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ABSTRACT

Based on a participant observation study of a full-day kindergarten in a North Carolina public school in 1994, this report argues that instructional transitions or classroom rituals act as rites of passage enabling children to disengage from their home roles, transition to school roles, and assume the moral identity of the student role. Portal rites of passage are comprised of three stages: (1) separation from the previous world (preliminal); (2) transitioning to the new world (liminal); and (3) reaggregation into the new world (post-liminal). Each day, kindergarten children pass through the separation ritual, experience liminal space, and have a reaggregation ritual. Liminal spaces are used to construct an organizational morality in which children apply the identity of "student." This construction takes form in: (1) learning what school is; (2) learning to transition between activities; and (3) learning to internalize the rules. Vignettes illustrate the construction of the identity of "student." The use of rituals such as naming tools used in the classroom (books, crayons, etc.) presents the metaphor of school as work and the transition to an external authority governing child behavior. Through the use of a special language and special symbols, the teacher transmits the classroom culture and morality and the social reality of schooling. The transitional rituals represent rule reinforcement, language internalization, and authority internalization. Children participate in the construction by resisting and modifying the objects of construction. (Contains 18 references.) (KDFB)

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Let's Get Our Houses in Order: The Role of Transitional Rituals in Constructing Moral Kindergartners

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Abstract

This paper stems from a participant observation study I conducted in a full-day kindergarten classroom in a central North Carolina public school during the autumn of 1994. In attempting to understand how morality was constructed by the teacher and children there, I saw that the teacher utilized a series of rituals to shed the children of their external (home) roles, transition them to school roles, and reaggregate them as students (as opposed to children). While she conceptualized these activities as merely organizing the children for the school day, I interpreted them as a manifestation of rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). This paper is the second in a three part examination of these rites of passage, in which I map out and explore the teacher's use of transitional or liminal rituals to construct the moral identity of student and foster the children's attachment to that role.

Introduction

At the end of a song (during which we are all dancing around the meeting space) we sit down. Mrs. Hooper holds her arms up and calls out to the class, "Open shut them, open shut them, give your hands a clap. Open shut them, open shut them, put them in your lap." Her hands, as well as the hands of the students, mimic the words of the transitional mantra.

The students are standing in line. Before she sends them outside, Mrs. Hooper calls out: "Fingers in the air, fingers on your hair; fingers on your hips, fingers on your lips." She uses her hands to follow along with the instructions, ending up with one finger pointing up to the sky from an upraised arm, and a finger from the other hand crossing her lips in a "hush" fashion. The students follow along with her gestures, smiling. We go outside.

The most common usage of the word "transition" in early childhood and elementary education is in the sense of moving from one bounded organizational system into another: a child can transition between pre-school and kindergarten or between kindergarten and first grade; a non-English speaker can transition into an English-only classroom; a child with disabilities can transition through mainstreaming or in-class resourcing; and, a child can transition between home and school. A less common, but still widely used, sense of transition is the movement from one bounded instructional situation or activity to another (Lombardi, 1992). The "Open, Shut Them" and "Fingers in the Air" routines described above are an example of this sense of transitioning. Mrs. Hanna Hooper, a kindergarten teacher in Pinedale, North Carolina¹, developed this

¹ What follows are some results of a participant-observation study I conducted in 1994 in Mrs. Hooper's classroom in Green End Elementary School. Mrs. Hooper is white and a 25-year kindergarten veteran. The school serves a mostly white, mostly professional population (of 24 children in her class, one was Hispanic, two were Asian, and three were African American). The study was conducted from August to mid-October, as I had identified this period during the

routine as a way to smoothly gain the attention of her students and move them from one instructional activity to the next.

This use of instructional transitions is in accord with the literature considering them to be a form of classroom management (see Emmer, et al., 1994; Fowler, 1986; and Jarolimek & Foster, 1989). In this way, transitional routines serve to maintain order and preserve control within the classroom. The assumption is that an effective teacher, and an efficient instructional process, is both supported and extended by the use of such routines. Maximum teaching and learning can occur through the minimizing of distractions, digressions, outbursts, tangents, or other off-task events. The routines exert a form of “benign” control over the students for the purpose of expediting instruction.

Elsewhere (McCadden, 1995; 1996) I have argued that the use of routines, transitional or otherwise, for classroom management purposes contributes to the hegemony of technical rationality (Ball, 1987; Collins, 1982) over how schooling is conducted in mainstream America. And yet this is what we do. As a form of resistance to such hegemony, and as a way to develop a richer sense of meaning for “transitions” as they are used in early childhood and elementary education, I intend in this paper to examine the instructional routines that one kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hooper, has developed and uses in her classroom as forms of rites of passage rituals (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969).

By moving in this direction I hope to get at a deeper understanding of everyday educative acts as moral rather than technical; that is, as expressions of how children learn how to be “good students” not in an academic sense but in a social identity sense. Since the language of rites of passage is associated most strongly with transitions between the sacred and the profane in religious

prior year’s fieldwork as the time period in which Mrs. Hooper worked most overtly at constructing the identity of “student” through ritual.

ceremonies (van Gennep, 1960), it provides the bridge to move from a purely technical-rational view of transitioning to a spiritual, meaning-making one. Amid the calls for back to moral basics and character education in our schools, I want to demonstrate that moral learning, knowing, and becoming already occur in school classrooms, they are simply not understood as such by practitioners and academics alike.

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage are “transitions from [bounded] group to group and from one social situation to the next. . . For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined” (van Gennep, 1960:3). Usually these transitions are considered in terms of change of status, as in the formal and informal ceremonies involved in “becoming a teenager,” “becoming a man,” or “becoming a woman.” Part of my interpretation of the rites involved in Mrs. Hooper’s classroom concerns the changes involved in “becoming a student,” when a five or six year old moves in identity from “child” to “student,” at least while in the physical space of school.

Part of the process of becoming involves the passage through ceremonial or symbolic doors or portals. van Gennep (1960) refers to territorial or portal rites of passage as the move from one symbolic space to another, as in moving from the foreign to the domestic when entering a home, or more clearly in moving from the profane to the sacred upon entering a temple. Mrs. Hooper contributes to this change’s underlying meaning as a movement from the profane to the sacred by separating outside (child) behavior from inside (student) behavior and constructing the former as “bad” within the context of the roles and responsibilities of “students.”

van Gennep (1960) refers to these portal rites as being constituted by three stages: separation from the previous world (preliminal), transitioning to the new world (liminal), and reaggregation into the new world (post-liminal). Turner describes a portal rite of passage as follows:

[A]ll rites of passage or "transition" are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or "limen"), and [re]aggregation. The first phase, separation, comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-a-vis others of a clearly defined and "structural" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions (1969:94-95).

My research showed me that the rite of passage that is entrance into kindergarten is not as linear as Turner describes above, nor does the ritual passenger in the liminal phase necessarily pass through "a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state." Turner's classical image of this sort of betwixt and between state involves a physical/spatial separation, a literal "neutral zone" between two rival spaces. In bounded ritual spaces, such as a school classroom, this aspect of the liminal phase is less pronounced.

Further, the ritual process does not necessarily result in the acquisition of a set of overt or settled norms and ethical standards. Certainly the students learned a new way of being with its own knowledge, values, norms, and procedures, but the transformation was not something that could be called total

or complete. The norms and values of family were not replaced, but modified by the public institution of kindergarten; they were “separated from” the kindergarten classroom.

Liminal Spaces, Liminal Rituals

The main weaknesses of right of passage language, as they relate to Mrs. Hooper’s classroom, are: (1) that the liminal or transitional phase has no distinct end point; and, (2) that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the three steps--separation happens several times a day in several forms, as do liminal transitions and incorporations, but not necessarily in any sequential way. The liminal also runs parallel to and dialogues with the post-liminal or incorporation phase. van Gennep points out that "although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminary ... liminal ... and postliminal rites ... in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated" (1960:11).

The rite of passage framework I am using works along iterative and extended temporal planes. Each day early in the school year the children pass through the separation ritual; each day they experience liminal space through the day's activities; and each day the students have a reaggregation ritual, which is the end-of-day recap of what was learned. Also, and more importantly for this study, liminal space extends across days, across time. “Liminal space” can be defined in several ways. For example, sociologically, Bowers (1984) describes such spaces as those moments in which a person, after bringing taken-for-granted beliefs to a surface level of consciousness is “betwixt and between” patterns of behavior and is open to new possibilities. Here, liminality seems to be a mechanism for change, providing a opportunity to break away from traditions. Alternatively, Turner (1987) describes liminal spaces anthropologically as those interstructural periods when an initiate is “betwixt and between” social

identities. Here, liminality seems to be tradition bound, in that it is a space where initiates are “taught” the traditional norms expected of them by “elders.” I prefer Turner’s anthropological sense of liminal space in this paper primarily because Mrs. Hooper’s routines (rituals) were constructed for the purpose of initiating children into existing traditions rather than initiating reform or change.

The liminal spaces existent in each kindergarten day and activity early in the school year were used very well to construct an organizational morality, the bounded domain within which the initiates (children) were expected to apply the identity of “student.” This construction took form in many ways, but there are three in particular that I would like to look at in depth here: learning what school is, learning to transition between activities, and learning to internalize the rules. I will present these as storied exemplars rather qualitative categories, according to Mishler's (1990) work in narrative validity. Exemplars are vignettes culled from the field as representations of categorical analytic themes. As categorical exemplars such vignettes can serve as points of discussion for what constitutes ritual and identity in Mrs. Hooper's classroom. This removes, in some regards, the onus of representing reality from me as the researcher, and moves it to us as writer and reader, as a discursive responsibility. The categories that come out here are more accurately described, then, as “mini-narratives.”

Naming the Tools: Learning What School Is

As I enter to observe on the first full day of school with everyone present, the children are sitting at their tables, each with a laminated nametag lying on the table in front of them. Mrs. Hooper is telling them that each table has a number, from one to five, and that when she calls on a table she means everyone at the table, not just one person, needs to stop, to look, and to listen to her for directions. She says “stop, look, and listen” in a louder voice than her normal, calm instructional tone, and this gets their attention. Having their attention, she continues, explaining that the items on

their tables are called their 'tools:' pencils, crayons, markers, and books.

She explains to them that each tool has a specific task associated with it. Holding up a book from one of the milk crates she asks, "Does anyone know what you do with this?" Several children start to shout out answers, but Mrs. Hooper spots one girl raising her hand and says, "Thank you so much for raising your hand and not shouting out, Judith. What is this for?" "Reading," beams Judith. "Right! Books are for reading. And pencils are for writing, markers are for drawing, and crayons are for coloring." Mrs. Hooper goes over this several times with them and then says, "These are tools that help us work, and we're going to show you how to use them."

From her overhead projector spot she begins a demonstration of the proper use of the tools. She writes her name on a piece of paper with a pencil, making sure to put the pencil back in the 16 ounce plastic cup when she's done, saying, "The points can be dangerous, so we need to keep them in their cups and not wave them around. We don't want to put it in anyone's eyes." The next tool is the thin-tip black magic marker. She cautions the children to only use these for drawing (outlining) pictures. "And when you're done what do you do? Right, you put the cap back on the marker. Then you put the marker back in its cup ... the marker cup, not the pencil cup." She demonstrates using crayons and points out that "There's enough at the table for each of you to have one of each color." She demonstrates how to pass around the crayon container, which looks like a sort of round, plastic, pickle/condiment dish, and how to wait their turn, not grab for it, and to take only those crayons they will use.

Switching to academic mode, she asks the children to sort the crayons into the different compartments of the dish, one compartment for each color. They oblige willingly. The last step, she then explains, is to color in the drawing with the crayons. The last tool she demonstrates is books. She says, "If you are done with your work and are waiting for the others to be done, you are to read these books. Let me show you how." She sits down at one of the tables and begins to model the proper way to read a book, complete with gingerly turned pages and a finger following the words. She says, soothingly, "Gently turn the pages, keeping your door [mouth] closed and your eyes on the pictures and words."

When you're done you can lay the book flat in front of you and take out another. You can show you're done by giving Mrs. Hooper your eyes."

The children, early in the school year and at many points during the school day, are "betwixt and between" the identities of child and student. In this example, Mrs. Hooper is teaching the children several things they need to know if they are to "become" students. Through the words "stop, look, and listen" she teaches them that there is an external authority that they need to seek out, and teaches them the meaning of some of the many phrases and mechanisms that she uses to get their attention during the school year, such as "give me your eyes." She also teaches them the power of raising a hand. Her ignoring the shouted answers and praising Judith for raising her hand indicates to the whole class that in order to get the teacher's attention and get center stage you have to raise your hand. This establishes order and positions the teacher as the focus of that order. Mrs. Hooper calls her praising of a child for "doing the right thing" positive attention in that she is publicly acknowledging someone for something they did well as opposed to the more common approach among teachers of using negative attention, or publicly acknowledging "bad" acts. The latter can be characterized as publicly admonishing the ones who shouted out instead of raising their hands.

The introduction to "tools" orients the children to several life skills. It is a concrete demonstration of the classic American/Puritan work ethic². Each tool has a job, a particular task that it is to be used for, and doing a job right requires

² I consider the construction of "work" in this classroom as "post-structural" in so far as Mrs. Hooper seems to blend several elements that a critical/structuralist such as Anyon (1980) divides into class-based categories. For example, Mrs. Hooper's interest in physical tools, their care and maintenance, is reflective of

selecting the right tool for it. Tools are “good” as instruments of labor and means of production, and therefore need to be cared for and maintained. Through her demonstration of the use of the tools, Mrs. Hooper imparts a right way of being a student: a good student cares for his or her tools, patiently waits his or her turn for supplies, organizes the job and the tools, plans out the execution of the job, and does not waste time but instead maximizes any free time (by reading a book, for example).

The metaphor of school as work is strong in this classroom. Phrases such as “working to be smarter” and “what is your job?” are prominent throughout the day, as is the conception of making products, as in producing things in centers. The children learn quickly here that school is a place for working and applying oneself and becoming better. Better is defined as that which is more organizational, efficient, and ordered. Finally, the children are learning how to do what someone else wants them to do, rather than what they themselves want to do. For example, they are learning that they can only color at certain times and on with certain tools; times dictated by an external authority rather than by themselves. This is a transition of control that is accomplished indirectly through such rituals as the naming of tools.

Getting Our Houses in Order: Transitioning to School

During the first week of school, when the children come in eight per day, Mrs. Hooper brings them up to the front of the room and introduces them to a new set of conceptions. She tells them to look down at the one-foot by one-foot square piece of spongy material they are sitting on in semi-circular rows. “These are called sit-upons,” she says, “so when I ask you to get up on your sit-upon, I’m asking you to sit up straight. We call that ‘getting your house in order.’” The students, when sitting at meeting time, are expected to sit on their sit-upons cross-legged, with their hands

Anyon’s working class, while her emphasis on their ability to conceptualize their jobs is reflective of Anyon’s affluent professional class.

folded in their laps, their doors (mouths) shut, and their eyes on Mrs. Hooper, or whoever is sitting in the chair facing them.

"We call this a house," she says as she makes a box shape around her seated body with her hands. "Alan and Amy each have a house. Alan has a house and Amy has a house. So what are they?" A child responds, "Neighbors!" "Right!" Mrs. Hooper then introduces the concept of personal space (a concept reinforced in P.E. the following week of school). She indicates a box shape around herself again and says, "This is my personal space, for my own self to be in, not anyone else. If Alan goes into Amy's house, where is he?" A child responds, "In her space?" "Right! Is that good?" while shaking her head she leads the children in a long, moan-like "Nooooooo."

"Mrs. Hooper is very particular about getting our houses in order and keeping in our own personal space, and I will give you signals about it. If your house is not in order you'll see me do this (gives a thumbs down sign). If I see you being a good boy or girl I might do this (gives a thumbs up)." She does a few examples of space violation, having the children alternately enter each other's space and then sit properly, asking each time, "Is this what we want?" The children say "No," in response several times, getting louder each time. Mrs. Hooper stops the examples and says, "You know, we can also use the signals to say 'yes' and 'no'. Sometimes our voices can get real big, but we don't want to disturb the class next door, because they're trying to learn too."

In this example of the ritual use of a liminal space Mrs. Hooper is transitioning the students to the moral language of her classroom, the socially constructed language that she herself has acquired over the years, as well as to the right way of "being" in her classroom. Words and phrases like "sit-upon," "house in order," "personal space," "eyes on me," "meeting time," and "door shut" are elements that work to help "explain how the values and beliefs of our culture are communicated and internalized into consciousness as part of the student's [and teachers'] conceptual map" (Bowers, 1984:34-35). Mrs. Hooper is, through the imparting of a special language and special symbols (thumbs up/down), helping to construct the students' intersubjective understanding, or

frame of reference, of the social reality of schooling. This language and symbol structure will most likely frame the children's understanding of "student" and "school" for years to come.

Similarly, getting one's house in order signifies the proper way to be a student: quiet, orderly, attentive, and independent. Independent being and working is especially important for students to internalize, as is evidenced by having its own language (personal space) and the many examples of it enacted in the scene. When children stay in their personal space and refrain from bothering their neighbors they are good, and this is the beginning of an understanding of independence that will be enlarged over time through telling students to stay in their own personal space at centers, at lunch, etc. It also may contribute to the sense of separation from our neighbors and communities we currently feel as adults (see Taylor, 1991). Neighbors are to be respected and not bothered rather than engaged in collective, communal activity.

Finally, getting one's house in order provides evidence of the "nesting" of liminal moments. On future school days, Mrs. Hooper will praise individual children and the class for having their house in order as a way of moving them from a liminal position that could open up a moment for renegotiation (Bowers, 1984) to an incorporation position in which desired norms are acquired (Turner, 1969). For example, on the first full day of school with all the children present, when she brings the class up front to meeting time and they sit down semi-orderly, Mrs. Hooper says "I see houses in order ... you people remembered a lot from last week!" This reinforces the prior construction and staves off a potential move away from it. The ritual she is actively constructing will, over time, provide

a symbolic mechanism (see Manning, 1987) through which the daily reaggregation of children into students can occur.³

Walking Down the Street: Transitioning through Song

When all the children are settled at their tables after a drawing activity, Mrs. Hooper lets silence fall and then breaks into a chorus of "When I Was Walking Down the Street." This song requires a partner, so she selects a child and stands him up behind her. They begin walking around the perimeter of the tables, he behind her, singing

As I went walking down the street, down the street, down the street

A superstar I chanced to meet, hi-ho hi-ho hi-ho.

She then turns to face her partner, takes hold of his hands and begins to alternately push the left forward while pulling the right back, then swinging their arms side to side she sings

A rig-a-jig-jig (left/right) and away we go, away we go, away we go (side to side)

A rig-a-jig-jig and away we go, hi-ho hi-ho hi-ho.

Then Mrs. Hooper and her partner each pick a new partner and the four of them sing the song again. This continues until all the children are up walking and singing. When all are up, she changes the song to "Let's Go Walking," leading the children around the perimeter of the tables again and singing

Let's go walking, walking, walking,
Let's go walking all around the room.

Let's go walking, walking, walking,
Let's go walking all around the room.

Subsequent verses change "walking" to "skipping" and "hopping." At the end of each verse, Mrs. Hooper stops the class and asks the children to point out some item they saw in the classroom. After about five new items, she continues to the next verse, with the last one being

Let's go sit down, sit down, sit down,

³ This notion of actively constructed rituals works against a common understanding of classroom rituals as spontaneous or accidental and moves into a possibility of such rituals as purposive, which may provide opportunities for purposeful moral construction in school that is non-curricular or non-programmatic (see McCadden, 1996; cf. Hansen, 1987).

Let's go sit down at the front of the room.
Here she leads the children to meeting space, where they take their seats on their sit-upons, still singing. When all are seated, Mrs. Hooper changes the song one last time to a rousing rendition of 'Here We Are Together:'

Here we are together, together, together,
Oh, here we are together in kindergarten.
Here we are together, together, together,
Here, we are together in kindergarten.
There's Jason, and Maggie, and Judith, and Erin.
Oh, here we are together in kindergarten.

She continues until all the children's names have been sung. She then stops and says, "Okay, are our houses in order?" The students reflexively wiggle into order for her.

The singing of songs is, without question, a large part of kindergarten life, at least during the early part of the year. For Mrs. Hooper, these songs do more than simply entertain. They work to construct school and persons, expend children's energy, and organize transitions between classroom activities. As tools of construction, the songs in this example act as ice-breakers and language-learners. The first song breaks down the physical space among children and between teachers and children through the choosing of partners and the physical touching. It also shows them that school can be a fun place, as everyone enjoys the song. The second song introduces the children to the classroom and its language through the naming of classroom elements, beginning the process of gaining ownership of the room and internalizing it--it is an intersubjective construction. The third song again breaks down barriers by naming the students for each other thereby working to turn strangers into friends. Also, it acts as an esteem-builder by publicly recognizing each student, the value of which cannot be underestimated if the students' beaming faces are any indication. Each song also acts as a form of ethical caring (Noddings, 1984)

in that each builds connection among the students, between the students and the room, and between the students and the teacher.

This musical tool of transition, of the use of liminal space betwixt and between identities, is wonderful to watch, as the whole class moves from their tables to their sit-upons so seamlessly and in such an engaged manner that no one even thinks of acting out or not cooperating. And that is what a transitional routine is for, to move the class from space to space and activity to activity without any "trouble." A transitional ritual, on the other hand, can be understood as having a deeper meaning and purpose. Initially, all rituals direct student focus to the teacher--here, as the leader of the songs. Mrs. Hooper is establishing herself as the authority, the dispenser of meaning, and the main focus of classroom organization. Eventually the transitions will become shorter and more subtle, and through repetition accompanied by verbal instruction the children will learn to internalize the intent of the transitions, and hence the classroom authority.

Getting on the Train: Lining Up for Outside

As part of getting ready to go outside, Mrs. Hooper demonstrates how the class is to line up. This is a big moment in the life of a student, symbolically, for they will be lining up for many years, moving from inside to outside and from class to lunch, music, recitals, P.E., etc. She designates Tommy as the line leader for today, explaining that she will rotate that and the other jobs so that each child will get a turn. Tommy comes up to the front of the room and stands in front of Mrs. Hooper, beaming. She turns him 90 degrees so that he faces the side of the room, still beaming. "Tommy is the engine of the train, and when I call a street, that street will stand up and get on the train." A few children start to get up, and she continues, "But not today. We're practicing today."

She calls up students, one at a time, placing each approximately half a foot behind the person in front of them, demonstrating the proper dimensions of personal space. She

validates good personal space use through positive reinforcers: if Neil bumps someone she'll say "Look how well Cheryl is keeping in her own space." This straightens all the children up. When she has them all in a line, she tells them what they are going to do next: "We're going to walk to the door. We're going to stay behind the person in front of us. When we come back inside we're going to walk back in and sit down on our sit upons."

On the way out, she stops the line at the bathroom door, as somebody said they needed to go. She points to the cardboard sign hung on the wall in front of the bathroom door by a string. On the front side of it is a "stop" traffic sign, and on the back a "go" sign. She tells them that when they need to go to the bathroom they are to check the sign first. "If it's turned to 'stop,' that means that somebody is in there. And if it's turned to 'go' that means you can go in. You need to look with your eyes. And when you go in, what do you do first?" After some foot shuffling, somebody answers, "Turn the sign to 'stop.'" "Right!" She then leads any girls who need to go into the bathroom to show them how to use it. While the rest of us are waiting, I chat softly with a few of the children and then try a positive reinforcer, saying to Mrs. Maxwell, Mrs. Hooper's aide, "I like the way Claire is waiting so patiently, Mrs. Maxwell, don't you?" She responds approvingly, "Mmm-hmm!" The children straighten themselves up in the line.

Every time the class leaves the room, except to go outside for play, everybody gets on the train. The process of calling the children up to the train street by street helps break the class down into manageable chunks. The "Fingers in the Air" ritual is usually the last part of this process, coming directly before the class exits the room. This example also contains instances of positive reinforcement of the rules and the "good" student. The children who act out to get attention, who are used to that system, are thwarted here, as Mrs. Hooper does not--or tries not to--acknowledge "bad" behavior publicly. Instead, she heaps attention on children who enact good school behavior. This is a further instance of internalizing the rules and utilizing liminal space, as a child needs to think about what Mrs. Hooper wants him or her to do in order to act on that and

hopefully be recognized for it. And Mrs. Hooper is very good at acknowledging “good” behavior in the children who do not normally personify it. This is a further strength of her system, since if the “bad” students do not get recognized for their efforts at being “good” then there is no reason to be “good.”

Finally, in this example Mrs. Hooper is connecting the abstract to the concrete; she is using concrete examples of the abstract concept “being a good student.” This occurs in her practical application of the concept of personal space. Here, the children see that personal space has a use, and they get to explore that use themselves. Further, from now on Mrs. Hooper will only have to refer to personal space in line and the students will remember what it means, but this is only so if she refers to it almost daily, which again indicates the “nested” aspect of liminality. If she waits a week, experience tells her, they will have forgotten about this exercise and she will have to restart the construction of this ritual and its meaning from the beginning.

Ritual and Moral Identity

About the nesting of liminal moments, Mrs. Hooper says, "It's tiring, and you might get bored, but you've got to keep at it. You've got to go back again tomorrow and do it all over again [reinforce the structures]." As moral signifiers (Manning, 1987), however, the transitional rituals represent a culmination of rule reinforcement, language internalization, and authority internalization. When a child has a finger in the air and a finger on her lips, it represents doing her job and reminds her to think about what Mrs. Hooper expects of her. When a child finishes the saying after Mrs. Hooper says, “Open shut them,” it represents her having internalized the organizational language and morality of the classroom. It is important to note here that Mrs. Hooper's transitionals shape liminal moments towards specific norms. This is an expression of Turner's (1969; 1987) and van Gennep's (1960) formulation of liminality, but not so much Bowers' (1984)

formulation, which sees liminal moments as being open to new, and not necessarily directed, possibilities.

In Mrs. Hooper's kindergarten, I saw a series of liminal moments, one nested inside another, evolving over time, within the larger context of a discourse on schooling. Each day, in constructing school, teacher, and student, liminal moments occurred in which the possibility for change presented itself. Unlike Bowers' (1984) formulation of liminality, however, no problematizing of schooling took place prior to liminal moments, since the children, being initiates, had very few taken for granted beliefs about kindergarten and school. Their very presence in the classroom as curious and energetic beings, however, problematized schooling.

Each new activity taught and learned was an opportunity for negotiation, and hence a liminal moment. Some of the students seized the opportunity and tried to negotiate a different meaning for student and schooling from what Mrs. Hooper wanted to construct. There were four boys and one girl who used their agency for this process. They resisted, questioned, and negotiated on a consistent basis, some successfully. Their negotiation efforts were successful in that over time they forced a compromise on the accepted definitions of "student" and "appropriate behavior." For example, over time a looser meaning of "having your house in order" was arrived at for Dontonio, who resisted frequently, than for Cheryl, who never resisted.

However, Mrs. Hooper held a tight rein on liminal moments in her classroom and focused on the children's acquisition of existing school norms rather than an exploration of change possibilities that diverged from organizational morality. Her own purpose for utilizing these moments and the rituals she created to manage them was to organize the children so that she could instruct them more efficiently and effectively. It has been my intention to show

that these rituals can and do have a deeper moral meaning and to make this meaning accessible through the use of “mini-narratives.” Educational practitioners can and do use ritual ways of teaching, knowing, and understanding to construct morality in schools. Children can and do participate in this construction by resisting and modifying the objects of construction. A teacher’s recognition of her or his power and agency in the moral education of children can provide, perhaps, a mechanism through which moral issues become more localized and purposefully addressed.

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