including young children, struggling learners, and second-language learners, access to books and time spent reading leads to growth in vocabulary, knowledge, language and literacy skills, general intelligence, and achievement (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Krashen, 1995). Similarly, when students do not read, their general academic progress is in jeopardy.

One way of providing students with abundant reading materials is through an intervention called "book flood," in which a large number of books are infused into a classroom for the teacher and students to use (Neuman, 1999; Elley, 2000). Neuman (1999) conducted a large-scale book flood study in child-care centers serving low-income neighborhoods in Philadelphia and examined its effects on the literacy foundations of young children. Teachers in more than 300 centers were provided with a total of almost 18,000 books, as well as training on how to use the books with children. Similar centers were identified as controls. According to Neuman (1999):

It is not just exposure to books that makes a difference ... [but rather] the intensity of engagement—the quality of talk and conversational interactions between adult and child—that nurtures and helps them to construct vital literacy-related concepts. (p. 310)

Neuman's book floods set off a "chain reaction." Books and training led to physical changes in the classrooms that in turn enhanced children's desire to interact with print, as well the quantity and quality of teacher–child literacy interactions. Both qualitative and statistical analyses of early literacy measures showed that students in the intervention groups made greater gains in early literacy measures and maintained them after 8 months.

In a follow-up case study of one of the child-care centers in the larger study, Neuman and Celano (2001) found that after the book flood, with its concomitant methodology shifts (including book selection procedures, discussion, drama, reading aloud, and handling books), the curriculum and atmosphere at the center changed drastically. Book use and story time commanded a significant amount of the day. Again, there were striking differences between the early literacy scores of students in the participating centers and those of students from comparable urban child-care centers.

Elley (2000) reviewed book flood studies that were conducted from 1980 to 1999 in a number of developing countries and discussed implications for raising literacy levels. In third-world countries, where large class sizes, inadequate facilities, and underpaid and underprepared teachers are often the norm, instruction typically takes place in the students' second language, and access to books and other instructional materials is limited. In Elley's review, teachers and students in Grades 1 through 6 in a variety of countries, including Fiji, Singapore, and Sri Lanka, participated in the book floods. In every location, students were being instructed in English, which was not their native language. In each site and study, 100 or more carefully selected books were placed in intervention classrooms. As with Neuman's studies, the book flood studies reviewed by Elley (2000) included training for teachers in how to engage students in using the books. Students were compared on formal and informal assessments in various aspects of literacy (comprehension, vocabulary, fluency), oral language, and transfer to content areas. According to Elley (2000):

The evidence is now strong that it is possible to double the rate of reading acquisition of Third World ... pupils with a "Book Flood" of about 100 high-interest books per class, and short teacher training sessions. (p. 233)

Elley stressed that in book floods, accessible books are viewed as central pedagogical tools rather than as supplements to the regular program of reading instruction. Further, the studies attest to the powerful language benefits of a rich diet of high-interest reading materials. Students' skills appeared to transfer to other subjects of the curriculum that depend heavily on reading.

Although "book flood" replications are plentiful and have shown consistent positive effects on students' language, literacy, and learning, it is important to note that instruction and engagement are also key determinants of students' ultimate reading progress. Therefore, any study of the infusion of print into the classroom must also examine the instruction that surrounds and supports book selection and use. It is not sufficient to put "lots of" books onto shelves and turn away, trusting to the books to carry the total instructional load.

ASPECTS OF ACCESS

Appropriate Books

A readily agreed-on tenet of instructional research is that reading progress is dependent upon matching a child reader with manageable text (Allington, 2002; Carver & Liebert, 1995). That is, when the material is too difficult, the reader will not make the same progress as if the material falls within a good fit of success and challenge. Even though our beginning-of-the-year assessments (the Flynt–Cooter Informal Reading Inventory) showed that most of the children could decode English sentences at the fourth- or fifth-grade level, they were unable to discuss what they were reading or to respond appropriately to prompts. Even for children who could decode rapidly, comprehension did not follow. (By contrast, the children's reading comprehension of passages written in Spanish ranged from second- to fifth-grade levels.) Through the assessment, we learned that most of these fifth graders were comfortable reading and discussing English texts written at first- or second-grade levels. That is, they *could* discuss what they read in two languages—if the texts were appropriately leveled.

But finding materials children can read may be difficult in many classroom libraries. A consistent finding of classroom library research is that there is often not enough material that children can (and want to) read (Martinez, Roser, Worthy, Strecker, & Gough, 1997; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Our own analysis of the extant library in our fifth-grade bilingual classroom showed that, in September, the texts in English ranged from first- to sixth-grade reading level, but a big proportion of the books (over 80%) were at the fourth-grade reading level or above.

There is further complexity when the children's home languages differ from the classroom book collection. In an ideal scenario, students find readily available reading materials that support their language and literacy development in their first language, as well as in English. In our library, texts in Spanish were often translations of award-winning books originally published in English and were comparably difficult.

There is also some evidence for the positive effects on students' reading motivation and achievement when they meet culturally relevant literature (in both languages) in the curriculum (Martinez-Roldán, 2000; Roser et al., 2003). Although more titles are being published that reflect the varied cultures of today's classrooms (Bader, 2003; Yokota, 2001), there are not yet enough readily available quality books in languages other than English. Further, school budgets are not sufficient to ensure that these materials appear in classroom collections. Teachers continue to use their own money to give their students access to materials (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). To supplement our fifth-graders' classroom library and to match the children with books of their choice in this investigation, we used the public library, the city's bookstores (new and used), online discount sites, our own libraries, and our own funds.

Appealing Books

Students from economically impoverished homes have less access to print materials (even at school) than do students from middle- and high-income homes (e.g., Neuman & Celano, 2001; Smith, Constantino, & Krashen, 1996). However, when classroom and school libraries do contain large numbers of books, the types of texts do not necessarily match students' instructional needs and interests. This access problem is especially critical for reluctant readers, minority students, students from economically impoverished backgrounds, and students learning English as their second language (Worthy et al., 1999; Martinez-Roldán, 2000).

To ensure that our "book infusion" met the children's interests (and the teacher's needs), we spent the first month observing instruction, taking careful note of the children's reading patterns, and inventorying the classroom library. At the beginning of October, we interviewed each child to learn more about his or her expressed reading interests and habits. Our interview questions focused on when, where, what, and how frequently the children chose to read. Toward the end of each 45-minute interview, we presented each child with a box of books literally spilling over in its of variety of genre, topics, language, and levels— from jokes, riddles, comics, contemporary magazines, picture books, and popular series to adventures, mysteries, classics, and more. As we presented the collection to be looked through, we asked conversational questions about what looked interesting or appealing. (We hadn't counted on our box of books being *so* appealing that children would plead for preview privileges. Many told us they could not wait for all our interviews to be completed before getting a chance at one of the books in the box.) To counter the drift, we refilled the box. The books that seemed most popular (initially) were scary ones (such as Alvin Schwartz's *Scary Tales to Tell in the Dark*, 1986, and Joe Hayes' *La Llorona: The Weeping Woman*, 1987), books in two languages (e.g., *Pepita Talks Twice/Pepita Habla Dos Veces*, Lachtman, 1995), and familiar picture books with Latino/Latina characters (e.g., *Abuela*, Dorros, 1997). Inadvertently, the box of books meant to sample interests marked the beginning of what became a rumbling underground of book movement between and among readers. As the children sampled the titles and read the stories, the sharing of titles began. *La Llorona*, for example, became a "best seller" within a week's time.

We (the university researchers and the classroom teacher) spent the first 6 weeks of the school year mapping the existing terrain. For example, we counted and categorized Ms. Flores' classroom library—recording more than 200 books, or more than 10 books per child. Like many collections, this one had been built from yard sales, the detritus of teachers retiring from the profession, and other low-cost sources. Many titles were entirely appropriate for fifth grade (e.g., *Maniac Magee*, Spinelli, 1990; *Number the Stars*, Lowry, 1989; *James and the Giant Peach*, Dahl, 1996). Some were in multiple copies—in English and in Spanish. A select few were appropriate for beginning readers (e.g., Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*, 1957), and a few seemed remote, such as a volume of short stories by O. Henry. Yet books from the classroom collection, housed on shelves facing a comfortable sofa and on shelves below the windows, seemed infrequently chosen for independent reading.

Our book infusions, staged at three intervals (October, January, and March), introduced many books that reflected the Latino/a culture and included what we had learned about the children's favorites, levels, curriculum, and library gaps. We placed popular magazines, activity books, comics, picture books, easy readers, holiday tales, series books, mysteries, adventures, information texts, plays, poetry, folk-tale variants, and books focusing on sports and humor in baskets lining two sides of the classroom rug. The rug was a classroom meeting place where children listened to and talked over books read aloud, met for book club, and read independently. After each infusion, we continued to monitor, observe, record, interview, assist, and support access to books.

Sufficient Books

Although research does not pinpoint the ideal size of the classroom library, some authorities recommend five to six books per child (Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez, & Teale, 1993). Even when classroom libraries duplicate some of the offerings in the school library, teachers argue the value of having books near at hand, instantly retrievable, well organized, and inviting.

Strengthening the case for classroom collections are the hard-to-find books in the school library. Access can mean ready availability, as well as sufficient supply.

A common characteristic of avid readers is that they have had opportunities to read materials of their own choosing (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Fink, 1995/1996). Students who have ready access to a wide range of reading materials are more likely to read and to make more progress than those who do not (Gambrell, Wilson & Gantt, 1981; Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997). Yet there is also evidence that students from economically impoverished homes have far less access to print materials, both at school and at home, than do students from middle- and high-income homes (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2001; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Smith et al., 1996, Worthy et al., 1999). Access was indeed a problem for these fifth graders. They reported that their personal libraries ranged from a low of 2 books to a high of 50, with an average of about 8 books of their own. Most of the books students owned had been purchased at grocery stores or provided by Reading Is Fundamental, a nonprofit program that offers new books to students in low-income schools. Our infusions increased the size of the classroom library to between 500 and 600 books.

FLOOD ENSURANCE BENEFITS

Paco, who claimed to read "only when I get bored," sheepishly admitted that he took home the book *Cuadros de Familia/Family Pictures* (Garza, 1990) "on accident" and "read the whole thing." As with many of Garza's readers, the brilliant paintings, familiar scenes, and text in two languages drew Paco in. We observed Paco and his classmates using books across their days as fifth graders—in free time, in self-selected reading time, before and after school, and at other times.

To record the experiences of our immersion, we made field notes of the "actions, interactions, and events" of the classroom days (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 28). As described, we also systematically analyzed the classroom library (for quantity, level, genre, author, etc.), interviewed the children at the beginning and end of the school year regarding reading habits and attitudes, tracked the children's reading choices, conversed with them about the reasons for their selections, discussed books with readers, and listened to samples of the texts read aloud. We kept a year-long classroom log of their book choices. We also recorded and kept notes during the discussions surrounding books that the teacher read aloud. And we worked in tandem with the teacher to continue to identify books and other materials, adding more than 300 texts to the classroom collection.

The more books that were shared with the students, the more they seemed to share with each other, and the more they found sources for books. The flood was cumulative and powerful. We propose three "flood benefits"—and some ideas about how to operate when there is drought.

Personalized Access: The Right Book in the Right Hands at the Right Time Won't Be Left Behind

We selected the books for the book flood to include a variety of genres, formats, and topics. An assumption of book flood studies is that students choose to read when they find books that appeal to them. Typically, decisions about what appeals to children are often derived from "preference inventories" ("Would you rather read this kind of book or that kind of book?" "Did you like this one? Would you like others like it?") Yet expressed preferences,

especially those measured through surveys, are not necessarily valid indicators of actual reading behaviors. That is, although students may indicate a preference for certain titles, topics, subjects, genres, or the like, their actual choices and habits may be influenced by a constellation of factors, including exposure/familiarity (e.g., peer recommendations, teacher read-alouds), as well as access. Researchers and teachers alike can risk overgeneralizing from children's responses to interest surveys. A complete picture of students' personal interests, then, can better be discerned by observing students as they interact with books in various classroom settings, engage with peers about books, and make independent selections for reading (Hickman, 1985; Monson & Sebesta, 1991). According to Monson and Sebesta's review of reading preference research (1991), the best evidence of reading interests may be derived when teachers/researchers act as participant observers, accumulating broad evidence and reflecting carefully—using ethnographic techniques.

We learned, too, that no single indicator or interview pinpoints the precise classroom collection. Like all experienced readers, our fifth graders became increasingly knowing, discriminating, and "idiosyncratic" in their tastes. Through informal interviews and chats and by simply being in the classroom for extended periods of time, we learned more about each student and about the books that were their hearts' desires. We kept notes and made plans to include these in future book flood phase-ins; but in many cases, it seemed clear that the students couldn't wait (and neither could we). Thus, between book club phases, we each found ourselves sneaking (slipping?) extra books into the classroom through the hands of the seeker of the book. These personal desires were sometimes surprising, as in the case of Gabriela, an able reader who nevertheless wanted nothing more than her own copy of *Green Eggs and Ham* (Seuss, 1960). When she finally got it, this fifth grader hugged it tightly, danced around the room, exclaiming, "I finally have it in my hands!"

By the end of the year, scary books and culturally relevant texts were still popular, but we could barely keep ahead of the demand for the popular characters in series books, most notably Captain Underpants, Junie B. Jones, and the sleuths in easy-to-read mysteries. Although most of the expressed reading interests were not surprising, there were often no books available in the school to match the expressed interest. Elva wanted to learn more about her homeland, Mexico, and was enthralled for weeks with a travel book that had been sitting on one of our bookshelves at home. Ilse and Eva pored over realistic picture books written by Latino/a authors, whereas Emma coveted a book, written in both English and Spanish, about the late Tejano singer, Selena. Several students longed to read *Harry Potter and the Sorceror's Stone* (Rowling, 1999), a book available in the school library but "always checked out." The absence of bookstores within a 10-mile radius of the school, along with the book's expense, made it nearly impossible to obtain on one's own. The extra copies we brought were enthusiastically received. *Harry Potter* (in Spanish or English) became a sort of "status read." Not everyone could move through Rowling's (1999) books, but nearly everyone wanted a chance to try. Copies of *Harry Potter* joined the book stacks growing on the corner of each desk and were also carried nonchalantly through the hallways. Harry's carriers were signaling, "I'm a reader." Indeed, some readers get launched in just that way.

Access and Exposure: The More Real Estate, Time, and Coverage Devoted to Reading, the More Valuable the Activity Is Perceived

Gaining access to books had been a problem for these students, whose personal libraries averaged about 8 books. The book flood, along with the teacher's instruction, seemed catalytic in increasing the flow. Ms. Flores's classroom space, her daily schedule, and her instruction

signaled the importance of thought, talk, reading, and writing—in two languages. We observed the influence of her instruction on reading motivation, including her (1) daily read-alouds from chapter books and picture books (which were then made available for students to read); (2) guided introduction of new books to the classroom collection ("For those of you who have been enjoying books by Marjorie Sharmat, here's a new *Nate the Great* mystery for our collection. In this one, Nate. . . . "); (3) preservation of a nearly sanctified time for students to read in free-choice books; (4) use of trade books during units of study in science and social studies; (5) pointed literacy instruction that focused on decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies, as well as on author craft and reading and writing within genres; and (6) provision of multiple venues for her students to share with their peers what they were reading.

The nearly obvious combination of valuing books, providing time for reading choice materials, and seeding with instruction seemed to catch hold. We observed students begin to be more relentless in their pursuit of library books already checked out; we noted books added to their reading stacks; we heard about books that came from friends, from the neighborhood ("that little store, you know, down at the corner"), or from family ("my uncle, he gave it to me"). A "gently-used book" cart opened for sales on Wednesdays during lunch, and Rosemary Flores' children were always in the line. Reading and writing were decidedly part of their school lives, and they were acting the roles of literate beings.

For example, during the read-aloud (in English) of *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2000), the students linked with, questioned, and considered the events—just as all book responders do:

- Ramón *asks for clarification*: "Was it the house that was burning?"
- Ms. Flores *ensures comprehension*: "Do you remember who Señor Rodríguez is?"
- Several children *verify* what is burning *by looking back*.
- Lupe *speculates* that the fire was deliberately set.
- Gabriela *is reminded of* a dream in which she nearly dies.
- Jose *links* the bad smelling papaya with the pungent smell of broken egg in "our Charlotte's Web story." Abel *connects* with murky water of diaper washes ("oooooh") in another story: "Like Freckle Juice."
- Ms. Flores *lifts language to be savored*: "I like the sound of that: 'The onions bit into her senses.' "
- Cruz *questions* whether grapes actually burn.
- Elena *empathizes*: "It hurts," she says in English and then in Spanish.
- Ana *evaluates*: "I think she is kinda spoiled."
- Juana *wonders* aloud: "Why, if Esperanza can speak only Spanish, are her words written in English?"

The talk stopped momentarily with Juana's inquiry. Why indeed are the words of a monolingual Spanish immigrant character written in English? Speculations began. Some were strained, other more reasoned: "Maybe Pam Muñoz Ryan wanted kids who can't speak Spanish to read it." After good discussion, we adults proposed prevailing on the author to help us. It seemed amazing to the children that the author might consider our wondering. When Ms. Ryan responded with a personal e-mail and book cover postcards for each student, a delegation of boys went to the library to ask for other books by the author. They had become even stauncher fans.

Book recommendations increased. Students reading Marvin Redpost books with their literacy support teacher recommended them to their friends in the classroom and created

new fans. Books once read were recommended and passed among class members. Always there was sharing. For the most part, books were not squirreled away into desks or secreted into backpacks but stacked (rather proudly) on desktops. Tiny Post-it notes tucked inside a book's first page indicated who had signed for the next turn. Was it "plenty" that created the generosity, the willingness to share? More likely, the sharing that manifested itself in so many other ways in the classroom culture had extended to incorporate the books.

Access and Purposes: Reasons for Reading Are Both Personal and "Stretchable"

Observations and conferences also pointed to many individual reasons for reading particular books at particular times. Rosemary Flores cultivated an attitude that students should read for a variety of purposes—from studying illustrations to sharing with friends to living inside a story to furthering understanding. Perhaps because of this attitude, students' book stacks included a range of difficulty levels and a variety of types of books. For example, Miguel's desk held a soccer book, two "how-to-draws," a book about whales, and some books intended for beginning readers. Miguel, a struggling reader in Spanish who had moved back and forth to Mexico several times, was just beginning to read English. At first, he refused to try books in English until we brought a box of easy, first-grade-level readers to the classroom. These books, rarely available in upper elementary classrooms, were just right for Miguel. After reading several books with the teacher or researchers, he began reading them on his own. His purposes for reading included learning how to read. Fortunately, there was no onus on choosing and reading easy books.

Other students, too, used reading time to learn or practice English or to maintain Spanish. Elena, having read the first *Harry Potter* book in English, chose to read it again in Spanish, to "look to see how they tell the story different." From the first chapter, she discovered that "It's longer in Spanish. They use more words to describe things." Esmeralda's father had made it clear to his children that they were expected to continue with their Spanish while they learned English. That valuing of native language was taken to heart by Esmeralda, and she typically alternated between reading books in English and in Spanish. By contrast, when Ricardo selected two books about snakes (one in English and one in Spanish), the fact that they were in different languages didn't seem to enter into his choice. It was his way of flexing his bilingual abilities, an indicator he could read any book he chose. "And they both have good pictures," he explained.

Reading as a social act also became more prevalent. Paulo, a novice English learner, was enthralled with a Texan Cinderella story that Ms. Flores read aloud. He announced he wanted to read it for himself "to get the whole story." Instead, he read it aloud to Miguel, who listened closely and inspected the illustrations even *more* closely. They talked over the book in Spanish, and Miguel, the classroom artist, provided some new illustrations of his own design. Two boys (Ricardo and Abel) who had borrowed the same book from the library showed their choices as they waited in the lunch line. When one of us asked if they planned to read the book together, Abel said no, paused, then turned Ricardo and asked if he wanted to get together after school to read. The students began to use their free time to read books and continuously reported back to us what they were reading and with whom. They also read side by side to encourage each other. For example, Alma, Ana, and Lupe were sitting in the hall at a table taking turns reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* together (Dahl, 2001). When asked why they were reading together, Lupe said, "We're helping Ana." Ana confirmed that quietly, "Uh huh." Her demeanor seemed to surprise Lupe: "That's what you told us. You wanted us to help you."

Students seemed to read for all the reasons mature readers do: They read to share, to escape, to get ideas for writing, and to learn. They read just because they could, to test their prowess, and because books made them laugh or think or even cry: "It's so sad, Miss, when Charlotte dies. Ms. Flores cried right here." An adult explained that all you need to do to make Charlotte live is to begin the book again. It seemed a satisfying explanation, whether or not it contributed to the amount of rereading we observed. Nevertheless, we later recorded:

ADULT: Why are y'all reading it now?

ISABEL: 'Cause Charlotte, it was dead, and for he can come alive, we read the book again.

BERTA: So she can come alive.

Rereading seemed to occur for other purposes as well. In this classroom, rereading books, a rarity in upper elementary classrooms, became a tradition. Predictably, popular choices for rereading were books that had been read aloud. As Ms. Flores pronounced the final word in a read-aloud, 18 hands shot up before she could ask the question, "Who wants to read it now?" In her final interview, one student said, "I like to read the books after the teacher so I can make my voice sound like hers."

But Ms. Flores' instruction offered still other reasons for reading and rereading, notably to interpret and perform (via readers' theater) and to talk about important ideas (via book clubs). Frequently, students practiced and presented favorite scenes or stories in well-rehearsed performances. Rehearsals supported both accruing meanings and fluent oral reading. In addition, they made performed books "best sellers," and they were just plain fun. So that we could observe the changes in thought and talk that accompany rereadings, we asked one small group to read *Because of Winn-Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000) in November and again in April. Students' insights, issues, and expressions of meanings across time lent further documentation to the contention that purposes for reading should include reasons to reread.

DISCUSSION

By the end of the year, students' desk stacks held 4 to 12 books—from thin picture books to tomes, some in process, some in planning—much like the bedside table of an avid reader. The students were reading. Our reading logs and their backpacks were stuffed with the evidence. Each of them (save one) passed the end-of year state examination in reading. That child missed by one question. In a classroom of comparable learners down the hall, the results were much more bleak.

For many students, "young adolescence marks the beginning of a downward trend in academics" (Ryan & Patrick, 2001, p. 438). Although there is a great deal of evidence supporting the positive effects of providing access to engaging materials and instruction, few studies have applied this research in long-term classroom-based studies in the intermediate grades over time. Researchers have called for studies that use a wide variety of data to study these factors in depth and over time in relation to instruction and within the social and cultural contexts of classrooms and communities.

Although it is important for educators to ensure that students have access to high-quality conceptually challenging literature, it is also essential that students' preferences be addressed in order to capture their attention and engagement and to enhance fluency, vocab-

ulary growth, linguistic competence, and confidence and, thus, to foster learning (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy & McKool, 1996). Summers and Lukevich (1983) recommended that teachers "treat norms lightly and analyze preferences for a particular class, within a specific school and community" (p. 358). We suggest going a step further, to attend to students' individual interests and reasons for reading. We have learned that it is impossible to know students' reading interests without knowing students. Certainly there are books that are popular with the majority, but each child also has his or her own personal tastes that change and grow in response to a variety of influences and that are almost impossible to predict.

As we segmented our data into meaningful units, wrote phrasal summaries and reactions to each unit, listed topics, discussed issues, and grouped the topics into categories based on recurring patterns, we returned again and again to the centrality of the teacher in this classroom for modeling, sharing, and, perhaps most important, honoring the children's personal interests and choices. Even more significant than a well-chosen "flood" of books and other materials seemed the orchestration of history and experiences, culture, language, purposes for reading, interests, and interactions that helped one teacher lead virtually every student in her class to become an avid reader. But the right books at the right time in the right hands in sufficient quantity and with time to read was a buoy.

Teachers and parents, who know students most closely, are in the best position to decide which books should be available to their children. But teachers need money to obtain these books as they get to know their students. Evidence such as that gleaned from Ms. Flores' class underscores that neither expensive test preparation nor costly tests themselves created these successful learners but, rather, an informed teacher with the tools she needed. In the meantime, garage sales, donations, online book closeouts, and overstocks, children's own collections, pleas in local newspapers, accruing "points" from publishers specializing in classroom sales, gifts from Reading Is Fundamental, and other civic groups may be more immediate means to obtain the critical "tools" of the trade. As we present these sources for books, a cautionary note comes from "Little Man" in Taylor's (1976) *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Little Man's first book at school had been worn and stained and marked by years of use by white children and only then discarded and labeled as offered to the "nigra" school. "No!" shouted Little Man. His rejection should reverberate for all of us who put books into children's hands. It is not classrooms awash with any kind of castoff book that constitutes the vibrant book flood; rather, it is the steady stream of a range of carefully chosen texts filtered through the hands of teachers who know and value both the learners and what they read that should be the flood ensurance policy for all children.

Suggested Titles

Author	Title	Date	Publisher	Pages	Inside the book
Soto, Gary	*Baseball in April*	2000	Harcourt	128	Soto offers a collection of 11 short stories set in central California. The Latino/a characters' problems and predicaments are real and universal—being cool, making a team, being embarrassed by family. The stories are lasting and invite talk.
Carlson, Lori (Editor); illustrated by Oscar Hijuelos	*Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States*	1994	Henry Holt	123	Appropriate for upper middle and high school, this collection of poetry in two languages unguardedly reveals what it means to be Hispanic. Teachers of intermediate grades will dip in to select poets and poems they, too, will choose to share.
Medina, Jane; illustrated by Fabricio Vanden Broeck	*My Name Is Jorge on Both Sides of the River*	1999	Boyds Mills	48	The immigrant child Jorge describes his experiences in free verse. Facing pages offer poems in two languages of hurt, pride, conflict, cultures, friendship, and family. Most of all, Medina has captured the misunderstandings and apprehensions of being new in the United States.

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