THE IMPACT OF SHARING TIME ON COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND ACCESS
TO SCHOOL-BASED LITERACY

by

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ABSTRACT

This research study examined the relationship between sharing time and community building, in addition to students' access to school-based literacy in a second grade classroom. This relationship was researched while sharing time was implemented as a daily classroom practice, which happened during the last 15 minutes of the school day. During the implementation of sharing time, data was collected using a variety of methods. These methods included video recordings of sharing time events, interviews with six randomly selected students, and a daily observational journal that was used to record personal reflections.

Throughout the process three major themes were identified: Sharing time and class work, reflection and goal setting, and the importance of storytelling. Students' stories and interactions are interwoven throughout the analysis as a link was drawn between sharing time, community building, and access to school-based literacy.

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CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND RATIONALE FOR STUDY

Problem Statement

Sharing time is a classroom practice in which students are free to create their own oral texts, sharing stories from their own lived experiences (Cazden, 1985). Students are generally called on one at a time by the teacher and asked to share with the rest of the class a story of their choosing (Barletta, 2008). It is also a structured classroom practice in which bringing in stories from outside of the classroom is acceptable (Cazden, 1985). The general focus of sharing time is on creating a sense of community and developing social and interactional skills. The presence of sharing time may help build a sense of community in classrooms as students and teachers begin to build upon one another's unique knowledge bases and global perspectives, strengthening their access to school-based literacy (Rogers & Renard, 1999; Short, 2007). However, sharing time, once a ubiquitous practice in elementary school classrooms, is rapidly disappearing as more classroom time is devoted to teaching to mandated curricula in order to teach to the standardized tests (Charney, 2002).

The departure of sharing time in elementary schools may limit the ability for students to engage in discussions surrounding experiences that matter to them most, denying them access to literacy by devaluing their experiences and ways of knowing (Michaels, 1981; Michaels, 1984; O'Connor & Michaels, 1993). As more time is spent working towards standards in classrooms, we may be denying the ability for students to learn from one another. This may also inhibit the strength of a classroom community by limiting authentic interaction. In addition, when time is to be spent working solely towards standards, in accordance with the teacher's agenda, speech that does occur in the

classroom is often resituated in the context of the content standards that require the use of academic language. Resituating all language into the context of the content standards denies students the ability to utilize prior knowledge and narrative practices in order to build new understanding and gain access to literacy (Gallas, 1997; Michaels, 1981; O'Connor et al., 1993). In essence, it holds the possibility of devaluing the lives of the students. When students' experiences are not validated within the space of a classroom there is danger in failing to recognize that their experiences are rich with cultural and cognitive resources.

In the primary classroom in which I was working there was no time set aside for sharing of personal stories. The school day was organized into blocks of instruction in order to meet the state-mandated standards for math and English, sparing no time for collaboration or community-building work. Unfortunately, this meant that when I began to teach full-class lessons that required group work, only a few students were capable of communicating with their peers. Students had yet to be provided opportunities that would enable them to become oriented towards one another's ideas in a sharing time space. This resulted in limited capacities for relating to each other on an individual basis. Furthermore, when students did engage in storytelling relating to their classroom context, they were often interrupted or silenced if their story had not met the standards for academic language use as expected by the teacher. This is especially true of English language learners, a growing population in this community. There seemed to be little capacity for orienting towards the ideas of others, especially when there was a perceived language barrier. Speech in these cases was viewed as a deficit. When interactions in the classroom remain to be unassisted, there is danger in minimizing learners' abilities to

build upon their present speech capabilities in a way that grows their knowledge of academic speech that is necessary to gain grounding in literacy in the classroom (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Zwiers, 2008). In other words, speech capabilities, especially relating to English language learners, can deny or grant students access into school-based literacy and hinder the formation of community. For the purpose of this review, school-based literacy, and literacy in general, will be defined as a students' experience with, and growth in understanding of, the language pertaining to communication, both in writing and speaking. This includes both the communication with peers and the teacher that is necessary for overall achievement in school.

Review of the Literature

The following section pertains to the literature that exists regarding sharing time and its implications for classroom use. The literature has been divided into three distinct themes: sharing time as a key speech event, variances in acquiring literacy, and the value of storytelling.

Sharing Time as a Key Speech Event

Teaching and learning in the classroom is a communicative process (Puro & Bloome, 1987). Studying discourse in a classroom unveils more than the focused, verbal transfer of knowledge from one individual to another. Discourse in a classroom is a multifaceted process in which learning and access to literacy is mediated to bring about a deeper understanding. However, access to literacy may also be denied, as language becomes misrepresented or silenced (Michaels, 1981; O'Connor et al., 1993). Sharing time as a key speech event (an event in which conversation is central to the objective of the task) has the ability to promote or deny access to a student depending on how the

event is organized. Given the nature of classroom time spent teaching to the mandated curricula, much of a student's speech is directed towards the content standards. This direction of speech, coupled with a teacher's agenda, student status, and variance of language use can all act as gatekeepers to literacy during sharing time (Gallas, 1997; Michaels, 1981; O'Connor et al., 1993).

One characteristic of discourse in a classroom is that teachers play an active role in controlling and sustaining dialogue (O'Connor et al., 1993). Discourse that occurs during key speaking events, such as sharing time, often promotes the agenda of the teacher and content standards. This is to say that discourse is locally managed during speaking events to meet the expectations of the teacher (O'Connor et al., 1993; Yazigi & Seedhouse, 2005). In a sense, there is a hierarchy of power demonstrated in classroom discourse, ensuring that not everyone has equitable access to literacy (Michaels, 1981; Michaels, 1984; O'Connor et al., 1993). Michaels (1981) asserts that because key speaking events, like sharing time, can either promote or deny access to key literacy-related understandings, acquiring a mode of literate discourse is not equally easy among all students.

In order to meet the expectations of the teacher, student speech must be comparable to that of the teacher's. When student speech does not compare to that of the teacher's, access to mediated understanding (utilizing peer response in discussions) may be denied (Michaels, 1981; Michaels, 1984). Discourse is then highlighted as a form of control and socialization in the classroom (O'Connor et al., 1993). Since acquisition of school-based literacy involves socialization into the values, purposes, and practices that stem from specific events in the classroom, varied linguistic styles result in differential

treatment during key speech events (Michaels, 1981; Michaels, 1984; O'Connor et al., 1993). Thus, teachers' discursive practices in the classroom work to organize academic tasks within social participation structures (O'Connor et al., 1993).

In a study published in 1984, Sarah Michaels offered findings in regards to students' varied discourse practices and their acceptance by the teacher. This study is rich in its explanation with regards to the differentiation of treatment based on students' learned linguistic practices. The central focus of this study identifies the differences in speech structure found in students, both Black and White, during sharing time events.

Michaels' findings suggest that 96% of White students' speech during sharing time was topic-centered. This is a stark contrast to the 34% of Black students, whose speech was topic-centered. Black students were more likely to use a topic-associating style of speech during sharing time. In analyzing sharing time events, Michaels found speech that was topic-centered was more often accepted without teacher mediation. This is determined to be a result of teacher expectation and accepting speech practices that are readily understood or shared. This holds many implications for students that do not share a topic-centered speech approach. The content of their speech is often misinterpreted or denied value within sharing time scenarios, ultimately hindering the students' access to literacy.

While this study sets up the problem clearly, it does not highlight English Language Learners, a growing population in classrooms across the country. This diminishes the study's transferability in terms of applying this model to other contextually similar classrooms. The focus of this study pertains to only fluent English speakers from varied socio-economic backgrounds. For the purpose of investigating

speech practices and how the teacher differentiates treatment it will be important for further research to include English Language Learners. As stated by Michaels (1984), negative judgments and academic inferences as they relate to free speech events, may deny students access and confidence in gaining literacy skills. Districts across the nation are working diligently to meet the needs of English Language Learners, and as a result, focus should be placed on how speech events are used in the classroom and what should be gleaned from such events (Olson, 2013). The point remains- if sharing time is a space offered to build community and gain access to school-based literacy, the way teachers structure the time to meet the needs of all students is essential (Bloome, 1986; Dickinson, 1985; Grugeon & Hubbard, 2006; Pianta, Belsky, Houts, & Morrison, 2007).

Variances in Acquiring Literacy

The hierarchy of power during key speech events suggests that not all learners will be brought into an accessible context for gaining literacy (Gallas, 1997). Gallas (1997) affirms that acquisition of literacy preparation begins in the home. While some students have access to books, collaborative storytelling, and enrichment activities such as museum visits and cultural events, other students do not share the same advantage of the rich linguistic practices valued by the schools. This advantage is generally shared among students that are raised in the mainstream, academic discourse present in mostly middle-class, educated homes and that matches that of the teacher's (Heath, 1982). For students that attend school with little to no formal literacy preparation, differential treatment during speech events may occur due to the fact that the speech style does not match that of the teacher's. This has direct implications in regards to a student's access to literacy. Michaels (1981) suggests that when this is the case, interaction between teacher

and child is often confused and marked by interruptions and misinterpretation of the speaker's objective. Students without formal literacy preparation do not receive equitable opportunities to share their stories. This places the entire classroom at a disadvantage as we limit the assets that are accepted as a part of the classroom community.

While students may arrive in the classroom with a variety of speech patterns, having had varied exposure to mainstream literary standards, access to literacy in the classroom depends upon the degree to which the teacher and students begin sharing a set of discursive principles and interpretive approaches (Michaels, 1981). Since many students are not acquiring literacy skills at the same rate outside of school that meets the expectation of a teacher's speech proficiency, Michaels (1981) advocates for questioning what skills are involved in literacy acquisition and what activities within the classroom provide or deny access to the kind of education that is needed to attain these skills.

There is clear evidence to suggest that students bring into the classroom a variety of linguistic assets. In Sarah Michaels' 1981 study, variances in linguistic practices are often viewed as deficits. While the study advocates for questioning what activities in the classroom provide or deny access to literacy, it does not provide examples for why speech should be valued.

Michaels (1981) suggests that implications for speaking during sharing time can deny or grant students access to literacy, but she does not overtly state how that access is granted or denied. There is a suggestion that cultural differences may act as a gatekeeper to literacy. For example, there is a Black assistant in the classroom that commonly facilitates sharing time and readily engages with the students' stories. However, this topic is hinted at briefly and left to be questioned by further research, diminishing the

transferability of this study. Since the presence of sharing time has been eliminated from the majority of classrooms there is presently little research that hints at the use of language within the context of classroom sharing time.

Value of Storytelling

Storytelling is much more than the sharing of personal experiences, histories, and cultures. Through stories we grant others access into our own ways of generating meaning while building on others' knowledge of the world in which we live. In turn, storytelling helps to promote student empowerment as they build secure, trusting relationships through their sharing of stories. Stories provide a vehicle for creating meaning, forming relationships, and developing community with others, while at the same time, building essential skills that contribute to confidence in school-based literacy. (Charney, 2002; Harris & Fucqua., 2000; Gallas, 1992; Nieto, 2013; Turner & Kim, 2005; Yazigi et al., 2005; Short, 2012; Wiseman, 2003).

Stories help us to make sense of our lives and the world in which we live. They are, in a sense, a mode of knowing. Stories are also a primary way through which we think and construct meaning from our lived experiences (Nieto, 2013; Short, 2012; Wiseman, 2003). The act of telling a story grants others access into understanding new perspectives. When approached authentically, stories can honor individuality while growing a sense of community (Harris et al., 2000).

The act of telling stories during sharing time also helps establish relationships that strengthen community. The practice of sharing time orients students towards each other's ideas. This helps to acknowledge the unique contributions of each individual while fostering active participation. Active participation can encourage cooperation and

inclusion among students, and contribute to a feeling of community culture (Bondy & Ketts, 2001; Harris et al., 2000, Horsch, Chen, & Nelson, 1999; Wiseman, 2003).

The fostering of community in a classroom brings students together. The reoccurring practice of sharing time promotes the essence of community by focusing on the classroom group of individuals, each bringing a unique perspective into the shared space. Each student is valued and their shared experiences contribute to the growth of the classroom community (Bornstein & Bradley, 2007; Harris et al., 2000; Yazigi et al., 2005).

Students belonging to strong classroom communities have a sense of connectedness (Rovai, 2002). Classroom communities support socialization and academic success as students create positive relationships with their peers, learn to collaboratively work together for a common good, solve conflicts respectfully, and honor one another's individuality. In a community-based classroom, students are empowered by their role and the emphasis put on their opinions. Students in a community-based classroom also have higher self-esteem (Harris et al., 2000; Nieto, 2013; Yazigi et al., 2005; Short, 2012). Sharing time meets these criteria as a community-building event that can promote a safe, secure place for students to engage in discourse and construct meaning from their stories.

In a study published in 1992, Karen Gallas offers a rich interpretation of a sharing time event in her classroom. Findings suggest that personal narratives belong to the invisible language that personifies thinking. In Gallas' class, sharing time is a space to consolidate social worlds and build community.

There is a sense that sharing time is highly valued in Gallas' classroom and is very much a learner-centered practice. This study, however, does not address the demands placed on teachers to teach to the test and offer literacy support to their students. The data collected is narrowly focused on one classroom. This could trigger complications for teachers who wish to implement sharing time in their classroom, but do not have knowledge to make it a valuable experience. The transferability of this study is questionable because the results of the study may not be applicable to other settings.

Action Research Question

There has been a great deal of research surrounding the benefits of building a sense of community in the primary school classroom (Bondy et al., 2001; Harris et al., 2000, Horsch et al., 1999; Wiseman, 2003). Sharing time, as a key literacy event, has been shown to promote individuality while emphasizing relationships within the classroom setting (Harris et al., 2000; Nieto, 2013; Yazigi et al., 2005; Short, 2012). However, with the current emphasis on standards and testing, little time is being afforded to help promote the growth and strength of a classroom community. Key speech events are often directed by the teacher's agenda, and as a result, many students are ill-afforded the opportunity to learn from one another and gain access to literacy (Michaels, 1981; Michaels, 1984; O'Connor et al., 1993).

Since the classroom into which I had been invited as a student teacher had not been structured to support the notion of community, I wanted to know if sharing time would impact the strength of a classroom community and guide students in gaining access to school-based literacy. In a genuine effort to get to know my students and understand how they made sense of the world in which they live, I implemented sharing

time as a common classroom practice. Sharing time occurred on a daily basis for fifteen minutes, at the close of each school day. Research was conducted to answer the question, "How does sharing time in the primary school classroom affect community-building and access to school-based literacy?" In concurrence with this research, I reflected on classroom practices that supported teaching to the standards while valuing students' prior experiences, using sharing time to enhance and leverage student learning.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Participants and Setting

The setting for my research took place in a second grade classroom with a total of 25 students. At the time I was a student teacher under the direct supervision of a mentor. The classroom was situated within a public elementary school in a small, northwestern, suburban community. The school, Apple Gate Elementary[1], served about 375 students, preschool through fifth grade. Roughly 65% percent of the student population was White, 13% was Hispanic, 9% was Asian, 2% was African American, and 14% were identified as two or more races. About 30% of the student population qualified for a free or reduced-price meal plan. In addition, almost 24% of the student population qualified for special education. The school was situated within a district that served over 9500 students; 71% of which were White, 10% were Hispanic, 7% were Asian, 2% were African American, and 9% were identified as two or more races. 29% of the students within the district qualified for free or reduced meals, and 14% qualified for special education. The district reported that 2% of the student population was considered transitional bilingual. Reports of transitional bilingual students were not made at the school level. There were, however, four students (16%) in my classroom that were bilingual, one of whom was an English Language Learner.

Apple Gate Elementary was among the highest scoring elementary schools in the district as determined through measurable testing known as the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test. While the report for the second grade students in my study was not be determined until the end of the school year, prior second grade classes had scored high in comparison to district and state reports. Second grade reading scores, as quantified

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[1] Pseudonyms are used for all names to protect the privacy of the participants.

through the MAP test, report that the previous second grade class achieved a score of 193 for the spring testing. This score is above the school's district norm of 192 as well as the state norm of 190. Grade level reading achievement is reported with a score of 190; therefore, the second grade students at Apple Gate Elementary School are reading above grade level by the end of the academic year. The MAP test is the only measurable test that second graders take (both reading and math) with scores that are reported to the public.

In light of the high test scores, there remained a heavy emphasis placed on reading within the school district. Maintaining the status quo was very important. Students at a majority of the elementary schools within the district participated in the Walk-to-Read program[2]. The Walk-to-Read program operates by grouping like-skilled readers in small groups for a portion of the literacy block. At Apple Gate Elementary, Walk-to-Read occurred within five minutes of the morning bell. Students were observed rushing into their classrooms, putting their backpacks away, grabbing their reading materials, and walking to their reading groups. Due to the nature of the literacy programming, I limited my data collection to only whole-class operational time periods (periods in which students were not in specialist classes or working in guided groups according to their tested reading and math levels).

Methods

This is a qualitative research study in which I have acted as a teacher-researcher during my student teaching period. A research journal with field notes, video recording, and student interviews were collected and analyzed. A majority of the data sets were

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[2] Walk-to-Read is a program that combines students into reading groups based on their shared reading abilities.

collected over a three-week period within the first ten weeks of the school year. The focus of these data sets centered on sharing time. Sharing time was implemented on a daily basis, during the last 15 minutes of the school day. Sharing time remained an open space for students to engage in storytelling, make general announcements, reflect, and set goals for further learning. The focus of sharing time was student-centered with teacher facilitation and informal in terms of language use.

Sharing time began with students configured in an inward facing circle. Each circle was maintained and shaped with the expectation that all students could see one another. The focus of speech during sharing time was primarily up to the students. There were a few instances when I, as the teacher, directed the sharing time circle as a means to reflect on particularly challenging parts of a school day, but this was rare. The same question was asked at the opening of every sharing time, "What is something that you would like to share about today?"

As students raised their hands, I, as the teacher, would often call upon the speakers. There were a few times when I asked the students to take the lead on calling on the next speaker. In addition, there were also a few times when I left the sharing circle entirely, providing students with the power and authority to facilitate the sharing time experience.

The primary purpose for implementing sharing time was to observe how students used sharing time to orient towards each other's ideas and experiences while building meaning within a community of learners. Throughout my three-week data collection period I was able to hear from every student in the classroom during sharing time. The

data was then analyzed to determine how sharing time builds community while promoting access to school-based literacy.

The students within this second grade class had not regularly participated in sharing time events. The introduction of sharing time necessitated the creation of norms specific to the occasion. The initial sharing time meeting consisted of a collaborative effort to generate meaningful norms that lent themselves to a respectful environment in which students felt safe to share their stories and experiences with the entire class.

When not engaged in sharing time, students were randomly grouped at tables with seating assignments changing every two weeks. The random selection occurred by assigning every student a number and then drawing for seating arrangements. This helped to ensure that students had the opportunity to engage in learning experiences with a variety of peers while eliminating any teacher bias in table-group selection. Students were also randomly paired for partner work throughout the data-collection process.

Data Collection and Analysis

The following section details how my data sets were collected and then analyzed. Data sets were broken into three categories: research journal and field notes, video recordings, and student interviews.

Research Journal and Field Notes

The uniqueness of my position as teacher-researcher allowed for self-reflection, study, and adjustment throughout the data-collection process. I kept a daily observational journal with detailed field notes. These notes served to record first-hand documentation of what was happening within the classroom. In concurrence with daily, observational field notes, I recorded my own, private reflections based on the events that transpired

each day. The focus for my observational notes was the nature of student speech within the context of the classroom as well as student engagement with class assignments. Interactions among students were also highlighted alongside the reflections of my work as a facilitator during sharing time events.

The research journal and field notes were coded using a combination of several practices. These practices ensured that the analysis was rooted in observation and that the data provided discovery of findings. In order to do this, key words and phrases were highlighted after multiple readings, categorized, and analyzed for potential patterns. These patterns helped to inform my findings in relation to my action research question. In addition, coding helped to minimize any bias in my own selection of important information that may address my research.

Video Recording

Sharing time events were video recorded throughout the entire data collection period. Video recordings aimed to capture both student participation as well as teacher facilitation during each sharing time event. Video recordings were utilized to bring another viewpoint to my research. Video recordings captured data that I might otherwise have overlooked in my field notes and personal observations. Since video recordings can also be reviewed multiple times I was be able to view sharing time events through multiple lenses, offering a variety of interpretations given my viewing focus.

Using a content log, I made systematic notes with time-stamps (referring to specific moments in my videos). I was able to further highlight areas of particular importance to be fully transcribed. Transcription notes were coded using the process of grounded data analysis. The grounded data analysis allowed me, as the researcher, to let

the data contribute to the findings. The data sets were analyzed for patterns of evidence that, in turn, were utilized for the creation of a theory, or explanation of the phenomena I was researching. In particular, I was looking at peer interactions and the nature of student speech during sharing time.

Student Interviews

Student interviews occurred during weeks two and eight of my student teaching experience. They were implemented to further my investigation by providing me with unobservable insights into my students' personal views on what was transpiring in the classroom (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were conducted over a total of four days (two per week). Six students were randomly selected for elective participation in the interviews. Interviews were designed as semi-structured totaling 5-10 minutes in length. Questions were open-ended and designed to engage the students in a discussion regarding whether or not sharing time was useful in promoting participation with peers and engagement in participatory work. Due to the nature of the interviews, not all students were asked the same questions. The same six students were interviewed twice in order to monitor advancement in analytical processing and to determine whether or not sharing time implicated community-building as well as access to school-based literacy. The student interviews also served to validate credibility in my research through the use of triangulation. Interviews were the third facet of my data collection and helped to strengthen my research, in addition to the field notes and video recordings.

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Limitations of Findings

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The time period for this study allowed only a short window for observing student dispositions and their gains in access to school-based literacy. In addition, the study

occurred near the beginning of the school year. This meant that, as a class, we needed to actively engage in creating and practicing group norms so that sharing time was implemented for the purpose of my research. In order to minimize time-loss, sharing time and the creation of group norms began at the first class meeting.

Researcher bias is also a limitation to my findings. Due to the nature of qualitative research, this study is conducted and analyzed through my lens as a teacher-researcher. This has meant that in connection with my data analysis, my own interpretations have been used to highlight important themes and supporting evidence. In addition, I relied heavily on student interviews to inform my analysis as they came directly from the students and were central to my findings.

I have used multiple data sources to triangulate my findings and minimize personal bias. Triangulating my data strengthened my research by allowing it to provide dependability (Freeman, 1998). As the researcher of qualitative data I followed strict structures to ensure reliability. These structures included coding and peer review. Coding minimized bias in categorizing information and helped to ensure that the data was used to inform the findings, not just my own personal analysis and reflection, while peer review was used to help identify places in my research that needed attention.

As I progressed through my data collection I referred back to the literature as a way to deepen my own understandings of the evidence in which I had collected. In concurrence with my return to the literature I have also accessed my colleagues to provide peer reviews of my work, which provided me deeper insight into my question and its relationship to the literature.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research study examined the relationship between sharing time and community building, in addition to students' access to school-based literacy in a second grade classroom. In order to analyze this relationship I implemented sharing time as a daily classroom practice, which happened during the last 15 minutes of the school day. During the implementation of sharing time I collected data using a variety of methods. These methods included video recordings of sharing time events, interviews with six randomly selected students, and a daily observational journal that I also used to record my own personal reflections.

Through my analysis of the data I identified three major themes. The first theme was the relationship between sharing time and class work. My analysis revealed that sharing time promoted student relationships and community building that in-turn impacted the ways in which students worked together during classroom lessons and group work. In addition, sharing stories during a facilitated sharing time motivated students to work together and provided material for students to relate to during classroom lessons.

The second theme that presented itself was the notion of using sharing time to reflect and set goals. My analysis revealed that when used to reflect on daily successes and challenges, sharing time improved the classroom community and motivated learners to persevere. Challenges were regarded in a positive light in our classroom community.

The third theme that presented itself was the importance of storytelling as a practice of the students. My analysis revealed that sharing time was viewed as a very satisfying part of the day. Students enjoyed sharing stories with each other and stated that

sharing time was a positive, safe place to explore storytelling and development of thought.

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings from the data I collected and analyzed using a coding process derived from several practices. First, I will describe the themes as they arose in my data analysis. Second, I will explore evidence for each identified theme. Finally, I will describe the implications for future use of sharing time in my classroom and recommendations for future research.

Findings

The subsequent sections provide insight into the themes that emerged during my data analysis. The analysis leads to research findings regarding the impact of sharing time within our classroom as we worked toward developing community.

Sharing Time and Class Work

The first identified theme was the relationship between sharing time and class work. Sharing time supported the building of student relationships and community building that, in turn, impacted the ways in which students utilized each other as bearers of knowledge. Underlying connections were made between the learning cycle (Zull, 2002), motivation, limiting work disruptions, and recognizing peers as resources. In addition, sharing stories during a facilitated sharing time provided material for students to relate to during classroom lessons that specifically enriched their writing.

One connection that was alluded to by the students was the idea that talking makes us smarter. The following highlights an exchange I had with Jack during our first interview session.

Teacher: Do you think sharing time helps us with our reading and writing and math?

Jack: Head nod

Teacher: How so?

Jack: Cause like, when we get to know stuff really well, like, know stuff really well.

Teacher: Do you think talking about stuff really helps us?

Jack: Talking a lot ourselves makes us smarter.

Teacher: How does it make us smarter?

Teacher: Cause we are getting smarter and smarter every time because we are talking to our self about smart stuff.

Teacher: What about talking to our friends about smart stuff?

Jack: That helps us be smart and them be smart too.

To clarify, my inference of Jack's replies is that sharing time is directly related to the idea that talking is an active form of testing our ideas. As Zull (2002) theorizes, learning begins with a concrete experience, one grounded in the real world. Concrete experience, in order to transform into a learning experience, must progress through the learning cycle in several stages. For example, once concrete experience has been had the learner must reflect on the experience. Then reflection can occur, allowing the learner to extract ideas from their learning experience and turn them into action. Sharing time facilitates this process to occur. Students are able to reflect on their experiences in an environment that deepens the learning of all involved.

In another student interview, Ana discusses the importance of sharing and the idea of utilizing peers as resources.

> Teacher: And do you think learning new things about other people helps us in other parts of our classroom?
>
> Ana: Yeah, so if you wanted to learn something you could learn it from someone else.
>
> Teacher: Do you think learning things about other people helps us during our math, reading, and writing?
>
> Ana: Yeah.
>
> Teacher: Yeah? How might it help us?
>
> Ana: It might help us with, by like telling, like they tell you how to do it.
>
> Teacher: So they become helpers? Other friends become helpers?
>
> Ana: Head nod
>
> Teacher: So how do you think sharing time helps with that?
>
> Ana: Well sometimes people share stories about how they learn stuff.

During sharing time students were free to share their individual stories. Many of these stories impacted the ways in which students communicated with each other and the teacher during the course of the data collection period. Students began to view each other as resources, and did not solely rely on the teacher for affirmation and praise of finished work. In my observation journal I highlighted several instances in which students sought their peers input during an art project that was facilitated by my collaborating teacher. This event happened outside of our sharing time.

> Calvin: That's awesome, wait, cool. How did you do that?

Ruby: I traced it. Watch.

Meanwhile Ana is helping Sara with a tracing technique and Eli is

assisting Jack in the same task. Several students are asking the teacher for

affirmation, however a majority of the students are sharing their work at

their tables and discussing their process for completion.

This instance highlights the valuable asset that sharing time generates for the

community of the classroom. Students were assisting one another in tasks and gaining

new ideas, thus enhancing their work and deepening their understanding. Voices were

shared among table groups as students used their understanding of sharing time to

communicate ideas and support one another's learning. Access to school-based literacy

was widely granted as a result.

Reflection and Setting Goals

The second theme that presented itself was the notion of using sharing time to

reflect and set goals. Students discussed the benefits of reflecting during sharing time and

the benefits of reflecting and goal setting to improve the classroom community.

What I infer Smith alludes to in the following interview excerpt is the belief that

perseverance is important in learning. We all face challenges, and in sharing time we

were afforded the opportunity to explore these challenges and build deeper connections

among our peers through the practice of reflection.

Smith: It helps that people might be struggling and they might need help.

Teacher: Do you think sharing time might help us recognize people that

might be struggling?

Smith: Yeah.

Teacher: That's great; do you think that it is a good thing to talk about

challenges during our sharing time?

Smith: Yeah.

Teacher: And why do you think that it is good to talk about our

challenges?

Smith: Because sometimes it could be good to challenge yourself,

sometimes, and sometimes you just need to struggle a little bit.

Teacher: Tell me more about that, why do you think it's good to struggle a

little bit?

Smith: It means you are trying hard and your working through the thing

that you are doing.

Teacher: And you see that as a good thing?

Smith: Head nod

During sharing time students spoke a great deal about challenges and successes. Students used the space to highlight exciting parts of their class day and speak to challenges they might have faced. These practices naturally occurred throughout the implementation of sharing time. This is to say that the practice of reflection was not addressed as a sharing time practice but rather came from the students' own desires to reflect and set goals. On rare occasions, I took the opportunity to create a reflection circle, but the practice had already been established by the students.

In the following excerpt, I have included a transcribed episode in which Gavin is reflecting on the challenges of the day during sharing time. Gavin is a high achieving student. Early on in the school year I recognized Gavin's need for guidelines. In order

for Gavin to succeed without strife, learning objectives had to be transparent with hard and fast rules for gaining understanding. To this end, the only time Gavin spoke in sharing time was when the topic was clearly established. During this sharing time episode I opened the floor with a brief discussion about the challenges of the day.

> Teacher: We had a particularly challenging time keeping our volume at an appropriately level this morning. Can we take a few minutes to consider this morning and how our actions impacted our learning?
>
> Ana: We took a long time to get quiet.
>
> Sarah: And that meant that we didn't have enough time to read our story.
>
> Teacher: Anyone else like to add something they noticed?
>
> Gavin: You had to constantly stop what you were doing because people were interrupting you. We wasted a lot of time trying to get quiet.
>
> Teacher: We did waste a lot of time. What goals do you think we can set for tomorrow so that we do not waste so much time?
>
> Gavin: We could write level zero on the board to remind us to be quiet.

Gavin was a student who would only answer direct questions. Even though the reflection platform had been established by students in previous sharing time circles, he only spoke when a direct question was provided. In lieu of Gavin's mostly silent participation in sharing time, this instance brimmed with possibilities.

Gavin's suggestion of writing reminders on the board was one that I carried through my practice. In addition to reminders, we wrote extensively about our challenges and our goals as a way to build our writing skills. These topics would not have been on the table if it had not been for sharing time. This meant that access to literacy was granted

to many students as they used the topics of the sharing time circle to inform their reflection writing.

Importance of Storytelling

The third theme that presented itself was the importance of storytelling. Students who were engaged in the sharing time experienced and, seemingly, valued the time to share their stories. As a mode of knowing, stories helped us to make sense of our lives and the world in which we live in. In addition, sharing stories helped support our relationships and community-building. The following interview excerpts highlight students' views on storytelling and the value that they found in the sharing time experience.

> Teacher: Can you tell me your thoughts about sharing time?
>
> Sarah: I like sharing time because you get to share what you made and you get to choose if you want to or not. Sometimes we play little games when we're sharing.
>
> Teacher: That's great, why do you think sharing time is useful?
>
> Sarah: So that we get to know each other.
>
> Teacher: And how might that help us in the classroom?
>
> Sarah: So that if we're talking, if someone's talking, we can understand what they are saying because we know a little bit about them.

Sarah was, in general, a quiet student. Sarah transferred from another school in the district at the start of the school year. Her experience during sharing time was thus unique, as she had no prior knowledge of the students in our class before the start of the school year. Sharing time then became a vehicle for Sarah to get to know others.

Eli, however, was well established in the school, having attended since preschool. Though quiet, Eli was a very responsive peer, eager to support learning through cooperative work and viewed sharing time as a way to promote kindness.

Teacher: Can you tell me your thoughts about sharing time?

Eli: I think sharing time is good.

Teacher: How so?

Eli: Because you get to share stuff with people.

Teacher: And why do you think that's good?

Eli: Because that's a way to be nice.

While Eli promotes kindness through sharing time, Ana promotes the useful notion of being heard during sharing time. There are few times during the school day where students get to freely talk in a whole-class format.

Teacher: Can you tell me your thoughts about sharing time?

Ana: Well sharing time is what you do and what you tell about and what you feel comfortable with.

Teacher: That's great. Do you enjoy sharing time?

Ana: Yeah.

Teacher: Can you tell me a little bit about what you enjoy about sharing time?

Ana: You just let your worries go, you can finally tell people and let them know and tell people how your day was. It's really nice to share your thoughts and let them hear it.

Teacher: Can you tell me how you find that useful?

Ana: Well it's, how it calms you down a little.

Teacher: That's great- do you enjoy hearing from others at sharing time?

Ana: Yeah!

Teacher: And what do you enjoy about that?

Ana: I like that you get to learn new things about other people.

Ana is able to view sharing time as a method for coping, making issues transparent. We were afforded the opportunity to build community through maintaining supports only if we know where to position them. Hearing another's challenges and stories allowed the students, as well as the teacher, to be supportive in the specific areas where students needed support. Sharing time allowed us to position supports in a manner that strengthened community and granted access to school-based literacy. Smith also shared his thoughts on sharing time as a way to build community through getting to know the speakers better.

Teacher: Good. How do find sharing time useful, or how can you find sharing time useful?

Smith: Sharing time is kind of special, because you get to know more about the person that is sharing.

Teacher: And how does that help us in our classroom?

Smith: I think it helps because you can know a person who is speaking better and get to know them.

These students provided a thoughtful reflection regarding sharing time. These reflections impacted the ways in which I viewed sharing time and provided me with a great deal of ideas on how to implement sharing time with my future students. While the

findings were quite strong throughout my data sets and discussions contributed to the findings regarding sharing time, there is reason to believe that other circumstances could have yielded the same results. Most of the students had known each other since kindergarten. Several lived in the same neighborhoods and played on the same sports teams. While these circumstances do not allow for a facilitated speech event to occur, they are certainly set-up to contribute the building of community.

Implications for Future Teaching

I am a strong believer in the value of storytelling and reflection. Using sharing time as a vehicle to contribute and honor stories is a practice that I will implement in my future classrooms. This research project enhanced my understandings of the importance of speech through an open venue, such as sharing time.

As access to school-based literacy became widely granted, motivation grew. This was most evident in writing, math, and collaborative work. Journals and essays often employed storylines from our sharing time and sparked story problems in math. Students were strengthening community as they shared their knowledge and grew in their capacities to learn. Reflection and goal-setting allowed to improve our practice and identify areas where we, and other students, needed support.

Sharing time, as a practice, improved my teaching in several ways. First and foremost, the sharing of stories provided me with a way to get to know my students in a short period of time, allowing me to adapt my lessons to provide access to learners with varying needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Though sharing time was widely accepted and valued within my classroom there are areas in which further investigation could prove useful. These areas include looking at social emotional health, whose voices were being heard, and teacher's bias in selection of speakers.

Sharing time was useful in reflecting on challenges and setting goals. How might this impact students' social-emotional wellbeing? A more focused research study could uncover some useful information into benefitting even further from sharing time. It has the potential to minimize conflict and provide for a safer classroom.

In addition, a more focused study could uncover the needs of every student in a sharing time space. Many sharing times concluded with voices left unheard. Who did not feel safe to share? While several studies in my literature review uncovered a great deal in regards to teachers' bias towards the use of speech, how can sharing time be utilized to honor all voices, even ones left silent? Further research may lead to new findings regarding silence as an utilization of power, or brought upon by teacher bias.

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