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## "SHOW AND TELL"

For young children in the early primary school years, one of the focal points of their school day or week is "Show and Tell" or "News" time - especially when it is their turn! Parents too are generally familiar with the traditional Show and Tell. This is the occasion when their young child is asked to bring along something from home and talk about it in front of the rest of the class.

Originally, teachers probably introduced this activity to help settle the children into school - enabling them to share something of their "home world" and grow in self esteem and self confidence as others listen and get to know them.

### **Why do Show and Tell?**

In 1996 Robyn Ann Cusworth surveyed 393 K-2 teachers in New South Wales. She investigated classroom 'newstime' practices and their purposes' and she found that these reasons still featured prominently. Oral language skill, self esteem, personal significance and listening skills were the four leading reasons given for making time for Show and Tell in the curriculum. The next most popular reasons were: routine/settling, questioning, allowing teacher to get to know the children, and enjoyment.

Cusworth differentiated between the reasons of building of oral language skill and the development of oral storytelling, the latter of which was rarely given as a reason for Show and Tell. The oral language skill development however included general goals such as - encouraging oral expression, extending vocabulary, giving an opportunity to speak in a public forum, allowing the teacher to monitor speech and language and developing speech and enunciation in individual children. In other words, the majority of the teachers surveyed viewed Newstime as a forerunner to public speaking rather than a venue for storytelling. Storytelling demands planning, organization and more sophisticated language features. In the discussion of the results of her survey and classroom observations, Cusworth warns that teachers, during Show and Tell, may in fact be underestimating what their students can already do in regard to their competence in communication and may be missing important opportunities to extend language and thinking.

### **Is Show and Tell past its use by date?**

92% of the 393 teachers surveyed by Cusworth, programmed for newstime on a daily basis. We have been conducting workshop discussions with teachers around Australia throughout the past 10 years, and we would concur that this "educational institution" is



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certainly still alive. Why is it then that so many teachers seem to have grown tired with the Show and Tell format? Teachers we have met often say "we know it is probably important but Show and Tell seems so boring and repetitive."

So does Show and Tell still deserve to have a place in the primary classroom in 2005 and beyond? Is there a problem with the concept or with its implementation?

Children benefit enormously from the opportunity to have an extended turn, to talk on a topic of their choice, to organize their thoughts, to inform and respond to an attentive audience. Whether you call it 'Show and Tell' or 'Newstime' - this time **potentially** offers a marked contrast to the discourse pattern commonly found in classrooms. Most classrooms are dominated by teacher talk and student listening. A typical classroom routine features teacher led questions on a topic followed by short answers from students. "Show and Tell" also tends to follow a strict formula in which teacher language largely dominates or controls the interaction and the children have only minimal roles. Often the potential of this language activity is not fully realized. However we do not believe that Show and Tell should be abandoned. It is one of the very few opportunities during the school day for the student to have an extended turn with oral language but we do need to make it more interesting, more challenging and more beneficial for all participants.

### Different ways to do "Show and Tell"

When we tell others about what we did or what happened, we call this an **oral recount** or a **personal recount**. This may seem a simple task but it does however involve a number of skills - providing background to orient the listener, recalling the events in order, staying on the topic, working out the relevant from the irrelevant, offering opinions or comments. A child may speak about going to Little Athletics at the weekend or a family outing to the movies or even the birth of a new sibling. Such a recount involves language use that is beyond the "**here and now**" which is at casual end of the **Oral Language Continuum** (see newsletter number 11). It is likely to be about an event at which most of the audience was not present and this requires the child to use specific vocabulary and logically sequence information - a more literate style of language at the "there and then" end of the continuum.

**Object based Show and Tell** tends to encourage labeling and description and the opportunity to present a true recount is marginalized. It is difficult to recount a past event, giving detailed background and information, when the object is present. Both speaker and listener are drawn to the object present - a good deal of knowledge about the object is therefore shared which makes the discussion stilted. The emphasis is on



the "Show" part of Show and Tell. It is at this time then that the teacher often uses or encourages the other children to use a 'formula' or script - Where did you get it? Who gave it to you? Why do you like it? etc. If teachers and families want to retain the tradition of bringing an object the following are suggestions for how to stimulate more imaginative and engaging language.

- Reverse the name - Show and Tell becomes **Tell and Show**. The child tells first while the object remains hidden or covered. A sentence starter such as "I decided to bring ..... because ..... is useful.
- Do "Show and Tell" in the traditional way and then ask **What if?**: "If you were/hadn't been able/allowed to bring the ..... tell us about what you would have chosen." This forces the child to recount some event or describe something not present - ie. they need to use more mature language to talk about the "there and then".
- Communicate the idea that the object is a "**reminder**" for the talk rather than being the main part of the presentation. In the example above, the child could have brought along a movie ticket. Would that have altered the nature of the task? If used as a reminder rather than as the main focus, it would add interest to the presentation and perhaps stimulate further comments - e.g. a reminder to tell about queuing for the tickets at the movies and the funny thing that happened.

The last point is really a different way of viewing "Show and Tell" and is perhaps why many teachers now refer to it as Newstime. Children need to be trained, as do parents, to move away from the object bound presentations.

### **Other suggestions for Newstime**

#### **1. Create a News Box**

Many children, when given a free choice for recounting an experience, find it difficult to think of anything. As adults we would probably find this too. Yet we believe that nearly all children have had experiences that others would be interested to hear about. It is just that they need a "trigger". A news box or small case of objects may contain such a trigger. For example, a baby's shoe may stimulate a child to tell the class about Aunty's new baby who came to visit on the weekend. A chewed dog's lead may lead to a "story" about the neighbour's dog escaping from outside the supermarket and how it was later found 5 kms away.



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There is a description of this activity "Just in Case" in *Time for Talking - speaking and listening activities for the primary classroom - Love and Reilly (Pearson 1997)*. Rotate the objects regularly using items related to the interests of young children or those that have an unusual feature which demands the children's immediate attention, e.g. a chewed dog's lead rather than just a typical one.

### 2. Have a theme

Each week the children choose or are given a theme for the news. Share this with children's parents through a class newsletter so that there can be discussion at home. Make the theme fun. Here are some examples: smelly news, wet news, news that features a surprise or a joke, bad weather stories, happiest memory news. You will be surprised how varied the news will be!

### 3. Use Thinking Questions

Sometimes it is difficult to think of appropriate questions that will move discussion on and promote fresh ideas and thinking. We suggest that the class, including the teacher, have access to question starters. Perhaps you could place them in the brightly decorated question box - *What would happen if.....? What do you like best about .....? What do you think about .....?* There are other suggestions for question starters in *Time for Talking* and also in material for Bloom's taxonomy.

### Think about how Newstime is organized.

Cusworth's 1996 study reported that 69.9% of the teachers surveyed conducted their daily News sessions in a traditional set up - a large group of children positioned in front of the teacher and the newsgiver. Small groups and a circle arrangement, more conducive for language interaction were used in only 2% and 9% of the classrooms respectively. In the past decade most schools have made an encouraging move to promote learning in small groups within primary school classrooms. Valuable "feedback" sessions, where students report on activities and their own learning, have also provided additional opportunities to use oral language. So it is now time to consider what kind of environment we are creating during Show and Tell or Newstime. As adults in a lecture or a workshop, we know that the seating arrangements and the size of the group will impact on our sense of involvement, our attention and our willingness to contribute. Children are no different. At all times there must be genuine interest in what each speaker has to say. The teacher's body language must reflect this. This will set the atmosphere of interest and involvement. Teachers must resist the chance to do or think about other things or to act as "crowd controller" of the children in the audience.



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Some suggestions for the organization of Newstime are -

- **"Pair and share"** - children tell their news to each other. A number of children are called on to report to the larger group about their partner's news.
- **Small groups** - News in small groups with designated speakers. Others in the group are invited to ask questions or comment. At the end of the session one of the speakers reports on an interesting comment or question from their audience.
- **Use comments** - make the most of the use of comments as well as questions. This is more conducive to an atmosphere of discussion.
- **Take a turn** - the teacher should take a turn at Newstime, modeling desired behaviours and openly sharing something of his/her own experiences.

### How can we change?

Discuss at a school or year level what happens in each classroom. Share ideas about the positive and negative outcomes and attitudes. Decide on 3 main goals of Newstime to implement. Share ideas that have been successful in achieving these goals. Discuss what is important to tell parents about newstime.

### References and resources:

The framing of educational knowledge through Newstime in K-2 Classrooms. Cusworth, Robyn Ann. (1996) Education Faculty University of Sydney.

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