Successful Students

Coming Full Circle: Dante's Story

Rose Mary Estice, The Ohio State University (Retired)

Dante Marshall was one of the first children in North America to benefit from Reading Recovery as an at-risk first grader in 1984–1985, the year Reading Recovery was piloted in the Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools—and he happened to be in my classroom. I was Dante's teacher, and it was my training year in Reading Recovery.

Dante began first grade with limited literacy skills, but in 15 weeks he caught up with and was reading and writing every bit as well as his peers. I knew he was on his way to being a lifelong learner that spring when the local librarian came to visit our class to talk about their summer reading program. As she was talking to the children, I noticed she called Dante by name. She didn't know any of the other children, and I was curious. After the children had gone, I asked her how she knew Dante. She said that he was a regular visitor at the library, and she had gotten to know him through his visits that year, particularly because he came alone. I knew the library was within walking distance from Dante's home, but I had no idea he was visiting there on his own. He was seeking out learning opportunities at the age of 6 because he had become successful and excited about reading and writing specifically—and learning in general.

Even though Dante was enrolled in a different elementary school every year thereafter, he continued to be a good student. He was selected to be a part of mentoring programs in middle school and took advantage of the Upward Bound program in high school. He graduated from Brookhaven High School in Columbus, where he was recognized for both his academic accomplishments and his leadership ability.

Through the years, I caught up with Dante from time to time to see how he was doing and to use his updated story as I worked with educators interested in Reading Recovery for their districts. I remember being so impressed with Dante's forward thinking as a ninth grader. I asked him how it was that he was able to stay away from the pressures of teenage life in an urban setting: skipping school, using drugs, drinking, and joining gangs were options many of his peers were taking. Dante replied, "I just think about where I will be in 10 years and where they will be. I don't believe in peer pressure." What an amazing insight for a 15-year-old.

Dante attended West Virginia University where he majored in sports management and minored in communication. He was on the dean's list and was involved in many campus activities, but he made time to tutor high school students. In December 1999 Dante graduated from WVU after only 3 1/2 years. Dante was accepted to The Ohio State University Law School in 2000.

In 1999, Dante spoke to the 4,000 attendees at the 15th Anniversary National Conference. (L-R) Marie Clay, Dante Marshall, Rose Mary Estice.

In ninth grade, Dante told Rose Mary Estice, his former Reading Recovery teacher, "I just think about where I will be in 10 years."

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He had come full circle! In first grade he was in OSU's pilot year of Reading Recovery in the Columbus schools and now he was a bona fide OSU law student. He graduated from law school in May 2003, having achieved his dream after much hard work and dedication. I was so honored to be with his family as we celebrated his graduation. What a proud day for Dante!

Dante is now an attorney-at-law in Atlanta. He is working with an established firm as a contract attorney, but already he has set his sights on establishing his own practice. He is working long hours after an already busy day to achieve that end. His dream is to have an entertainment and corporate law practice of his own within the year. He has not wavered in setting his goals and working hard to achieve them. He is surely an inspiration to all of us.

Reading Recovery made a difference in Dante’s life. Once he caught up with his peers in first grade, he was able to take advantage of learning opportunities at every stage of his education. To me, Dante represents the potential of all Reading Recovery students. He affirms in a very real way the commitment and dedication of Reading Recovery professionals everywhere.

Editor’s Note: Rose Mary Estice was one of the original Reading Recovery teachers trained by Marie Clay and Barbara Watson in 1984–1985. Now retired, she was a Reading Recovery teacher, teacher leader, and university trainer at The Ohio State University.

About the Cover
For this special 20th Anniversary issue of The Journal of Reading Recovery, editors invited Dante Marshall to be featured on the cover with a current Reading Recovery student. Dante was a Reading Recovery student during winter 1985, the first year Reading Recovery training began in the United States. Twenty years after his Reading Recovery lessons, Dante is now a contract attorney in the Atlanta area. He agreed to visit with a few of today’s Reading Recovery students at Meadowcreek Elementary School in nearby Norcross, Georgia. The student pictured is Donovan Davenport.