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"SHARING TIME" IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Diane Brooke

One day, while I was sitting in the yard, I overheard parts of a conversation that went something like this:

"Yes, they do it the first thing every morning for about 30 minutes."

"In Sherry's class they have it for 10 minutes after lunch. I guess it's to give the teacher a breather from lunch."

"Mark really enjoys it. Every evening he hunts up something to take. Sometimes he gets so desperate. Like yesterday, he resorted to taking his sister's birthday doll to show the class."

"My Bobby doesn't like to take things to school. His teacher makes all the children bring at least one thing during the week to tell the class about. Usually, I wind up hunting something for him to take."

"You know it can be a pain. If Mark forgets to set something out to take for the next day, it's up to the rest of the family to help him dig something up. This little episode usually puts us behind, too!"

"You know what gets me. Every day Sherry comes home and tells me about all the new toys and things her friends got. Then she expects me to run right out and buy them for her."

Questions to Ponder

The longer I listened to this conversation, the more aggravated I became. Is this the purpose of what is supposed to be a free expression period for the children? Are we forcing children to get up and "show and tell" about things they don't want to? Are we stressing material assets? Are we shaming children for their lack of material goods? Is it the parents we are stimulating or is it the children? Are we allowing a nonsense period, a time to kill period, or does it serve a good purpose?

I think these questions need to be answered. I have become tense more than once when I have heard the words "Show and Tell" or "Sharing" mentioned. I am never sure what new method some teacher has projected upon his class.

Sharing—Good or Bad?

The basic idea of a time to "share" and discuss ideas, I believe to be a very good one. Children, especially in the early grades, delight

in telling about their personal experiences. In many instances, the child's environment provides him with ideas about which he is concerned and interested, and he would enjoy telling. Often children are taken to places of interest outside their environment, and so they have new and different experiences to think about and share with their fellow classmates. Children can be stimulated and enriched in many new areas by hearing their enthusiastic peers expound on their findings and experiences.

Not only is this a time when children should be able to relax and really enjoy sharing, but there is so much that can be taught. This time, if well spent, can be of great value to the teacher.

The worth of this experience depends entirely upon the planning, organization, and the objectives the teacher has set up. If it is to be used merely to fill in time and not to meet the needs of the children, we can stop right here. But, if it is to have a meaningful purpose, we must go on and investigate our objectives and decide how we can best attain these objectives and meet the needs of each individual.

Developing Language Needs

The development of the proper use of our language is one of the most important goals in our education system. Boys and girls need many different experiences in the area of language development. They need to learn how to organize their ideas so that they may present them in an interesting and understandable way. A sharing period is one very good way to aid in proper language development.

What are some of the goals the teacher could hope to achieve:

1. Develop speaking skills.
 - a. Aid in proper pronunciation, enunciation, and articulation.
 - b. Develop voice control.
 - c. Develop ease and poise in front of an audience.
2. Develop growth in independent thinking and acting.
3. Develop self-confidence.
4. Learn to ask and answer questions.
5. Learn to consider the interests of the group.
6. Build vocabulary.
7. Widen interests and background of the class.

Values for Children

The needs of children are countless and encompass all areas of endeavor. One very important need children have is to have people around who are concerned enough to listen to them and answer their questions. Sharing time is, at least, one time when the children can feel that they have the undivided attention of the *teacher* and classmates.

Children can gain many worthwhile skills from sharing their ideas and experiences. Some are:

1. Increasing their power in expressing ideas.
2. Developing self-confidence.
3. Widening their range of interests.
4. Learning to face an audience.
5. Discovering the joy and satisfaction of sharing with others.
6. Learning to ask and answer questions related to the material presented.
7. Learning how to select and prepare their contributions.
8. Making their contributions interesting to the group.

Values for Teachers

Sharing can enrich the children in many areas. It can aid the teacher in developing language skills. It is also a method which enables the teacher to observe and gain real insight into her children's personalities and behaviors.

Here are some values of sharing time for the teacher.

1. Provides teachers with countless opportunities to gain an insight into the child's world of thinking and feeling.
2. Discovers the children's interests and needs.
3. Helps children to use their ideas in new and more creative ways.
4. Develops new activities out of the individual ideas of the class.
5. Creates a deeper understanding between teacher and pupil.
6. Clarifies misunderstandings and misconceptions children might have.
7. Creates a meaningful learning situation.

Sharing in Kindergarten

"I found a bird's nest on the way to school . . ."

"I didn't come to school yesterday because I went to the dentist . . ."

"My mother said we could get a dog."

"Look at these pretty leaves I found . . ."

These are typical examples of sharing in Kindergarten. Children are delighted to get up and tell all about the very exciting things they have done, or found, or gotten.

At this stage, anything the child wants to contribute in class should never be refused. He needs to build confidence in himself and gain the recognition of his peers. The key words should be *praise* and *encouragement*.

The teacher may want to stimulate the children's power of observation and inquiry by asking them specific questions. Hopefully, these questions will stimulate them to find the answers and share their observations the next day. The questions may deal with science, social studies, music, art, language arts or the specific interest of that child.

Sharing does play a very important role in the lives of Kindergarten teachers.

Sharing in the Second Grade

The first thing a teacher usually does at the beginning of the school year is to become better acquainted with her class. This is an excellent time to begin a sharing time.

At first, many of the children might need some extra encouragement. A well prepared and informed teacher can have ready some possible questions dealing with the children's interests. This will help to encourage some responses. If this is conducted in a relaxed atmosphere and the children find only praise for their contributions, they will gain satisfaction and begin to enjoy and look forward to this time.

When the children have begun to take a real interest and show real enthusiasm, it is time for the teacher and pupils to develop standards they should follow during sharing time. These standards depend primarily upon the *maturity*, *needs*, and *interests* of this particular class.

If the above is done properly, the teacher then should not need to take an active part. She can sit at the back of the group. This does not mean that she can take roll, put grades in the grade book, or make out seatwork for the afternoon's math lesson. She is an active

listener and should serve as a *guide* while the children *conduct* the period. It is the teacher's job to keep discipline, to clarify any misconceptions, and help children in expressing their ideas clearly.

The children should be able to plan their own procedure. They may want to choose a chairman to lead the period. The chairman may change every day, or maybe, only once a week. They may decide just to write their names on the blackboard and the first name is the first person to share.

As the children grow and mature, they may add many of their ideas during teacher-pupil planning. These ideas usually deal with the various content areas and can be discussed during that time. It should be the discussion of the children.

When sharing as a class, it is best to have the entire class sit together on the floor or rug. If the group is small enough, they might prefer to sit on chairs arranged in a semi-circle or circle. This way everyone's attention is focused on the speaker. There is also less distraction than if the children would remain at their desks.

The topics for discussion should be considered. Because of the variety of interests, these are going to vary considerably and should be based at least partially on the following criteria:

1. Needs of the class.
2. Needs of the individual child.
3. Economic area.
4. Social standards, background, and needs.
5. Home environment.
6. Maturity level of the individual.

In some classrooms, "sharing time" may be considered very successful if two children give an account of what happened on their way to school or at the dentist's office. In another, half the class may have ideas and experiences very pertinent to what the class is studying in the various content areas. This will clearly show the maturity level of the class as a whole and of each individual.

If there is ever any question as to whether a child should be allowed to share whatever it is he has brought in it is not up to anyone but the teacher to decide. Only the teacher can decide if it is important to this particular child, at this time, to express himself. She may not always follow the standards set up by the class. Flexibility in meeting the individual's needs is very important.

Time is another item to consider. This should be decided by the class but kept flexible. If on Monday, there are several very interesting ideas being discussed, then you should be able to feel free enough to continue. Then again, if you feel it is time wasted, the period should be cut short. Sharing can only be as effective as you want to make it.

The standards set by the class should be guided by the teacher and follow the criterion previously suggested. An example of some possible standards set up by a second grade might look something like this:

Second Grade Standards for Sharing

1. Things you talk about should be interesting to the class.
2. You should be prepared. You should know what you are going to say before you start.
3. If you have a story from the newspaper, you should be able to read and discuss it.
4. Any ideas concerning things we have studied or will study are good to share.
5. If you have a *very* special toy or something very interesting happened to you, you should talk it over with the teacher first. You can also write an original story about it. Then you can read it to the class.

The standards should be changed as the class matures and their needs change.

Sharing in the Fifth Grade

Sharing in the fifth grade has usually taken on a new name. It can be a current events time or a hobby time. It might even be based on the various experiences and trips the children take. Some teachers might prefer to incorporate much of it into science, social studies, language arts, music, and other content areas, and discuss the children's contributions at that particular time.

Regardless of the form it takes, the most important thing is—is it meeting the criteria set up for this grade level and maturity level? Are you developing the necessary skills?

If the answer is “yes,” then you should concentrate on keeping it a useful tool. If the answer is “no,” then a critical evaluation should be made and steps taken to put it back on the right track.

Suggestions for the Teacher

Teachers can gain a great deal of information from these various forms of sharing experiences. In order to remember these important details, it might be useful for the teacher to have a small pad of paper or filing cards on hand to jot down items that may be of value in extending activities or working on specific skills during the language arts period.

Many times children will need help in expressing themselves. The teacher might ask questions such as:

What is this you have to share with us?

Would you like to tell us something about it?

Jimmy has something very exciting to tell us.

Are there any questions the rest of us would like to ask about it?

Many problems will be alleviated if the class has set up standards and follows those standards.

The effort of every child should be praised, so that a feeling of self-confidence may be established.

Problems that Could Arise

In any classroom situation, there are many problems that could arise. Here are three common problems and what a teacher might do to handle them.

A child who is unsure of his contribution, or continually becomes confused or nervous in front of the group might need extra help from the teacher. She may allow him to come in early and explain to her what he would like to say. Through guidance and a few extra hints on how to organize his thoughts, he may be more willing to make contributions.

The shy, embarrassed child might be brought out by sharing in a small group instead of in front of the entire class. An alert teacher might be able to create an interest group on “just his favorite subject or book.” After the shy child has gained confidence in a small group, he might then be encouraged to contribute in front of the entire class. But, by all means, he should not be forced.

There is also the case where one child or several children monopolize the entire period everytime you have a sharing period. If these children are meeting the standards set up by the room, they should not be stifled. If they are not, they should be asked politely to sit down. Also, they might be encouraged to further develop or investigate their ideas and present them at a later date. These people might also be asked to do special projects in the different content areas and pre-

sent them during that time.

They could be teamed up with a shy person and work on some mutual area of interest to share with the class.

Variations of Sharing

Sharing can involve many different areas and take on many forms. The teacher may use the following suggestions to substitute for a sharing period or use them in addition to a sharing period.

1. Books: Children love to tell about the books they have read or even read aloud certain parts. A teacher can have oral book reports or written reports.

During an oral report the class can ask pertinent questions to check the child's reading comprehension. For written book reports, a variety of types should be available from the very easy (draw a picture of your favorite part) to harder, more thought provoking questions (who was your favorite character and why?).

2. Original Stories: Many times children want to tell interesting things they did the night before or over the weekend. Many times, when one person tells something interesting, 29 more children, all of a sudden, discover they have something just as exciting to tell. Original stories sometimes helps to solve this problem. If their news is that necessary, they can be asked to write a story about it. Then they may read it to the class or it can be posted on the news bulletin board for all to read if they like.

3. News: A news time is usually fun and informative no matter what the grade level. Many times you have too much news. Some ideas on this line is to:

- A. Choose a new person every day to bring in an interesting article and discuss it.
- B. Choose groups to present the news for one day or one week, or once a week for a longer period.
- C. The upper grades might want to be more creative by producing a real news program with the announcer, microphones, and commercials.

Conclusion

“Sharing Time” can be very useful to the teacher in gaining insight concerning her students, learning their interests and desires, and finding

their weak points and problem areas. Through using this tool, the teacher can build language skills, improve speech, encourage organization of thoughts and widen knowledge and interests.

Sharing is established by first setting up standards based on a set of criteria for the grade level and maturity level of the class. It should be kept flexible and grow and develop as the children grow.

There are many values in sharing, but many pitfalls if it is not handled properly. With careful planning, organization and insight, these will be quickly worked out.

References

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