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Ritual in education

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INTRODUCTION

Ritual in animals generally refers to a rigid pattern of motor acts which function as signals controlling behaviour between animals in specific situations. Ritual in humans generally refers to a relatively rigid pattern of acts specific to a situation which construct a framework of meaning over and beyond the specific situational meanings. Here, the symbolic function of ritual is to relate the individual through ritualistic acts to a social order, to heighten respect for that order, to revivify that order within the individual and, in particular, to deepen acceptance of the procedures used to maintain continuity, order and boundary and which control ambivalence towards the social order.

Ritual will be considered as an expression in action as distinct from thought of man's active attitudes towards these non-empirical aspects of their reality, which are expressive of ultimate values.

First, we shall examine these notions as they relate to a school as a social form and, secondly, we shall examine the effect of changes in the function of the school on ritualizing processes.

THE SCHOOL AS A SOCIAL FORM

A school can be considered to transmit two cultures: an instrumental one and an expressive one. The instrumental culture consists of those activities, procedures and judgements involved in the acquisition of specific skills, especially those that are *vocationally* important.

The expressive culture consists of those activities, procedures and judgements involved in the transmission of values and their derived norms. We are talking about an expressive culture when we make pronouncements about the aims of education, for example.

The expressive culture of the school can be considered as the source of its shared values and is therefore cohesive in function; whilst the instrumental culture is potentially divisive. It is the expressive culture which is the major mechanism of social consensus and thus prone to ritualization.

These rituals may be divided into two main groups: consensual and differentiating.

(a) Consensual rituals

These are the rituals which function so as to bind together all members of the school, staff and pupils as a moral community, as a distinct collectivity. These consensual rituals give the school continuity in time and place. They recreate the past in the present and project it into the future. These rituals also relate the school's values and norms to those held by, or alleged to be held by, certain dominant groups in the non-school society. The consensual rituals give the school its specific identity as a distinct and separate institution. They facilitate appropriate sentiments towards the dominant value system of the wider society. They assist in the integration of the various goals of the school within a coherent

set of shared values, so that the values of the school can become internalized and experienced as a unity. In general the consensual rituals consist of assemblies and ceremonies of various kinds together with the consensual linements of dress, the imagery of signs, totems, scrolls and plaques for the revivifying of special historical contexts and other symbolic features. An important component of the consensual rituals is the rituals of punishment and reward.

(b) *Differentiating rituals*

These are concerned to mark off groups within the school from each other, usually in terms of age, sex, age relation or social function. The differentiating rituals deepen local attachment behaviour to, and detachment behaviour from, specific groups; they also deepen respect behaviour to those in various positions of authority, and create order in time.

These two main types of rituals are major mechanisms for the internalizing and revivifying of social order. They function to maintain continuity, order, boundary and the control of dual loyalties and ambivalence. The rituals control questioning of the basis of the expressive culture and so are conditions for its effective transmission and reception. They buttress the formal authority relations and evoke respect through the ritualization of difference and similarity of function; they create continuity in individual and social time and relate the value system and its derived norms to an approved external order.

To give an illustration: the school is a community related to, but different from, kin and local community. It is a stage in the emancipation of the pupil towards his acceptance of a wider referent group. Problems of divided allegiance and relation on the part of pupil, kin and school are partly solved by ritualizing, so sharpening the boundaries between the different groups. The consensual rituals and their inductive subsets facilitate detachment behaviour from family and local community and attachment behaviour to the school. For parents these rituals transform the child into pupil. The consensual rituals of the school orient the pupil to special classes of behaviour and give him a specific consciousness of age, sex, school and kinship status. The separation of statuses—for example, in possessing a distinct school and family status—increases the degree of control the school can exert on both the pupil and the kin.

Within the school the problem of ordering, integrating and controlling the heterogeneous population is assisted by the differentiating rituals and their initiating or inducting subsets. There are at least four types of such differentiating rituals.

(1) *Age differentiating rituals*. These help to differentiate groups in time by marking out age status as of special significance. The age rituals often function as *rites de passage*. They may become sources of conflict where such *rites de passage* have been weakened in the non-school society. The age rituals often reinforce the class as the basic unit of social organization and in this way serve to regulate local attachment behaviour to persons, territory and property. They also serve to impersonalize the relations between different age groups, controlling and focusing clashes or crushes.

(2) *Age relation rituals*. These are essentially concerned with authority relations. Often the age groups are marked off from each other in terms of different approach behaviour to those in formal authority. A cluster of rituals normally group round the prefect system, marking it off as a separate system of social control. These rituals serve to increase distance

and thus boundary between unequals. They strengthen commitment to basic values and control feelings of ambivalency and dual allegiance.

(3) *Sex rituals*. These are consensual in single sex schools but differentiating as far as the non-school society is concerned. Conceptions of the masculine are celebrated by such rituals. They cohere round sporting activities but may appear as approach behaviour to female members of staff or to visitors. In dual sex schools they become differentiating rituals reinforcing sex typing. In boys' schools and particularly in girls' schools, these rituals may also control sexual display behaviour. However, it is as well to remember that the black stockings of the 30's have become signs of sexual display in the 60's.

(4) *House rituals*. These are the rituals which delineate fictional communities within the school, and each community has its own set of consensual and differentiating rituals together with their inductive subsets. The whole is supported by the linements of dress, the imagery of signs, totems, the associations and sentiments invoked by scrolls, plaques, chants, etc.

One further point should perhaps be made. Cognitive difference between boys, as this finds expression in ability, is often transformed into a component of consensual ritual if it is related to the school, or into a component of the differentiating ritual if it is related to a particular class. Sporting prowess is similarly transformed. The consensual and differentiating rituals then function to assist in the creation of a unique identity for the school, in defining and regulating boundary behaviour, continuity, and order, and in controlling ambivalence and dual allegiances. These rituals both facilitate the transmission, reception and internalization of the values of the expressive culture and relate these usually to an approved value system outside of the school. The rituals also serve to prevent questioning of the values and of the social order which transmits them.

So far then we have been considering not what necessarily exists, for schools vary in the degree to which the expressive culture is ritualized, but the critical points of ritualization. The more a school resembles a total institution (that is where the life of the pupil is almost wholly spent in the school as in a boarding school) the greater the ritualizing of its expressive culture. It is also likely that day schools in countries with a single, explicit political or religious ideology are likely to display extensive ritualization, especially schools in those countries which are currently undergoing, or have recently undergone, rapid technological change. In this case ritualization within the school is a major means through which such single ideologies are transmitted and social cohesion maintained under conditions of rapid social change. The school itself symbolizes and celebrates the social order to come.

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND RESPONSIVENESS TO RITUAL IN SCHOOLS

In advanced industrialized societies the social purpose of the school becomes one of educating for diversity in social and economic function. In this situation it is worthwhile examining the forces which may have critical consequences for the pupil's responsiveness to consensual and differentiating rituals. We are thinking here particularly of the situation in Britain.

(1) *Differentiating rituals*

In the school these rituals tend to mark out specific groups in terms of age, sex, age relations, and house. The latter may perhaps be regarded as the school equivalent of

community. The process of industrialization reduces the significance of the family as a determiner of occupational status. It affects age relations (authority relations) by dissolving customary boundaries, mutual spheres of freedom and control, and renders more implicit and informal the transfer of adult responsibilities to the young, so that effective regulation of the young becomes problematic. Moreover, family rituals, which mark out as of special social significance changes in age status, weaken. In fact, age as a social status comes to have an important achieved element. Early adolescents, by various accessories (cosmetics and dress) present themselves as middle adolescents in order to achieve youth group identity, whilst 50-year olds attempt to present themselves as members of a younger age group. Thus there is a compression in that part of the age span which is socially significant. At the same time sex typing of the young is reduced and sex status is less significant as a restriction on occupational function. The net effect of changes in the significance of age, sex, age relation, and family status for the ordering of social relations is to increase the possibility of innovation within a society and to widen the area of individual choice. At the same time this creates problems of assuring cultural continuity for those transmitting the society's culture and creates problems of boundary, order ambivalence and thus of identity in the young.

Further, age and sex tend to become less relevant as general social categories for distinguishing and separating groups within the school. This can be seen in the development of vertical integration in the primary school where children between the ages of 5 to 7 years are placed together to form one educational group. At the secondary level on the other hand, and especially in comprehensive schools, children are placed in sets according to the single criterion of the ability they display in each subject. In this way the social unit for school organization becomes both less homogeneous in terms of age and sex and more differentiated. Further, the changes in age relations (authority relations) are likely to make the authority of the teacher in expressive spheres conditional rather than automatic.

Thus differentiating rituals in the school in terms of age, sex, age relation and house membership are not matched by adult-regulated differentiating rituals in similar areas in the family setting or community; the organizational procedures of the school make its social unit often less homogeneous and the units themselves more differentiated; the authority of the teacher in expressive spheres becomes conditional.

(2) *Consensual rituals*

These are the rituals which, it was said, function so as to bind together all members of the school, staff and pupils as a moral community. They assist in the integration of the various goals of the school, within a coherent set of shared values, so that the values of the school can become internalized and experienced as a unity. In pluralistic, industrialized societies, there is often considerable ambiguity in their central value systems. This can lead to a sharp discrepancy between the clarity of the value system of the school and the ambiguity in the value system of the society. This tends to weaken responsiveness to the school's expressive culture, and thus also to its ritualization. The need to exploit intellectual ability leads to overt and covert selection procedures in order to increase the proportion of children who pass examinations. This often leads to a sense of failure, and some-

times alienation in the children who are less able. This situation is further complicated by the task the school has (especially the grammar school), of assimilating the children of parents who do not share, or who often do not understand, the expressive culture of the school. Here the acceptance of the school's expressive culture may also require a reorientation of the normal procedures a pupil uses to relate in his family setting and local community.

Thus the response to the consensual rituals is likely to be weakened because of ambiguity in the society's central value systems, the divisive consequences of covert and overt selection procedures and the increase in the social heterogeneity of pupils at selective secondary schools.

It is likely that the social basis for the ritualization of the expressive culture of the school will be considerably weakened and the rituals may come to have the character of social routines. We might also expect a switch from the dominance of adult-imposed and regulated rituals to the dominance of rituals generated and regulated by youth. It would seem then for the reasons given that there is likely to be a marked change in the pupil's responsiveness to consensual and differentiating rituals whilst organizational changes in the schools may not facilitate their development.

(3) *Ritual and changes in school structure*

We have been considering how the expressive culture of the school is transmitted and we have suggested that a major means of its transmission is through its ritualization. We have indicated that the pupil's responsiveness to ritualization of the school's expressive culture is likely to be weakened in state schools in our contemporary, pluralistic society. We now want to consider changes in the structure of the school as a social form and the consequences for changes in the *means* through which the expressive culture is transmitted. Ritualization is likely to be highly developed in schools where pupils are ordered and grouped on the basis of a fixed attribute or an attribute which is thought to be fixed. This fixed attribute can be sex, age or I.Q. If I.Q. is considered as a fixed attribute then this acts to produce divisions within an age/sex group. Thus if a fixed attribute is taken as a basis for ordering relationships within a school, then a fairly explicit vertical and horizontal form of social organization develops. We shall call such a structure a stratified one. This structure facilitates ritualization of the expressive culture and especially so, if the school is insulated from or can insulate itself from the community of which it is a part. This can often be facilitated through the ritualization of relationships at its boundaries. However, if the basis for ordering relationships among the pupils is not a fixed attribute, then the school structure ceases to be stratified and becomes differentiated. This is the case where cognitive ability is seen as a process rather than a substance. A process which does not develop in a uniform way in all pupils, nor in a uniform way in all subjects, but a process which can be shaped and modified by the social context. If cognitive ability is perceived in this way then a school will not develop explicit vertical and horizontal organizing procedures. Ideally, pupils will achieve different positions in a range of groups or sets, membership in which is less likely to be related to age or sex but more likely to be related to special proficiency in a particular subject. The notion of education for diversity receives institutional embodiment in the differentiated school. The shift from stratified to differentiated schools may not always involve a change in the content of the expressive culture but it does involve a

change in the *means* by which it is transmitted. As vertical and horizontal organizing procedures become less relevant then the structural basis for consensual and differentiating rituals becomes much weaker. The values of the expressive culture in stratified schools are translated through ritual into elements of its social structure, whereas in differentiated schools the values tend to be psychologized and issue in the form of inter-personal relations. This changes also the basis of social control.

Ritual involves a highly redundant form of communication in the sense that, given the social context, the messages are highly predictable. The messages themselves contain meanings which are highly condensed. Thus the major meanings in ritual are extra-verbal or indirect; for they are not made verbally explicit. Ritual is a form of restricted code. The expressive culture then in a stratified school is transmitted through a communication system which is verbally both highly condensed and highly redundant. The expressive culture of a differentiated school is likely to be transmitted, not through ritual and its restricted code, but through a communication system where the meanings are verbally elaborated, less predictable and therefore more individualized. If the basis for social control through ritual is extra-verbal or indirect, impersonal and non-rational, then the basis for social control where ritual is weakened is likely to be personal, verbally explicit and rational. A major source of control in stratified schools is the internalizing of the social structure and the arousal and organization of sentiments evoked through ritual, signs, linements, heraldic imagery and totems. In differentiated schools there is likely to be a weakening of ritual and its supporting insignia. The social structure is then unlikely to be experienced as a unity and social control will come to rest upon inter-personal means. It will tend to become psychologized and to work through the verbal manipulation of motives and dispositions in an inter-personal context. We shall call this form of social control, this form of transmission of the expressive culture, *therapeutic*. In the differentiated school both teacher and taught are exposed and vulnerable in a way very different from their relationships in a stratified school. One might wonder whether the stratified, ritualized school does not evoke *shame* as a major controlling sentiment in the pupils, whereas the differentiated, personalized school might evoke *guilt* as the controlling sentiment. The stratified school, is perhaps, also more likely to communalize failure, whereas the differentiated school is more likely to individualize failure. Thus changes in school structure and in the means used to transmit the expressive culture may have important socializing consequences.*

This shift in school structure from stratified to differentiated can be understood as a shift from a social order resting upon *domination* to one resting upon *cooperation*. This shift itself is probably related to a similar shift in the character of work relations in an advanced industrialized society.† However, this shift in school structure entails not only problems

* It should be possible to distinguish *within* forms of stratified or differentiated schools in terms of the degree and kind of stratification or differentiation. Some stratified schools may well display differentiating features and differentiated schools may well have sections which are stratified.

† The shift from stratified to differentiated is not necessarily related to changes in the character of the occupational order. The American high school started as a differentiated form with a relatively weak instrumental culture and a strong expressive one. The function of the latter was that of integrating the large immigrant population into the American society. Further, one would not expect, for example, Soviet schools to display marked differentiating features, as such features would weaken the transmission and reception of the political ideology transmitted through the school's expressive culture.

of order, boundary, continuity and ambivalence for pupils but also a shift in consensus within the school from that based upon shared ends or values to that based upon shared means or skills. This possibility must finally be considered.

(4) *The instrumental culture of the school and the basis of social consensus*

The more the social purpose of education is to educate for diversity in economic and social function then the more likely it is that the school will shift from a stratified to a differentiated form. We have argued that the response to the expressive culture is likely to be weakened and social control to be based upon therapeutic rather than ritual procedures. Inasmuch as the school is a major instrument of the division of labour through its control over the occupational fate of its pupils it has taken on a pronounced bureaucratic function. Here it subordinates pupils' needs to the requirements of the division of labour through the examination system. The teacher-pupil relation, where the pupils are selected as potential examinees, often becomes almost one of contract with limited commitment on each side. Knowledge is rationally organized by the teacher and transmitted in terms of its examination efficiency. Control over such pupils stems from control over their occupational or higher educational fate. Such control is bureaucratic. The instrumental culture of the school is likely to be transmitted through bureaucratic procedures which effect curriculum, the transmission of knowledge and the quality of the pupil-teacher relation.

For the non-examination children the school functions not so much as a delicate instrument of the division of labour but much more as an instrument of social control regulating the behaviour of such pupils, their emotional sensitivities, their modes of social relation to what is considered acceptable to a section of the society to which the pupils often feel they do not really belong. The school is regulating style of life. The teacher here can be likened to a social worker concerned with the transmission of social skills. Indeed this conception of the role of teacher is explicitly recognized. The control over such pupils is not so much bureaucratic as it is therapeutic, resting upon personal, verbal, rational techniques. Conformity within the school is obtained through the transmission of occupational and social skills. Social order within the school comes to rest upon shared techniques or skills rather than upon shared values. Here we have a dominant instrumental culture transmitted either through bureaucratic or therapeutic procedures.

Educating for diversity of economic and social function in pluralistic societies often involves a strengthening of the instrumental and a weakening of the expressive culture of schools within the State system. Problems of continuity, order, boundary and ambivalence become socially active as the school moves to a differentiated form, or as stratified schools become de-ritualized. Pupils are then likely to generate their own consensual and differentiating rituals in order to assist in the development of a transitional identity. What is new is not this but that the organizational setting of the school, its focus upon attributes of selected pupils, its emphasis upon skills, the bureaucratization of learning, the individualizing of failure, is facilitating the dominance of the informal, autonomous youth group as the major source of shared values and sentiments. This shift from adult-imposed to the dominance of pupil-generated and regulated rituals is likely to weaken still further the transmission of the school's expressive culture.

Inasmuch as the school is more and more closely linked to the demands of the occupa-

tional system the more probable it is that the tendencies discussed will be strengthened. Indeed the viability of the differentiated school may be lost so that it becomes simply a disguised form of the stratified type. In fact it may be that the only means available to weaken the dominance of the instrumental culture is to challenge the *élitest* assumptions and functions of the contemporary British University system. It is the small percentage of the age group which is at present in Britain attending higher education which is responsible for overt and covert selection procedures, the bureaucratization of knowledge, the divisive nature of the instrumental culture in all schools, stratified or so-called differentiated and the shift of educational resources and rewards towards the *élite* pupils and away from the less successful. If the number of places at the higher levels of education were greater than the number of students available to fill them (which would make selection procedures less relevant) then the schools would at least possess a degree of autonomy over their procedures, curriculum and organization. Educating for diversity under contemporary social conditions inevitably reduces the possibilities of social consensus at the level of ends within the school. It may be that, in a period of heightened social change, continuity in the transmission of culture can only be obtained at the cost of a false yesterday or a mythical tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to analyse the role of consensual and differentiating rituals in British state schools with some reference to problems of continuity order, boundary and ambivalence. We have suggested that these rituals facilitate the transmission and internalization of the expressive culture of the school, create consensus, revivify the social order within the individual, deepen respect for and impersonalize authority relations. They also serve to prevent questioning of the values the expressive culture transmits. We have argued that the social basis for the transmission and response to ritual has been weakened within the school as a result of changes in age, sex, age relation and family status in the society and through changes in school organization and social composition. We have also suggested that educating for diversity in economic and social function under contemporary social conditions increases the dominance of the school's instrumental culture, which may switch the focus of ritual from the celebration of ends to that of means. We have argued that bureaucratic and therapeutic forms of social control may develop, and that this probably will facilitate youth-generated and regulated rituals which will tend to replace adult-imposed and regulated rituals as the source of shared values and sentiments. Finally, we have suggested that if the school is to be more than a passive mediator of, or at worse, an amplifier for, general social pressures, a way must be found for attenuating the relationship between the educational and the occupational system.

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