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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to analyze the success or failure of school reform efforts, this study looked closely at student and teacher interactions in one elementary classroom where a "democratic" approach was being implemented. The study used Victor Turner's work on rituals to analyze one episode in a third-grade classroom (one student sucked on a lollipop during the Pledge of Allegiance). Eating was treated as a metaphor for the larger issue of social order. The student's eating any time he wished implied no order or discipline and hence, in terms of ritual theory, he appeared anarchic and dangerous. Rituals, including formal schooling, demand attention to order and norms. The analysis concluded that this attempt to institute more egalitarian roles failed and illustrated the discouraging prospects for school reform. In this classroom, the larger traditional and hierarchical social norms of the United States overrode the teacher's attempts to bring about egalitarian social relations, a fact that cast doubt on the likely success of some types of school reform. The paper argues that an effective democratic classroom in the 1990s could be more effective if it recognized the utility of hierarchy and sought to use hierarchical relations in a positive way to instill a modified egalitarianism which fosters authentic relationships among members of the classroom, thus enhancing education. (JB)

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CHANGING ROLES IN A CLASSROOM: AN ATTEMPT THAT DIDN'T WORK

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In his recent book, The Classroom Crucible, Edward Pauly has brought the focus of school reform down into the individual classroom by asserting that "the lives and experiences of ordinary teachers and students must form the center of any serious analysis of efforts to improve our schools." (Pauly 1991, 3). His thesis is that reform from outside the classroom is useless. School reform has failed because it has focused its remedies on fictitious generic schools rather than on individual, real-life classrooms. The purpose of this paper is to take the less discussed and examined next step by asking what is involved in the teacher-student interactions which make or break reform efforts. By unraveling and beginning to understand the dynamics of teacher-student interactions, more fruitful interactions which support reform may be possible. In this paper I will be focusing on what it means to do school and the relation between continuity and change in classroom reform.

Despite the best of intentions, school reform is difficult. Some school reform aims at creating democratic classrooms which require less authoritarian roles from teachers and which include students as active participants in their educations. Despite all the efforts to change roles, teachers and students often end up with the same traditional roles they had originally. This study looks at one classroom trying to change to egalitarianism and how the participants construct and destruct roles within

the classroom. In it we see what happens when a new conception of school is pasted over a traditional conception. The setting is a classroom within a school which is overtly trying to implement democratic classrooms.

Here is an interesting episode I observed in this "democratic classroom." Having been puzzled by this incident, I decided to look at it through anthropology to see if I could make some sense of it. In examining the incident, I gained some insights into how traditional roles were perpetuated despite overt efforts to create an egalitarian classroom. As I relate the episode, look at it in terms of this question: Is reform thwarted by teacher's and students' differing understandings of doing school?" Here is the episode:

It is 8:20 AM, ten minutes before class is to begin in this third grade suburban elementary school. Children are wandering around the classroom, eating food from their lunch boxes, playing chess, visiting with each other, and holding the guinea pig.

At 8:30 the teacher, Mr. Marshall (also called Tom by students and staff at school), announces that it is time for everyone to be in their seats and ready for school. Students leave their chess games and social groups and sit down in their seats. Many close their lunch boxes although some continue to quietly eat.

Tom: "Raise your hand up if someone at your table is missing who is not in genetics club. We have a couple of people there."

Several names are called out.

Tom: "OK, anyone else? Lunch. Who wants a salad? Salad. Anna, can you hear me all right?"

Student: "We get salad with our pizza."

Another student: "Ummmm!"

Tom: "Oh, I think we've passed by the salad. Raise your hand if you are ordering lunch from the cafeteria today. Would you return to your seat so I don't count you twice? If you're wandering around I might count you once up there and then again over there. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and Sam back there is 8. 12 is still the record. We tied it last week. Pizza. Is that it? Pizza?"

Students: (happily) "Yeah!"

Tom: "Pizza's the popular one." (Grimaces)

Students: (a jumble of voices as they talk about pizza)

Tom: "It's time for the flag."

Students stand quietly and face the United States flag. Two students have lollipops in their mouths. A student whispers something to Tom.

Tom, loudly: "Oh, you don't think it's appropriate that they eat a lollipop while they do the pledge." He only acknowledges the student's concern but does not intervene. The offenders hear him but one continues to suck on his lollipop.

Before they can begin the pledge, the loudspeaker comes on: "Attention for morning announcements." Students remain standing but take their hands off their hearts.

As soon as announcements are over, the class begins in unison, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America..."

Willy still has his lollipop in his mouth and says none of the pledge. Students nearby look at him and snicker during the pledge and immediately afterwards as they have their minute of silence. His friend makes a motion of wide open hands to Willy. Willy wiggles his lollipop in his mouth.

Tom: "Minute of silence is over."

Willy walks across the classroom and throws the lollipop in the trash as Tom begins the lesson. He saunters back across the classroom with nothing in his mouth.

Tom: "It's time to come for morning circle." One boy dumps a handful of food in his mouth before closing his lunch box and coming to circle. Only he and Willy's friend, Walt, are eating. Since he took his out for the pledge to the flag, Walt has reinserted his lollipop in his mouth. He carefully takes it out whenever he is addressed or talks. Occasionally he licks the lollipop contentedly.

Tom: "Today the whole school is talking about things we are thankful for. Each class has a cardboard fruit like this to write all the thankful things on and then all the fruit will go together into a big cornucopia on the front bulletin board. Is it OK if I'm the scribe? OK, who has something they are thankful for?" Students are serious, quiet, fully focused on the subject of thankfulness. Only Walt has any food and his lollipop is only occasionally in his mouth. Whenever Walt is addressed or speaks, he takes the lollipop out of his mouth.

To a visitor in this classroom, the students appear to eat all the time. Lunch boxes are often seen on the tables or under the chairs. Only occasionally are students directed to put their lunch boxes off their workspaces. Never are students directly told not to eat. This teacher avoids giving commands in order to instill, by example, egalitarianism in his process of helping to build a democratic classroom. On closer inspection, food is not eaten all the time but it does seem to play a role in marking the boundaries of ritual, formalized schooling and in so doing, becomes a symbol of what it means to be a "good" student. Before I begin a discussion of this episode, let me stress that I am quite aware that mine is but one of many possible interpretations of this classroom. Gregory Bateson might see this as an example of a double-bind, Eric Erickson as an example of a student not picking up cues for changes in context.

LINKS TO ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

In the process of constructing and destructing roles within the classroom, students and teacher display their boundaries of formalized, structured, ritual schooling and informal schooling. My working definition of ritual schooling is the formal transference of knowledge which requires the element of time and moments in which we can identify certain actions of clearly focusing on one center. Focus requires concentration and fused attention by participants. Ritual school is not a physical place, it can occur outside the classroom as well as inside. Likewise, while we think of informal schooling occurring outside of the school, it is alive and well within school too.

In examining the boundaries of ritual schooling, we are not just looking at ritual versus informal schooling but the privileging of ritual schooling over informal. In the ritual of the flag ceremony, the students stand quietly as they ready for the pledge. So too they are quietly attentive for their lesson on thankfulness. Contrast those ritual times with the informal times. Before school, students jovially visit with each other, and during the lunch count they talk and wander around. The flag ceremony and formal lesson on thankfulness are recognized by the students as different from and more significant than the time before school or the settling-in time of attendance and lunch count. For the important formal schooling, the students are quiet, respectful, and still, as opposed to talking and moving around during the times before the ritual schooling began.

My reason for labeling the formalized, more structured aspects of schooling as "ritual schooling" is that these times have the characteristics of ritual.¹ Their rituality elucidates why the students recognize and behave differently during these times than they do during informal school times. Arnold van Gennep outlined the three periods which must be present to be considered a ritual: a separation phase (preliminal), a transition phase (liminal), and an incorporation phase (postliminal). Victor Turner, in discussing characteristics of rituals, includes the following:

- 1) initially there is a separation
- 2) there is a period of time, the liminal phase, the "betwixt and between" time, in which participants are equal, submissive, silent, considered to be blank slates, heteronomous (as opposed to autonomous)
- 3) rituals depend on traditional authority which is considered sacred
- 4) rituals reinforce structure, they keep the status quo. This is the incorporation phase.

¹ One qualifying note here is that unlike some other rituals which last a short, definitive amount of time, these school rituals are embedded in what I see to be a larger ritual of school itself as a passage of untamed young children into controlled adults who can then be good citizens of the United States. More on this issue later in the paper when I discuss Willy's behaviors in light of social reproduction theory.

As to equality in the liminal phase, in the flag ceremony all of the students are considered equal in that they are all being trained as citizens. They are all part of pledging allegiance to something higher than they are, in this case to the flag which is a symbol for the United States. Although the teacher also pledges to the flag, he still has the ultimate role of seeing that the pupils go through the ritual of pledging. In the morning lesson, despite the teacher asking permission to be the scribe, he is clearly in charge. One must ask the question, "Who is the ritual for?" to realize that the teacher is the representative of society initiating the students into school knowledge. Thus, only the students are considered equals. This relates to their silence, their passivity, their submissiveness, their heteronomy. In the flag ceremony everyone is to stand still and respectively, hand on heart, and recite the pledge in unison, all acting the same. In the morning lesson, students are to sit still, be silent, pay no attention to toys or distractions but only to the teacher, and are to follow the teacher's directions. "The passivity of neophytes to their instructors, their malleability, which is increased by submission to ordeal, their reduction to a uniform condition, are signs of the process whereby they are ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life" (Turner 1967, 101).

As to authority, the flag ceremony and the formal lesson are linked respectively to the traditional authorities of the nation and school knowledge. Contrast this with the taking of attendance in which there is no clear authority and in which individuals are prominent as opposed to individuals melting into a group and being equals. This is why Willy stands out in the flag ceremony and in the beginning of the morning lesson because he is being an autonomous individual while others are not. Willy, being marginal, displays a lack of boundedness which serves to elucidate the bounded, structuredness of his group. Because of his presence, the group "protects

itself against threats to its way of life, and renews the will to maintain the norms on which the routine behavior necessary for its social life depends" (Turner 1967, 111). The student questioning Willy's right to have a lollipop in his mouth during the flag ceremony and the students who continue to pledge to the flag despite Willy's actions are examples of efforts to maintain the norm.

In the flag episode in which Willy sucks on his lollipop, having the lollipop in his mouth precludes his speaking the pledge. This is a major inversion of the ritual of the flag ceremony. Reciting the pledge is central to the flag ritual. Although Willy is standing quietly and could put his hand over his heart, having his mouth plugged so that he cannot easily recite is opposite to what he should be doing and thus gives the message of disrespect to the authority of the nation, symbolized by the flag.

Many teachers would order Willy to stop eating the lollipop but Tom does not. It's possible that he doesn't want to expend the effort on Willy at this moment, though it is more likely that Tom is following his usual tack of trying to model good behavior and trust the student to make his own decisions. This bow to the right of self expression reflects the United States' society which gives legitimate authority to acts of individualism as well as reflecting the tenets of a democratic classroom. Whereas in many school situations students are not given the authority to be individuals, in this case Willy takes that authority and the teacher allows it. For this teacher, sharing authority is part of his creation of a more democratic classroom. The underlying guideline in this classroom is that students and teacher should consider their actions in light of others' needs. If they are not interfering with others' needs, they can do what they decide. If someone feels offended by another's actions, they are to tell the offender what is bothering them, why it bothers them, and the two are to work out a mutually agreeable solution. This cultivates an individualism which is mindful of the

interrelatedness of individuals.

Some would argue that Willy may be engaging in ritual rebellion. He is so aware of the ritual process of the flag and of his marginal identity that he has inverted the category of the student, thereby not playing the submissive role of student in the classroom. Others would argue that rather than rebelling, Willy may be using his astute recognition of the behavior of authoritative people to be equal to his teacher. Turner might explain Willy's taking authority as an outgrowth of a perceived lack of authority inherent in the equality of the classroom. "Those living in community seem to require, sooner or later, an absolute authority, whether this be a religious commandment, a divinely inspired leader, or a dictator" (Turner 1969,129). Willy may be simultaneously recognizing the discrepancy between the teacher's ideology and the actual dynamics of the classroom to claim a position in both. The teacher is consciously trying to teach egalitarianism in the classroom as seen by his being called by first name, by his avoidance of giving orders about how to do the flag ceremony, and by his asking permission to be the scribe during the morning lesson. Eating is usually equated with egalitarianism in United States society. People eat and visit together as convivial equals. Despite the teacher's trying to establish egalitarianism where he is on an equal standing with the students, the classroom actually operates in a traditional hierarchy in which the teacher has higher authority than the students. Because of that traditional hierarchy of authority, Willy's actions stand out as nonconformist when in actuality, Willy is the only student acting on the egalitarianism of the teacher. By eating during the flag ceremony, he is the only student conforming to the teacher's ideologies of egalitarianism by acting as if he has egalitarian rights in the classroom!

Although a student might not be stopped by the teacher from exerting

individual authority, the majority of the classroom nevertheless recognizes the higher authority of the teacher. When the teacher (or flag) is clearly the focus in the classroom, most of the students signaled their recognition of that authority by being attentive and following the ritual. In the case of the flag ceremony, that means standing still, hand on heart, reciting the pledge, and not eating. In the case of most ritual lessons, that means sitting quietly, raising a hand to ask to speak when it is appropriate to respond, and not eating. These are important displays of recognition of authority. As the teacher begins the morning lesson, Willy again violates the protocol of students sitting quietly for ritual lessons by walking across the front of the room to throw his lollipop in the trash. Rather than being just a case of rebellion, Willy's actions reflect a recognition of what authority is and the behavior of authoritative people. He knows what authority can do and he does it. Whereas the good students are sitting quietly and listening, Willy is standing and walking, a role reserved for the category of the teacher during this ritual lesson.

In discussing the category of the person, Louis Dumont stresses the hierarchical nature of dualisms. In the context of school, one side of a dualism gets privileged over the other side. The teacher is privileged over students, and ideal students are privileged over nonconforming students. Judging by the actions of the teacher and students, the following are descriptors of what it means to be a teacher or a student in this class.

descriptors of the category of the teacher

controller (like conductor of an orchestra)
 talker (tells, asks questions, orders)
 alone at head of class
 stands
 gives information and orders

descriptors of the category of the student

follower
 quiet, responder
 one of many
 sits
 ingests

The last descriptor of a student as one who ingests reflects the concept that students take in knowledge that the teacher dispenses. Ingestion is appropriate for a student but not for a teacher. In this classroom, not only did the students ingest knowledge but they were the only ones who ingested food. The teacher never ate in the classroom.

In noting the boundaries of eating, food per se is not always a sign of informal times at school. The topic of food, but not eating food, can be included in a ritual lesson such as the lesson on thankfulness. Here is a schematic of how food is accepted in the school vignette:

	When	Ritual or Informal
OK	eating before school	Informal
	eating during role & lunch count	Informal
	discussed during thankfulness lesson	Ritual
NOT OK	eating during pledge to flag	Ritual
	eating during morning lesson	Ritual

In the United States, eating can be an individual activity or a social activity. When it is a social activity, eating becomes an activity that binds a community together, be it a family or friends. As a communal activity, it involves socializing as well as eating. The flag ceremony is also a social activity in which participants are equals but one which demands different behaviors. Rather than eating, smiling, and chatting as is done in communal eating, the flag ceremony requires the participants to recite in unison and not eat. Willy's individual eating turns into social eating as he catches the giggling glances of some of his classmates and responds by looking at

them and happily wiggling his lollipop. Willy's eating is binding a small community of classmates together as ones who are less conforming to the flag ceremony than the flag ritual requires. Willy persists in eating while most of the class acknowledges the specialness of the flag ceremony by acting differently than they did moments before, which includes seriously looking at the flag and no longer eating.

In the flag episode in which Willy sucks on his lollipop, it is interesting to note that not only does Willy violate most of the class's conceptions of the boundaries of food and ritual occasions but in doing so he reinforces what it means to be a non ideal student. The girl who asks the teacher about the lollipop is an ideal student, one who follows the perceived rules of the classroom (including when to get out of her seat and when to eat), who keeps up with her assignments, and who knows the material. Willy, however, is not an ideal student. He often does not appear to pay attention in class (although he carefully orchestrates his contrary actions to coincide with the timing of class activities), takes longer to do his work, and makes many mistakes on his paperwork. By keeping the lollipop in his mouth during the pledge to the flag, he sets himself off from the rest who do not eat, who take the proper stance and say the pledge.

If schools are viewed as reproducers of the society, following rules has direct bearing on becoming good citizens in the society. Untamed youth enter schools and must be taught how to sit still, how to follow directions from the teacher, how to stand in line, when to eat, when to talk, and any number of other regularities that schools expect of students. The assumption is that obedient students will be obedient citizens when they leave school and enter the society as adults. Disobedient students are assumed to become the criminals in society, the citizens who break society's rules by acting savagely and selfishly, the citizens who do not consider other citizens' needs

but only their own. The good students are on their way to becoming model citizens who know how and when to act, in this case, to eat. Their obedience reflects their willingness to consider others' needs. Willy, however, represents the untamed, unstructured spirit who eats anytime he wishes. In *The Ritual Process* Victor Turner addresses why actions that break the structure are regarded as dangerous.

My view is briefly that from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of "structure," all sustained manifestations of communitas [anti-structure] must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions. And, as Mary Douglas (1966) has recently argued, that which cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as "polluting" and "dangerous" (109).

I have focused on eating as a metaphor for the larger issue of order. Willy's eating anytime he wishes implies no timetable, no order, no discipline, no norms - hence he appears anarchic and dangerous. Rituals, including formal schooling, demand attention to order and norms. The consumption of food, then, can be interpreted as a representation, a technique for describing ritual schooling. Because of the differing demands of informal times compared to the ritual times, it is appropriate for individuals to eat on their own during informal times in the classroom but not during formal lessons or formal ceremonies. Discussing food, however, is acceptable as a group activity during times when there is a formal lesson. At those times, food is a topic but food is not actually ingested. Students who follow the unspoken guidelines of when food may be appropriately eaten represent what it means to be better students. Thus, good students may ingest food during informal times; they ingest knowledge and not food during ritual times.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As I look at the complexity of roles within this classroom which is trying to institute more egalitarian roles, I can see a pessimistic and an optimistic conclusion in regards to school reform.

First, the pessimistic which contends that the social context, being the United States' society in this case, is stronger than any competing ideologies which the teacher brings. Despite the teacher's explicit efforts to run a classroom which places equal responsibilities and decisions on the students, Tom is still blatantly different from the students. The students are aware of that difference, except perhaps Willy. Tom is still the teacher who runs the classroom. He stands while students sit, demands their attention, speaks while they listen, and "coerces by means of observation" (Foucault 1979, 170). Tom's role as teacher commands respect, whether he explicitly asks for it or not. Within United States society, historically the role of teachers is to be authoritarian and the role of students is to be compliant and receptive. The role of visitors is to be quiet and not disrupt the classroom routine. Despite occasional efforts to change those roles, this historical model of teacher, student, and visitor is still the norm. Even in this classroom, the teacher stands in front and the students all follow his cues for what to do next. As an observer, I was in the very back of the classroom with a video camera poised on my knee. The students knew I was there but since they are used to a stream of visitors, they rarely noted my presence. All of us were following the traditional roles set by United States' society, rather than following the ideological roles that the teacher envisioned. As La Fontaine has stressed, "the concepts of the person are embedded in a social context" (La Fontaine 1985, 138). For this classroom, the social context of the United States' society seems to overpower the alternative social context of egalitarianism which the teacher is trying to create. The resulting traditional roles in this classroom are a product of the larger society. The concepts of what a student is and what a teacher is are so deeply

ingrained in the United States' society that this classroom is reflecting those concepts. This is in keeping with Durkheim's contention that the educational system is a dependent social system which changes when the larger social system of which it is a part changes. Despite the teacher's concerted efforts to reform the classroom and build a more egalitarian, democratic environment, the power of rituals in the schooling overrode those attempts. Reform was reformed into another confirmation of the traditional classroom. The classroom continued to operate with the same hierarchies and rituals that are in other United States' classrooms who have never attempted to reform into egalitarianism.

The more optimistic view is in line with Edward Pauly's The Classroom Crucible in stressing that quality relationships within a classroom are what make the difference in the success of school reform. In this case, the teacher is espousing egalitarianism, yet modeling a combination of egalitarianism and traditional hierarchy. This teacher has found that giving students the responsibility for their own actions, rather than having to control each student's behavior, makes his job easier most of the time. He accepts this egalitarianism as long as it doesn't undermine his ability to get his job done. In conflictual situations, he resorts to his hierarchical authority, reminding students of protocol and obviously being the authority. Most of the children hear his louder message of hierarchy and clue their actions in the classroom to that message rather than to the softer message of egalitarianism. It is difficult for a teacher to peel off ritual roles and given the nature of formal schooling, probably impossible. The very act of engaging in ritual schooling demands adherence to ritual roles of hierarchy. This teacher lacks an understanding of the dynamics of ritual schooling. He has a vague notion of egalitarianism being essential to a democratic classroom.

More useful would be a recognition and acceptance by the teacher of his ritual

roles and a more realistic interpretation within the school of what democracy can be within a classroom. The teacher can actually use the roles of ritual schooling to facilitate the co-construction of a democratic classroom. In working towards a more democratic classroom, the teacher can initiate real dialogue with the students. With the teacher's guidance, they can share in constructing goals and agendas. Rather than the individualistic egalitarianism tooted by the free schools' movement of the 60s, a democratic classroom in the 90s can recognize the utility of hierarchy and seek to use that positively to instill a modified egalitarianism which fosters authentic relationships among members of the classroom in ways that enhance the education of each member.

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Walt Whitman

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