

## "Sharing Time" with Young Learners

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### Abstract

Although "Sharing Time" is a popular and widespread activity in English for Young Learners (L2) classrooms around the world, there have so far been no research studies of the interaction that is generated and its relationship to learning processes. The aims of this study were to find out how interaction is organized during "Sharing Time" and what kinds of learning it promotes. Audio recordings of 18 complete sessions of Sharing Time in a second grade class in a private English-medium international school in Abu Dhabi were fully transcribed and qualitative analysis of the transcripts was undertaken together with a simple coding system. The focus of the interaction is found to be on topic, meaning, and fluency, rather than form and accuracy. The teacher has no prior knowledge of the topic of the interaction and works collaboratively with the learner to develop the topic and sometimes upgrades the learners' structure and vocabulary. Sharing Time conforms to a social constructivist learning model.

### Introduction

Sharing Time, which may also be known as "Circle Time" or "Show and Tell," is an umbrella activity that is widely practised throughout the Western world in both L1 and L2 primary classrooms. Whilst there are many variations on what may actually take place during this activity, common features are as follows. The focus is on creating a sense of community and developing social and interactional skills. In general, there is a central activity in which one child speaks at a time and shares feelings or ideas with the rest of the group. Normally the class sits or stands in a circle (but this is not always the case since classroom layout may not allow this, and other configurations do occur). Broadly speaking, the term "circle time" may be used to describe group-bonding activities, "Sharing Time" may be used to describe activities in which a child shares feelings or ideas with the rest of the group and "show and tell" may be used to describe an activity in which a child shows an object to the rest of the group and talks about it. However, terminology in this area is imprecise, and in some cases all three terms could be applied to the same activity.

The aims of the research reported in this article were:

- a. to describe the interactional organisation of "Sharing Time" in one particular classroom in terms of structure, repair, and turn-taking, and,
- b. to find out what kinds of learning and language acquisition are promoted by this activity, if any.

Research in L1 classrooms has long established that a number of different interactional varieties occur during the course of lessons:

Each classroom consists of differentiated forms of social organization each with particular demands for communication: these organizations... are socially active entities constructed by students and teachers as they engage in social interactions of the classroom to achieve specific instructional goals. (Green & Wallat, 1981, p. 176)

In L2 classrooms a number of research studies (Ellis, 1984; Hasan, 1988; Seedhouse, 1996; Tsui, 1987; Van Lier, 1988) have identified different varieties of interaction that occur in the L2 classroom. According to Seedhouse (1996, pp. 118-119) in each of these interactional varieties a particular pedagogical focus combines with a particular organization of the interaction. The current study attempts to describe Sharing Time as an interactional variety from this perspective. It is intended to describe the pedagogical focus as well as the organisation of the interaction in terms of turn-taking, topic, and repair.

## **Sharing Time**

Sharing Time has roots in different parts of the world dating back to the late 19th century. In Sweden, Circle Time is a daily event in preschools, and has been part of the official curriculum since the 1880s. Recommendations and modifications were made over the years, corresponding to the changes in the economic, social, and cultural structure of society. Circle Time is said to have originated in Froebelian Kindergarten pedagogy. The philosophy underlying it stems from Froebel's natural romantic approach, which believes that sitting in a circular configuration symbolises infinity and communion with God. The development of Circle Time has been influenced by Froebel's approach that calls for the child to develop in a homelike atmosphere as well as by a tradition which holds that work needs to be individualized (Reich, 1994, p. 53).

Its development in the United States owes much to the thinking of Carl Rogers (1961; 1980), an American therapist who worked on developing his clients' self esteem by putting them in warm non-judgmental settings. It is also underpinned by the thinking of transactional analysts whose framework "Parent, Adult, Child" supports an equal/equal relation and gives much encouragement to young people, driving them towards autonomy. From this perspective, for Sharing Time to be effective, it should occur in a classroom with a non-threatening and supportive environment where students are not afraid of making mistakes; a non-authoritarian classroom where the teacher is but another member who cares, helps, mediates, and facilitates; a classroom where real life concerns are discussed, and experiences shared; a classroom where autonomy reigns. To see such a philosophy integrated into the curriculum means allowing students to operate in authentic, meaningful contexts, and involving them in real life issues.

## **Sharing Time in L1 Classrooms**

Sharing Time is now common in L1 primary classrooms throughout the Western world. It gained prominence in the UK with the introduction of the National Curriculum, which has placed a high value on speaking and listening. Housego and Burns describe what typically happens during Circle Time in a UK setting:

During Circle Time pupils and teacher sit together in a circular formation and share ideas and feelings about a range of subjects. All pupils have the opportunity to participate, but are allowed to opt out should they so wish. With very young children,

who may find it hard to take turns and listen carefully to others, a shell or microphone may be passed round . . . The person holding the object has the right to express views and be listened to with attention. There is usually a starter phrase such as "I am happy when . . . , " "I don't understand . . . , " "I am frightened of . . . ". (1994, p. 23)

Harris and Fuqua describe typical Circle Time activities, including Sharing Time as one kind of activity:

Each morning there is a familiar routine across kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. Children gather on the carpet, sit in a circle, and begin to sing songs of greeting. Next comes a calendar routine during which the children name the date, identify days of the week, and count the number of days in school. A designated helper observes the weather and records the observations onto a graph . . . . To provide an overview of the day, the teacher may review the daily schedule, reminding children of specially planned activities or resource classes they may be attending. Many teachers also delegate classroom responsibilities and remind children of their particular jobs by reviewing a daily helpers' chart. Routines of taking attendance or the lunch count or collecting money may be included in Circle Times as way to use mathematics in a meaningful way. In some classes a Sharing Time may follow these routines, and then the teacher may read a story to integrate literature with the science or social studies currently being studied. Thirty minutes later children are dismissed from the circle to begin the work of the day. (2000, p. 44)

Circle Time is viewed then as a daily ritual that creates a sense of community, security, belongingness and also order. To the staff, circle time corresponds to a need for structuring activities and indicating obvious changes during the day. It is also a time "to appear before others and be acknowledged" (Reich, 1994, p. 57). The teacher is seen as a participant in and a facilitator of emerging conversations:

She comes to a circle as a participant and facilitator of the emergent conversation and singing. She wants the children to talk, share ideas, sing, relax, and enjoy their peers and, in doing so, to develop group identity and the skills for creating group conversation. (Kantor et al., 1989, p. 435)

There are a number of strategies or variations that may take place during Circle Time. For example, a child may sometimes be picked as the single "special person" who is asked to leave the circle while the rest of the group think of the ways the child is special. These may be listed by the teacher and the children, who are given the chance to tell the "special person," who returns to the circle, of his/her special qualities. Other activities may be conducted which foster turn-taking skills, good eye contact while conversing , and listening skills. Sometimes Circle Time is used for discussing problems that may have occurred amongst the children and finding ways to resolve them. When asked about their curricular goals for Circle Time, teachers generally stated some or all of the following:

- a time for social training
- a time for strengthening the sense of class community and togetherness
- a good daily rhythm and structure
- a time for group interaction and collaborative conversation.

According to Curry and Bromfield (1994), Circle Time has the following advantages as an activity:

- Raises self-esteem
- Improves listening skills
- Facilitates working together co-operatively

- Increases insight and awareness
- Teaches social skills
- Builds confidence
- Promotes effective communication
- Enhances friendships
- Provides conflict resolution strategies
- Encourages problem solving solutions
- Offers understanding
- Makes children more sensitive to one another
- Explores feelings
- Is fun!

## Sharing Time in L2 Classrooms

As well as being widespread in L1 primary classrooms in the Western world, Sharing Time is also popular in many primary L2 classrooms, particularly in international schools around the world. As yet, there have been no published research studies on Sharing Time in L2 classrooms. When used in L2 primary classrooms, Sharing Time acquires an additional aim and dimension, namely that of improving the student's ability in the L2 in terms of speaking and listening. The main principles underlying current approaches to Teaching English to Young Learners may be summarised as follows.

The principles below summarise best practice according to the literature on Teaching English to Young Learners. The principles derive from Cameron, 2001; Halliwell, 1992; House, 1997; Moon, 2000; Phillips, 1993; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; and Slattery & Willis, 2001.

- Listening and speaking should be taught first.
- The primary focus should be on meaning rather than form.
- Activities should be fun and enjoyable.
- Activities should involve "doing" or performing tasks.
- Activities should create a need or a desire to communicate.
- Young learners should feel relaxed in the classroom.
- Language use should be illustrated by use of objects, pictures, actions or gesture.
- Suitable activities include use of rhymes, songs, stories, poems, drama, project/theme based approaches and TPR activities.
- The use of 'chunks' of language should be promoted.
- Lessons should be conducted in the L2 as much as possible.
- There should be a variety of activities.
- Classroom routines should be established.
- Activities should use children's sense of imagination.
- Tasks should be simple enough for children to understand what they are expected to do.
- Activities should be demanding, but not too demanding, and must be achievable.

## The Research Context

The school is a private international school in Abu Dhabi (UAE), which has achieved accreditation from the local authorities. The school admits children at the age of 4 for an entry-level Kindergarten class and runs through grade twelve, where students either graduate with a high school diploma or an international Baccalaureate. English is the language of instruction for all subjects except for Arabic and Islamic Studies. Most teachers at the elementary level (grades K-4) are native speakers of English. The class teacher teaches her students most subjects; the specialist subjects (physical education, music, computers, Arabic, and Islamic studies) are taught by specialist teachers. On the whole, the class teacher spends 28 out of 40 periods a week with her students, 15 periods of which are devoted to language arts. In 2000, a new language

curriculum was adopted. While reading and writing had been more stressed in the former curriculum, speaking and listening in the updated curriculum gained equal status. In this school, Sharing Time is used from entry in kindergarten (KG1) to primary 4. Sharing Time is not part of the curriculum and is implemented by individual teachers.

In order to ascertain how Sharing Time is used in this institution, a questionnaire was given to teachers of grades K through 4 with the following results:

At the Kindergarten level (KG1), one teacher described it as a time when students are seated on the carpet and listen to what is being taught: Show and tell, learning songs, counting, or playing educational games. Another teacher has a small stage set up for the children who talk about various activities such as "the weekend," "holidays," or favorite things.

In Prep or KG2, a teacher draws a distinction between "Sharing Time," "Show and Tell," and "Circle Time." Sharing Time is "an ongoing consistent process that needs to go on through the grade level on a daily basis" (teacher interview data). It includes story time, register or song, calendar, and daily counting assignment. Show and Tell, on the other hand, is done every two weeks, while Circle Time includes playing language listening games or pattern games.

In grade one, Sharing Time ranges from discussions to reading to showing and telling. Stories are shared about special occasions, weekend past times, holidays and as one teacher put it "whatever any student wishes to share."

In grade two, students bring in items from home that are of interest to them and discuss them with the class (Show and Tell), or talk about some event that took place and left an impact on them.

In grade three, a more structured approach is taken. One child is selected each week to be the V.I.P., on a rotational basis. On each day of the week the child is assigned to make presentations to the class as follows:

- Sat. Show and Tell
- Sun. Biography (Tell about themselves, family...)
- Mon. Photographs (from home, growing up...)
- Tues. Newspaper article (something interesting from an English newspaper)
- Wed. Compliments (classmates give compliments to the V.I.P.)

In grade four, an approach similar to the one in grade three takes place. A student likewise is chosen to be the "student of the week" required to do various things, one of which is to bring something special to share with the class.

The class under investigation in this research is a second grade class of 16 students, from different ethnic backgrounds (mostly Arabs), who have had two years of English language instruction. Their ages range between 6 and 8 years. Their first languages are Arabic, Persian, Chinese, English, and Sinhala. Their countries of origin are the U.A.E., Iran, Argentina, USA, Australia, Egypt, Senegal, Palestine, Syria, Algeria, and Lebanon. Their level of English proficiency ranges from beginner to intermediate, based on school-internal tests.

## **Research Design**

The study was intended to answer the following research questions:

1. How is the interaction organized in the Sharing Time context?

## 2. What kinds of learning are promoted by this activity?

In order to answer these questions, a triangulated approach was used with the following elements. Between December 1998 and March 1999, audio recordings were made of the students in the grade two class under investigation during Sharing Time. Later, recordings of 18 complete sessions of Sharing Time were fully transcribed; these are available in Appendix 1 of Yazigi (2001). In this particular classroom context, a tape recorder is part of the normal classroom environment; the students are familiar with it and on many occasions have had the chance to use it and record their voices on it. Using the familiar tape recorder was therefore felt to be relatively unobtrusive.[1] Qualitative analysis of the transcripts was undertaken, focusing on the organisation of turn-taking, topic, and repair. A simple coding system was also used to determine typical interactional patterns.

Questionnaires for both teachers and students were used in addition to the audio recordings / transcriptions to triangulate perspectives. Yazigi in the role of teacher-researcher in her own classroom carried out the data collection. The questionnaires were given to those teachers at the lower elementary school who do Sharing Time. The student questionnaires were given to the researcher's 21 students. The teacher questionnaire was distributed so there was at least one representative of every grade level at the lower elementary school, grades KG to grade four. All questionnaires were returned, giving a completion rate of 100 percent. The original questionnaire is listed in Appendix 2A of Yazigi (2001). The student questionnaire was made up of two parts: personal data and Sharing Time and was handed to the students in class. It took them 10-20 minutes to complete and again had a return rate of 100 percent. The original questionnaire is listed in Appendix 2B of Yazigi (2001). Both questionnaires were piloted before distribution and minor adjustments were made in light of the respondents' comments.

### **Rationale for the Use of Sharing Time in this Classroom**

According to the class teacher, Sharing Time is a daily morning activity adopted for a number of reasons:

1. *To establish teacher-student rapport and a sense of community.* The teacher uses this means to establish and maintain personal relationships with the individuals of her class. The Sharing Time activity is thought to allow for the development of such personal relationships (Malamah-Thomas, 1987).
2. *To build self-confidence.* Standing in front of the class and addressing their classmates, the students build self-confidence, self-esteem and develop a better self-image.
3. *To encourage fluency and the use of English for talking about real life issues.* As English is their second language, students may still lack the confidence in using it in talking about their personal lives. The Sharing Time activity is believed to be a suitable activity for encouraging its use.
4. *To address a need felt by students.* They plead with the teacher to be given the chance to share.
5. *It is an enjoyable activity and a good induction to the day.* Sharers and listeners seem to enjoy the activity. Moreover, the teacher feels it sets the tone for the day.

Sharing Time is usually conducted in the morning after the learners are seated, and once the morning rituals of greetings, calendar, and helping hands are assigned. The teacher announces that it is Sharing Time and learners who wish to share raise their hand. Classroom size does not allow for a circle gathering or for student grouping. The students remain seated in their rows while the teacher summons a volunteer to the front of the class. She moves to the side, leaving the learner at centre stage. The topic, object, or story for Sharing Time, is entirely up to the student sharer. Students communicate issues that relate to their immediate environment. They talk about personal experiences, relationships, and feelings. The teacher stands far enough from the learner so the teacher is not the centre of attention but close enough to offer emotional and verbal

support. There is no system for choosing the learners but the time allotted for this activity is 10-15 minutes. Should there be more sharers beyond the time limit assigned for the activity, the teacher postpones it either to the end of the day or for the next day. On rare occasions, she may extend the Sharing Time session by 5-10 minutes.

### **Qualitative Analysis of Transcripts**

In this section we consider how Sharing Time as an interactional variety is organised in terms of turn-taking, topic and repair.

#### **Turn-taking in Sharing Time**

This section will look at how turn taking is organized during Sharing Time and consider how this organisation relates to the pedagogic focus of the teacher. The transcription system is based on Van Lier (1988). In the extract below, the students raise their hands and the teacher ushers L1 to the front of the class and asks him to begin:

### Extract 1

- 1 L1: before on Wednesday I went to a trip to Dubai  
2 because my father's work they gave him a paper  
3 that we could go to a free trip to Dubai.  
4 T: ah::  
5 L1: ya, and on the paper it said we could stay in a  
6 hotel for any days you want so I said to my  
7 father for two days and when I was going to  
8 Dubai Mark called me.  
9 T: he called you?  
10 L1: ya, and we were talking and then when we  
11 finished talking, er:: on Thursday my father  
12 took me to Burjuman, ya, there was something  
13 like this big just twenty dirhams , ya,  
14 I bought it and it..=  
15 T: = what is this, something like this, it's big?  
16 L1: it's like a penguin but not a penguin. It's a  
17 bear, ya, not very big like this.  
18 T: uhu::  
19 L1: like me, ya. I press a button, it moves like  
20 this, and it carries me up like this and puts me  
21 down.  
22 T: are you serious?  
23 L1: and also in the hotel I saw the tallest man in  
24 the world and the shortest man in the world.  
25 T: really? ha! where do they come from?  
26 L1: er:: I don't know. one is from China, I don't  
27 know, Japan and one is from here. The tall  
28 man he's like this (extending his right hand up)  
29 bigger than the short man.  
30 T: is he the same one that came to school?  
31 L1: no, bigger than that one.  
32 T: oh really? even taller?  
33 L1: (nods)  
34 T: jeez! o.k. thank you Arash for sharing.

(Yazigi, 2001)

The teacher (T hereafter) initiates the interaction by allocating the learner (L1) interactional space. L1 introduces the topic of his trip to Dubai. T's response in line 4 (*ah::*) conveys that the message is understood and that L1 can proceed. In line 5 L1 confirms the new information (*ya*)

and adds further information to clarify the situation. He also introduces a sub-topic (*Mark called me.*) Mark is a student in class and the speaker is thereby making a connection between the trip in the outside world and the classroom speech community. T responds to the piece of information in line 8 by rewording it into a question (line 9). The purpose is to encourage L1 to proceed and to show that the point caught her interest. L1 elaborates on the sub-topic of speaking to Mark but he soon drops it and returns to the previous main topic of the trip to Dubai. In line 15 T interrupts L1 requiring clarification and more specific details about what the "something" is which L1 bought. Apparently T fears that the meaning and hence interest may get lost on the learners. It should be remembered that L1 is addressing the whole class and clarification was indeed needed so that the listeners can follow the evolving dialogue. L1 responds to the teacher's initiation and attempts to clarify the point in line 16. Again in line 18, the discourse marker (*uhu:.*) allows the learner to proceed with the topic and offer further information (line 19). T responds with a question in line 22, which allocates L1 a turn and in effect allots him interactional space to continue to develop the topic further. However, L1 declines and chooses to open up a new sub-topic, thus inviting T to respond to his new sub-topic. The question posed in line 25 indicates T's interest in the topic and also effectively requires L1 to confirm the information shared and asks him to provide further information, which is provided in lines 26-29. T then draws on common background knowledge (line 30) to make the input more comprehensible to the rest of the class and to enable them to continue to follow the dialogue. She also relates the outside world to the classroom speech community. T finally concludes the sharing episode in line 34.

The analysis shows the interaction to be locally managed on a "turn-by turn" basis. T neither initiates the topic of interaction nor is aware of where the interaction may lead. She also does not know how the learner may respond. The focus is on meaning rather than form, on fluency rather than accuracy. This is evident in that the learner was allocated enough interactional space to develop topics and sub-topics. The teacher did not attempt at any point to correct the linguistic errors. The pedagogic focus is on the speaker's expression of personal meaning and on the contribution of new information to the immediate classroom community. The teacher's role was more that of a mediator whose purpose is to ensure that L1's message is conveyed to all of the other students, as well as a collaborator in the dialogue, thereby encouraging a smooth flow to the conversation and nurturing fluency. The teacher's utterances therefore contain markers of change of information state and clarification requests. There is an attempt on both sides, teacher and learner, to connect the real world to the classroom speech community (lines 8 and 30). The teacher attempts to keep the other learners engaged, focused and interested. In the extract below, the learner is invited to the front of the class to share his picture; unusually for this type of interaction, several other students participate in the talk.

## Extract 2

- 1 L1: my cousin..she went to the store and she got  
2 me this.., it's a picture of Venus..it's  
3 um:: it's true..it says in the back it's  
4 from NASA!  
5 T: oh::  
6 L1: and uh and the rocket ship that took the picture  
7 of it.  
8 T: very interesting. this is Venus, planet Venus.  
9 L2: part of it.  
10 L3: ya / ((unintelligible 1 sec.))  
11 L4: it's Venus.  
12 T: the surface of Venus.  
13 L4: *Yani* ((tr: this means)) you can't see the whole  
14 picture of the planet.  
15 LL: yes / ya / but ((unintelligible 1 sec.)) the  
16 camera is so =  
17 T: it's not a real picture. on the back it gives us  
18 information about it and it says that uh::  
19 it is uh:: it is uh:: a painting by an  
20 artist and this is his imagination, this  
21 is what he thinks the surface of Venus  
22 looks like.  
23 L: ah::  
24 L5: he took a picture then he started looking at the  
25 picture and paint?  
26 T: no, no, he was just, he read a lot about planet  
27 Venus and this built his imagination and he  
28 started uh painting the picture.  
29 LL: ah::  
30 T: very interesting.  
31 L2: why do they lie?  
32 LL: ( students commenting) they don't lie/  
33 ((unintelligible 1 sec.))  
34 T: no, they don't lie. they're not lying here . . .  
35 ((unintelligible 1 sec.))  
36 thank you very much that was very interesting  
37 Sameer.

(Yazigi, 2001)

Here the learner is again allocated interactional space, and he introduces the topic in lines 1 and 2, showing the picture of Venus to the class. T responds with an *oh::* (line 5), marking a change of information state (Heritage, 1984), showing interest and allowing L1 the chance to continue to elaborate. L1 expands on the topic (line 6). T, then, evaluates the topic as "very interesting" and addresses the rest of the group, affirming that the picture is of Venus. The utterance also adds that Venus is a planet, which may not have been clear to all students. This prompts L2 to continue with the topic and he points out that the picture only shows part of the planet, which L3 confirms in line 10. L4 reconfirms that it is Venus (line 11) which is later further clarified by the teacher who expands on this, stating that it is actually the surface of Venus. In line 13, L4 agrees and justifies the teacher's opinion that it must be the picture of the surface, as one cannot see the whole picture of the planet. The other learners agree (line 15). It is as if the learners and the teacher are engaged in a "real life" conversation in which the negotiation of a topic is underway and a common interpretation of a picture is reached through discussion. The learners are allowed to take turns and voice opinions without reference to the teacher, who only joins as a more or less equal negotiator herself in trying to make sense of the picture, which is as new to her as to the students. The unintelligible seconds add to the sense of an evolving struggle to make sense of the picture in which others join in but only the most articulate are heard. In lines 17-22, the teacher nominates herself to take a turn and explains, while examining the back of the picture, how the picture is actually not real, as previously believed, and that what actually is seen is a painting. L5 requests a clarification in line 24, which T provides in lines 26-28. In line 29 the learners mark their change of information state. Once again T comments on how "very interesting" the topic of discussion is (line 30). In line 31, a learner questions the veracity of the information provided. Interestingly, some students dispute this directly with L2, before the teacher reaffirms that what was written was not a lie. She chooses to end the negotiation by thanking L1 in line 36 thereby regaining control of the floor.

Unlike the previous extract, where the sharer and teacher manage the interaction on a turn-by-turn basis, we find the floor open here to more participants, who manage the interaction locally. The teacher does not allocate turns to the students and instead allows them to manage the interaction themselves to some extent. The Sharing Time context here was much like a discussion panel where the sharer initiated the topic then backed away, allowing the rest of the learners to develop the interaction. In the other 17 extracts, the teacher normally leads dyadic interaction with one learner, so this extract is unusual.

The organisation of turn taking in "Sharing Time" has been shown to be in harmony with the pedagogical purpose of the teacher, which is that of maximizing the opportunity for self-expression. Sharers were allowed interactional space to develop topics and sub-topics. The focus was on meaning rather than on form, on fluency rather than accuracy. The general impression over the 18 extracts is that turn taking seemed to be more controlled by the teacher with less fluent speakers while more autonomy is given to the more fluent ones.

### **Repair in Sharing Time**

Repair is defined as the "treatment of trouble occurring in interactive language use" (Van Lier, 1988, p. 183). Van Lier (1988) suggests that there are three goals for repair in L2 classrooms. These are:

- a) Medium-oriented repair: This focuses on the form and function of L2.
- b) Message-oriented repair: This focuses on the transmission of thoughts, information and feelings.
- c) Activity-oriented repair: This focuses on the organization and structure of class environment, such as rules for conducting activities and the like.

What Van Lier feels should be borne in mind is that "certain types of activity naturally lead to certain types of repair, and that therefore the issue of how to repair is closely related to the context of what is being done" (1988, p. 211). According to Seedhouse (1999, p. 60), "within each context a particular pedagogical focus combines with a particular organization of repair which is appropriate to that focus." We will now examine extracts from the Sharing Time context and attempt to uncover the organisation of repair and see how this relates to the pedagogical focus.

### Extract 3

- 1 L1: yesterday I don't know my grand my grandfather  
2 and m.. and with my bay.. with their baby ya  
3 and with my grandmother I don't know they  
4 will came today.  
5 T: they will come today? they're coming? your  
6 grandmother and grandfather? yes? where  
7 from?  
8 L1: Australia. (Arabic pronunciation)  
9 T: oh, they're coming from Australia to  
10 visit you here in Abu Dhabi?  
11 L1: ya.  
12 T: that's wonderful.  
13 L1: ya. and then they came and bring me toy  
14 it's like...it's like..it's doll but it  
15 can talk.  
16 T: oh, that's nice. so they're already here. when  
17 did they arrive? yesterday?  
18 L1: ( nods )  
19 T: yes and they brought you a doll, a  
20 talking doll. would you like to bring it  
21 and share it with us..your talking doll?  
22 LL: (unintelligible 2 sec.)  
23 T: huh? can you bring it ?  
24 L1: no I can't.  
25 T: oh, you can't bring it? O.K.no problem.  
26 anything else Stephanie? (L1 shakes  
head.) no? thank you.

(Yazigi, 2001)

Although there are a number of linguistic errors in the above extract, at no point does the teacher stop the speaker to correct her or make her repeat her words. When L1 makes a grammatical error in line 4 (*they will came today*), T treats the error indirectly, using embedded correction, that is, a repair done in the context of a conversational move, which in this case is a move of agreement and confirmation: "That is, the utterances are not occupied by the doing of correcting, but by whatever talk is in progress . . . . What we have, then, is embedded correction as a by the

way occurrence in some ongoing course of talk" (Jefferson, 1987, p. 95).

This provides L1 (and the other students) with the correct version whilst maintaining the flow of the conversation. Her series of questions (lines 5-6) ask for confirmation and perform correction at the same time. L1 responds to T's questions and pronounces *Australia* in her L1 Arabic.

In line 8, T performs a similar embedded act of repair, providing L1 with the correct L2 pronunciation. Line 8 also displays a full statement of the situation, which enables the other learners to follow the evolving dialogue, and acknowledges L1's statement with a marker of change of information state. L1 responds to her question and T's positive evaluation in her next turn (line 11) prompts L1 to proceed. L1 continues to elaborate but again produces a number of linguistic errors. T's move in line 15 is very interesting. She ignores the many linguistic errors and instead chooses to focus on meaning and message. She performs an act of message-oriented repair (*So, they're already here?*), which has a dual function; it allocates L1 a turn and at the same time provides information for the listeners so that they are able to follow the dialogue. It is necessary for T to firstly clear up the confusion as to whether they have arrived yet or not. The linguistic errors, however, do not go unattended. T again repairs them--using embedded correction--in the context of her next conversational move (line 13), with *bring* being corrected to *brought*.

The analysis of the above extract portrays the non-threatening context of Sharing Time in which errors are made, accepted and indirectly repaired. The focus was primarily on meaning and fluency rather than on form and accuracy. The teacher's acts of repair were an attempt to upgrade the learners' linguistic system and to provide them with a model of the correct versions whilst maintaining a focus on fluency.

#### Extract 4

- 1 L1: last Thursday my sister and my father was  
2 sleeping my father said wait I'm coming then my  
3 sister closed the door and locked herself inside  
4 and she could not open the door so my  
5 father tried but we cannot.  
6 T: you could not open the door?  
7 L1: ya  
8 T: and she was locked in the room?  
9 L1: she started crying then we called one man he  
10 brought a gun and he started drilling  
11 then the drill got stuck.  
12 T: oh my God! in the keyhole?,  
13 L1: ya.  
14 T: where did you start drilling? around the  
15 keyhole?  
16 L1: ( nods )  
17 T: oh  
18 L1: ya, ya ya and when he started drilling the  
19 keyhole went..uh..got out and we opened  
20 the door we found out my sister, my sister  
21 sleeping.  
22 T: oh she was sleeping? ( laughs )  
23 LL: ( laugh and make unclear comments )  
24 T: that's funny.  
25 L1: and when she woke up she started crying.  
26 T: then she started crying again? thank you  
27 Moussa.

(Yazigi, 2001)

In the above extract we find the teacher using embedded repair. When L1 makes a linguistic error in line 1 (*my sister and my father was sleeping*), T refrains from any corrections so as not to interrupt the flow of the language. Later, in line 6, she finds an opportunity to correct L1's error of tense in line 5 in the move of a confirmation request (using embedded correction) whilst providing a correct version for the listeners. L1 is allowed the interactional space to continue and he expands on his topic (lines 9-11). In line 20, though, he produces another linguistic error (*we found out my sister, my sister sleeping*) and T performs a similar act of embedded correction again, displaying a correct version in line 22.

The teacher in the above extract managed to keep a focus on form while nurturing fluency. She provided linguistically correct versions, which functioned as both input and model. The types of repair are similar to those found in L1 adult-child conversations. The term "scaffolding," first introduced by Bruner (1983) may be used to describe such interactional work.

In the following extract we find evidence of uptake in that L1 accepts T's corrections and repeats them without interrupting the flow of the conversation.

### Extract 5

- 1 L1: yesterday ya my uncle took me where they wash  
cars.
- 2 T: to the car wash?
- 3 L1: ya the car wash and also I started uh washing  
them.
- 4 I worked with them too sometimes.
- 5 T: the workers?
- 6 L1: ya.
- 7 T: what did you do? did you wax the car after it was  
8 washed?
- 9 L1: ya.
- 10 T: you helped waxing it?
- 11 L1: ya and also inside.
- 12 T: oh. what did you do inside?
- 13 L1: uh::: first thing my uncle putted everything in the  
14 back:::
- 15 T: uhu..
- 16 L1: and then the back was so heavy so he couldn't  
drive
- 17 very good so we moved...everything...so it was  
18 so we started cleaning, then we putted them back  
19 again where they were next to each other:::
- 20 T: uhu..
- 21 L1: ya..and after ..we opened at the back and we also  
22 started cleaning ya and now my uncle's car is so:::
- 23 T: very clean.
- 24 L1: ya. very clean.
- 25 T: when you said the back of the car you meant the  
26 boot?
- 27 L1: ya. the boot of the car.
- 28 T: O.K. thank you Nabil.
- 29 L: (unidentified voices )
- 30 L: miss Rana, miss Rana can I share?

(Yazigi, 2001)

In the above extract we find the teacher performing an act of vocabulary expansion in line 2 which is then taken up by L1. When L1 talks about his uncle taking him to "*where they wash*

*cars*", T's move in line 2 performs multiple functions: She requests confirmation of L1's utterance; this allocates him the turn and the chance to expand and simultaneously repairs L1's utterance by using a more specific word *car wash* in an attempt to upgrade the learner's interlanguage and probably the listeners', too. This is accomplished without interrupting the flow of the interaction. The fact that L1 in line 3 shows uptake of T's repair is encouraging to the teacher. In line 5, T again uses message-oriented repair (embedded) asking for specification as to who *them* are as mentioned by L1 in line 3. In lines 13, 17 and 18, where L1 produces a number of linguistic errors, T refrains from any repair and rather allows L1 the interactional space to expand on his topic. L1 was narrating his experience and T felt that any attempt at repair would interrupt L1's story and his train of thought, which would clash with her main pedagogic focus. In line 23 T performs an act of message-oriented repair and treats what seems like trouble in the flow of the interaction by completing L1's utterance with an appropriate expression. L1 again displays uptake of the repaired item by repeating it (line 24). In line 25 there is an overt, pedagogical correction, which is more typical of "form and accuracy" contexts. In line 25 T refers back to lines 14 and 16 and initiates repair of the expression *the back of the car*, replacing it with *boot*. L1 again displays uptake by using it in line 27.

What is encouraging for a language teacher in the above extract is the fact that the corrections were picked up and used by the learner. It is interesting that the teacher focused on form only when she felt it did not clash with her main pedagogic focus, which is on fluency. In other words, she allowed L1 to complete his narrative before conducting repair.

Acts of repair in the Sharing Time context were varied in form and function. Instances of repair were mainly of message-oriented, but medium-oriented and activity-oriented repair also occurred. There was embedded as well as overt repair. There were also instances of the teacher not undertaking repair of errors. The focus of almost all instances of repair was on maintaining the flow of the interaction, the fluency of the conversation and on meaning, and message. There is therefore a clear link between the organisation of repair and the pedagogical focus. It should also be noted that it is always possible to identify a topic in Sharing Time. By contrast, during "form and accuracy" focused interaction there is generally no carrier topic as such (Seedhouse, 1996) as the pedagogical aim is to produce particular strings of linguistic forms.

### The Length and Structure of Sharing Time

**Table 1. Duration of Sharing Time:**

Extract	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Duration in minutes	1:25	4:45	2:17	3:40	1:30	1:00	0:49	1:05	0:40	1:15	1:43	1:05	1:09	0:47	1:43	1:13

To summarize the table, we find that:

- Three sessions lasted over two minutes (Extracts 2, 3 and 4)
- Three sessions lasted for less than a minute, namely between 0:40 and 0:49 seconds (Extracts 7, 9 and 14).
- Ten sessions of sharing lasted between 1:00 and 1:43 minutes (the rest).

If we examine the three long sessions (extracts 2, 3 and 4, available in Appendix 1 of Yazigi (2001)) we note the following common features:

- In all three extracts the speakers connected the outside world to the classroom speech community.
- There was laughter in all three, involving the teacher and learners in extract 2 and the

teacher alone in extracts 3 and 4.

- The student speakers were fluent and had a relatively large vocabulary, were confident, and had good public speaking skills. The teacher probably kept them on stage for a longer duration to provide a model for other students.
- The teacher's interest in the topic. In all three extracts, the teacher mentioned how wonderful or interesting the topic was;
- Unlike all the other sessions, there was mention of animals, both real and fictional. In extract 2, it was about pet animals and parrots and African culture. These all have immediate connections to the class curriculum. In extract 3 it was peer culture that triggered the interest of the children: there was talk of friends playing tricks and writing a sign that read "Danger Keep out!"; of a toy that changes into a wizard and later into a tiger that can talk! Extract 4 makes connections with the science theme at the time, plants: the student talks about the moss he found at the beach and wanted to take home and observe its growth. In all of the above cases, the topic was one of general interest to all students. Where the topic elsewhere was of purely personal interest to the sharer, it appears that the teacher did not prolong the interaction.

As seen from the above analysis, these issues seem to have affected the length of the extracts:

- The nature of the topic in terms of its relation to class curriculum or peer culture.
- The public speaking skills of the students; without fluency, the interest of the teacher and students will have waned.
- The ability of the speakers. When rewarded and positively evaluated by the teacher, the high ability speakers tended to participate more. Low-ability students may regard the teacher's praise as sufficient social reinforcement and thereby refrain from expanding (Johnson, 1995).
- There appears, then, to have been a relationship between the fluency of speakers and the length of time the teacher allows the interaction to continue.

A number of other factors may have affected the duration of the extracts. These may include the schedule of the day, the moods of the teacher and the class, and the number of learners who requested to share, since a large number will prompt the teacher to keep interactions short.

### Coding of Typical Interactional Patterns

The qualitative analyses conducted so far show the interaction underlying this structure to be fluid, performed on a turn-by-turn basis. We will now examine five extracts in terms of the speech acts and speech moves involved, using a simple coding system in order to uncover typical interactional patterns. A skeletal drawing of the analysis will follow with a key for further analysis:

**Figure 1. Key to Interactional Patterns**

ER =	Embedded Repair
IU =	Initiation Understood
LR =	Learner Response ( a brief answer; or yes, no, etc )
EI =	Learner elaborates / Teacher requests elaboration
P =	Learner proceeds / Teacher allows interactional space to proceed
TC =	Teacher confirms
C =	Teacher requests confirmation
Tcl =	Teacher clarifies
Cl =	Teacher requests clarification
E =	Evaluation
TI =	Topic initiation
S =	Teacher Suggestion or Statement
OLR=	Other learner Response
TM =	Teacher Move
LM =	Learner Move
OLM=	Other Learner Move

**Table 2: Coded Extracts**

Extract 5																			
TM	IU		C/VA		C1/ER		ER/C		EI		C	C	C	C/E				TC1	
LM		TI				LR		LR		LR	P	LR	LR				LR	P	
OLM				OLR												OLR		C1	
Extract 10																			
TM	IU		C		C		E1		E1		E1		P		P	C1/ER		C1	
LM		TI		LR/P		LR		LR		LR		E1		P/E1		P		LR	LR
OLM																			
Extract 12																			
TM	IU		TC1		C/C1		ER/C/TC1		C/ER/C1/P		E/S		E1		E/END				
LM		TI		P		C1		P			LR		P		OLR				
OLM																			
Extract 22																			
TM	IU		C/ER		C/SA		C1		C		P		C/ER		E		C/END		
LM		TI			LR		P		LR		LR		P			P			
OLM															OLR				

A general look at the skeletons reveals the following:

1. The structure is to a large degree dyadic, an overwhelmingly teacher-single student interaction. Other learners rarely gain the floor.
2. All skeletons begin with a teacher initiation (IU), which may be non-verbal, followed by a topic introduction (TI) by the learner. Learners then are allowed interactional space to initiate topics and talk.
3. All skeletons begin with an initiation understood (IU) and end with an evaluation (E) and a concluding remark (END). One aspect of the teacher's role is that of a timekeeper who signals the beginning and end of the event.
4. The structure of the interaction in between the teacher's beginning and ending moves seems to be highly flexible and fluid. Moves of elaboration (E1) and expansion (P), confirmation(C) and clarification (C1) are present in all the skeletons to a large degree. So is the learner response (LR). Such moves signify a high degree of contribution from both teacher and learner to the development of the interaction.

### What Kind of Learning is Promoted by Sharing Time?

In this section we will first consider the teachers' and learners' views on the kind of learning that has taken place. It should be pointed out at this stage that Yazigi's role of teacher-researcher might have had an influence on the responses given by learners and colleagues. We will then relate Sharing Time to the literature on Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). Twenty-one students filled in questionnaires. The table below summarizes their responses:

**Table 3. Questionnaire Response Summary**

Question	Yes	No
It makes me a better speaker	21	0
It makes me a better listener	21	0
It teaches me to wait for my turn	21	0
I learn new words	20	1
I learn more about the world around me	19	2
I learn more about my classmates	20	0

Asked whether Sharing Time was necessary, all the children said yes. When asked to justify their responses, they wrote the following:

- I learn about other places and things.
- I learn more about my friends and where they come from and what they did yesterday.
- I get new friends.
- I like to listen to interesting things about other people.
- I can share.
- I learn.
- I learn new words.
- I learn how to talk.

The teachers, in their questionnaires, report the following about Sharing Time and learning:

- It develops language fluency.
- It develops class interaction skills.
- It improves speaking skills.
- It improves listening skills.
- It improves eye contact / body language skills.
- It improves organization skills. (Students need to remember to bring the thing they want to share to school.)
- It teaches patience and attentiveness. (Turn-taking)
- It enforces school rules. (Raise your hand when you have something to say.)

Whilst there is some overlap between student and teacher perspectives, it is noticeable that there are a significant number of differences in the perceived values. In terms of L2 learning and acquisition, while one teacher reported it was useful in improving her students' English, the others reported that it was extremely useful. They all agreed that Sharing Time helps develop: fluency, speaking skills, and listening skills. The degree to which Sharing Time develops each skill, according to the teachers, is shown in the following table:

**Table 4. Skill Development**

Skill	Fluency			Vocabulary			Speaking			Listening		
	G	S	No	G	S	No	G	S	No	G	S	No
Degree of Development												
Number of responses	7	2	0	6	2	1	9	0	0	3	5	0
G = Great development S = Some development No = No development												

The teachers unanimously agree that Sharing Time greatly develops students' speaking skills.

Fluency and vocabulary are also among the skills that are believed to be developed. Listening is felt to develop to a small extent only, which is surprising when one considers that listening is integral to the success of Sharing Time. The students' questionnaire showed that most students (15 to 6) enjoyed listening to others during sharing as much as taking the floor themselves. One student wrote: "I love listening to others and I love it when people listen to me." Another one wrote: " I listen and get ideas."

From a social constructivist or Vygotskian perspective (see, for example, Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Ohta, 2001), children develop higher mental functions when interacting and negotiating meaning with adults. According to Danielewicz et al. (1996, p. 312): "[I]ndividual mental growth is related to communicative practices in social contexts." In a sense, Sharing Time can be seen as a demonstration of the Zone of Proximal Development in action, in that all children get a chance to demonstrate how well they can express themselves in the L2 with the assistance of a skilled adult. We can also see in Sharing Time an embodiment of Bruner's (1983) principles of scaffolding (particularly in the use of embedded repair by the teacher) and routines, which combine the security of familiar routine with the novelty of the news or feelings or objects that the learners introduce. We see examples of this in extracts 3, 4 and 5.

Talk, interaction, and communication in a social context help children develop as intelligent beings. Housego and Burns (1994, pp. 25-27) point out how talk "deepens children's thinking," but for talk to contribute to such development it needs to be "exploratory talk" where children are allowed to voice their views, to negotiate, and to challenge. During Sharing Time, a complex type of interaction takes place in which connections are made, meanings are negotiated and challenges are presented. The child talks and the teacher challenges him/her to build on what has been said. The teachers' questions are varied in nature and complexity, but there is usually a focus on some type of cognitive operation. Sometimes the focus is on making connections with the outer world, thereby learning more about it. In extract 2 involving the African parrot, the students gain some information about the organisational system followed in a pet shop, about a strong African parrot, about prices of parrots, and about African culture (Appendix 1, Yazigi 2001). It is through this interplay and negotiation of meaning that learning occurs, as noted by Housego and Burns (1994, p. 26).

At other times, the focus is on narration and creativity, as in an extract (not reproduced here) where a gift with buttons turns into a talking tiger (Appendix 1, Yazigi, 2001). Sharing Time offers students the opportunity to tell stories, to narrate experiences thereby developing their thinking and enhancing their learning. Gallas notes how "[c]hildren's narratives, if 'uncovered' and honored in the context of the classroom, can become powerful vehicles for thinking and learning" (1992, p. 173). Sharing Time, then, can develop children's cognitive abilities if narration and exploratory talk are encouraged. Another important feature of Sharing Time that is thought to enhance learning is positive self-image. According to the teacher questionnaires, Sharing Time "boosts self-confidence and self-esteem," "makes students feel important," "develops self-pride and self-worth," and is a "a confidence-builder." As Housego and Burns (1994, p. 26) observe, once the children feel confident and important, they are more likely to challenge, ask questions and hypothesize, and so "they are more likely to learn." Sharing Time improves teacher-student and student-student relationships. One teacher points out "The teacher gets to know the students better and the students get to know each other." Another writes how Sharing Time is "good for relationship building among peers and student-teacher." Gumperz reports that such relationships "affect both the communication and the products of learning" (1986, p. 53).

From the perspective of learning theory, we can see that Sharing Time is an effective activity because it incorporates important principles such as scaffolding, zone of proximal development, and promotion of self-esteem. Sharing Time is also thought to promote conversational or interactional skills such as turn-taking, careful listening, and good eye contact, which students learn as the activity develops throughout the year. Sharing Time, when appropriately conducted, seemed to promote listening and speaking skills. Also, there is evidence in some transcripts of the

teacher upgrading learner's vocabulary and structures and there is sometimes evidence of uptake.

There are interesting cultural aspects to the talk. The setting is an English-medium international school in Abu Dhabi with children from many different countries. The topics that the learners choose talk this international, multicultural setting into being, with three other countries being mentioned in the extracts above. The children's talk also evokes typical activities in this culture, for instance entertainment in Dubai, visits from overseas, going to the car wash.

## **Key Findings**

This study has attempted to analyze the interactional organization of Sharing Time and the following findings have been reached in relation to this particular classroom:

1. Sharing Time is a variety of interaction that occurs in the L2 classroom. The focus of the interaction is mainly on topic and meaning, on fluency rather than form and accuracy.
2. The interactional structure of Sharing Time has some common, invariable elements and some variable elements. All the exchanges have a clear beginning and end. They begin with an (often non-verbal) "Initiation Understood" (IU) followed by a Learner Response (LR) and end with an Evaluation (E) and a "Closing Move" (END). The sharer's moves are mostly responses, elaborations, and confirmations. The teacher's moves are requests for confirmations, clarifications and elaborations, structural and vocabulary alternations, both exposed and embedded repairs, initiations, evaluations, and closing moves.
3. Turn-taking seems to be managed cooperatively on a turn-by-turn basis with fluent sharers while it is more teacher-led with weaker speakers. The teacher has no prior knowledge of the topic of the interaction and works collaboratively with the learner to develop the topic. The focus is primarily on content while sometimes maintaining a degree of focus on form. The teacher leads the interaction in that she chooses the sharer; she initiates and concludes the interaction. She is able to exert control over the progress of the interaction should she wish. The interaction is teacher-led, but not in a lockstep, formulaic way.
4. Repair does occur and is often embedded. It is normally managed without interfering with the flow of the interaction. It does not occur consistently, though. There are times when the teacher abstains from repairing.

Several exchanges show teacher moves of structure and vocabulary substitution. These are done in an attempt to upgrade the students' linguistic system and to serve as both input and model for the whole class. As far as vocabulary development is concerned, the transcripts show multiple instances where the teacher performs vocabulary substitutions or expansions with the intention of increasing both the sharer's and the listeners' repertoire of vocabulary.

## **Conclusions and Pedagogical Recommendations**

This study demonstrates the significant value of Sharing Time in this particular L2 young learners classroom. The findings were based on the analysis of a number of recordings, available in Yazigi (2001). Whilst 18 recordings do provide a representative picture of Sharing Time in this particular classroom, it would be unwise to generalise too far regarding Sharing Time as an interactional variety on this basis. On a theoretical level, the value lies in the way in which this interactional variety embodies the social constructivist principles that underlie Teaching of English to Young Learners. On a practical level, we can see evidence of the development of speaking and learning skills, social and interactional skills. We can also see evidence of the teacher upgrading learners' utterances on the level of vocabulary and structure.

According to this study, the most interesting, longest and richest interactions were those which connected the outside world to the classroom community and which had a topic to which all students were able to relate in some way. Theme-based or theme-connected Sharing Time has the

advantage of placing children in a common background, thereby making them topic-focused and more likely to contribute to interactions. The theme-based approach (cf. Cameron, 2001, p. 180) is further enhanced if parents get involved. Involving the parents in this activity will help connect themes to the outside world and will help to better prepare the child for his/her moment in the spotlight. Parents are typically eager to help with such matters as Edwards reports (1996, p. 346). One parent wrote that if she had had anything like this (referring to the Sharing Activity) she and her mother would have been closer. Another father talked about the several work promotions he had missed because of his inability to talk in front of an audience. He appreciated what Sharing Time is teaching his child. Such an approach to Sharing Time may help improve the quality and the quantity of the interaction and may enhance learning.

How do the children feel about sharing Time? The children most certainly love this activity. In their questionnaire (See Yazigi, 2001, Appendix 3 A) 19 out of 21 said they loved it, while 2 said they liked it. All students picked *Yes* when asked whether Sharing Time made them a better speaker and listener. The teacher's questionnaire (Yazigi, 2001, Appendix 3 B) provided a similar result where 8 of the 9 teachers said it was one of the activities the students loved most. The students are obviously enthralled by this activity, probably because of the high status with which they are endowed by it. They are given centre stage and can have their moment in the spotlight. They can talk about whatever they wish, whatever interests them or is on their mind. Their teacher and classmates are listening attentively and responding to their message, their meaning and their interest.

## Notes

[1] Conducting video recording, an unfamiliar procedure, would have made the students self-conscious and had a more obtrusive effect.

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