

# The Role of Ritual in Preschool Settings

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Ritual is a fact of school life and is enacted by teachers in their everyday classroom activities. This paper explores the various forms of ritual as they are played out in preschool settings. A key finding is that rituals have both variant and invariant qualities. The invariant order of ritual provides the stable framework that has become part of the school system, whereas rituals with high levels of variance are responsible for a more personalized and flexible approach to teaching. Classroom rituals have the potential to act as a tool through which teachers structure a particular form of practice that carries a rational pedagogical purpose for teachers.

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**KEY WORDS:** ritual; preschool; early childhood practice.

## INTRODUCTION

Ritual is a complex and multifaceted concept. Whilst interest in ritual has a long history with anthropologists, sociologists, and theologians, educators have turned their attention to ritual only in more recent times and it remains largely unexplored, particularly in the field of early childhood education. The literature on ritual highlights both the difficulty associated with its definition and use, and exposes the multidimensional aspects of the concept. Ritual has been described as a pattern of action (Jennings, 1982); a form of communication through signs, symbols and gestures (Harris, 1992; Turner 1969); a means of maintaining social order (Bernstein, Elvin, & Peters, 1966; McLaren, 1986); being responsible for enacting meaning through concrete patterned activity or action (Geertz, 1973); a means of

sustaining, transmitting, and internalizing societal and cultural ideologies (Geertz, 1973; Henry, 1992). These definitions are derived from the various theoretical perspectives of their authors. For example, ritual has been regarded as an intellectual function (Jennings, 1982), a performance (Rappaport, 1989), a structural system (Turner, 1969), and a cultural context (Geertz, 1973; Henry, 1992). Likewise in the field of early childhood education, ritual has been noted as having various functions. To illustrate, consider the ritual of "whole group time." This ritual has a set of actions that is relatively stable and stylized and communicates to the participants certain messages about how to act, behave, and participate. The ritual of "whole group time" acts as a structure for a set of instructional goals and has an intellectual function for the teacher (performer) and the children (participants).

Jennings (1982) defined ritual as a symbolic structure. His view is that ritual is not a senseless activity but is one way in which human beings make sense of their world and discover who they are in the world. Jennings suggests that variations to the ritual performance do exist and it is this variation that enables ritual to be regarded as a mode of inquiry. According to Grimes (1982) ritualization occurs through stylized, repeated gesturing and posturing. He maintains that ritual is both an implicit and explicit part of everyday life which carries both an overt and covert function for the performers as well as the participants. Rappaport's (1989) definition of ritual "as the

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<sup>3</sup>In this study preschool denotes the noncompulsory year of schooling immediately before children enter formal schooling. Children in this setting turn 5 years of age between January and December. Formal schooling in Western Australia begins in the year the child turns 6 years of age (January to December). The Montessori Pre-School catered to children from 3-5 years in keeping with the founder's philosophy of mixed age groups.

performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances" (p. 467) also suggests that there are two levels at work in the messages being transmitted by the ritual performance: First, at the overt level is the performance itself, or technical production. Second, at the covert level, are the messages carried by the deeper formation of meaning as indicated through the variations, signs, and symbols included in the ritual performance. For example, in Australian early childhood settings the ritual of "snack time" is often a series of carefully orchestrated and predictable actions whereby children come together in a circle to share a snack. However, the ritual also conveys covert messages about socializing children, communicating effectively, and signaling a transition in the program.

According to Harris (1992), ritual pervades society and culture and society's values and norms are expressed and transmitted through ritual. In its simplest form, a ritual is an uncontested pattern of behavior that has symbolic meaning for participants. Ritual goes beyond the surface meaning and is symbolic of a particular world view (Henry, 1992). Acknowledging the difficulties with a generic definition of ritual, Friedrich (1966) provided the following explanation which summarized his key concept of ritual and which has been adopted as a framework for this study:

I have taken ritual to mean sets of repetitive and culturally specific ceremonies or performances . . . ritual and ideology are parts or dimensions of culture which can be thought of as the expression or articulation of the deeper-lying values, attitudes, ideas, and sentiments of the individuals in a community. (p.192)

Although ritual may be difficult to define, according to Grimes (1990) the key aspects of ritual include performance, enactment, and other overt forms of gestural activity. He views ritual as a quality rather than a concrete thing and refers to a list of qualities as indicators that begin to appear when action becomes ritualized. These qualities listed by Grimes (1990, p. 14) include enacted, formalized, stylized, repetitive, rhythmic, collective, institutionalized, patterned, invariant, traditional, highly valued, multilayered, symbolic, perfected, dramatic, mystical, adaptive, functional, and conscious. When an activity becomes dense with certain qualities then it becomes increasingly proper to refer to it as ritualized. With reference to preschool teachers' classroom practices, a significant proportion of the daily activities are carefully planned, repetitive, symbolic, and highly valued patterns of action put in place over a significant length of time.

### Ritual in Education

Classrooms have been identified as rich sources of ritual systems which act to create and sustain assumptions and values and which in turn have powerful consequences for how students think and how they act (Henry, 1992; McLaren, 1986). Through interactions, students and teachers construct a culture of their classroom, a learned way of doing, feeling, and thinking which is then transmitted and affirmed through well-defined, ritualized patterns of behavior.

The literature on ritual and schooling (McLaren, 1986, 1987;<sup>4</sup> Henry, 1992;<sup>3</sup> Bernstein 1975;<sup>1</sup> Bernstein *et al.* 1966<sup>1</sup>) has largely centered on the sociological issues of maintaining control and order and on the transmission and internalization of school norms. In his analysis of schooling, Bernstein (1975) investigated the role of consensual and differentiating rituals in British state schools. He suggests that rituals facilitate the transmission and internalization of the school's shared values, norms, and mechanisms that perpetuate social consensus, thus the rituals become an expression of the culture of the school.

Attempts have been made to link ritual with pedagogy and according to McLaren (1986) these have been both tenuous and undisciplined. In his ethnographic study, McLaren examined daily life in the classroom and in the process paid attention to the way schooling is learned through bodily gestures. McLaren proposed that as cultural sites, classrooms constitute powerful symbol systems and thus allow us the opportunity to gain greater understanding of cultural realities.

At the preschool level, Johnson (1985) found that schooling initiates children into the nature of school and the process of schooling. It represents the separation phase in the rite of passage, as children are separated from their families and households and from influences other than those occurring within the confines of the classroom.

In other studies conducted in the early years of schooling, specific program events have been investigated with reference to what really happens at these specific times and what the implications are for the participants. Reich (1994) selected the curricular event of "circle time" in different child care centers as a means of exploring the social and educational content of this event. Reich concluded that circle time is both a ritual and meeting. It enables the teacher to structure activities and to indicate changes during the day. Similar conclusions were found by Pasma (1992) who examined the ritual of sharing time in a first-grade classroom in the United States and found that the ritual functions as a deeply cultured event in which a diverse and multiethnic group of children constitute a single speech community.

Traditionally, the preprimary teacher's day-to-day classroom practice reflects clearly defined sets of organization and routine. These are acted out and instituted through repetitive patterns of actions that have the appearance of unconsidered and effortless automaticity. In a study by Leinhardt, Weidman, and Hammond (1987) teachers were observed to build simple routines to form more elaborate strings of action, thus increasing the variety and complexity in the classroom. These authors described routine as shared socially scripted patterns of behavior that allow instruction to proceed fluidly and efficiently.

A key issue in this paper is that ritual is enacted by teachers in their everyday classroom activities and as such must play an important role in teachers' and students' existence. This paper seeks to examine the forms and functions of ritual in structuring teaching in preschool settings. Applying the concept of ritual to classroom life provides a way of examining the pedagogy of preschool teachers.

## METHODOLOGY

The investigation and data analysis was guided and shaped by the need to interpret, understand, and describe meanings and processes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) related to the experiences and behaviors of three teachers in three preprimary classroom settings.<sup>3</sup> The study incorporated features distinctive of ethnography. Preliminary data were collected through life history techniques (Bogdan & Biklen 1992). Participant observations were conducted 1 day a week in each of the settings over a period of 15 months, where field notes were made and sequences of classroom action were videotaped. During observations my intention was to record the ongoing experiences that made up life in the classroom and to relate an accurate and detailed account of the teachers' actions, practices, and events that form part of their day-to-day teaching. In addition, unstructured in-depth interviews with each teacher were conducted after each observation and these were audiotaped and transcribed and provided a concrete, detailed record which supplemented the field notes. The interviews were used to understand the complex behavior of the participants. The data and interpretation evolved simultaneously and the fieldwork and analysis were concurrent.

The research took the form of case studies of three teachers working in preschool classroom settings. My intention as researcher was to identify, describe, and interpret sets of teacher actions and teachers' intentions and beliefs, thereby exploring what was both common and unique about the cases. In analyzing the data I

**Table I.** Demographic Details of the Participants in the Study

Participant (Pseudonyms used)	Location (Pseudonyms used)	Teaching experience
Helen	Radford PP State Government Middle socioeconomic area Four full days a week for 5-year olds	33 years
Jean	Swanleigh Montessori PS  Privately owned, fee paying preschool. On fringe of city Optional sessional or full-day attendance 3-5 year olds	8 years as a Kindergarten teacher 3 years as owner and head teacher of a Montessori school
Diane	Conner PP State Government Middle socioeconomic area Sessional attendance of 4 half-days a week for 5-year olds	9 years

looked for familiarities, patterns, and categories and relationships among those categories. Personal notes and inferences were documented and these formed the basis of questions, puzzlements, themes, and issues which were discussed and clarified on a weekly basis with the three teachers.

Three experienced preschool specialists were involved in this study. Each of the participants had a reputation for conducting effective preschool programs and for being considered excellent models of practice within the field of early childhood education. Based on this information Helen, Diane, and Jean (pseudonyms) were purposefully selected as participants in the study. Helen and Diane were working within the state government education system, whereas Jean was the owner and head teacher of a Montessori preschool. In view of my personal experience of having taught in the government education system and visited many schools in my role as early childhood teacher educator, the Montessori setting was chosen in order to provide a contrast with a less familiar setting. Table I shows demographic details of the participants in this study.

## FORMS OF RITUAL

The teachers in this study had established different ways of going about the business of teaching. Each of the three teachers held strong personal views of their role in teaching young children and of what early childhood was about. The teachers' social and cultural background together with knowledge gained from training, life experiences, views, and assumptions of childhood and of teaching, contributed to a construction of early childhood

**Table II.** Categories and Forms of Ritual Activity

Categories	Forms of ritual	Examples
Invariant ritual	Macro	Formalized institutional events
	High rituals	Ceremonies and celebrations
	Institutional rituals	Daily, weekly, yearly schedule
Variant ritual	Micro	Everyday activities which together make up the daily schedule
	Low rituals	Routinized activity
	Personal rituals	Distinctive action for specific intentions
Nonritual	Spontaneous, ad hoc activities	Initiated on the spot

education. Based on their individual pool of knowledge, the teachers developed theoretical assumptions; a pedagogical ideology including goals, intentions, objectives, and strategies for practice; and perceptions of what was educationally and morally sound. This knowledge base accounted for their views of the different forms and functions of ritual being put in place by each of the teachers.

Based on the literature and data analysis conducted during both a pilot study and the main study, different patterns of ritual forms emerged. These ritual forms were categorized as *invariant* and *variant*. *Invariant* rituals were those that remained constant and unchanged and were characterized as repetitive, ordered, formalized, and elevated in status. Conversely, *variant* rituals had the potential to transmit deeper messages and to permit variations in behavior within the framework of the ritual itself. Within the category of invariant ritual, further forms were identified as *macro* ritual, *high* ritual, and *institutional* ritual. The category of variant ritual revealed forms of ritual classified as *micro* ritual, *low* ritual, and *personal* ritual. Table II provides a representation of the categories of ritual activity in classrooms.

## INVARIANT AND VARIANT RITUALS

A distinctive feature of invariant ritual was that there appeared little change within the sequence of ritualized action. In each of the classrooms the repetitive, deliberate, and stylized action was uncontested, accepted, and unquestioned by the teachers. For example, in Diane's classroom invariant ritualized action which dominated a large proportion of the day was that of the children being together on the mat as a group. The ritual taught children how to assemble on the floor, sit in a circle, how to wait for a turn, procedures for speaking and listening, sharing, using manners, clearing away, and

knowing the rules for moving and behaving. Thus, when children came together for snack time, Diane's ritual generated for the participants a knowledge of how to act in this particular situation, that is, social order, conformity, and compliance.

The category of variant ritual depicted the variations in ritual behavior and had the potential to transmit new messages. Thus, when teachers varied what had otherwise become traditional classroom rituals such as sitting in circle for fruit time, or gathering and dismissing children in formalized patterns, the ritual not only took on different forms but also expressed more complex messages to participants by virtue of the particular variations. When Diane altered the predictable pattern of snack time so that groups of children could share the opportunity to have a picnic in the clubhouse, she transformed the invariant ritual into a problem-solving activity. The children were instructed to make up a basket of fruit, take it to the cubby house, and were left to their own devices as to how they would organize and conduct themselves. The underlying messages of snack time remained as unspoken rules, yet for the participants in the ritual there was scope for personal interpretation, through intellectualizing and discovery. In this way, Diane worked within and around the ritual to meet certain intentions and the ritual took on a pedagogical function.

For Helen invariant rituals provided a structure or tool for the transmission of a particular kind of knowledge. The content of her program had become very stable and predictable and she delivered her "theme work" consistently as part of her morning mat sessions. However, within the framework of her mat session, Helen included a number of supporting activities such as "roll call" and "star person," and these fulfilled specified goals for her. When these variations occurred there was a deeper and more personalized pedagogical purpose for both these teachers.

In Jean's case the rituals, which were an important part of the Montessori philosophy, assumed invariant forms. Her commitment to children's development of mastery and completion of tasks remained constant and systematic. She did not deviate from the way the children were instructed to complete tasks. Invariant ritual enabled Jean to go about her daily teaching in a well-defined, predictable manner and above all to hold to the fundamental principles of the Montessori philosophy.

### Macro and Micro Ritual

The subcategory of macro ritual represented that which McLaren (1986) described as the aggregate of all daily activities, and included the weekly and yearly

schedule which related to structure and acted to maintain certainty and uniformity for the participants. In preschool settings the daily and weekly timetable represented a ritualized structure that was relatively stable and patterned and which teachers reverently adhered to and which provided continuity, a sense of security, and comfort for all participants.

In each setting there was a clear pattern to how the macro program was designed and structured over the extended period. The macro system of rituals had elements of uniformity across the three settings yet there were also differences in each of the classroom settings. Helen and Diane used theme work to integrate content areas and in many instances these were introduced at the same time of the year. For example, both teachers began the year with the theme of "Myself" and ended it with the theme of "Christmas."

Helen adhered to a very strict regime over the year. She had developed a sequential structure for her yearly program which had become a long-standing tradition for her. She had identified a set of topics and repeated these on a yearly basis with very little variation in the 20 years she had been teaching at Radford Pre-School. When I returned to her classroom 1 year later, she was talking about the same topic, using the same resources, and implementing the same activities.

Diane also had her prescriptive schedule. Although more flexible in her approach, she had identified several significant themes she regarded as worthwhile and which formed the framework for her schedule. Diane's daily timetable provided a structure for her and the children through which she could be accountable. Although this overall schedule remained relatively constant, she was more spontaneous in her daily decision making and not as strongly committed to adhering to established plans within the broad timetable structure as was Helen. For example, Diane was more inclined to be flexible and change content and plans at the last minute for personal reasons although she remained within the boundaries of her timetable.

Micro ritual denoted those everyday actions that together made up the daily events of the program. For example, mat time, followed by activity time, followed by story time became a series of micro rituals. On a micro level Helen worked to a carefully formulated plan. She had developed a set formula for each day and a plan for the week with which she conscientiously complied and which in her mind enabled the children to know the routine and anticipate the coming events, thus in her view providing children with a sense of security and stability.

At Swanleigh, Jean's program did not alter signifi-

cantly on a macro or micro level. There was a strong sense of consistency on a year-to-year basis and on a day-to-day level. It was difficult for me to identify where the year's work began and ended for the children, such as the cyclic nature of the daily events. In fact there was no beginning or end for the children, rather, they experienced a smooth transition through the program as 3- to 5-year olds, the end coming if the children changed into a mainstream education system. The stylized behavior the children engaged in was highly predictable, stable, and repetitive both on a macro and micro level.

### High and Low Rituals

Henry (1992) codified rituals as "high" or "low" depending on their status. She explained that in the anthropology literature, "high rituals" relate to ceremonies such as initiation rites, funeral rites, feast days, and marriage rites (p. 5). In the preschool setting *high* rituals include the celebrations of social and cultural events such as Father's Day, Christmas, and birthdays, as well as ceremonious events such as attending the school assembly. These rituals were identified by teachers as those less likely to be omitted from their program and were symbolic, well planned, rehearsed, and held particular significance for the teachers and the participants.

Each of the three teachers embodied high rituals as part of their repertoire of teaching. In the Montessori setting, Jean celebrated cultural events such as Christmas, Mother's Day and Birthdays. For Jean the embracing of high rituals was a way of keeping in touch with events that were important real life and culturally specific situations for the children. Although not a part of the Montessori tradition, in Jean's mind they formed part of the "life skills" advocated by Montessori and were therefore worthy of a place in her program. Jean sought to address culturally specific events and yet to maintain a strong Montessori focus.

At Helen's and Diane's centre, high rituals were the public face of their preschool. Parents and relatives were invited to join in the celebrations and to witness the enactment of special events. The ceremonies, be it a concert, grandparents' afternoon tea, or a social gathering, were intended to raise community awareness of the purpose and meaning of preschool. For Helen, public displays were ways of reaching out to families, maintaining her reputation, and demonstrating her accountability to parents. Whereas for Diane high rituals such as Father's Night, Christmas, and Valentine's Day were elaborate productions for her and the children and an opportunity for her to display her talents to parents and colleagues. These celebrations enabled her to put herself, as teacher,

on show for the school administration and parents to judge her performance and competence.

*Low* rituals were those activities that were lower in status and which allowed for individuality and variation. Examples of low rituals were those “paler, less authentic actions” (McLaren, 1986, p. 40) which included routines, but nevertheless were genuine forms of ritual. In preschool, examples of low rituals included arrival, greeting the teacher, transitions between set periods of the day, packing away equipment, gathering and dismissing children, and checking the weather. Low rituals accounted for the individualization of curricular events in preschool settings and pertained to those rituals set in place to fulfill specific goals such as “calling the attendance roll” as a means of welcoming and acknowledging each child on an individual basis.

### Institutional and Personal Rituals

*Institutional* rituals were those happenings that had been put in place by the establishment or hierarchy of the school to mark significant events or to maintain tradition. Examples of institutional rituals in preschool were sports day, joining the school for assembly, or observing significant cultural events and holidays. This group represented the stable, formalized, and traditional events which generally had become institutionalized, that is, sanctioned by outside influences such as the administration, or the education system, or parents and community expectations.

For example, at Swanleigh the three-period lesson (a teaching strategy traditionally used in the Montessori approach) was used to maintain the Montessori tradition. The ritual of mastery, which was a well-documented feature of the Montessori approach, formed the foundation of Jean’s program. This aspect of Jean’s approach accounted for her devotion to the Montessori system and at the same time sanctioned her approach to parents. Her personal rituals stemmed from influences outside the Montessori tradition. Jean justified her mat sessions as the influence from her kindergarten training, whereas her use of the bell to assemble children who wished to use the bathroom evolved due to constraints of the location and physical setting.

For Helen and Diane institutional rituals were drawn from long-standing traditions and from personal experiences of teaching. Thus, rituals such as snack time and mat time fell into the category of institutional ritual. Added to these were the conventions perpetuated by the local education system, such as observing cultural events, promoting sports day, and convening school assemblies, all of which maintained a particular public

image of the school.

In preschool settings, *personal* rituals took on an intimate form when teachers adapted and varied patterns of action to meet personal intentions and to achieve certain outcomes. Many examples of personal forms of ritual were evident. For instance, Diane established a range of transitions, while for Helen, a ritual which became a formal, deliberate, and personal action and consequently became part of her pedagogy was the daily practice of “reading the notice board.” These forms of ritual functioned to personalize the teaching process and to individualize the system and procedures so that specific styles of practice could be identified.

### DISCUSSION

What is important to note from this study is the difficulty in drawing clear and consistent boundaries between the categories of ritual. The categories are not always mutually exclusive and therefore, it is not possible to strictly codify or categorize ritual in a particular form or function. Indeed, in some cases a ritual may fit more than one category, for example, *low* and *personal* rituals may overlap. Roll call was a particularly notable ritual in Helen’s repertoire. It was a low ritual, in that it appeared to have a somewhat low status and to be a routinized set of actions. However, roll call was also a personal ritual for Helen and became more than merely calling a list of names from a register and marking those absent and present. She had a personal set of intentions and the ritual was intended to fulfill this agenda. In many ways this simple ritual of roll call lay the groundwork for her overarching philosophical principle, that of a “caring and sharing community.”

The rituals that formed a significant part of classroom action were largely invariant. The invariant, macro, high, and institutional forms of ritual remained relatively stable over long periods. They expressed the formalized and traditional events which generally have become part of the school system, sanctioned by outside influences such as the administration, education system, parent, and community expectations. Thus, these forms of ritual functioned as ceremonial events and became a public demonstration of the beliefs and practices of a particular classroom. They provided structure, predictability, and stability which in turn provided continuity and enabled teachers to go routinely about their business.

The second group of variant, micro, low, and personal forms of ritual represented the day-to-day events that were multilayered, symbolic, and personal. These forms of ritual functioned to personalize the teaching process. Helen, Jean, and Diane each had an individual-

ized system and a set of procedures by which their classroom procedures could be identified. When teachers did vary the ritual framework they acted to engage the participants in new ways and therefore maximized teaching and learning opportunities. Also, when variations occurred teachers took a more active role in the teaching process. They became more cognitively engaged in making decisions about content, process, and intentions and the outcome was greater deliberation, thoughtfulness, and creativity in their practice.

In many ways, the rituals put in place by the three teachers became an articulation of their rationale for teaching and a representation of the decisions they made about pedagogy and content and the theory and beliefs which underpinned them. All three teachers operated from a theoretical base. They held individual pools of knowledge that had become sacred, more specifically, elevated to a status of highly valued and revered. This sacred knowledge was different for each teacher. For example, Jean's (Montessori) rationale was founded on a set of specific principles and beliefs and was made explicit, in that it was visible in her daily orchestration of classroom life and was clearly articulated by her in our discussions. For Helen and Diane, their rationale for teaching was more implicit. They drew on a set of principles which had come to underpin their current practice. What was evident and crucial was that these practices had been individually interpreted by the two teachers, so that personal purposes and intentions underpinned their practice.

It is not surprising, therefore, that although there were commonalities among the three teachers in this study, there were also significant differences. It is also important to note that although some differences were immediately obvious, others were implicit and only after many observations and discussions did they begin to define themselves. In other words, with events that appeared common, over time subtle differences emerged and became stronger. This was the case with whole-group time, which is recognized as a key event in preschool settings. All three teachers incorporated whole-group time in their program. On the surface it appeared to represent a meeting time and place, a gathering of the whole group with the teacher taking the lead role. It most often occurred at the beginning of the daily session and included a number of discrete activities designed to orient the children to school and the daily program. In all three settings, the teachers had specific individual agendas for whole-group time according to their personal goals. The ritual patterns of whole-group time served different means for reaching different ends. For Helen, it was a time when she did most of her teach-

ing. She instructed the children and imparted a body of facts and concepts. She set her standards, inculcated her beliefs, and set the conditions for operating and learning in Radford Pre-School. Jean used whole-group time as a transition. It was a break in the morning schedule and allowed children to come together before moving to the next sequence of activity time. It was short and focused and the main purpose for Jean was to gather, settle, and look ahead to the next time part of the program. For Diane, whole-group time was where the "real" work was done. She set and maintained her standards and established a behavior code through group time and it became a way of validating her work to outsiders.

## CONCLUSION

Ritual is basic to life in the classrooms and, as such, gives shape and form to that life. It determines what life in that particular classroom looks like and feels like for teachers and students. The overarching framework, the invariant-ritual system appears predictable and relatively stable as was observed in all three settings. However, repeated performances of the same ritual in the same setting over an extended period reveals differences in detail.

Practitioners would agree that rituals and routines are helpful in structuring daily teaching and for simplifying the many demands of classroom teaching. However, there is a danger that rituals may become so invariant that they go beyond the provision of a stable framework to become controlling devices and even mindless procedures enacted by the teacher. Variant rituals provide the teacher with a more flexible framework and more personal form of teaching. Variations in ritual are indicative of a teacher's willingness to adapt to changing circumstances, and of the degree of creativity, spontaneity, and responsiveness to the needs of the participants (in this case the students). Rather than operating on an automatic level and being constrained by the invariant ritual, teachers are likely to work within and around the ritual and the ritual itself acts as an impetus for new pedagogical strategies. In this way variation was not random, but planned and deliberate. Thus, when teachers remain mindful of the rituals set in place, then the rituals have a greater pedagogic function.

If rituals are to be generative, rather than controlling, then teachers need to be made aware of both the explicit and implicit roles, functions, and purposes of ritual. Teachers need to be skilled at challenging common rituals and adapting them to new uses so long-standing patterns of action are transformed. Educational change is more likely to occur when teachers engage in self-evaluation and reflection on practice and when they con-

sciously and actively think through, plan, and use ritual to achieve certain goals.

Finally, if ritual does indeed have a didactic potential then it seems reasonable to suggest that teacher educators should consider ways of making ritual, its forms and functions, more explicit in teacher education programs. Given that teachers use situation-specific rituals that become automatic with experience, there is a need to determine the extent to which teachers are taught to use ritual and what ritualized forms are being taught to them in teacher education programs.

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