

Patterns Interrupted - By Amelia Tennyson

Little Greenwood Kindergarten were prepared for their first day of filming. Permission slips signed, haircuts completed, and proud parents read their 4 years olds the riot act: listen to your teacher, do not pick your nose and sit up straight on the mat! Most importantly, do not embarrass or shame me or make me angry or else.

Since the success of their creative education grant application, Little Greenwood Kindergarten – or LGK kids, for fun! Had been practising for weeks. Mrs Orange took great gratification in her strong behavioural management approach – just look, the children were wonderful only a term into their inaugural educational year. They put their morning tea, sip and crunch, bento boxes, water bottles, No Hat No Play! hats away, returned their library books, hung up their book bags, back packs, parkers and parked themselves on the mat. Listening ears and eyes on, arms crossed, legs crossed, made the sign of the cross, nobody acting cross, because this was a growth mindset classroom.

Dear Parents and Care Givers, Mrs Orange had written, LGK has been selected to showcase a premier early learning environment. With your permission, our children will be documented over a number of weeks. Through ‘intentional play’ the children will demonstrate their extraordinary literacy and numeracy knowledge, their observance of routines and rules, their superior social skills and self-care, their manners, their adherence to the zones of regulation; all the while modelling the values of the LGK community! Mrs Orange quietly congratulated herself on her communication skills, a sophisticated melding of superior old school literacy and AI tech.

As the film crew set up surreptitiously in the little kitchen corner, a line of well-groomed and serious faced four-year-olds marched into the classroom. They conducted their morning jobs with aplomb, unhitching their cosmonaut sized-back packs, hanging them up, placing their possessions on hooks or in various cubby holes. Good boy, good girl, good job, or good morning, to each and every child as they continued to the mat for some cooperative learning.

Mrs Orange took her position on the edge of the rocker, poised such that the teak chair never really rocked, swung or squeaked in the slightest. She drew out the moment of silence as all children gracefully arranged themselves, like miniature ballet dancers denoting the end of a sequence. Or a flock of birds in the sky, wingbeats settling into stillness as the starlings dropped into their proper place. What a magnificent, well-orchestrated display, an inward nod to self.

As Mrs Orange’s lips parted to deliver her well-rehearsed morning address, there was a

tap at the door. This is unexpected, she thought, as all heads and camera swivelled to the sound. There by the door was a small smiling boy. Clutching his mother's hand, with his backpack, jumper, jacket and all other goods and chattels sandwiched between her arm and chin. The boy made a beeline to the block bookshelf, the tonk, tonk of dusty pine blocks resonated as his mother proclaimed: Hello! We're new!

Mrs Orange's memories of her first day were cloudy. She was chasing flapping geese at the bottom of her garden then marched up a hill to a weatherboard schoolhouse; an oversized, sweaty leather satchel strap rubbed up against the baby satin skin of her shoulder. She could feel her mother's cheek pressed against her own as she said goodbye.

I'm Mac! The new boy announced and began to unstack the rectangle and square blocks. Mrs Orange, a quizzical look on her face, told the children to stay put while she dealt with this glitch. Ergh, welcome Mac, now please come to the mat! But Mac continued to play stacking blocks this way and that, and a murmur ascended from the semi-circle of kids. Come to the mat, Mrs Orange repeated, but Mac kept stacking, and the murmuring hummed higher. Until one curious boy perched upright on his haunches, broke free of the pack, scampering like a meerkat towards the wooden castle creation.

Mrs Orange, a tad thrown by this breakaway, stood quietly and waved out for the pair to return. But they seemed swept up in the block tower with a convoy of matchbox cars motoring in.

While Mrs Orange waved once again, there was a swing from the circle; two more children scurried across to the play corner. They snatched up a pair of fairy wings and chef's hat off the rack, picked up some whisks and started to act. The fairy requested scrambled eggs with ice cream, as the miniature baker dusted the bench boldly with glitter.

Mrs Orange looked across to the camera crew while clearing her throat, it was time to take charge, to tell the children who's boss.

She took a step sideways then some more fly away pairs: one set bolting to unpack the paints, while another few flew to the Lego crate – plastic bricks cascaded onto the floor like colourful waves crashing at the beach. Cshh, cshh as they sorted through their spilled-out loot. More pens and pencils were tipped from canisters, papers hushed over desks, the scratching of lead and the smudging of pastels.

Mac stood proud and shouted out, this kindy is the GOAT: the greatest of all time! And a

cheer erupted from his new playmates, as some squealed and spun like helicopters. More little people popped up with their faces painted with biro, three extra eyebrows and one marked like a cat. Meow, meow, the kitten said, slinking away towards her decorated friends. The neighbourhood dog trotted into the room as the last errant few slipped out through the gliding, sliding architecturally designed doors. Brandishing bubble kits, watering cans and wands, running with prams and pushers, barrows and trolleys, a new wave of playmates poured out of the doors. A stealthy camera man crept after his small subjects, traversing the toy-strewn lino as if booby-trapped.

One child plonked themselves soundlessly in the pristine sandpit and grabbed handfuls of soft silica, the fine white particles spilling through little fingers. A solar system of bubbles haloed around their head before being ushered away by a gentle breeze. Teetering on a low brick wall, small hands strained for the forbidden fruit: the dwarf mandarin in the sensory garden – unspoiled by immature folk, maintained by the garden design specialists, bordered by purposeful plantings and artificial turf. A bucket awaited their coveted citrus pickings, a few snaffled up and another tangy fruit tossed through the air.

Mrs Orange stood like a great tree rooted to the low pile mat. As the sound of small feet slapped against lino, the whoosh of children racing around her, and laughter reverberating around the room, she felt her breaths come in sharp and fast, her back teeth bearing down, and a sound like a test pattern bleeped in her ears.

She remembered being little, sitting at a hard-wood desk, her forearms sweated and slipped against the grain in the heat. Sitting up straight, arms crossed, how the white bloused teacher had called her to the front. How that teacher had kept their class in order.

The sound of the block tower tumbling down, Mac and the children springing back and trilling too, with the interloping dog vocalising his joy before it foraged for truffle-esque treats and soft sandwiches.

What happened in class that day, it was hard to recall? Had she smirked, or snorted, chortled or guffawed? Or was it her homework, or a wrong answer she said? The classroom in chaos, the camera now swingingly wildly around, the cacophony of sounds, from down and all around. It was a spectacle in movement, disorder and noise. How she had laughed when she was slapped, slapped hard against her cheek, cracking like a stockman's whip. How she laughed harder, her own hands forcing the hilarity back as the fear, shock and shame in front of the class, and she had wondered what she had done or said or what had happened all, except that she must have done something wrong or out of line.

Mrs Orange pulled her hand away from her cheek, took a breath, and laughed again. She couldn't stop.

When the sliding doors were officially thrown open by a tousled Mrs Orange, Mac and the children raced to their expectant parents, scooped up nevertheless with spaghetti faces, mandarin fibres stuck to shirts and pressed their cheeks against theirs.