



Cap sur l'école inclusive
en Europe



Best Practice Rituals and school time Section of the module /Reasure

Contact : Umberto Cugola
<http://www.ifrass.net/>



1. Context

The context envisioned may be a primary school or a junior high school

2. Goals

This fact sheet aims at thinking about the development of rituals for both a function of learning one's place in time, which brings thus appeasement, while still cutting down the effects of constraint and the search for stereotyped behavior. The ritual also marks the passage from one space to another, the social space of the family, the MECS¹ or the ITEP² ... to the social space of the school with its organization, its hierarchies and its particular rules.

3. « Best practice » conduct

We are in a class where many pupils have attention, behavior, and autism spectrum disorders. These children are particularly agitated and unstable when arriving in the school space, and their difficulty in making a transition with the space they come from is striking. On the opposite way, when they leave school, one can notice a strong feeling of anxiety in these pupils. We can therefore consider two high points of ritualization of the passage: on arrival and on departure from the school.

- On arrival in the morning, a welcome time is provided in an appropriate space. The child can share a snack (a fruit, a biscuit and a glass of water for example) with his classmates and the adults involved in the class. One can also imagine a playing time over ten minutes: dodgeball, "blind man's bluff" etc ... Through playing the child enters into the social space of class and in relationship with the adult. The adult's involvement in a "*doing with*" is important because it is immediately accessible to the child which mitigates the effects of anxiety he/she may feel. In the same way, the idea of passing through a game table is a ritual that can help mitigate the scary effects of separation.
- On departure at the end of the day, a time of 20 minutes can be taken to give the floor to who wants to evoke his/her emotions of the day. If speaking is too complicated, one can consider a small writing

¹ Maison pour Enfants à Caractère Social, i.e. social house for children.

² Institut Thérapeutique Educatif et Pédagogique (educational and pedagogical therapeutic institute).

that the child will put in a box. At the beginning of this ritual, the little words of the day before are read by the adult who discusses the evoked emotions and regulates the flow of speech. This ensures a return to family or institution cleared of the negative emotions of the day.

- Passing from recess time towards a return in class can sometimes be distressing for the autistic child for example. The case of one who can't stand in line and who manifests stereotypical gestures. So one can create a small ritual of sitting on a bench with the AVS (school life assistant), as a way to search for a THRESHOLD. There is no general ritual fit for everyone anytime, it is sometimes necessary to adapt, to improvise rituals according to the problems encountered.
- Children who tend to act out due to their troubles must be able to identify a ritualized system of regulation. At each overflow, a reference adult takes over from the teacher and accompanies the child to an appropriate space. It is a space whose aesthetics and layout break frankly with that of the class.

There he can play, have a snack, interact with the adult who will develop this ability to listen, in order to hear beyond words. Very often, the event that triggers the acting out is only a pretext for externalizing an internal state in tension. For example, a child may be distressed by abandonment in relationship with his/her own story and act out during the day when his/her teacher announces that she is leaving school.

4. Activity evaluation

- Check the child's well-being in the collective and in learning situation. Does he/she manage to participate in class time and in other activities? Is he/she not introverted? Does he/she feel well in the exchange with the group of children or with some in particular? Does he/she feel well in the exchange with the adults around him? Is the number of overflows or "crises" down?
- Provide expression spaces with the group of children, teachers, accompanying persons and possibly the family to collect what the child feels, what he/she can say about the place that one tries to make for him/her in the school. Does he/she feel well installed at the place one is trying to make for him/her?

5. Limitations

The challenge here will be to take into account each child's singularity and needs. An autistic child doesn't have the same needs in terms of ritualizing his time as a child with behavioral disorders for example. Another pitfall to take into account too is the dependence that can be created by over-ritualizing time. Consider gradual emancipation from the rite as the child progresses through the years and levels. Finally, for snack time it is necessary to provide for a small budget and an appropriate space.

6. Prospects

Rituals and school time is a theme that should be thought globally in a school. Because it ensures a stability in the course of time which sometimes turns out to be distressing for children with SEN. But it also offers a constraining framework, a discrete authority function that makes the child available for learning. The harmonization of this practice throughout an institution doesn't have the same scope as in a single class.