

## **Role of Students' Home Language and Literacy Patterns**

Various research studies examine the relationship of students' home language and literacy patterns to their school performance. Often, educators' expectations of language use, communication patterns, and literacy differ from the home or cultural interactions of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Jimenez, Moll, Rodriguez-Brown, and Barrera (1999) explain why many Latino children are unresponsive and unsupported in current school environments that do not recognize or respect their linguistic and culturally differences. In part, they argue that the research conducted among Latinos often highlights school failure and dropout rates rather than the richness of the culture, language, or literature. In addition, they point to insensitive interpretations of large-scale assessment that "focuses only on English literacy and then considers English reading and writing solely from a native language perspective" (p. 6). In contrast, these researchers point to years of "low-level" and "fragmented" instruction" (pp. 8-9) that many Latino children receive. The authors also express fears of the avid push for one particular method over another, or what Bartolome (1994) refers to as the "methods fetish" (p. 173) and the unrealistic dependency on methods to solve issues of inequity in education. (For a recent update of bilingual children's reading, see Garcia, 2000).

Research by Au (1980) and Jordan (1985) reveals that the home and community language use and communication patterns of native Hawaiian children were highly interactive. The children's cultural patterns differed significantly from the way the children were encouraged to use language and communicate in schools. Au (1993) has observed that "teachers seem to have definite requirements for the type of account they expect children to share" (p. 95) during sharing time, regardless of whether or not the teachers articulate their expectations .

Michaels (1981) says European-American children often use *topic-centered* ways of sharing; their descriptions are linear, have a single or related focus, and are closed or resolved. This form of sharing is preferred by the teacher, who understands its logic and can scaffold the students' attempts to communicate. In contrast, African-American children often use *topic-associated* ways of sharing; they tell stories that share a theme or follow a person through episodes. The classroom teacher often does not value this form of sharing, does not understand its logic, and does not know how to support the students' efforts to communicate.

Heath's (1983) longitudinal study of working-class African-American children and middle-class European-American children revealed significant differences between home and school expectations of language use, communication patterns, and literacy. For instance, Heath observed the types of interactions between adults in the two communities and noticed that African-American children were not asked known-answer questions at home but were expected to answer them at school. When the children did not respond in the teacher-expected manner, some teachers assumed that the children did not know the answers; in fact, the children did know the answers but did not offer to verbalize them because everyone else knew the answers as well.