



PERFORMANCE, TRANSITION AND 'COMMUNITAS': THE STUDENT JOURNEY TO PRACTICE FROM A SYMBOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRANSITION FROM STUDENT TO PRACTITIONER?

To answer this, I explored findings from three studies of adult learning and development, drawing on dramaturgical theory around performance, ritual and symbols.



FOCUS OF RESEARCH

- Two qualitative research projects of CAM university students undergoing preclinical and supervised clinical practice (Fixsen and Ridge, 2012; Fixsen et al, 2015)
 - Professional doctorate ethnography of (soft skills) staff learning and development programmes
 - Term LDPs is used to cover these types of development programmes
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SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

People act based on symbolic meanings they find within a given situation.

The goals of our interactions are to create a shared meaning.



ERVIN GOFFMAN

Focused on the vast repertoire of unspoken norms and everyday ritual acts situated and played out within social situations. Saw life as a performance - we are constantly acting out to an audience to “maintain face.”

“Life itself is a dramatically enacted thing”



Erving Goffman

'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1990).

A black and white photograph of Erving Goffman sitting at a desk, looking down at some papers or a book. He is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt.

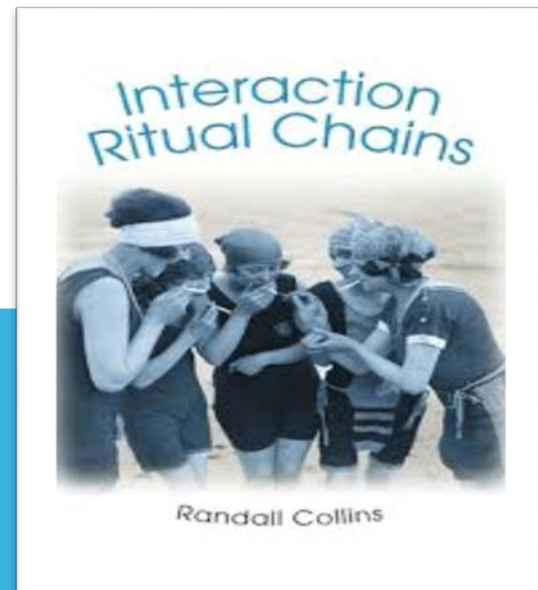
Society is an insane asylum run by the inmates.
(Erving Goffman)

izquotes.com

RANDALL COLLINS, SOCIOLOGIST

Rituals are “momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness”

“Emotional energy” is what individuals seek in interaction rituals (Collins, 2004; p. 44)



FAILED RITUALS

Fall flat

No shared attention

No entertainment

Little group solidarity

Emotions: embarrassment, depression, alienation
(usually low energy)





SUCCESSFUL INTERACTION RITUALS

HIGH EMOTIONAL ENERGY

Enthusiasm

Group affiliation

Enjoyment



Moral cohesion

Solidarity

Confidence



VICTOR TURNER: RITES OF PASSAGE

Rituals as foci of creativity enlivening societal make-up

Rites of passage – mark change in status and identity, and have three phases: separation, margin (limen- signifying threshold) and reintegration or completion (Turner, 1969).



LIMINALITY

During the middle liminal phase of a group ritual, the “passenger” (the student) is “betwixt and between” two cultural phases.

Being under tutelage, they are relatively free of responsibility.

This allows them to experience a sense of social communion or “communitas.”



DATA COLLECTION METHODS


Participation (ethnography only)

Observation (ethnography only)

Semi structured one to one interviews



COMBINED THEMES OF STUDY FINDINGS

- LDPs as “social spaces”
 - Relationships- trust and tensions
 - Performance issues (anxiety about being observed or judged, emotion work)
 - Embodied engagement and synergy
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LDP “SOCIAL WORLD”

Relatively discreet and emotionally open.

On crossing the ‘threshold’ participants can suspend their daily work tasks and duties.

Provides a safe space where people can express and share thoughts and feelings that might be difficult in the outside world.



LDPS AS MEETING SPACES

“Courses like this are great in allowing you to meet different people, sharing views and being creative.”

“A space where (people) meet others and connect and learn how others are doing things- make connections that are more than just an email”



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

“We had a fantastic group...we got on right from the start. We shared very deeply about ourselves...and sharing definitely helped us bond...we cut through the superfluous quite quickly.”

“Everybody seemed very friendly, I was very struck by, you know how willing everyone was to try and make something happen. I guess that positive vibe isn't something that you always get.”



TRUST AND SAFETY

“It brought some level of safety, some sort of camaraderie . . . I mean we had real tears on it, which was good.”

“We took very seriously the idea that ‘what was said among us stayed amongst us’, so there was building that trust.”



NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL ENERGY

'We had a couple of very, very unhappy people in our group who were trying to turn the conversation their way . . . And then we had a couple of people who were just like this big wall of negativity- it was so hard to turn them round.'



“PERFORMING”

On LDPs participants engaged in a range of ‘performances’ alone or in groups.



PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

“I’m not very good at facing people or standing in front of people . . . I’m just getting used to it now (chuckles)”

“Heightened anxiety, I think that was the main thing. I don’t think any of us slept the night before our first few clinics until we relaxed.”

PERFORMANCE AND EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT

“ I remember being really upset for her (the patient) and I was very much caught in the moment of what had actually happened. ”

“ I wanted to burst into tears, already you ’re nervous and on edge....I remember coming out of the interview feeling very shaky and just sort of out in control. ”



DYNAMIC (GROUP) PERFORMANCES

“It (the programme) had a very interactive dynamic . . .it was a lot of fun doing stuff.”

“ You know, adults can play as well as children and I think that kind of playfulness is really good from the point of innovation and creativity.”



'EMBODIED' ENGAGEMENT: SYNERGY

"The energy in the room, the positivity, the potential synergy of working in different teams, and meeting other small teams as well . . ."

"Being with people you just find social and personal points of connection- I think it helps build a sense of community and collegiality."



‘REINTEGRATION’- NEW STATUS

“The fact that I actually did do all those things that I was terrified to do... You know nothing terrible has happened to me, I haven’t burst into flames.”

“I look at myself now and compare myself and I realize that my confidence has really grown.”

“I’ve even started thinking that I could do some teaching, I would never had stood up in front of a group of people before.”



CONCLUSIONS

The performed-for-an-audience aspect of rituals renders them both meaningful and stressful as students must not only utilise a new set of skills, but also exhibit this to others in attendance.



PASSAGES WITHIN PASSAGES

Students go through a whole series of rituals, some of which have clear beginning, middle and end; i.e. they are rites of passage.

They emerge from each passage with a different sense of self, identity and set of rewards and responsibilities.



EMBODIED ENGAGEMENT

Embodied engagement refers to the participation of the entire self in an activity, including in understanding and meaning making (Ray 2006; Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Embodied engagement, whether an implicit or explicit element of 'rituals', would seem essential for the success of group activities such as feature on LDPs.



COMMUNITAS

At their most dynamic and engaging, face to face group ‘learning rituals’ can generate an elevated sense of collectiveness, or *communitas*, which contrasts with the individualism of modern life.

As embodied group learning diminishes so we need to consider how different phases within a student's “rite of passage” can be best supported and celebrated.



THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

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