Teachers' Differential Treatment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students during Sharing Time

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This synthesis includes 19 studies that investigate children's narrative styles during "sharing time." It looks at teachers' responses to children's talk and how teachers' responses affect children's school performance and evaluation. Findings reveal that when there is a match between the language of the teacher and the student during sharing time, the student receives positive feedback and is allowed to practice her or his oral preparation for literacy. On the other hand, when there is a mismatch between the language of the teacher and that of the student during sharing time, teachers often fail to see the point of what the student is saying. In many cases, the teacher cuts off or interrupts the student, inhibiting the student's acquisition of literacy skills. This article discusses the differential treatment students receive during sharing time depending upon whether a match or mismatch of teacher/student discourse is present.

1. Introduction

In many preschool and elementary classrooms across the United States, there is a time of day during which children have the opportunity to share with the rest of the class a narrative about an object brought from home or to give a narrative account about some recent personal experience (Michaels 1990). These classroom narrative events are referred to as "sharing time" (also "show and tell," "rug time," "news time," and "circle time" in some classrooms) and are usually centered around the acquisition of literacy (Cazden 1985). Literacy acquisition is generally focused upon during sharing time through teachers' questions and comments, especially those aimed at helping students to structure their own discourse (Michaels 1981; Poveda 2001). Sharing time is characterized by face-to-face exchanges between the teacher and students in which children are provided an opportunity to create their own oral texts (Cazden 1985), usually by the teacher inviting them to share a narrative of personal experience about their out-of-school lives (Cazden 1988).

Sharing time in preschool and elementary classrooms is of interest because it is typically the only time during the day in which children have the opportunity (during classroom time) to create their own oral texts (Cazden 1985). In other words, this is the only time that students are allowed and encouraged to talk freely about a personal experience. Sharing time also allows students to talk about their experiences outside of school.

During sharing time, students are called on one at a time by the teacher to go to the front of the class (in most cases, they stand next to the teacher, who is seated on a chair) and asked to create a monologue. This is usually followed by a

dialogic exchange between the teacher and the student. Through questions and directives, the teacher determines who talks, how long the student talks, and what general or specific topic is addressed. Also through questions, comments, and suggestions, the teacher seeks to expand, clarify, or alter the text – in accordance with the teacher's own, often implicit, expectations about what counts as an appropriate or successful text (Michaels 1990). At the same time, teachers can provide support and assistance to the child by expanding on a topic (Michaels 1984).

In U.S. schools, there are several restrictions or rules (varying from classroom to classroom) that are prevalent during sharing time. For example, teachers may ask students to: 1) talk about one thing; 2) talk about "important" things; 3) not share private family matters; and 4) not talk about television or movies (Michaels 1981, 1986). Interestingly, Poveda (2001) did not find these (or similar) rules in the public school kindergarten classroom that he observed in Madrid, Spain. On the contrary, Poveda found that children's presentations of oral narratives in Spanish classrooms focused on family problems, movies, television shows, and video games (something that is typically not allowed in U.S. schools).

Research indicates that children from different racial, ethnic, class, and cultural backgrounds bring to the classroom different styles for organizing narratives (Labov 1972). Some children employ a narrative style that is closer to their home environment, where verbal exchanges take place with familiar people and on a regular basis (Hicks 1990). At home, a discourse style that relies on shared background knowledge and assumptions, contextual information, nonverbal cues, and prosody for supplying parts of the intended message is often present (Michaels 1983).

Research has shown that middle-class households with highly literate parents tend to socialize their children into structured routines and patterns of interaction (Heath 1982; Scollon & Scollon 1982; Ninio & Bruner 1978). Through the topic statement/question/answer exchange, the child learns to produce a single, expanded message. Linguistic minority children from low socioeconomic backgrounds often are at a disadvantage in American classrooms due to having very little or no access to similar early learning opportunities at home. As a result, children who fail to acquire literacy skills are quite often working-class, minority children from backgrounds that are ethnically and linguistically different from the dominant culture of the school (Michaels 1983).

In learning to become literate, children have to learn to shift from their home-based conversational discourse strategies to the written language strategies needed to communicate to an unknown audience (Michaels 1983; Collins & Michaels 1986). In other words, they must acquire a new discourse strategy. For example, Cazden and John (1968) argue that the "styles of learning" into which Native American children are socialized at home greatly differ from those to which they are introduced in the classroom. Hymes (1967) indicates that this may lead to sociolinguistic interference when teacher and student do not recognize these differences in their efforts to communicate with one another.

In order to be considered competent, children must conform to the teacher's implicit expectations as to how information should be organized and presented (Michaels 1984). If teachers cannot hear the structure or logic in a student's story, teachers are generally inclined to assume that no structure exists, that the talk is rambling, unplanned, or incoherent (Michaels 1984). This often leads to differential treatment and misevaluation of children. It is important to note that ethnic differences in discourse style have a significant influence in classroom interaction and learning. According to Michaels (1981), this problem is not due to racism but rather to differences in ethnic and communicative background, often leading to unintentional mismatches in conversational style.

Shuy (1981) argues that the language of the classroom is one out of many possible daily language styles. For example, classroom language tends to be different from the language of the home, the playground, and the street. At sharing time, some children's ways of sharing stories match the expectations of teachers better than others, thereby making it easier for teachers to understand their narrative accounts. When a student's narrative style matches the teacher's own style and expectations, collaboration is considered successful, and allows for the improvement of the student's literacy skills. For such students, this speech event can be considered a preparation for oral literacy. On the other hand, when there is a mismatch between a student's narrative style and the teacher's own style and expectations, collaboration is often unsuccessful. Here, the student is interrupted or simply misinterpreted. In the long run, such interactions may negatively affect a child's school performance and evaluation. Further, it may exclude the student from the instruction and practice needed to acquire literate discourse strategies.

Mismatches in student/teacher discourse may result in differential amounts of practice doing literate-style accounting for African American and White children (Heath 1982). Therefore, it is possible to argue that a student's narrative style during sharing time can have far-reaching consequences. That is, a child's narrative style (which always exists in relation to the "preferred style" sanctioned by the teacher and the school system itself) during sharing time can either provide or deny access to key literacy-related experiences depending on the way in which a teacher and child start "sharing" a set of discourse conventions and interpretive strategies (Michaels 1981).

Past research on sharing time reveals that White and African American children's sharing styles vary considerably. For example, the discourse of White children tends to be tightly organized, centering on a single, identifiable topic. Michaels (1981, 1984) calls this discourse style *topic-centered*. A discourse style that is topic-centered is one that closely matches the teacher's own discourse style as well as notions of what is considered good sharing. Here the teacher and student have a shared sense of what the topic is and are able to collaborate. Further, this style gives the teacher an opportunity to build on the student's contributions and help her or him produce a more focused and lexically explicit discourse (Michaels 1981).

In contrast to a topic-centered approach, African American children are more likely to use a *topic-associating* style. According to Michaels (1981), this discourse style consists of a series of implicitly associated personal anecdotes and is generally characterized by an absence of lexicalized connectives other than "and" relating the anecdotes, and no explicit statement of an overall theme or point. This style often gives the impression of the narrative having no beginning, middle, or end, and ultimately, no point at all. The result is often that children seem to ramble on. Here, the teacher might have difficulty discerning the topic of discourse and predicting where the talk is going (Michaels 1981, 1983). The teacher's questions may also be mistimed, stopping the student at mid-clause as well as interrupting the student's train of thought. In addition, the teacher may not build fully on the child's own narrative intentions.

This article summarizes and synthesizes the studies that have been done on children's narrative styles during sharing time, teachers' responses to children's talk, and how teachers' responses affect the talk as well as the children's school performance. Implications of these studies for practice are also discussed. To date, no other syntheses have been published summarizing this body of research.

2. Method

2.1 Selection of Studies

Taking the approach used by Klingner and Vaughn (1999) in their synthesis of student perceptions of instructional procedures, the studies presented in this synthesis were selected based on a two-step procedure. A thorough search on "sharing time" was conducted in order to ensure that all of the existing publications in this area were located. In order to gather as much information as possible on sharing time, four modes of searching were used in this synthesis: (a) searches in subject indexes, (b) citation searches, (c) consultation, and (d) browsing.

Step 1: Initial Selection of Studies

Searches in subject indexes. Similar to Klingner and Vaughn's (1999) synthesis, I conducted computer searches through two databases to identify relevant published articles, papers presented at major national educational conferences, final reports, and dissertations. These searches consisted of utilizing the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and ProQuest Digital Dissertations.

A number of computer searches through *ERIC Database Advanced Search* were conducted (not limited by date) and included sets of descriptors such as: "sharing time And teacher role And racial differences" and "sharing time And child language And teacher response." When the first set of studies was identified using the above descriptors, the major and minor descriptors found in these

articles were examined in order to find other articles. A second stage of searches was then conducted with the following sets of descriptors: "sharing time And oral language," "story telling And cultural differences," "sharing time And teacher student relationship," and "show and tell And classroom environment." Once additional studies had been identified using these descriptors, more stages of searches were initiated.

Additional searches were conducted of ProQuest Digital Dissertations to gather information not available through other sources. I used various types of descriptors in this database such as "sharing time And classroom discourse," "circle time And classroom discourse," and "classroom discourse And literacy." Abstracts that matched these descriptors were reviewed to determine if they included a focus on children's narrative style during sharing time, teachers' response and interaction with the children during sharing time, and how the teachers' response and interaction affects children's learning.

Citation searches. Lists of citations were checked from relevant studies to assure that every article cited was looked at for possible inclusion in the sample. This approach was helpful due to the identification of articles that might not have appeared in ERIC or in the dissertation abstract database.

Consultation. I attempted to locate articles that might be "in press" or "in progress" by contacting several researchers who have published articles on sharing time in the past. I sent letters to several researchers asking if they had any articles on sharing time that were "in press," "in progress," and/or if they were aware of any other researchers who had written articles focused on teachers' response/interaction with students during sharing time.

Browsing. Hand-searches of the following journals were conducted: *Linguistics and Education*, *Journal of Education*, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *Language Arts*, *Bilingual Research Journal,* and *Theory into Practice*. I browsed through the journals' table of contents, going back twenty-five years. These articles were chosen because researchers writing on sharing time published their articles in these journals. Browsing through these articles allowed me to search for articles that were not located in the ERIC database.

Step 2: Final Selection of Studies

In order for a study to be included in this synthesis, it must contain data on students' narrative style during sharing time, the teachers' response/interaction with the students during sharing time, and teacher/student collaboration during sharing time. I did not include articles that focused on teachers' attitudes about students' narrative during classroom speech events. Further, I did not include studies about why some students are less talkative than others during classroom speech events nor studies on how students learn to participate in sharing time. When a study included multiple components, I included only relevant components that fit my criteria.

2.2 Analysis Procedures

After I assembled the set of articles, my next step was to read and code them using the following categories: purpose of the study, participants' narrative during sharing time, and applicable findings. When studies had multiple purposes, including measures and results, only those that pertained to this synthesis were included in my analysis. For example, with the Davis and Golden (1994) study that examined teachers' perceptions about children not attending school with an increased English verbal communication ability as well as how misunderstandings become interpreted by teachers, I only included information about the misunderstandings; I omitted the teacher's perceptions because it did not address the purpose and criteria for this synthesis.

In order to summarize the findings of the articles I collected, I read the articles and recorded their descriptions and key findings in a database. I then pulled out common themes from the articles and transferred them into another database. Finally, I re-read the articles to determine whether the findings should be included or whether the findings were unrelated to the purpose of this synthesis.

3. Results

3.1 Participants

The studies in this synthesis included participants in kindergarten through seventh grade (one study included teachers as participants analyzing students' narratives). It was challenging to determine the exact number of participants in each study due to the fact that not all of the studies under consideration provided the total number of participants. For example, some studies included only the number of classrooms observed (for example, Danielewicz et al. (1996) studied one first-grade classroom). Of the 19 studies in this synthesis, eight studies included participants of different ethnic backgrounds (other than African American and White), two studies included an equal number of African American and White participants, four studies included only African American participants, in one study participants were predominately African American, and in four studies the ethnic background of participants was not reported. Table 1 provides a summary of the studies included in this synthesis. The numbers assigned to the studies will be used to refer to them throughout the article.

Table 1
Summary of the 19 Studies

Study	*Purpose*	*Participants*
1. Cunningham, 1976-77	Investigate **teachers' tendency to correct Black-dialect-specific miscues** and their ability to recognize Black dialect	214 teachers analyzing work done by students in grade 4
2. Danielewicz, Rogers, & Noblit, 1996	Investigate **students' narrative style** and **interaction patterns** during sharing time (teacher-led format and child-led format)	One first-grade classroom
3. Daniell, 1996	Expand on Michaels' (1986) findings of Deena's story during sharing time (and offers a critique to a student's **narrative style**)	One African American female student in the first grade
4. Davis & Golden, 1994	Discuss the differences between **students' and teachers' communication style** (and **interpretation of utterances**)	300 kindergartners (98% African American)
5. Gallas, 1992	Present one **student's narrative style** and looks at the social nature of the classroom community. Provides information on how children and teachers can work together to understand each other's stories	First-grade classroom of 22 students (3 African American, 11 White, 6 Japanese, 1 South African, and 1 Ethiopian)
6. Gee, 1985	Give an analysis of an African American **student's narrative style** and discusses the **teacher's response** to the narrative. Also seeks to explain how the child makes sense of her experiences through narrative	One 7-year-old African American female student

Table 1 (continued)
Summary of the 19 Studies

Study	Purpose	Participants
7. Gee, 1989	Offer an analysis of an African American and White **student's narrative style** during sharing time	One 11-year-old African American female student and one 11-year-old White female student
8. Hyon & Sulzby, 1994	Discuss **students' narrative style** during sharing time	Forty-eight African American low-income kindergartners
9. McCabe, 1997	Synthesizes research on the importance of stories in classrooms and how **students' narrative style** differs from culture to culture	Synthesis
10. Michaels, 1981	African American and White **students' narrative style** is analyzed (and the **teacher's response** to their discourse)	One first-grade classroom of diverse students
11. Michaels, 1983	Discuss the significance of ethnic differences in **students' narrative style** and its influence on classroom interaction and learning; looks at **teacher/child collaboration** at sharing time	Four Boston integrated classrooms (1st, 2nd, and two combined 1st-2nd grades) and one Berkeley classroom (half middle-class White and half working-class African American)
12. Michaels, 1984	Look at **students' narrative style** during sharing time (also **teacher/child collaboration**)	One 2nd-grade classroom of ethnically diverse students

Table 1 (continued)
Summary of the 19 Studies

Study	Purpose	Participants
13. Michaels & Collins, 1984	Discuss situations in which sharing turns result in more successful **teacher/child collaboration** and extended discourse than others (including **students' narrative style**)	One 1st-grade integrated classroom
14. Michaels & Foster, 1985	Look at **students' narrative style** (and **teacher's response**) to or evaluation of children's discourse	One combined 1st-2nd grade classroom of 20 ethnically diverse students
15. Michaels, 1986	Discuss **teacher's response** to **students' narrative style**	One 1st-grade classroom (half White and half African American students)
16. Michaels & Cazden, 1986	Discuss how discourse patterns related to ethnic background affect the quality of **teacher/child collaboration**	One 1st grade classroom (30 students) of ethnically diverse students (14 White, 15 African American, 1 Asian)
17. Michaels, 1990	Discuss **teacher's response** to **students' narrative style**	Sharing time in one 1st grade classroom and one 2nd-grade classroom and a composition writing activity in one 6th-grade classroom
18. Poveda, 2001	Look at **similarities and differences between sharing time speech events in Spain and U.S. schools**	One kindergarten classroom (18 students) of ethnically diverse students (Spanish gypsies, African and Latin American immigrants, and non Spanish gypsies)
19. Puro & Bloome, 1987	Look at teacher/child **interaction patterns**	One kindergarten class, one 1st-grade reading group, and one 7th grade classroom

3.2 Data Sources

The primary data sources for all of these studies were students' narrative accounts and teachers' responses during sharing time. Measures included: observations of teacher-led sharing time (2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19), observations of student-led sharing time (2, 14), students' language and interaction patterns (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19), teachers' responses to students' narratives (2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18), written narratives (13, 17), oral interviews (4, 8, 13, 15, 17), and written questionnaires (1).

3.3 Description of Studies

Of the 19 studies that met the criteria for inclusion in this synthesis, 14 were published in refereed journals and five were published as book chapters. All studies reported that one of their purposes was to investigate students' language style during sharing time. In addition, all studies sought to look at teachers' responses to students' language style as well as collaborative exchanges between students and their teachers.

3.4 Summary of Findings

An analysis of the articles generated eight categories of findings: Students' Narrative Style, Teacher Response, Teacher/Student Collaboration, Interpretation of Utterances, Interaction Patterns, Students' and Teachers' Communication Style, Teachers' Tendency to Correct Black Dialect-Specific Miscues, and Similarities and Differences between Sharing Time Speech Events in Spain and U.S. Schools. Some of the studies addressed only one of these categories, while others overlapped and covered multiple categories. The applicable categories addressed by each article are highlighted in bold text in the purpose statements listed in Table 1.

3.4.1 Student's Narrative Style

Fourteen studies address students' narrative style during sharing time in some way. Students' narrative style during sharing time was the primary focus of 12 studies (2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17), and a secondary focus of two (3, 13). One theme related to students' narrative style was identified: *topic-centered style and topic-associating style.*

Nine studies address the two styles of narratives that children use during sharing time: *topic-centered and topic-associating* (3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17). Topic-centered narratives are characterized as discourses that are tightly organized around a single topic. In contrast, topic-associating narratives are characterized by frequent shifts in time, location, and key characters. Research on

sharing-time stories indicate that White students tell topic-centered stories, while a significant number of stories told by African American students are topic-associating stories (Michaels 1981; Michaels & Cazden 1986).

In one study, an African American female student's (Deena) narrative style is analyzed and identified as topic-associating (3). According to Deena's teacher, her story appears to be a stitching-together of unrelated pieces of information (Daniell 1996). As a result, Deena's teacher was not successful in helping her to structure and clarify her narrative. Deena's topic-associating story caused her teacher to ask questions at inappropriate times, causing Deena to lose her train of thought.

In another study, the narrative of a seven-year-old African American girl ("L") is examined (6). "L's" topic-associating narrative style during sharing time is not immediately recognizable by her teacher and as a result appears as incoherent. In the end, "L" is given less instructional time and attention than those children who use a topic-centered style. Gee (1985) argues that "L" is considered to be a master of making sense of her experience, and she carries her story with full utilization of prosody, time and sequence markers, parallelism, and repetition.

The purpose of another study (8) was to assess the frequency of topic-associating narratives among African American kindergartners. The study found that the stories told by the participants included both topic-centered and topic-associating narratives. Results revealed that out of the 48 narratives, there were 16 topic-associating stories, 28 topic-centered stories, and 4 stories whose category was not clear. Further, results indicate that the topic-associating style was not predominant among African Americans, as Michaels' observations have shown.

Another study (11) presents a pair of excerpts (including both topic-associating and topic-centered styles) with the teacher's response to the students' discourse style. The study examines the discursive skills that are required in literate-style communication and focuses specifically on the effect that differences in discourse style may have on teacher/student collaboration. The author presents findings that indicate that middle-class, highly literate parents engage their children in structured routines and patterns of interaction (contrary to working-class, less literate parents). This practice allows children to develop their communicative abilities, thereby preparing children for the demands of literate discourse. Further, the author argues that a child's use of a discourse style that is at variance with the teacher's expectations decreases the quality of instruction in key classroom activities, which then interferes with the child's development of a prose-like discourse style.

Another study (12) examines children's preferred strategies for structuring a narrative account. Findings indicate that 96 percent of White children, 34 percent of African American males, and 27 percent of African American females used a topic-centered narrative style during sharing time. Michaels suggests that African American children are more likely to tell narratives using a topic-associating style while White children use a topic-centered style. Further, she argues that teachers are better able to follow cues in topic-centered discourse due

to turns meeting the teachers' expectations about where certain information should be located and how a topic should be developed.

In a number of studies (10, 13, 15, 17), topic-centered and topic-associating narratives are illustrated and analyzed. The topic-associating narrative in all these studies is that of Deena, an African American female. During Deena's sharing turn, her teacher repeatedly tells her to talk about "one thing," interrupting and questioning her several times. These studies indicate that such types of responses/actions by teachers (with topic-associating children) interfere with students' train of thought, causing them to stop talking or revert to one or two-word responses. When Deena's teacher was asked what she thought about topic-associating turns, she explained that students really don't think about what they want to say in advance and simply talk off the top of their heads. These studies indicate that Deena and her teacher were working within their own sharing time schema; that is, without a shared sense of topic as well as a shared set of discourse conventions. On the other hand, these studies indicate that students who used a topic-centered narrative were understood by the teacher; the teacher was successful at picking up on the students' topic. The teacher's questions occurred after pauses, descended from general to specific, and the teacher's responses and clarifications built on students' own contributions.

3.4.2 Teacher Response

Five studies focused on teacher response to students' narrative style during sharing time (6, 10, 14, 15, 17). All five studies emphasized teachers' responses when students used a topic-centered narrative style versus those that used a topic-associating narrative style. Teachers tended to offer students who used a topic-centered style a scaffold on which to build their narratives. For example, through statements, questions, and responses, teachers were able to elicit more explicit information on the students' topic. Students in these studies that used a topic-centered narrative style received interactive support from teachers as well as extended practice for learning the narrative demands of the classroom. On the other hand, teachers were less successful at providing a scaffold for students who used a topic-associating narrative style. For example, during their narrative accounts, teachers' questions were often mistimed, teachers interrupted students at mid-clause, and students' turns were often cut short by the teacher. This tended to throw the children off balance and ultimately interrupt their train of thought.

3.4.3 Teacher/Student Collaboration

Four studies focused on teacher/student collaboration during sharing time (11, 12, 13, 16). In one study (11), the teacher actively participated, asking questions and making comments to help students clarify, structure, and expand their discourse. In this study, students were encouraged to be clear and precise, and to put all the information their audience needed into words rather than relying on

shared background knowledge or contextual cues to communicate part of the intended message (Michaels 1983). Michaels' study found that the teacher collaborated more successfully with some students than with others; according to Michaels, this collaboration depended on the degree to which the teacher and student shared a set of discourse conventions. It was revealed that the Berkeley teacher frequently used a confrontational strategy with topic-associating students telling them to talk about "important things" or "one thing only." The Boston teachers, in contrast, rarely used overtly confrontational strategies (Michaels 1983). Finally, Michaels found that problems in teacher/student collaboration stem from a mismatch between a teacher's and student's narrative strategy and use of prosody. Further, Michaels believes that these mismatches, over time, result in differential amounts of practice and instruction for children in organizing information according to a literate model.

In a second study (12), an interactional pattern ("vertical construction") that can result in collaborative development of a topic is described. Through this statement/question/answer exchange, the teacher and student collaborate to produce a single, expanded message. This study focused on the role that a second-grade teacher played during sharing time. It was found that the teacher played a pivotal role as listener and responder, addressing questions and comments to the child sharing or the audience at large, trying to help the child clarify and expand his or her discourse (Michaels 1984). While African American and White children in this study used a sharing intonation (i.e., up-talking) strategically, the teacher was better able to follow these cues in topic-centered discourse because these turns met her expectations about where certain information should be located and how a topic should be developed (Michaels 1984).

In the third study (13), collaborative exchanges between a teacher and her students at sharing time were analyzed. It was found that some sharing turns resulted in more successful teacher/child collaboration and extended discourse than others. As a result, some children seemed to get more practice using literate discourse strategies than did others (Michaels & Collins 1984). It was concluded that the teacher/child interaction was asynchronously paced when students used an "oral discourse style" during sharing time (as opposed to a "literate discourse style"). When students used an oral discourse style, the teacher made frequent interruptions, thematically inappropriate comments, and, as a result, there was minimal collaboration between the teacher and her students. Michaels and Collins argue that lack of teacher/student collaboration results in a pattern of differential treatment and negative evaluations that diminish students' access to the kind of instruction and practice necessary for the acquisition of literacy.

The final study in this group (16) focuses on teacher/child collaborative exchanges during sharing time. This study pays attention to the following pattern: the student says something (often in response to a teacher's question), is again queried by the teacher, and then provides more information as elaboration. It is argued that through the above sequence of questions and answers, the teacher and student construct (together) a single, expanded message. Furthermore, this kind of

exchange gives the student practice at being lexically explicit. The teacher in this study participated actively at sharing time, and sharing time in this classroom was considered a kind of "oral preparation for literacy." However, it was found that not all of the students gained equal access to help. The teacher collaborated more successfully with some children than with others at sharing time, depending on the degree to which the teacher and student started out sharing a set of discourse conventions. Michaels and Cazden found that collaboration stemmed from a match between teacher and student's narrative strategies and use of prosody.

3.4.4 Interpretation of Utterances

One study (4) focused on teachers' interpretation of students' utterances in a kindergarten center. In this study, two teachers explain that the lack of teacher-student communication is due to some children not having much language experience and therefore, not having sufficient vocabulary. They explain that many students lack the kinds of experiences at home that would help them prepare for school. While these teachers interpret some students' verbal communication in terms of a deficiency, they are unable to see other possible explanations for lack of student participation, such as miscommunication due to differences in interactional styles. Both teachers believe that if a student's behavior does not match the school language and expectations (that is, mainstream language), then that student comes from a home lacking in language and "proper" ways of behaving (Davis & Golden 1994). Davis and Golden argue that the ways in which these teachers evaluate students and engage in classroom interaction can be harmful to the students with whom they work.

3.4.5 Interaction Patterns

Two studies (2, 19) focused on student interaction patterns during sharing time. One of these studies (2) investigated students' language and interaction patterns during teacher-led and a student-led sharing time events. During the teacher-led speech event, students spoke the language of the school modeled by the teacher, responded to the teacher's script, and spoke the words insisted upon by the teacher. In the teacher-led event, the teacher controlled the conversation and steered the conversation toward categories of acceptable talk. During the student-led speech event, students in the role of the sharer established the topic and controlled the interaction to extend discussion. Danielewicz et al. (1996) found that this student-led dialogue fostered peer culture and a sense of individual and group identity. Further, they found that student-led sharing speech events allow students to gain power and control while simultaneously building community through shared discussions and common rituals.

The purpose of the second study (19) was to help students acquire reading vocabulary as well as develop their reading comprehension skills. When a student answered a question in a way not acceptable to the teacher, the latter modeled

how the former was to structure the response (that is, in a book-like sentence). Here, students learned how to formulate an appropriate answer to a teacher's question as well as how to construct a book-like sentence. Puro and Bloome (1987) argue that teachers and students interpret each other's messages in terms of the interactional context. This can be observed, for example, when a student has to reformulate his/her answer in terms of a book-like sentence. From the interactional context in this event, the student and the others in the group learn how to structure their relationship to printed text and what constitutes comprehension (Puro & Bloome 1987).

3.4.6 Students' and Teachers' Communication Styles

One study (4) focused on student and teacher communication styles during storybook reading time. The study suggests that the ways in which teachers engage in classroom interaction can be harmful to the children they work with. During storybook reading time, when students answered teachers' questions in unison, two teachers allowed it in some instances but not in others. These two teachers reinforced "appropriate" behavior during storybook reading by either ignoring the students or asking a specific student if s/he wanted a talking turn. A third teacher utilized several different strategies with the expectation that children would respond in unison. For example, one strategy was to pause and have children complete the teacher's text. If the students responded correctly, the teacher affirmed this by restating their response.

3.4.7 Teachers' Tendency to Correct Black Dialect-Specific Miscues

One study (1) focused on teachers' tendency to correct Black dialect. This study investigated teachers' attitudes toward non-meaning-changing miscues and to see if these attitudes were different for Black-dialect-specific miscues. It also aimed to discover if a relationship existed between the number of Black-dialect miscues teachers indicated they would correct and the number of speech samples they recognized as being spoken mostly by African American students. Teachers' responses indicated that they would correct significantly more Black-dialect-specific miscues (78 percent "would correct" responses) than non-dialect-specific miscues (27 percent "would correct" responses). Cunningham (1976-77) argues that a major obstacle to reading success for African American children may be found not in their language but in their teachers' attitude toward and reaction to that language.

3.4.8 Sharing Time Speech Events in Spain and U.S. Schools

One study (18) compared differences between sharing time in Spain and the U.S. Poveda (2001) states that "*la ronda*" (the round) and sharing time are

distinguishable in participation structures, conversational topics, children's initiations, and teachers' feedback. In Spain, *la ronda* is an event used to socialize students into a classroom community that shares a number of behavioral, affective, and cognitive standpoints. Sharing time in the U.S., on the contrary, is an instructional event in which certain linguistic-discursive forms, often explicitly related to later literacy development, are practiced (Poveda, 2001).

4. Discussion

Sharing time is an activity that gives students the opportunity to share with the rest of the class a narrative about an object brought from home or to give a narrative account of some recent personal experience. In U.S. schools, these narrative events are usually seen as a type of oral preparation for literacy, focusing on academic skills and content (Harris & Fuqua 2000). A number of studies have suggested that children from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds attend school with different skills for giving narrative accounts.

Studies in this synthesis indicate that when a student's discourse style matches the teacher's own style and expectations, collaboration is synchronized and allows for informal practice and instruction in the development of a literate discourse style. In contrast, when the student's narrative style is inconsistent with the teacher's expectations, collaboration is often unsuccessful and, over time, may adversely affect school performance and evaluation.

The present study summarizes 19 studies conducted within the last 28 years; its goal is to come to a better understanding of students' narrative styles during sharing time and teachers' responses to them. Further, it seeks to document the differential treatment students receive depending upon their narrative style. Studies addressed the following aspects of students' narrative style: teachers' response/feedback, teacher/student collaboration, interpretation of students' utterances, teacher/student interaction patterns, students' and teachers' communication style, and students' school performance and evaluation.

4.1 Implications for Practice

This synthesis provides direct implications for school teachers and administrators. One of the most significant findings in this synthesis is the suggestion that teachers view the majority of African American students' language (during sharing time) as uncommunicative and unacceptable. Furthermore, teachers interpret many African American students' communicative style in terms of a cognitive handicap and view them as coming from a home lacking in language. Teachers in these studies tend to label the majority of African American children's narratives as having no beginning, middle, and end, and ultimately, no point at all. In the end, teachers respond differently to African American Vernacular English (topic-associating style) and Standard American English (topic-centered style).

Teachers' attitudes of student's language style during sharing time often lead to children having differential access to learning opportunities in the classroom. Most studies in this synthesis indicate that after an African American's narrative account there was a complete absence of teacher/student collaboration, something that occurred very infrequently with White students. Thus, the discourse style employed by a student influences the kind and amount of teacher/child collaboration that occurs. If a student uses a topic-centered style, the teacher is successful at picking up the child's topic and offering a scaffold on which to build. In addition, the teacher offers interactive support, asking general to specific questions, thereby building on the child's own contributions. On the other hand, if a student uses a topic-associating style, the teacher is less successful at providing a scaffold. Further, the teacher asks questions that are often inappropriate and thereby mistimed. The result is that the teacher often interrupts the child at mid-clause and throws her or him off-balance.

Researchers in this synthesis believe that mismatches in teacher/student discourse frequently result in interruptions, misunderstandings, and misassessment and misevaluation of children's abilities (e.g., evaluating children as less capable of producing organized, well-planned texts). It is indicated that over time, these negative evaluations may in turn influence the teacher's expectations and treatment of and attitudes toward these children as learners. Michaels' research (1981, 1983, 1986) argues that mismatches between teachers and students negatively impact the literacy instruction children receive. She goes on to state that these misunderstandings negatively affect the teacher-student relationship, a crucial factor in learning. Moreover, Collins (1982) suggests that any sort of communicative mismatch between the language of the teacher and student will reinforce decisions about which students will be classified as high-ability and which will be classified as low-ability learners. He goes on to argue, following Anyon (1981), that such decisions can influence allocation of the teacher's time, compounding the general tendency in public schooling to allocate the smallest percentage of resources to those who need them most (Collins 1982).

Students make meaning of their teachers' responses toward their own (and others') way of speaking during sharing time. For example, during an interview conducted by Michaels, Deena (a six-year-old African American student) expressed a keen sense of frustration about being interrupted during sharing time. She saw being interrupted as an indication that the teacher was simply not interested in what she had to say:

> Sharing time got on my nerves. She was always interruptin' me saying', "That's not important enough," and I hadn't hardly started talkin'!. . . I felt like slappin' her upside the head,. . .sayin' 'Well it's important to *me*, so you just listen when I'm talkin' to you woman! (Michaels 1990)

Deena's older sister recalled similar frustrations from her sharing experiences five years earlier in both kindergarten and first grade.

These studies teach us that the problem of mismatched discourse appears to relate more generally to differences in ethnic and communicative backgrounds, leading to unintentional mismatches in conversational style. Over time, such mismatches may result in differential amounts of practice doing literate-style narrative accounts for African American and White children in class, which may ultimately affect children's progress in the acquisition of literacy skills. Further, mismatches can greatly influence children's participation and educational success. In the end, improving teacher/student collaboration can increase students' opportunities to learn by enhancing students' access to the kind of quality instruction that they need.

These studies also reveal that children's communicative style is associated with their cultural identity and presentation of self. They suggest that teachers and schools do not understand or value students' mode of expression, do not see students' language style connected to a culture and sense of self, and that teachers do not give access to the instruction that would ensure that students could switch narrative style, let alone do so in a way that does not threaten their own sense of self. Cazden (1976) argues that in out-of-school conversations, one's attention (as speakers and listeners) is on the meaning, the intention, of what someone is trying to say. She maintains that teachers have gotten into the habit of hearing with different ears once they enter the classroom; they only hear the errors to be corrected.

4.2 Limitations

There were three limitations to the way research was conducted in the studies reviewed that deserve mentioning. First, no studies were found that focused on English language learners. There is a need for more research to focus on linguistically (as well as culturally) diverse students during sharing time. Second, almost all data in these studies were based on observations of African American and White children. It would be critical to look at different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to learn whether different narrative styles during sharing time are present. Third, African American children in the studies tended to be working-class (or poor) and come from inner cities. It would be important to expand this research to include African American children (as well as children from other ethnic backgrounds) that come from various income brackets as well as geographic regions.

There are some questions that remain unanswered after reviewing the studies in this synthesis. First, it was not indicated whether it is possible for similar problems to be present in other contexts where teachers and students attempt to collaborate in the joint development of a coherent message. For example, can mismatches exist between teachers and students during group reading lessons? Second, there was no suggestion regarding the frequency of topic-associating

discourse among African American children. For instance, how often and within what contexts does a topic-associating discourse occur? Third, while sharing time is seen as an oral preparation for literacy, its influence on children's reading ability is unclear. It would be valuable to explore how children's discourse style (topic-centered and topic-associating) affects their reading ability.

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