

FASTBACK

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Planning and Conducting Better School Ceremonies

Edward A. Wynne

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Since 1970 he has conducted or supervised more than 600 studies of public and private elementary and secondary schools in the greater Chicago area. The studies focused on identifying and conceptualizing the elements of excellence found in these schools, particularly those elements related to community spirit in a school. That focus led him to write this fastback, since school ceremonies are a vital element of community-building.

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Planning and Conducting Better School Ceremonies

by
Edward A. Wynne

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The chapter sponsors this fastback to honor the memory of Gordon J. Beels. Mr. Beels was a charter member of the Northern Illinois University Chapter. He gave willingly of his time and talents to be of service to others. He was a professional educator of the highest order.

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Introduction

I recently attended an elementary school graduation. The graduating students sat at the front of the auditorium. On signal from the presider, the students arose from their seats and scattered to their families throughout the auditorium. Each graduate delivered a sealed envelope to his or her parents. The students then returned to their seats. I noticed the mother seated in front of me as she opened her envelope. As she read it, she removed her glasses and rubbed the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. I later discovered each letter contained a personal note of gratitude written by the graduate to his or her parents. This mother was weeping tears of joy! Without spending a lot of time or money, some imaginative educators in this school had done something special to increase human happiness. They also had taught their pupils a great deal about thoughtfulness — and the power of the written word. When schools help parents feel joy, they create an enormous store of community goodwill.

Little has been written for educators on improving ceremonial life in schools. Yet my research indicates that many educators believe ceremonies are important. They would find considerable support from cross-cultural studies by many anthropologists. Educators in schools I have studied have many good ideas about how ceremonies make their schools work better. Unfortunately, busy educators often lack the time to organize and disseminate their knowledge. This fastback aims to correct this deficiency.

When considering the role of ceremonies in the life of a school, many practical questions arise about: money, pupil and faculty time, the mechanics of planning sometimes elaborate activities, the aesthetics of particular activities, the maintenance of pupil discipline, and the values ceremonies should express. But whatever the complexities, there is good reason to believe that ceremonies play a central role in creating a sense of community in a school.

Effective schools research emphasizes that the faculty, students, and parents of such schools share common values. They work together as a team to achieve agreed-on values or goals. Ceremonies and rites are one of the ways human institutions use to communicate and reinforce such values among their members. (The annotated list of suggested readings at the end of this fastback provides an entry point to anthropological and sociological literature on the role of ceremonies.)

The effective schools in the Chicago area that I have studied give much attention to their ceremonial life in such areas as:

- Assemblies for awards and recognition, for entertainment, and for spirit-building purposes;
- Leave-taking occasions – graduations, end-of-year transitions, farewells for faculty and other school employees;
- Rites of intensification, where group members organize for pep rallies, daily flag salute, singing the school song;
- Organized parties and entertainments for special occasions – homecomings, proms, Valentine's Day, music assemblies – where groups can share their affection and perform for each other.

These schools plan ceremonies to involve different groups of students and to celebrate many different occasions. Their ceremonies reflect much creativity but are structured in ways that foster good discipline but at the same time allow for much spontaneity. Some of the good practices gleaned from studying these schools are discussed

in this fastback. The last chapter provides specifics about some of the ceremonial practices in two excellent public schools, an urban elementary school and a suburban high school.

Let us also remember that ceremonies can be forms of instruction. They teach; they communicate and reinforce individual and group values and attitudes. In the anecdote that opened this chapter, many things were taught. Parents learned they were loved and appreciated; the graduates learned how better to express their love and appreciation; and both the graduates and the parents realized their school cared about their happiness. And so in this fastback educators will become more aware of what well-designed school ceremonies can “teach” and how they do it.

The Nature of Ceremonies

All important human institutions rely on ceremonies to establish and reaffirm their values. Essentially, ceremonies and rites are deliberately organized occasions where people assemble to communicate symbolically what they believe to be important. Oftentimes the structure of and occasions for ceremonies are determined by tradition and precedent.

The forms of communication in ceremonies are extraordinarily varied and include many aesthetic elements: music, physical gestures and postures, special garments, processions, dances, recitation of special words individually or collectively, and displays of symbols and art. Much of the communication in ceremonies and rites relates to previous learning of the participants. A flag salute has meaning because the persons saluting know something about the history of their country and identify themselves as citizens of their country. Because of these previous learnings, people attach special meanings to the ceremonial activities in which they participate.

Ceremonies develop intimacy and cohesion among group members. Then, the group works together more effectively. For instance, there is a strong tradition of ceremonies among employees in many Japanese corporations. They often wear common garments; their workday may open with the singing of a company song; they engage in group calisthenics during breaks.

Although less common in the U.S., some corporations make effective use of ceremonies to build group spirit and motivate employees.

A good example is the 1989 annual meeting of the Wal-Mart Company, which brought together 9,000 shareholders, executives, and employees in the University of Arkansas sports arena. Company founder Sam Walton worked the crowd, exhorting employees to be "exceedingly friendly" to customers. Young store executives and a senior vice president dressed as cheerleaders led the crowd in chanting, "U.S.A., U.S.A." and spelled out Wal-Mart with big cardboard letters. Near the end of the meeting, an assistant store manager stepped to the microphone and belted out "God Bless America" while a video montage in the background displayed families, the flag, and the Statue of Liberty. This is ceremony American style. It just might account for why Sam Walton is one of the wealthiest men in the nation. Clearly he knows the power of ceremony to motivate human beings.

Ceremonies work by heightening the expectations people bring to the occasion. The very fact of stopping normal activities and dedicating time to a ceremony emphasizes certain values. The power of ceremonies also is heightened when important persons in the community take time to attend and participate in the ceremony.

Ceremonies often are used to demarcate critical life events (marriages, graduations, funerals, initiations, farewells). Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960) calls these events "rites of passage." He maintains that such rites instruct individuals in the new roles they are assuming and at the same time communicate expectations to others (relatives of the bride and groom, friends of the graduates, and mourners of the deceased) who participate in the ceremony. As van Gennep states, "The 'passages' represent real, objective changes in the lives of the participants. But without traditional public ceremonial demarcation, the many persons concerned with the change will have less assurance of what is expected in the new situation."

It is well to remember that the word "holiday" — an occasion for ceremonial commemoration — comes from "Holy Day," a day designated for special religious recognition. In our secular times, holidays have far fewer ceremonial elements than did the traditional holy days.

Some even contend that the decline in the ceremonial elements of holidays has made them meaningless. A case in point is our newest holiday, Martin Luther King Day, which is celebrated with a day off from school or work in many communities. But just having a day off from school or work serves no ceremonial or commemorative purpose. How much more meaningful the holiday would be if students were in school participating in organized commemorative and ceremonial activities. To their credit, many schools do conduct impressive ceremonies just prior to this holiday and still give students the day off.

Planning School Ceremonies

Ceremonies can occur either in individual classrooms or on a school-wide basis. Let us look first at schoolwide ceremonies and the school infrastructure that makes them possible. For instance, one of the school infrastructures is an auditorium or other space large enough to hold the entire student body. If the school does not have an auditorium or other large space, it is handicapped in planning all-school ceremonies. Fortunately, many infrastructure factors affecting ceremonial planning are more manageable than the lack of a large assembly space.

The first infrastructure factor is the school activity calendar. Typically, such calendars are developed at the beginning of the school year by the principal, with the help of a staff committee. The basic planning decision is determining what events should be ceremonially marked and when they should occur on the school calendar. Once these decisions are made, then more specific planning can begin covering such matters as:

- Setting aside space and time.
- Designating a faculty person (or committee with a continuing chair) to oversee the event.
- Identifying the key elements of the ceremony, planning how they will be carried out, and establishing a time-line for their completion.
- Delegating responsibilities to designated participants.

- Locating and assembling necessary resources.
- Carrying out practices preliminary to the occasion.
- Requesting teachers to organize individual class activities that are integrated with the ceremony.
- Disseminating appropriate external and in-school publicity.
- Inviting parents and other special persons to participate in the ceremony.
- Identifying the particular classes to be involved (or the whole school).
- Creating, publishing, and distributing printed programs if appropriate.
- Identifying and planning for any discipline or student control problems that may be generated by the occasion.

Many school ceremonies are replications of what was done in previous years; they are part of the traditions of a school. But this does not negate the need for careful annual planning. Communities change, the student body changes, and new circumstances call for different approaches to the ceremonial life of a school. As the principal and staff plan the school calendar, they should reflect on what was done in the past and consider what might be done differently in the coming year.

What Occasions Should Be Ceremonialized?

Schools should use ceremonies to affirm their values. The nature of the ceremonies will vary depending on the developmental level of pupils, but the differences have more to do with the techniques used than with the values being promoted. Following are some kinds of ceremonies serving different purposes, which I have observed in schools (often one ceremony can serve several purposes):

1. Recognition of individual and group academic excellence and achievements in the areas of character/citizenship and sports.

2. Cultivation of a sense of community within the school and between the school and its neighborhood through assemblies, parades, and other occasions where pupils entertain each other and sometimes the community. Oftentimes, such occasions celebrate ethnic holidays that have special meaning for the community. For example, in an Italian neighborhood, Columbus Day might receive special recognition. One characteristic of a true community is that its members look to each other for wholesome entertainment.
3. Occasions (often national holidays) designated to honor prominent historical figures (Washington, Lincoln, Martin Luther King, etc.) and important events (Flag Day, Veterans Day, Arbor Day). These ceremonies can become occasions for reflecting on important values, such as the sacrifices that living and dead veterans have made to protect our freedom.
4. Occasions for good-spirited fun (Valentine's Day in elementary schools, dress-up-silly days, School Spirit Week, dances, etc.). The value here is simply one of community members enjoying each other's company.
5. Initiations and inductions into the Honor Society, Student Council, and other significant school groups. One high school assigned all freshman a mentor from the senior class. At a formal ceremony at the beginning of the school year, the freshmen were matched with their mentors and the obligations of the mentor were recited. The students found this to be a moving occasion.
6. Welcoming assemblies, where the principal and other key staff greet students and outline the school rules and expectations.
7. Pep rallies to stimulate student enthusiasm and school pride.
8. Homecoming events, where graduates renew their ties and express their affection for their old school.
9. Farewell occasions such as commencement or the retirement of a favorite teacher.

In addition to the above, more traditional ceremonial events, there are other occasions that lend themselves to ceremonial invention. Some that come to mind are:

1. Recognizing a special gift to the school from the PTA, a local business, or an individual. This is a time to say a collective "Thank you," to recognize what the gift means to the school, and to accept the responsibility for using the gift in ways that contribute to the school's purpose.
2. Recognizing the accession of some new officeholder, for example, a new principal or a new football coach. This can be an occasion for noting the achievements of the person and for allowing that person to communicate his or her goals for the school or team.
3. Honoring the contributions of special persons to the school or community.
4. Welcoming home a successful team (sports, debate, musical group, academic bowl, etc.).
5. Recognizing important anniversaries, such as the 50th or 100th anniversary of the school.
6. Dedicating some new unit or program in the school (swimming pool, computer lab, new band uniforms, etc).

Involving Parents and the Community

The school's external community should have a role in its ceremonial life and planning. Since parents make up a major part of the audience for many ceremonial occasions, the committee planning the ceremony should consider such matters as: What dates and times are best to ensure good attendance? What kind of publicity is most effective to attract parents? Are there particular ceremonial occasions that are more appropriate for parents than others?

The planning committee can involve parents as resources for ceremonial occasions. There are parents who can rehearse a choir,

sew costumes, organize a party or dance, contact a prominent public figure they know to speak at the ceremony, or write up the event for the local paper. Many parents want to be involved. All it takes is inviting them to help.

Ceremonies also can be occasions for honoring parent contributions to the school and to their own children. The delivery of the "Thank you" notes described in the Introduction of this fastback is an example of such recognition. That simple act of saying "Thank you" in a public ceremony conveys the message that the school values the contributions parents make to their child's education.

Pupil Discipline and Control

Schoolwide ceremonies provide a good test of a school's discipline policy. When a large group of students assemble in an auditorium or gymnasium, a sense of anonymity develops and students feel they have license to act up. This is especially true when the occasion is one where emotions run high, such as at a pep rally. Frequently the disorderly conduct becomes contagious and spreads through the group. This is one reason some administrators are reluctant to hold many schoolwide ceremonial events.

There is no simple solution to the complex issue of pupil disorder at schoolwide gatherings. However, seasoned administrators who believe strongly in the importance of school ceremonies have developed strategies for student discipline and control, some of which I share below.

1. Administrators should make it clear that maintaining order during assemblies and other ceremonies is the responsibility of the total faculty, not just those who may be presiding. All teachers should be expected to bring their classes to and from assemblies, to be on time, and to monitor them during the program. Teachers also should communicate to their individual classes what is appropriate conduct during the assembly. The principal or other authority figure should be conspicuously present to oversee the whole process. In schools that are highly departmentalized or that have no homeroom system, stu-

dents have no "base" and are not accountable to a specific teacher. Under these circumstances, it is best to assign a teacher to monitor a specified number of students during assemblies.

2. The person(s) planning the occasion should solicit input from teachers regarding such details as the routes students should take to and from the assembly, the best time for scheduling the assembly, whether classes should proceed in single or double file, whether students should sit together as a class, whether ushers should be used, and whether a seating plan should be followed.

3. Where special seating arrangements are necessary, teachers should have their classes practice filing in and out of the assembly area a day or two prior to the occasion.

4. In general, ceremonies should be enjoyable and interesting for the students involved. However, not every moment has to be exciting or fun. Part of what ceremonies teach us is that certain standards of decorum are expected, even if our interest is sometimes flagging. Also, one must take into account the developmental level of students. But if ceremonies are consistently dull and poorly presented, discipline problems are likely to arise.

5. Ceremonial occasions should be well paced. They should start on time, not be too long, and not have awkward delays between presentations. If awards are to be made to a large number of students, organize the process so it proceeds expeditiously.

6. Regular and formal opening and closing rites (trooping of the colors, recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, the singing of the Alma Mater, etc.) help to establish a mood for the occasion.

7. Applying the principle that dress helps to shape conduct, some occasions call for students to dress up. This requirement should be announced well in advance and repeated several times prior to the occasion. It might be advisable to send parents a notice specifying what is appropriate apparel (skirts and blouses or dresses for girls, slacks and shirts for boys). Students who blatantly disregard the dress requirement should not be allowed to attend the event.

8. On some occasions (proms, dances, parties), parents can help as chaperones. They should be given clear instructions as to expected standards of behavior and what to do if violations occur.

The Role of the Arts in School Ceremonies

Throughout history, the arts have had a major role in the ceremonial life of different societies. Anthropologists tell us that members of traditional societies spend a significant portion of their time in creating artistic items to use in their ceremonies. The arts should have a role in school ceremonies. The arts I am referring to are the creative expressions of students, faculty, and parents. Such expressions can take many forms: stage sets, floats, banners and flags, musical performances, original songs or lyrics set to familiar melodies, student poetry, parades, and processions, to name a few.

Creating art works for school ceremonies can be integrated into the school's regular art program. When students know that their artistic expressions will be used for a meaningful purpose, they will be motivated to do their best work, knowing that it will be displayed or performed publicly. Also, they will be more open to thoughtful criticism, an important component of the creative process. When planning school ceremonies, be sure to allow enough time for students and faculty to prepare their artistic creations. They should not be slapdash efforts prepared at the last minute.

In addition to the arts, other areas of the curriculum can be involved in school ceremonies. Reading biographies and historical fiction provides a deeper understanding of the persons and occasions we memorialize. Social studies and history provide background information and other insights about national and ethnic holidays. Research reports and writing projects might be tied to particular ceremonies. Dramatics, home economics, and shop classes all can make contributions to ceremonial occasions. It goes without saying that involvement of these other curriculum areas will require careful planning and much cooperative effort.

Planning Classroom Ceremonies

Planning and managing classroom ceremonies involve many of the same elements as schoolwide ceremonies. There must be time set aside for planning with attention to the purpose and content of the occasion. Will it be related to the ongoing curriculum or just a festive holiday celebration? With disruption of the normal classroom routine, teachers must anticipate potential problems with regard to classroom management and student behavior.

Students must be prepared to participate in the ceremony. This might involve art and writing projects, learning a new song, and decorating the classroom. If refreshments are to be served, a student committee might work with parent volunteers on the arrangements. If the occasion is one to which parents should be invited, a written invitation from the teacher or, better yet, from the students should be sent home.

Sometimes classroom ceremonies may be part of a larger schoolwide celebration, for example, a classroom Halloween party and an all-school Halloween costume parade. This calls for cooperation and coordination among the staff. Teachers should share their plans and exchange ideas. New teachers, in particular, will welcome suggestions from old-timers about the school traditions.

Teachers who serve as sponsors for school clubs and other extracurricular activities often will need to plan ceremonial occasions for these organizations. Examples include induction into the Honor Society, induction of student council officers, and athletic team awards banquets. Ceremonies can play an important role in affirming the values of these organizations to their members. These smaller, more intimate types of ceremonies are often more meaningful to the participants than are the large, all-school ceremonies.

Ceremonial Integrity

In *Rites of Passage*, van Gennep discusses the concept of "ceremonial integrity," which means that the values implicit in the ceremony should be consistent with the status of the persons or organizations involved in the ceremony. For example, institutional size is a factor affecting ceremonial integrity. Graduations and awards ceremonies at large high schools are often perfunctory affairs. The logistics of handling huge numbers of students and an audience of even greater size become overwhelming; the audience becomes bored and impatient. Thus, an event with personal significance becomes "depersonalized." The ceremonies only become personal at the moment when the parents' child walks across the stage to receive the diploma or award. Some schools have overcome this impersonalness by arranging smaller, more intimate awards ceremonies where fewer students are honored and the audience is limited.

Ceremonial integrity also means that the recognition bestowed reflects reality. For example, if the induction of student council officers is to have integrity, then the council should have a significant role in the governance of the school. If the school administration is concerned because the student council currently has a trivial role, with the elections being mostly a popularity contest, one constructive step might be to make the induction of council officers a major schoolwide event. This would provide an opportunity to artic-

ulate genuine responsibilities for the council. It also could encourage more students to run for council offices and for the entire student body to take council activities more seriously.

Ceremonies are important to reaffirm values, or even to foster value changes. But they cannot do the work alone. Where changes are desired, ceremonies must be accompanied by appropriate programmatic revisions and new priorities. But even so, we should not underestimate the power of well-conceived ceremonies. The Wal-Mart stores annual meeting described earlier was an elaborate and carefully designed ceremony to generate employee enthusiasm for really caring about Wal-Mart customers. Complex preparations underlay that ceremony. Wal-Mart executives did not organize the whole occasion for something they did not really care much about.

Achieving ceremonial integrity requires that educators reflect on the nature or purpose of their ceremonial practices. Do such practices reflect the actual values and policies prevailing in a school? If we want to use ceremonies to help change values and policies, we must consider what program changes are needed to carry out values or attitudes the ceremony emphasizes.

The Ceremonial Site

Another element of ceremonial integrity is the site where ceremonies take place, be it the auditorium, gymnasium, classroom, stadium, or even the trophy case. Ceremonial sites can do much to enhance, or detract from, the occasion.

If a site is poorly maintained and needs a coat of paint, or if the site is outdoors and the area is littered with trash, the environment is hardly conducive to a dignified ceremony. Some imaginative and determined principals I know have not let such conditions deter them. They have recruited parent volunteers and organized student and faculty teams to carry out beautification campaigns. The spirit engendered by such campaigns actually takes on the qualities of a ceremony. Indeed, a high-spirited, purposeful clean-up rally for stu-

dents, parents, and faculty might be a good way of ceremonially emphasizing a beautification campaign.

But vital ceremonial sites need more than structural and janitorial attention. Even more important are aesthetically appealing symbols and other trappings that support the school's ceremonial program. The nature of such symbols will vary depending on the school's traditions, the age level enrolled, and the resources (financial and human) available.

Let me offer an example of the power of a site. In Westminster Abbey one of the large stained-glass windows has worked into its design the names of the Royal Air Force squadrons that fought in the Battle of Britain in World War II. The beauty of the stained glass, its setting in Westminster Abbey, and the historic moment it commemorates all combine to create a powerful message. Looking at the window teaches many things: People have done things worthy of great honor. The airmen from those squadrons died or took great risks to protect their country. Their bravery is recognized in a conspicuous and public way. So, too, must symbols and displays be used to enhance ceremonial sites in a school. There are many ways this can be done:

1. If the school is named after someone, it can honor that person by displaying a portrait or large photograph, along with a brief account of that person's achievements. Such a display gives students some sense of the school's heritage and a reason to be proud of their school.
2. A display can honor notable graduates (or simply graduates who lived honorable, decent lives) using photos and text.
3. A display can honor educators formerly associated with the school and explain who they were and why they are honored.
4. A display can honor former (or present) students or groups of students for notable achievements in athletics, musical performance, scholarship, and other school-related pursuits.

5. A display can honor prominent local and national figures (living or dead) and groups of citizens, who serve as role models for students.
6. The school can post announcements recognizing achievement in academics and citizenship in the school and community.

The visual symbols — posters, slogans, inspirational quotations, banners, or trophies — in classrooms, hallways, auditoriums, or playgrounds all contribute to the ceremonial life of a school.

Case Studies of Ceremonies in Action

To illustrate some of the ideas about school ceremonial life discussed in the preceding pages, I conclude with two case studies. One describes a rather elaborate homecoming ceremony in a medium-size suburban high school; the other looks at a variety of ceremonies practiced in an urban elementary school. The names of the schools are fictitious, but the events I describe are real.

Homecoming at Oakdale High School

Homecoming at Oakdale High is integrated into School Spirit Week — a series of activities culminating in the Friday homecoming pep rally, parade, and football game, and a Saturday night dance.

In planning School Spirit Week and homecoming, the Student Council's initial task was to come up with an overall theme. The decision-making process bogged down as council members argued over possible themes. But the assistant principal, who had responsibility for student activities, got the group back on track; and it chose "The Sixties" for its theme. There was then discussion about the separate themes (or contests) for each day of School Spirit Week. After some help from the assistant principal, the council identified the following themes or activities: inside-out day, team uniform day, class colors day, dress in hippy clothes day, and school colors day. The meeting then adjourned.

Later planning, which included both faculty and students, identified a number of ancillary activities: the ugliest student contest, elaborate activities in connection with the pep rally, selling roses for "dates" to the homecoming dance, contests for decorating the school halls, voting by the senior class for the homecoming king and queen and their court, special arrangements for maintaining discipline, and specific plans for the parade.

Many activities were in a contest format, with competition among the four classes in the school. The faculty designed a point system for each contest. The class accumulating the most points over the week would be the winner. The contests included:

- ugliest person
- highest percentage wearing class colors
- best hall decorations on the "Sixties" theme
- making the most noise at the pep rally
- silly relay races at the pep rally
- best float in the parade (competition was among school clubs)

The selling of the roses for dates for the homecoming dance had an element of drama. The Student Council sold roses to students throughout the week. Each purchaser identified in writing the name and lunch period of his or her date. On Friday during the lunch hours, council members called up the designated dates -- in front of the assembled students -- to receive their roses. The attention generated by this public presentation is something only teenagers would relish.

During the planning process, the administration developed a number of documents outlining policies and procedures. An example is a form that was to be submitted by each club planning to have a float in the parade. Also, the administration and faculty tried to anticipate problems that might arise during the pep rally (last year, things got a little out of hand). Students were asked to wear school colors the day of the pep rally to show their commitment. The principal made

a firm but friendly announcement about expectations for behavior over the school PA system on the first day of the week.

At the rally the school band performed. The homecoming king and queen, their mothers, and their "court," were announced and introduced. Then, the football team members were individually introduced. The cheerleaders, in their attractive costumes, performed a series of skits/poems they had composed lampooning each football player.

The silly relay races and a series of tug-of-wars (previously organized among different school groups) were carried out before the whole assembly. Then, the cheering contest among the four classes was held. While tumultuous, the affair was basically orderly. At the end of the rally, the class accruing the most points for the whole week's activities was announced. The class and the year of its victory will be inscribed on a permanent trophy kept in the school's main hall.

After the rally, which lasted about one hour, the students moved outside in preparation for the parade. The parade included the marching band, the school pompon girls, three local fire department vehicles, a police car, eight floats, the homecoming king and queen, their mothers, and their court. (Before the parade a committee had judged the floats for the "best float" contest.) The parade caught the attention of bystanders and residents on its mile-long tour through the community. Periodically, groups of paraders would burst into loud school cheers, which were interspersed with the siren of the lead firetruck. Students on the floats threw candy to the watching children. All seemed to be having a fine time.

The football game was played Friday night before a large crowd. The next morning, students from the four classes came to school, removed the decorations from the halls, and set them up in the lunchroom where the dance was to occur. The dance, with live music by a combo, was orderly and enjoyable. Parents and teachers acted as chaperones. A week after the event, the Student Council sent "Thank You" notes to the many persons and organizations that had helped with different parts of the weeklong celebration.

The above description of the varied activities conducted during School Pride Week at Oakdale High School captures many elements of effective school ceremonies. Faculty and students worked together in planning the events. All the activities helped to reaffirm the value of school pride. The community was involved with the parade and football game. The arts were featured in the floats, the hall decorations, the marching band and dance combo, and the costumes. Attention was given to discipline and appropriate conduct. Perhaps most important was the involvement of the whole school in having fun.

Ceremonial Life at Washington Elementary School

This K-8 school, serving an urban, low-income community, has about 700 students. I observed in this school throughout the 1986-87 academic year because of its reputation for general excellence and its rich ceremonial life. Following are some examples of its ceremonies.

Each day begins with the flag salute for the entire school led by a student council member speaking over the PA system. The rite serves partly to signal the beginning of instruction, but teachers and students in individual classrooms join in with great enthusiasm. In addition, all pupils know one or more patriotic songs and, from time to time, sing a song after the salute. One teacher, with great brio, frequently leads her fifth-grade class in the national anthem. They sing it very well.

The school has many assemblies for diverse purposes. Each begins with the trooping of the color guards, the flag salute, and the singing of a patriotic song. Teachers move their classes into the assembly quickly and quietly and emphasize proper decorum. Typical assemblies include a Christmas program, a Halloween costume contest, musical presentations by each class, graduation, awards day, and presentations by special visitors. A special assembly was organized on a Monday at 9:15 a.m. — on one hour's notice — after the sudden death of the mayor over the weekend. It was conducted with great sensitivity.

Other ceremonial activities include a Halloween costume parade through the neighborhood and a schoolwide balloon-release day to celebrate the beginning of spring. Each balloon carries an appropriate note from the sending student. During the Christmas season, pupils from different ethnic groups parade through the school singing native carols, with some wearing native costumes. Farewell parties are held for all departing faculty members. Dances are conducted for upper-grade students during the last part of the school day at Christmas, Valentine's Day, and graduation.

Graduation ceremonies are elaborate. Students qualifying to graduate with honors wear their honors ribbons a week before the occasion. One rehearsal (really, the graduation minus gowns) is held before all assembled students. The rehearsal is followed by a party and dance. The next day is "real" graduation. The graduates entertain the audience with songs and short speeches. A reception for graduates, parents, and guests follows. The occasion is one of both laughter and tears.

Ceremonies bring parents into the school. The Christmas assembly is filled to overflowing. Parents help to organize many activities, including some of the parties and dances. Such involvement generates much good will for the school and serves as a form of community monitoring. When parents are in the building, they can observe pupil discipline, building cleanliness, and teacher engagement.

Faculty work hard and seem to enjoy their work. Discipline is emphasized, but students like being in this school. Parents are generally pleased. These factors all combine to create a school climate that enhances pupil achievement as reflected in above-average standardized test scores.

Vital school ceremonies provide emotional rewards for educators. They generate heightened levels of caring, respect, and commitment among all members of the school community. Ceremonies are a natural outlet for educators to express their altruism. It is my hope that this fastback will help educators find increased gratification from their work and in the services they render to students.

Suggested Readings

- Triumph of the Will*. A powerful and provocative full-length film, made in 1934, of an enormous Nazi party rally in Nuremberg, Germany. Now available on videotape. Seeing it gives one a new perspective on the power of ceremonies — for good or evil.
- Eisenstadt, S.N. *From Generation to Generation*. New York: Free Press, 1971. Explains the many ways different cultures have used rites to mark the transition from youth to adulthood.
- Kanter, Rosabeth M. *Commitment and Community*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972. Describes how communities establish structures to strengthen the commitment of their members.
- Klapp, Orrin E. *The Collective Search for Identity*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. Explains how identity is determined by the groups one is affiliated with and how symbols and ceremonies affirm that affiliation.
- Lesko, Nancy. *Symbolizing Society*. New York: Falmer/Taylor, Francis, 1988. Describes the role of ceremonies in a contemporary Catholic girls high school. Many of its themes are relevant to public school educators.
- Skinner, B.F. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971). A basic work generally outlining the techniques societies and institutions use to generate member loyalty.
- van Gennep, Arnold. *Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960. A classic work describing the psychological and social processes of rites.
- Wilkinson, Rupert. *Gentlemenly Power*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964. Describes and explains the rites developed in famous English public schools, which were really private residential schools designed to train the sons of the elite to be leaders of the future.

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