Studying a Kindergarten School-Home Literacy Project: Questions of Classroom Use and Student Response

Sharan A. Gibson
San Diego State University

Patricia L. Scharer
The Ohio State University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to document teachers' use of and student responses to a set of early literacy texts designed as a school-home literacy project. Participants in this study were 23 children from six urban kindergarten classrooms and their kindergarten teachers; 11 with high letter identification at entry (HLID) and 12 with low letter identification skills (LLID). Data collection included 82 classroom visits from November to May, over 100 running records, and student scores on the TERA-2. Teachers used the early literacy texts in shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading contexts. Books were typically introduced in large-group settings and reintroduced in small guided reading groups as teachers provided varying levels of support related to student needs. Keep Books were also used in thematic study and across other contexts including the play corner and writing activities. Student response to the texts was overwhelmingly positive with a strong pattern of spontaneous, playful, unprompted language production across all six classrooms. Students' success in reading these books supported a sense of ownership and provided opportunities to talk explicitly about print features, words, reading, and writing. By the end of the year, however, researchers noted a differential pattern of responses to the Keep Books between LLID and HLID students.

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INTRODUCTION

Low reading test scores in urban school districts have encouraged educators to carefully study how young children learn to read and write. Emergent readers need to develop their knowledge of language and print, and their ability to read words fluently. It is not only the content of literacy programs that matters for the success of emergent readers, however, but the characteristics of the programs as well. Preschool and kindergarten teachers who emphasize emergent literacy practices obtain higher levels of growth in children's knowledge of written language (Stahl & Yaden, 2004).

Currently, an important line of research examines school-home relationships for ways to support literacy learning by developing the partnership between the parent, child, teacher, and school (Edwards, 1989; Goldenberg, 2001; Neuman & Roskos, 1993). The goal of these studies is to accelerate the development of children's understandings about reading and writing during preschool and the early elementary grades in both home and school settings. A number of studies have identified the importance of home support for literacy learning and children's access to books (Morrow, 1989; Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2000). This essential access to books varies, however, resulting in students entering with a wide range of familiarity with literacy (Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Teale, 1986). In her review of research, McCarthey (2000) concludes that while access to literacy materials is essential for literacy development, it is not sufficient. The type and amount of materials, the amount of time spent by children in literacy activities, and the nature of the interactions around those literacy events are also important factors towards success in school.

Recently, a variety of publishers have responded to the need for early reading texts by developing inexpensive, consumable, easy-to-read series of books or easily duplicated folded books suitable for distribution at school. The relationship of these books to early literacy instruction and development, however, remains largely unexplored. An extensive electronic search of publication databases yielded few studies in this area. In 1989, McCormick and Mason found support for the use of little books with Head Start children, using a book recitation instructional procedure. Their study was based on a stage-model perspective and identified positive and consistent results on student testing, parent perception, and teachers' evaluations using a set of emergent literacy texts developed by one of the authors. More recently, Menon and Hiebert (2005) found that children reading little books performed significantly better during post testing than did those students reading basal anthologies on both word lists and graded passages.

The current study contributes to existing studies by examining teachers' implementation of and students' responses to a school-home reading project involving Keep Books® during their kindergarten year. Keep Books are consumable early literacy texts, intended to be introduced at school and to foster early independent reading. These early literacy texts are designed to be appealing and engaging to primary-grade students, and provide opportunities for extended, supported, and independent practice using a range of effective beginning reading strategies. Experts in early literacy instruction designed the books for students to receive in school and take home to read and reread independently. The intent is to create multiple opportunities for children to successfully read texts to accelerate student learning in both school and home settings.

An earlier study investigating the use of Keep Books in 27 classrooms in three urban school districts involved over 600 children who received 48 titles to take home during the school year (Gibson & Scharer, 2001). This research focused on the observations of teachers and parents as they noted children's responses to the texts in both home and school settings. Analysis of parent and teacher survey and interview data revealed a number of factors contributing to early literacy development through this school-home partnership, including the importance of children experiencing (a) a sense of ownership of a set of familiar texts, (b) an initial degree of success with early literacy tasks, and (c) their parents' positive responses to their growing literacy repertoire.

The present study continues this line of research and was designed to closely examine the use of and student responses to a set of consumable, school-home early literacy texts in kindergarten classrooms as well as to document shifts in literacy learning for a range of learners during the school year. This descriptive study, then, was designed to examine the Keep Books' role within a set of classroom-based sites for teaching, learning, and development (Glasswell, Parr, & McNaughton, 2003). The following questions guided data collection during the school year:

1. In what specific ways are early literacy, school-home texts utilized within classroom activities during the kindergarten year?
2. How do kindergarten children with varying levels of achievement, and in three urban school districts, respond to school-home early literacy texts in school settings?
3. How do kindergarten children's literacy behaviors change during the kindergarten year in response to school-home early literacy texts?

STUDY DESIGN

Participants and Data Sources

Participants in this study were 23 children from six urban kindergarten classrooms and their kindergarten teachers. Students were selected from the pool of parents who indicated willingness for their child to participate in the study.

In five classrooms, two students with relatively higher scores (25–55) on Clay's Letter Identification task (2002) during fall testing (HLID) and two with lower scores (0–16; LLID) were selected since letter identification is a strong predictor of future reading achievement (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Three students (two LLID and one HLID) were selected in a sixth classroom for a total of 23 students. This purposeful selection enabled us to document student responses to early literacy texts for the school-home project for two groups of children with varying initial levels of literacy, operationally defined through the use of initial letter identification scores. All of the students in the six kindergarten classrooms received one or two little books each week between November and May for a total of 48 books per child.

Two of the six teachers participating in this study were early in their careers with 1 and 2 years of teaching experience at the beginning of data collection; the other four teachers had 14–30 years of teaching experience. The six teachers worked in three large urban districts with a high percentage of students qualifying for free and/or reduced-price lunch status. All of the teachers were in schools that were members of the Literacy Collaborative® network and had participated in 1 or 2 years of staff development focusing on the implementation of the Literacy Collaborative framework for literacy instruction (Scharer, Williams, & Pinnell, 2001). Each day, students in these kindergarten classrooms participated in such literacy activities as shared reading, interactive read-aloud, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, shared writing, independent writing, and writing workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The instructional emphasis was on students' engagement in authentic literacy activities each day and learning through teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent literacy activities in large group, small group, and individual contexts. Teachers planned instruction based upon periodic and daily assessments to meet students' needs.

Data collection for this study was accomplished through 82 classroom visits, lasting approximately an hour each, and occurring approximately every 2 weeks between November and May during language arts instruction. The researchers created field notes for each classroom visit documenting teachers' uses of the early literacy texts, children's responses during the introduction of a new text in large- and small-group settings, and children's involvement with and responses to the texts during independent reading. Researchers also documented evidence of work with the school-home early literacy texts occurring between observations, such as new books in browsing boxes or new charts on the wall and children's journal stories about familiar texts. Formal and informal interviews with the classroom teacher also documented children's use of the early literacy texts during daily reading and writing activities on days between visits, as well as teacher decision making and planning for the use of the books.

The researchers took over 100 running records (Clay, 2002) with selected children across the duration of the study as students read new and familiar

Keep Books. These running records were analyzed for accuracy, self-monitoring, and self-correcting behaviors; field notes were taken regarding such reading behaviors as fluency, expression, one-to-one pointing, engagement with the task, and students' control over book handling skills. In addition, periodic assessments were conducted with each student in order to document changes in literacy behavior over time. The Letter Identification task (Clay, 2002) was administered to all students in both fall and spring. In addition, the Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA-2, Pro-Ed, 1991) and a running record on an unfamiliar text, *Sally's Tricks* (Deford, 2000), were administered in spring. *Sally's Tricks* is the Benchmark 2 text from the Reading & Writing Assessment Portfolio (DeFord).

Data Analysis

The overall purpose of data analysis was to provide a detailed description of classroom usage and student responses to Keep Books. Data analysis began with weekly transcription of field notes following each classroom observation. The research team met regularly during the year of the study to read the emerging data set, discuss data collection, and begin to generate initial codes, which were then tested for sufficiency during computer coding of several observations (The Ethnograph, 1998). Examples of coding for student responses to the Keep Books are included in Table 1 on the following page. Ongoing adjustments in coding categories were made to combine, rename, or delete codes using multiple passes through the entire data set. The final coding process included an intentional search for negative cases (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). Tentative findings were then compiled on a code-by-code basis, identifying key themes for classroom usage and student responses to the texts.

The search for patterns of shifts in student achievement included analyses of running records, computer-coded field notes for each student, and test results across the school year for each of the 23 students. First, data sources were analyzed to create a monthly description of each student's current reading behavior. Next, a matrix was developed for both high and low students (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in order to identify patterns of achievement for each group of learners across the year. Two researchers independently analyzed data sets for three students to ensure sufficient inter-rater reliability. Researchers' summaries of the monthly descriptions of these three students' reading behavior were then compared, resulting in full agreement on overall patterns of achievement.

Limitations

The goals of this study were to explore the ways in which teachers used early literacy, school-home texts as part of daily literacy instruction and student responses to the texts during their kindergarten year. Data collected in this

Table 1. Coding for Observations of Student Responses to Keep Books

Category	Example from Field Notes
Language Rehearsal	OC: The other two students in the group are choosing Keep Books, mostly browsing through the pictures. Two students are chanting the rhyme in a play-like fashion to each other.
Responses to Teacher Talk	T: What's making him hot? The sun in shining. What did he do? S: He shave.
Talking About Print	S: Hey look! The letter's like my name!
Student-to-Student Interaction	T: Are you sure? At the very end, do you see an R? What happens next? S2 (said to student addressed by teacher): Who ate it? OC: This comment is from a student sitting next to the student the teacher is assisting, helping out with the strategy use the teacher is prompting for.
Positive Student Responses	S: I read the whole book! T: Great! How'd you do? You're a reader!
Negative Student Responses	OC: Reading *Building a House*. Appeared to have memorized this text. Was reading without looking at the print in a quick, bored voice. 100% accurate.
"Knowing" a Keep Book	S: is this one we know? T: Uh huh. We did that poem a long ti me ago, but yesterday we read it again.
Home Reading	T: Okey dokey. Pass me your books. Did you practice your books when you went home? S1: I went home and found five. S2: Every other night.

study were within the context of a variety of instructional techniques such as shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. In addition, students encountered many other types of texts including quality children's literature and other little books intended for classroom use. Consequently, the unique contribution of Keep Books to students' literacy learning cannot be specifically determined. Future studies designed to look more specifically at the effects of school-home materials may provide more insight into the ways such a school-home project supports children's early learning of reading and writing. Similarly, while this study identified a range of ways in which early literacy, school-home texts were used in the classroom, the relative effectiveness of curricular integration, small- group reading, independent reading, or shared reading on student achievement and the relationship between such classroom activities and literacy activities at home remain unclear.

Finally, this study is also limited by the characteristics of the students chosen as participants. One of the major findings of the study was that some Keep Books were either too easy or difficult for the HLID and LLID students at certain times during the year. Future studies including a broader range of students in kindergarten and other primary grades may provide deeper insights into the relationship between text difficulty, teacher selection of titles, and student achievement.

RESULTS

Teachers' Classroom Use of Early Literacy Texts

Data analyses revealed a variety of ways in which teachers introduced and utilized Keep Books in the kindergarten classrooms. All six of the teachers observed in the study introduced each of these texts to their students in large-group contexts, typically as students gathered on the rug during a class meeting. Books were sometimes introduced through a chart the teacher had made of the text of the little book, enlarged so everyone could see it, or the teacher used one of the enlarged versions of the Keep Books. One of the teachers introduced each new book by holding one copy in front of all of the students and discussing the pictures and text before giving students copies during small-group instruction. Five of the teachers handed out copies of the texts for individual student exploration before the formal introduction. At times, they would guide students' explorations by encouraging them to look for a particular text characteristic, a known word, or meaning relation in the new text. For example, one teacher instructed, "I want you to look through and see if there are any words you know."

Early literacy texts in guided reading

All six teachers used these early literacy texts extensively during guided reading (small-group reading instruction with children of similar abilities as readers), prior to sending them home with students. Typically, groups met after a whole-class book introduction and teachers reintroduced the book to each group by varying the level of introduction provided before children read independently. For example, after introducing *Building A House* (Estice, 1999) to the whole group, one teacher thoroughly re-introduced the book to the lower-level group with an in-depth discussion of the story and pictures. In contrast, the reintroduction for the average group included some prompting to look for new sight words and a brief reminder of the storyline of the text. Students in the top reading group were expected to reacquaint themselves with the text without prompts from the teacher and to read independently. The varying amounts of introduction reflect teachers' attempts to provide appropriate scaffolding to ensure that students could successfully read the text before taking it home to read to parents and family members.

While each child read the book during guided reading, teachers listened carefully while individuals read, observed their reading behaviors, and provided immediate support and instruction as needed. For example, instructional attention to the following skills and strategies was documented while small groups read *Building a House*:

- Work with initial and final consonants
  "I want you to figure it out. We have a… [nest]. It starts with N."
- Prompting for meaning
  "I'll give you a hint—they need a bird house. Did that make sense?"
- Word parts/orthography
  "Guess what I noticed! If you cover up the I-N-G it says build and then it says building."
- Differentiation of strategies
  "How did you know it was a nail? Are you talking about the word or the picture?"
- One-to-one matching
  "Did your finger match the words on the page?"
- Prompting for rereading
  "Go back and read that again. You got it!"

These examples illustrate the variety of teachable moments that arose through the use of these early literacy texts in small-group work as teachers responded to the needs of individual students and guided their development of effective reading strategies.

Integration of early literacy texts into thematic study

Teachers often selected a specific text to fit a thematic study. Early in the year, for example, many teachers used the rhymes and songs set to introduce students to such nursery rhyme favorites as *The Itsy Bitsy Spider, One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*, and *Fuzzy Wuzzy*. Teachers often enlarged the texts using charts or sentence strips and led the class in repeated shared readings to familiarize children with the nursery rhymes and songs. Teachers used these shared readings to teach early reading strategies such as word matching, left-to-right pointing, and return sweep. Children also read the charts during independent reading as they "read around the room," selecting their favorite chart stories and using a pointer to read by themselves or with a friend.

Across all six classrooms there was evidence of the integration of these texts in thematic studies of animals, plants, friends, and maps. One teacher, for example, developed an extensive map and graphing skills unit based on *My Map* (Pinnell, 1995). Another teacher described these texts as crucial to thematic studies because the books provided a way for all students to feel successful and enter into the thematic "world" the teacher was trying to create.

Integrating early literacy texts with other learning experiences

Teachers often connected specific texts with other learning experiences, to extend the text and encourage children to revisit the text again and again. In one classroom, for example, the teacher linked *Building A House* to the block play area by adding a toolkit to use with the blocks when her students were reading this book. After the experience of reading the book and building a house with the blocks, one student made a house and yard out of construction paper at home and brought the project, accompanied by the text, into the classroom to share with his classmates. Similarly, the folk tale little books were often related to other versions of the same tale in a genre study that included reading aloud quality children's literature. These kinds of text extensions were a frequent and very visible component of the classroom use of these school-home texts.

Teachers also created new writing experiences based upon these books through interactive writing and sentence scramble games (using sentence strips children could mix up and sort into the proper order). One teacher, for example, helped a small group write their own little book using a phrase similar to the little books they had been reading.

T: Just like Boo Boos, we could make our own little teeny tiny book. We could say "Look at me" because we've been working on that word me.

S: I can write *me*!

T: How do you think you'd start the word look? Who can help me with that word?
S: L, two O's…

The teacher continued in this manner until each of the children had written their first page. As the children each wrote the sentence, the teacher supported their attention to the initial sound of words, the spacing between each word, and the period at the end of the sentence. Later in the year, one class created a caterpillar display with round segments for each favorite book including the child's reason for selecting that book; many Keep Books were favorites for this class.

Emergent literacy texts and independent reading

Teachers created a variety of experiences to ensure that children had many opportunities to read the texts successfully and independently before taking them home. Multiple experiences with each title helped to ensure that children would be able to successfully read the books to parents and family members. After the whole-class introduction and small-group instruction, these books were placed in students' browsing boxes (typically small plastic boxes containing familiar books) for children to read before taking the book home. Students read the books in their browsing boxes at the beginning of the school day, to "warm up" before a guided reading lesson, or during independent reading time when they were directed to read the book to themselves, to a friend, and to an adult in the room. Additional copies of these texts were often found in baskets throughout the room across the school year, providing easy access for students long after they had taken their own copy home. The texts of many of these books were also accessible through the display of enlarged versions teachers created that students read using pointing sticks. During classroom observation, students were found reading by themselves, in pairs, or in spontaneously created choral reading groups. Each of these experiences provided additional opportunities for students to read and reread favorite texts, encouraged children to engage in reading behavior, and supported successful reading experiences centered around these texts in both school and home settings.

Encouraging reading at home

Teachers strongly encouraged children to read their Keep Books at home to parents, siblings, friends, and neighbors. Some teachers provided reading logs for parents to sign after students read their books. Teachers also encouraged each student to write his/her name as "owner" in the inside cover and color the pages of the Keep Books, make their own little books, and store their book collection in a child-accessible place at home, in order to facilitate multiple readings.

Student Responses to Early Literacy Texts

Observed student responses to the set of early literacy texts were overwhelmingly positive. A search for negative responses yielded very few examples, primarily consisting of instances when individual students were temporarily reluctant to initiate their engagement with a book. Even where an individual student read a particular text using limited strategies and/or word knowledge, resulting in low levels of accuracy, the task was typically engaged in enthusiastically. Rarely, a book appeared to be too familiar and/or too easy to read for a particular student. In one instance, for example, a child picked up a copy of *Building a House* and began to “read” by reciting the text with a quick pace and bored voice without looking at the text.

While students were not directly asked if they liked the books, comments such as the following were found in every classroom: “That was so easy! I can read Keep Books at home!” or “I read the book all by myself!” As one guided reading group of six students completed their reading of their new book and the teacher initiated a discussion about the story, a student in the group (a) pulled her own attention away from the group discussion, (b) quietly commented to herself that she was going to practice, (c) carefully and accurately reread the entire book to herself, and (d) stated, “I read the book all by myself!”

Language surrounding early literacy texts

Field notes taken during classroom observations documented a pattern of spontaneous, playful, unprompted language production supported by the Keep Books within a variety of contexts. This tendency was found across all six classrooms as children read to themselves and others. It was common to hear students playfully chanting the rhymes and songs of their known texts together. In one classroom, for example, a group of students at a nearby math center chimed in as the students at the guided reading table were reading *Fuzzy Wuzzy*. In another classroom, three students began singing *Itsy Bitsy Spider* using their individual copies of the book and were joined by another student reading the chart version of the same text. Another student read *This Little Pig*, holding the text up to the student across from him as if he were reading it to him. As another student at the same table chose and started reading *Teddy Bear Teddy Bear*, three other students at her table chanted along quietly without looking up from their own, different texts.

In many cases, this spontaneous, playful, unprompted talk occurred on a student-to-student basis; helping each other read a book or working together to select a known book to read. The researchers noted a strong sense of classroom ownership of the texts, with this shared literacy knowledge forming the basis for the observed student-to-student assistance in literacy learning. Both teachers and students frequently referred to texts that were “known” by the entire class. One student, for example, quietly laid out the set of Keep Books from his table's browsing box for independent reading time into two piles and commented, "Ones I know."

Other types of talk surrounding the books included opportunities for students to learn to talk explicitly about literacy. This talk included comments such as, "Hey look! The letter's like my name!" or "What does the dots mean?" or "I got a mistake, but I fixed it up!" This talk appeared to be exploratory in nature, and evidence that children were beginning to appropriate some of the teacher's talk about literacy. Students also talked about the rituals they had at home regarding Keep Books. One child explained to her teachers that she read them every night before bed, often falling asleep with her set of early literacy books all around her. Another student kept close track of the number of books in his home collection, commenting "I already have them at my mom's house. I have 19 Keep Books and this one's 20. I count mine!"

Shifts in Students' Literacy Behavior: Differential Patterns of Response

There was evidence throughout the classroom observations of student engagement with reading strategies through their independent and supported reading of the texts. Students would enthusiastically count the number of words in a sentence or phrase and practice matching one-to-one with eyes, voice, and fingers. By January most students were showing evidence of early sight word knowledge in their reading of the texts and were consistently using the familiar story lines and textual language as support.

Analyses of student data also, however, revealed differential patterns of responses for LLID and HLID students. Eleven students (2 in each of 5 classrooms, and 1 in a sixth classroom) with relatively high fall LID scores (25–55) were identified as HLID and 12 students (2 in each of the same 6 classrooms) with low LID scores (0–16) were identified as LLID participants. LLID students experienced varying degrees of success with Keep Books at the beginning of the study. A number of the LLID students showed marked difficulty early in the study in their ability to control the language and/or plot of even a well-introduced and practiced text. While some LLID students were able to match words one-to-one with a finger on known text by December, this group of students typically did not begin self-monitoring their reading with one-to-one matching until March or April. By February, the LLID students were beginning to demonstrate an increasing confidence with language and story lines while reading familiar books. Three of the LLID students also began controlling early self-monitoring behaviors, typically through their control of a few well-known sight words as well as one-to-one matching. This pattern of success for the LLID students continued into April, when these students were reading familiar Keep Books with fluency, expression, and confidence. By May, however, the new books teachers selected became more difficult for these students.

Consequently, the LLID students appeared to revert back to inventing stories and minimal overt attention to print. Teachers' attempts to provide additional supportive introductions were not sufficient to enable these LLID students to successfully read these more difficult texts later in the year.

The HLID students in this study experienced immediate, early, and sustained success with their reading of these texts. They appeared to internalize the language of the texts easily, and learned how to use meaning, one-to-one matching, and known sight words to self-monitor their reading. By May, at least two HLID students were also beginning to independently utilize initial consonant letters for problem solving at the word level when reading Keep Books. By spring, the books selected by the teacher appeared too easy for some students in this group as they read quickly and fluently with little need for self-correction or word problem solving.

DISCUSSION

Within this study, the Keep Books became an integral part of each teacher's efforts to actively engage students in daily, interesting, and rewarding reading and writing practice and instruction. The kindergarten students in this study used school-home early literacy texts to orchestrate their literate learning within and across sites; to create their own "goals, ways of participating, strategies for performing effectively, and ways of regulating that performance" (Glasswell, Parr, & McNaughton, 2003, p. 497) within their classrooms' emergent literacy activities and instruction.

Keep Books were not just briefly introduced by teachers and then sent home. Instead, the texts were integral and consistent with the daily literacy instruction in these six kindergarten classrooms through shared and guided reading, thematic study, and extension activities. This active level of instructional and student engagement appeared to be formed around not only individual children's reading of the texts but within each classroom's discourse community for literacy learning, as evidenced by the positive response to the books by students throughout the study as well as the students' frequent spontaneous, playful language production around the use of the texts. The physical characteristics of these consumable, early literacy texts may have contributed to student engagement in response to the colorful covers, inviting text, repetitive language, and well-spaced layout of the words on each page. Additionally, such key characteristics as ease of reading, accessibility, and a sense of ownership (Gibson & Scharer, 2001) appear to provide support for teachers' strong expectations that children would read and reread the books both independently and with instructional support at school as well as at home, and throughout the year.

This study provides support, then, for the use of well-designed, inexpensive, consumable and easy-to-read school-home texts within a strong kindergarten literacy program. As argued by Menon and Heibert (2005), little books can support good instruction but cannot replace quality teaching. The teachers in this study built on the supportive characteristics of Keep Books for early readers and used instructional techniques to meet the individual needs of their students, involve them in related writing activities, and ensure that children could read the little books successfully when they took them home to share with parents and family members.

This study has also identified an important concern that should be considered as teachers plan for the use of school-home early literacy texts within kindergarten classrooms. Although the selection of Keep Books for thematic study did provide strong links across instructional activities and thus often placed the reading of texts at the center of the classroom literacy program, the characteristics of those books selected did not consistently match with the current reading abilities of individual children across the school year. By May, new Keep Books selected by teachers were difficult for LLID students to read. These students then reverted back to invention of stories with minimal overt attention to print. Conversely, books chosen by teachers appeared to be too easy for some HLID students, who read these texts with little need for self-correction or word problem solving. While the teachers in this study did attempt to provide appropriate support for students through additional book introductions, which varied in the degree of teacher support provided, there was evidence that some texts remained either too easy or too difficult for some children. Further, while this study documented the positive value for texts that were known and shared by the entire class, teachers also face a challenge when trying to accommodate individual student needs while also selecting a text to introduce to the whole class. In this study, this challenge appeared to negatively affect students at both the low and high ends of the class range. Some Keep Books selected by teachers were too easy for some students and too hard for others, particularly towards the end of the school year.

The findings of this study, then, provide evidence of the potentially central role of school-home emergent literacy texts. In this study, these texts provided a strong context for kindergarten literacy instruction that targeted students' ownership of shared texts, acquisition of reading skills and strategies, and active engagement in language use embedded within literacy learning. The difficulties faced by low-performing students in this study, however, as they encountered a series of difficult-to-read texts and thus reverted to less-effective reading strategies highlights the never-ending and essential nature of teachers' differentiated instructional decisions. For low-achieving readers, instruction must be accurately targeted all of the time. The fragility of low achievers' progress in literacy acquisition demands only the best in instructional practices set in the context of exactly right texts all of the time.

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