‘This is my lesson’: Ethnomethodological lessons in classroom order and social organisation for adults with learning difficulties

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Abstract

Education as practiced is predicated upon order, structure and organisation. This educational order can be ‘found’ in the classroom within lessons, activities, and tasks, and is the collaborative achievement of those present within them (e.g. teachers, students and, in this case, learning support assistants). The pivotal issue is how the various sense-making practices found in the setting (e.g. talk, gesture, gaze, embodied action) enable those present to ‘find their place’ within the present educational lesson. These considerations are made perspicuous in the research reported here as the various students present have attributed learning difficulties and disabilities and are attending a Further Education (FE) College to take part in a course purposefully designed to teach them practical everyday living skills. The specific learning difficulties attributed ranged in type and degree and the relevance of these designations will be documented when necessary. For present purposes issues of order, structure, organisation and authority inundate the opening sequence of a timetabled cleaning lesson in which an individual student verbally dissents and makes an embodied challenge to the authority of the teacher, threatening the organisation of the whole lesson. As a result the teacher (in conjunction with others) successfully reintegrates the stubborn student by utilising a series of methods and resources explicated in the paper to include: cohorting practices, claiming ‘ownership’ of lessons (linked to ‘lesson appropriate actions’) and ‘if/then formulations’ as a warning technique.

INTRODUCTION

If we take it as read that classrooms (amongst other things) form the bedrock of education, then what happens within them becomes analytically interesting and important. The primary ambition of this paper is to contribute to an understanding of the (social) order and organisation found within these settings. Sacks’ (1989) statement that there is

'order at all points' reflects such a position in that slicing open any piece of (educationally-situated) data at hand reveals an orderliness and discernable (or findable) sense in terms of what is happening. What is at stake are the sense-making practices and co-ordinated action fundamental to students 'finding their place' within the on-going activities and learning lessons[1] (Macbeth 2011; Lindwall et al. 2015).

In this instance, 'order' needs to be understood in terms of the principles and analytic approaches of ethnomethodology (hereafter EM) and conversation analysis (hereafter CA). Order, as explicated throughout this paper, refers to the way in which the actions and conduct of parties to a social setting are built upon a 'world-known-in-common' that is made *available, discernable* and *recognisable* for what it is, for all present, by reference to preceding events, the actions of the teacher or other pupils in the cohort or class *now*, other classes or lessons previously attended and so forth. The following quotes provide nuanced explanations of this argument.

> The idea [is] that we might look to find the organisation that is, so to speak, put there to be found. (Sharrock and Anderson 1982, 178).

> EM [ethnomethodology] pointed to local structures of practical action in everyday worlds. It re-sited the locus of social order from distal organisations of formal structure shaping action *from afar* to local orders of competent practice and practical reasoning from within, assembling order from within. (Macbeth 2003, 242).

The core objective of this paper is to flesh out the meaning of the above quotes in a particular educational setting, namely a college in which students with moderate to severe learning difficulties and disabilities are taught a variety of daily skills in the hope of maximising their independence outside of the specific educational environment. In particular, the article applies the analytical tools of EM and CA in this specific kind of setting to investigate classroom cohorting practices, how students/staff claim and manage 'ownership' of lessons (linked to 'lesson appropriate actions') and the various techniques used to formulate and create order (e.g. 'if/then' formulations).

The educational setting and broader context

The audio-visual materials analysed in this paper are drawn from an educational course in the UK designed by Mencap[2] (an advocate group for those with learning

[1] According to Macbeth (2003, 244–5), one of the crucial insights offered by Mehan's (1979a) classic study was the way in which it demonstrated that classroom activities '[w]ere not only "lessons about," [mathematics, geography or English] but virtual, praxiological curricula for *doing* them, for every student who did not yet quite know how to do them'.

[2] For more information see their dedicated website (http://www.mencap.org.uk/). This type of organisation represents an example of what Goffman (1990) referred to as the 'own and the wise' where the membership is made up of both those with learning difficulties themselves ('the own') and advocates ('the wise') familiar

disabilities) and mostly implemented in established educational institutions where mainstream courses were also run. The college course known as the 'Essential Skills Award' (hereafter ESA) was designed for adults (aged 16 or over)[3] with a range of attributed moderate to severe learning difficulties with the express purpose of providing a safe and supported environment in which each student could learn, practise and repeat practical daily living skills that could enhance their independence in their everyday lives away from the class. As such the classroom and community-based lessons and activities that constituted the ESA were intended to replicate the everyday experiences of the students (e.g. when at home, working, socialising etc). The educational logic and policy that this encapsulates is based on the following principle:

> To maximise learners' potential for learning, the essential skills should be *taught through practical activities* and *wherever possible within natural settings*. (Mencap 2001, 10, emphasis added).

The main 'subject' areas 'taught' and, more importantly, practised included: shop, cook and eat; cleaning and personal hygiene; art and crafts; community and leisure; and information technology.[4] Within these timetabled lessons each student would generally be assigned a specific task tailored to their abilities, (in)competence and individual need[5] which related to their personalised targets for the 2-year course. While each specific task tends to be individually assigned it is important to emphasise that the work being carried out by every student is part of a timetabled 'lesson' in common.[6] The college accepted students across the broad spectrum of competences, abilities and needs, and the class seen in the data extract to follow is evidence of this inclusive policy in which each student's attributed learning difficulties are noted and instructions/work 'recipient designed' (Sacks et al. 1978).

Note on the researcher's role in the setting: developing an ethnographic sensibility

During the academic year 2004–5 I worked as a Learning Support Assistant (LSA hereafter) in the college previously mentioned. This work experience provided an understanding of the working practices of the college, organisational knowledge, course structure, and the lessons themselves. Given that much of my timetabled schedule

with the lived experiences of those living with learning difficulties, such as family, friends, teachers, healthcare professionals, volunteers, etc.

[3] In the UK educational system, as it stood in the school year 2003–4, mandatory school attendance ended at 16 years old. In this study the student ages ranged from 16 to 49 years old.

[4] The 'subjects' or topics on the ESA timetable at this level bear some resemblances to ordinary school curriculum. However, the actual activities involved and student 'targets' incorporate mundane skills and practices that schools do not ordinarily assess. For example, 'shop, cook and eat' entails the students selecting meals, writing shopping lists (where possible), safely navigating their way to the local superstore, behaving appropriately when in public, in addition to locating the right ingredients, dealing with checkouts (which involves communicating with the cashier and handling money) and so on.

[5] Only rarely did all students in the classroom conduct exactly the same task.

[6] For instance, during the 'shop, cook and eat' lesson the students choose a common meal to prepare and then different aspects of the meal preparation would be shared out amongst the students present.

involved assisting and supporting the various students on the ESA (either as individuals or within small groups), this meant that I experienced a high degree of exposure to each student seen in the video recorded data and that I therefore developed a familiarity with how their attributed learning difficulties and (physical) disabilities were made visibly and hearably manifest and therefore publicly available. This is not, however, a study of any particular learning difficulty (autism for instance) in general. Routinely there would be between 2 and 4 LSAs present per lesson. As LSAs we received no *formal* training in the specific learning difficulties of the cohort and instead we learnt from and with the students about themselves (Butt and Lowe 2012). Within the instructional environments no mention of attributed learning difficulties was made. Instead it is a study of the *education of a group of adults* who have attributed learning difficulties.[7]

BEGINNING THE WEEKLY 'CLEANING' LESSON

Extract orientation

The following extended sequence is taken from an audio-visual recording of what was locally called the 'cleaning' lesson, although this term was a gloss for 'cleaning and personal hygiene' within the ESA guidebook (Mencap 2001). This entailed each student being assigned cleaning tasks that they had to complete around the college premises (e.g. washing up in the classroom, washing windows in hall display cabinets or hoovering the college boardroom etc). They were normally accompanied by a member of staff who supervised, instructed (where necessary) and evaluated each student accordingly.

Its sense as a 'beginning' of something new (i.e. separating what is about to commence from the previous time period, lunchtime) will be critically important in the interaction between the teacher (for *this* lesson each week) and one particular student. That is, there is a disagreement as to what should happen next, which takes the form of a discussion of '*this* lesson appropriate actions'.

Prior to this sequence a number of notable things have occurred. The students have been encouraged to pack away or stop what they had been doing during lunchtime (e.g. jigsaw puzzles, playing on the computers, etc). The teacher (T1 on the transcript) has

[7] This context can be understood as a 'perspicuous setting' to explore these issues (Garfinkel, 2002). Analytically this study adopted what Schegloff (2003) refers to as Type II analysis 'from the "neurologically impaired" to Conversation Analysis' in which data in which the neurological impaired are present (or here the those with learning difficulties) is used to find phenomena that can shed light on conversational practices in general that might have remained unexplicated otherwise. This method is in contradistinction to the work of Wootton (1999) and Local and Wootton (1995) on autism and Wootton (1989; 1990) and Peskett and Wootton (1985) on Down's syndrome in which conversation analysis (CA) is used as a means of learning about specific communicative practices of people with such disorders or syndromes (known as Type I analysis that Schegloff calls 'From Conversation Analysis to "neurologically compromised" data', or "applied C.A."). For example, Wootton utilised CA to study the unique features of echolalia displayed by autistic people, which can take an immediate or contextual form (Local and Wootton 1995) and a delayed form (Wootton 1999). However, it is important to state that these approaches commonly utilise CA as a method of producing 'professional' or academic analysis, whereas the ethnographic approach of the research reported here is more ethnomethodological in orientation as it focuses on members' methods (in my case as an LSA).

written on the white board the tasks that each student will pursue during the course of this lesson, she has informed some of the LSA's as to who they are observing and instructing and what task they are doing during the course of the lesson, and she has also collected the box of cleaning products ready for the students to gather the required materials when instructed to do so. During this time PH (a student) has approached the teacher mid-conversation and said "Miss"[8] to which the teacher courteously replied "Just a minute, Paul", an interaction that is crucial to what happens next.

Parties present

Table 1 (below) provides an overview of the parties involved in this interaction. The inclusion of the details of each student's attributed learning difficulty(ies) should not be seen as a full blown explanation of their behaviour or the way in which tasks are selected and instructions given. Although in this sequence it is possible to provide an understanding of the teacher's selection and designation of task to each student, many of the tasks of the day could be performed with modification and support by any of those present. However, there are of course some practical constraints and difficulties. This acknowledgement is instructive in that it reveals how the simple identification of the existence of even a particular learning difficulty or disability does not provide the reader with sufficient information regarding its specific manifestation and impact on this individual. Whilst the precise nature of the skills, as well as limitations, of the students are to an extent previously known to the teacher and subsequently influence task selection and allocation, the level or type of instruction and support needed by the student in the course of the on-going remains to be discovered or revealed.

Teacher	**Learning Support Assistant**	**Students**
T1 ('Jenny')	A1 ('Chris')—the author	PH ('Paul')—Cohen Syndrome
	A2	JB—Autism
	A3	JL—Autism
		RS ('Richard')—Prader Willi Syndrome
		JM—Downs Syndrome
		SS ('Stuart')—Cerebral Palsy

Table 1: Details of staff and students present

NB all of the identities of the parties involved in this study have been anonymised to protect the interests of those included in this paper. Names are only provided if the individual in question is specifically referred to during the sequence presented here.

[8] This type of utterance is akin to the seeking of a 'ticket to talk' (Sacks 1975), which is discussed in terms of owning lessons and talking 'rights' later in the paper.

Figure 1: Orientation picture—starting positions—left front PH ('Paul'); centre right (standing) T1 ('Jenny')

01 T1 Right: ev'rybody
02 (0.4)
03 JB[9] There you are °Jenny°
04 T1 Paul are you going to come and join us (.) today. We have a lot to do
05 ((PH starts to walk back to main table)), Kyle's off, so we're
06 already one person down (0.3) and I need you (.) to, um: (2.0) just
07 show me what a professional you are (0.4). Now you did want to speak
08 to me a little bit and I asked you to wait so have you got something
09 to tell me first?
10 (0.5)
11 PH Yeh I wanna (0.3), fi:nd I wanna ((Pointing towards computers))(0.2)
12 sum triple H's pic-chures on the com-put-ers
13 (0.4)
14 T1 Well can we leave that [til tomorrow.
15 PH [N:o N:o, I'll do it now:
16 ((Walks off again))
17 T1 **No you will not do it now Paul because this is my lesson. You can't**
18 **do it *now:***
19 JB It's Jenny's lesson
20 T1 This is my lesson Paul ((PH arrives at computer area))
21 JB I know

[9] JB remains out of shot throughout the entire sequence as he is sat at the other end of the main group of tables.

22 T1 And if you're not prepared to take part in my lesson then we might as
23 well ring home and have you sent home.
24 PH **N::o.**
25 (0.7)
26 T1 Well come and sit down then please (2.2) I've had this performance
27 for you- from you Paul now, (0.3) for the last three lessons
28 (1.9)
29 A3 ((approached PH)) Paul, come on, sit down. Let's turn this off.
30 (0.2)
31 PH N::o.
32 (0.2)
33 No::, because- it's not computer time.
34 JB I know, it's not [computer time now.
35 A3 [Come and sit down and listen to Jenny. (0.7) Come on
36 (0.6) *Ev*erybody' s waiting for you.
37 PH (Just I need to)
38 A3 No, not now.
39 (3.4)
40 Come and sit down Paul.
41 (2.4)
42 T1 Paul, do I need to start this lesson without you.
43 PH No.
44 JB I hope not.
45 T1 Well you're stood over there and everybody else is sitting here.
46 JB Ah yes
47 T1 Well I need to start my lesson (.) n:ow. If you're not going to come
48 and sit down in this chair (0.2) then we might as well start without
49 yer.
50 (5.7)
51 ((PH walks back to chair))
52 ((T1 pulls his chair out from under table))
53 T1 Right, Thank you very much. ((PH sits down))
54 I do appreciate that. Thank you. Richard, are you going to mark the
55 register today.

Table 2: Lesson opening—full sequence[10]

[10] The transcript for this paper has been produced using a simplified selection of conversation analytic transcription protocols originally devised by Jefferson (2004).

Figure 2: Positions at the end of the sequence—PH ('Paul') now seated left; T1 ('Jenny') centre right preparing register

ANALYSIS

Gross characterisation of the sequence

To begin with it might be helpful to make a first pass through the data to find our bearings before we look at the material in more detail. The events that unfold can be said to be the result of the earlier conversational interchanges between the teacher and student. The student, having waited patiently, is invited by the teacher to tell her *now* what he wanted to say *previously*. What this will come to be is the pivotal element of how this particular sequence plays out. The student tells the teacher that he would like to go back on the computers and continue finding pictures of his favourite WWE wrestler Triple H, which he had being doing over the lunch recess. Now, the teacher tries to politely (and vaguely) turn down this request and to turn attention back to beginning the lesson at hand, namely 'cleaning'. This results in the elongated disagreement sequence that we see unfolding in which the teacher, a fellow student and a LSA try and eventually succeed in bringing Paul back into the group that is assembled ready to begin the group session. How this happens in its interactional detail will now be explicated in terms of cohorting practices, owning lessons and if/then formulations.

Cohorting practices: inclusion/exclusion strategies

At this point in proceedings all the relevant parties have arrived in the classroom (i.e. a teacher, three LSAs and the six students). The teacher has set out the cleaning materials on a separate table and is now *personally* ready to begin the cleaning lesson that is scheduled to take place on a Monday afternoon as was customary. It is at this moment that she produces the 'attention-getting device' or cohort assembling[11] utterance on line 1 (Schegloff 1968, 1080; Payne and Hustler 1980; see also Atkinson et al. 1978 on re-focusing attention in meetings). "Everybody" in this sense is an inclusive category reference and one that intends to constitute the group of students assembled as a 'class-as-a-whole' making the teacher-class a two-party interaction rather than series of two-part conversations.[12] The 'everybody' at this point also includes Learning Support Assistants, although their role vis-à-vis the teacher and cohort category-pairing is somewhat more difficult to classify and define neatly. There is no single 'device' or collective term that can be invoked to cover these separate categories or identities in this situation so 'everybody' does a fair amount of work.[13]

JB at this juncture (line 3) also acknowledges the teachers presence ("There you are Jenny"), her utterance and her "right"[14] alone as the teacher to start the lesson, a fact that the teacher will have to explicitly state during the course of this particular lesson (see Payne 1982; Payne and Hustler 1980; Macbeth 1992, 137ff). Furthermore such a request for attention awaits the discovery as to 'what' it is the teacher will say. A 'warrant to listen' is thus issued. However, it soon becomes apparent that the cohort is not yet fully assembled in that not all members of the class are seated around the *appropriate* cluster of tables. To rectify this omission and slight delay the teacher issues a polite 'invitation' to Paul to "come and join us today". What we may call a 'negotiation problem' arises initially between lines 4 and 14. By this I mean the student continues to assert his preferences as to the afternoon's proceedings in spite of the institutional restrictions and mandates that we see displayed in the video. As such we see the teacher exhibit (through her 'worded' and non-vocal actions) concepts of inclusion and exclusion from the cohort. According to Payne (1982, 96) part of the reason for this is that the 'outsider' or rogue student provides

[11] 'Learning Support Assistants' are included in this grouping in as much as they themselves await instruction regarding which student(s) they will be supervising or monitoring during the course of the lesson at hand. Therefore it is imperative that they are also listening to the particular tasks or activities assigned to the students' as it will fall to them to instruct, prompt and encourage the students during the course of the lesson (see McHoul 1978; Sacks et al. 1978 on the warrant to listen).

[12] As Hammersley (1974; 1976) states the mobilisation of pupil attention in this manner is predicated upon the fact it is done for a 'purpose' i.e. 'participation' in the lessons activities.

[13] Of course the membership categories of teacher, LSA (in modern educational settings) and students can still be 'heard' as going together and part of a classroom setting, whereas Prime Minister or mother would be hearably and visibly incongruent (on 'hearer's maxims' see Sacks 1974, 219ff).

[14] See Schegloff and Sacks (1974, 241ff), and Goodwin and Goodwin (1990, 16 fn8) on how utterances such as "okay", "well", "[all] right" and so on mark 'transitions' such as openings, pre-closings, topic shifts etc. Here it is used as a beginning device; see Payne (1976, 38; 1979, 80) for a parallel case in which the teacher uses "right" as a 'marking off or changing of activities' away from bringing the class to order and toward the subject to be talked about during the lesson.

a continual threat that may disassemble the cohort or class and disrupt or delay the commencement of the classroom activities.

The use of the 'term of address' ("Paul" line 4) given to an individual student in this fashion indicates here the beginning of a separation of the individual student from the cohort or class and furthermore we start to see that much of the forthcoming talk is teacher-individual student, rather than teacher-cohort in which group instruction is made possible (Schegloff, 1968, 1080). As Macbeth states, the teacher has in their toolkit the knowledge that cohorts can on occasion be sub-divided (e.g. separating the badly behaved from the rest of the class) or the teacher has the option to resort to the 'availability *to* individual[ly] address [a named student], and penetration of the anonymity of a noisy assemblage' (Macbeth 1992, 142).[15]

It is to counter this potential issue that the teacher invites Paul to join the group at the main tables. An 'invitation' (line 4), to use conversation analytic parlance, forms the first part of an 'adjacency pairing' (invitation-acceptance/declination) of which question-answers, greeting-greeting and offer-acceptance/refusal are other examples (Schegloff and Sacks 1974, 238ff; Schegloff 2007, 13ff). The hearing of the production of a first pair part makes the production of the appropriate second pair part the correct next action for the hearer (any absence potentially being noticeably or 'officially absent' (Schegloff 1968, 1083; 2007, 20) and can be potentially topicalised).[16] For obvious reasons spoken invitations generally are responded to with spoken replies. However, in this case the lack of such a feature is treated as unproblematic in that the reply comes in the form of an action, i.e. soon after receiving the invitation the student makes a move away from the computer area and back toward the main table where the rest of the class is situated. Thus the 'form' that the appropriate second pair part takes (an acceptance in this instance) is tied to the particular nature or content of the invitation.

There is a certain amount of detail contained within the 'invitation' that can be explicated further. The teacher is, to an extent, opening up a relevant division (centred on 'us') in the hope that the out of place student will take his place at the main table. The "us" in a sense plays off of the "everybody" in line 1 and makes apparent that "you" (the student) cannot considered to be part of that grouping on this occasion (line 4). The spatial separation reflexively reinforces and makes explicit this 'distance'.

The teacher's subsequent remarks about being a "professional"[17] and pulling your weight in a reduced class (due to Kyle's absence acknowledged on line 5) adds to the notion that being a part of this educational 'class' is akin to being part of a 'team', a quality which Sacks (1974, 220–221) refers to as 'duplicative organisation'. Thus although each individual will eventually be given a cleaning task of their own, the teacher is trying

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[15] Of course this need not be seen as purely a negative option that is available to teachers in that, under different circumstances to the one being analysed here, individual address can be used to select an individual to answer a question or carry out a particular task (McHoul 1978). Of course a huge list of studies could be provided here.

[16] See Sacks' example where a very young girl is reprimanded by her mother for failing to produce a greeting when one is offered to her (1974, 227).

[17] This term is discussed further later in the paper.

to suggest that the satisfactory completion of all the activities or tasks that she has planned are in some way a 'class' responsibility.[18]

Physical exclusion

Another way that cohort boundaries are marked in the classroom can be explained is by employing the everyday interactional notion of the 'F-Formation' originally described by Adam Kendon (1990). Without wishing to get bogged down in formal definitions this concept basically refers to the way in which face-to-face interaction between two or more people is built upon all participants orienting to one another in the form of body positioning, gestures, gaze and so on. For now I simply wish to emphasise the way in which the teacher's talk (that express separation) is intertwined with and plays on the F-formation type properties of the classroom.[19] The division between Paul and the rest of the class is visibly and spatially accentuated by the physical separation (Paul has not joined his colleagues), there is also the misalignment of height with his fellow students (he is standing whereas they are seated), as well as the way in which him standing means that the focus on the 'standing' teacher (who eventually becomes the only person standing in the room) is further disrupted and the 'system' interfered with.

During the course of the sequence the teacher and a LSA (A3) 'ungloss' what it means to "take part" (line 22) in this lesson *at this time*. This involves stating what activities will be permitted (or otherwise) as previously articulated ("it's not computer time" line 34), as well as the repeated request to 'come and sit down' (line 26, 29, 35, 41, 50), which is sometimes accompanied with additional instructions to 'turn this [computer] off', 'listen', and to 'sit down in this chair'. The demarcation between PH's actions and the rest of the class is explicitly stated by the teacher on lines 45 ("Well you're stood over there and everybody else is sitting here") whereby the contrasts include over there/here,[20] standing/sitting and you/everybody else. As Birth (2001, 242) neatly puts it (in educational settings) 'groups sit, and individuals act'[21] and as such it is abundantly clear that PH's

[18] This trait would seem to be true of practical tasks (such as the one under consideration here) and Questions-With-Known-Answer sequences (or QWKA sequences as they are sometimes referred as) (Macbeth 2003; Mehan, 1979a; 1979b). Payne and Hustler (1980, 58, Extract 3, Line 36) record the teacher saying 'anybody else help him' when a student displays signs of difficulty with the question asked. Their analysis of this utterance in line with the topic of their paper, namely cohorting a class, runs as follows: 'Although the teacher has asked the question of an individual the others can see it as theirs as well. As the one is having difficulties the others can help him out because to a certain extent his difficulties are also theirs. The difficulties [or the task or activities in general] belong to the whole class' (1980, 58).

[19] A similar notion in the ethnomethodological literature is Pollner's (1979) 'explicative transactions' and 'visibility arrangements'. As his paper neatly demonstrates 'visibility arrangements' can be talked of, talked up, as well as being embodied.

[20] This speaks to not only the physical separation but also the fact that there is a 'correct' set of tables to be present at.

[21] The findings and analysis presented in this paper deviate from Birth's in a fundamental way in that his data of university lectures is more lexically-bound and as such he puts a fair amount of emphasis on the fact that students' usage of 'we' when talking about lecture-based activities relate to the collective as 'passive'. This of course is opposed to the 'isolated individuals' who act up and in terms of their category identification are very much separate from the wider group. Thus while the foreground-background identification work

physical presence in the same room is not sufficient on its own for the teacher to start the lesson and instead it is required that he demonstrates he is oriented to the same on-going course of activities as everybody else. It could thus be argued that PH's actions represent an embodied challenge to authority.

On owning lessons: Some introductory remarks

Lessons are in some sense the preserve of teachers. The ownership of lessons and corresponding rights will be fleshed out and exhibited in the current section, particularly with regard to how this ownership can place restrictions upon other parties to the setting (in this case a specific student).

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07      show me what a professional you are (0.4). Now you did want to speak
08      to me a little bit and I asked you to wait so have you got something
09      to tell me first?
10      (0.5)
11  PH  Yeh I wanna (0.3), fi:nd I wanna ((Pointing towards computers))(0.2)
12      sum triple H's pic-chures on the com-put-ers
13      (0.4)
14  T1  Well can we leave that[ til tomorrow.
15  PH                         [N:o           N:o, I'll do it now:
16      ((Walks off again))
17  T1  No you will not do it now Paul because this is my lesson. You can't
18      do it now:
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Table 3: Excerpt—lines 7–18

With the outlying student's cooperation and participation seemingly secured (around line 7) the teacher allows him permission to raise an issue mentioned prior to the lesson without knowing the full implication of what it might consist of or the consequences that it may lead to. The teacher's willingness is accounted for by the fact the student is deemed to have politely and patiently waited to gain the right to speak[22] (or to cash in his 'ticket') whilst the teacher got the classroom ready and prepared herself to begin (Sacks 1975). However, it is important to realise that by allowing the student to 'tell' her something[23] the teacher in no way commits herself to acting on whatever it is he comes to say (see

somewhat parallels the analysis presented in this paper, the type of data, methods and subsequent characterisation of the cohort is ill-fitting in this case.

[22] As Sacks (Sacks 1974, 229ff) argues there are some membership categories that appear to have 'restricted rights to talk', e.g. children vis-à-vis adults or in this case students vis-à-vis teachers. In the latter case the teacher has the right to deny the student the right to talk as they manage the 'topics' that any talk may consist of (see Payne and Hustler 1980, 55). Elsewhere Sacks (Sacks 1995, 256-7) has talked of 'improper conversationalists' such as those mentioned previously. However, these should not be understood as universal rules.

[23] The fairly open-ended nature of the teacher's question means that Paul could make the use of the permission granted to ask a question, make a request or make an announcement for instance (Schegloff 2007; Terasaki 2004).

Mehan (1979a) on the Initiation-Response-Evaluation turn-taking structure that is common in classroom settings in which the teacher as initiator has the right, sequentially and authoritatively, to remark upon or judge student contributions).

Watson's (1986; 1987) explication of how background assumptions and relevancies relate to the practical work of an organisation,[24] can provide some useful insights into this case. He outlines two principles that a counsellor has to bear in mind when answering a call at a helpline. Namely, a 'provisional relevance' as to whether the telephone call, or in our case a request, will turn out to be appropriate, valid and the like for a particular type of helpline,[25] and a 'prospective circumstantiality' element, or better put a 'it all depends' clause, whereby no promises of help can be made without sufficient *grounds* (Watson (1987, 274), see also Sharrock and Turner (1978) for a similar idea in relation to calls to the police).

Arguably the same notion applies quite neatly to Paul's utterance and the way that the teacher evaluates it in a fashion that seemingly rejects his request (line 14). That is, how the teacher will respond to what Paul says is very much conditional and contingent matter. While this is certainly so the teacher still has to satisfy Paul as to why he is being thwarted as no reason or account has *yet* been provided. However, at this point what we are seeing is the manifestation of the so-called 'negotiation problem', whereby it is 'opened up' by the teacher (lines 7–9) and 'closed down' by her once Paul has said his piece (lines 11–12),[26] first in a soft and delayed[27] declination (line 14). However, this method is soon abandoned in favour of proffering an immediate, emphatic and categorical "**No**" on line 17,[28] when Paul issues a stern and unswerving response in overlap with the teacher's rebuff ("no, no I'll do it now" on line 15). The remainder of the sequence is taken up with Paul's refusal to accept the teacher's evaluation of his comments and the consequences of his actions, with the teacher quickly becoming more assertive and explicit about what Paul can and cannot do.

Thus, as Hustler and Payne (1982, 57) state 'it is in [their] spare time that they [the students] can do things they may want to', such as going on the computers or doing jigsaw puzzles in this case, unlike lesson time. The upshot of this as Hustler and Payne (1982, 56) neatly outline is that:

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[24] In his research this consisted of a telephone service for those contemplating suicide.

[25] This might be described in a short-handed manner as a 'wait and see' policy whereby the call is treated as relevant 'until further notice', which is intimately tied in to the second clause outlined by Watson.

[26] Recall that this lesson is designated for cleaning, personal hygiene and self-presentation.

[27] This is based upon the conversation-based findings of Sacks (1987) and Pomerantz (1978; 1984) whereby acceptances of offers and the like, are produced on-time or straight away with little or no detectable delay. Delays under this reading indicate a dispreferred response is to follow and are often softened in their formulation. The 'soft' component relates to the way in which she says he can carry on his search "tomorrow", where she presumably means during break or lunch time tomorrow (i.e. the student's 'free time').

[28] The immediacy of the teacher's response is deliberately in sharp contrast to her original soft approach. It seems pretty unproblematic to suggest that the teacher's utterance, and the manner in which it is made, represent an attempt to quickly shut-down a situation that could easy escalate if her authority and opposition is not stated clearly, firmly and early enough. Further it makes it explicit to the student that what is occurring is certainly not a 'negotiation' or anything akin to one.

> Lesson time is teacher time in that it is time during which the teacher has control, time in which the teacher will decide what the pupils can [and cannot] do.

In this way, generally speaking, the organisational constraints of the college timetable means that students cannot propose what activities the class should be engaged in at any given time (unless they are told otherwise *by the teacher* as occasionally happened on the ESA course under examination).[29] As such PH is deemed to be speaking out of place. This filters into the following discussion, which documents how the teacher accounts for her stance on this matter at this time by recourse to the *ownership of lesson proceedings*.[30]

On owning lessons: 'This is my lesson'

The contestation of lesson activities can also be explored in terms of ownership of the lesson. In this way the question at hand is how can we account for the teacher's pronouncement that it is "my lesson"?[31] (This utterance occurs on lines 17, 20, 22 and 47). That is, what does it achieve and why is it used?[32] For current purposes I will explore these issues solely in terms of what Sacks talked about as 'possessables' and 'possessitives' (Sacks 1995, 382ff; see also Garfinkel and Wieder 1992, 184–187). The former relates to the question 'What objects are possessions, recognisably so'?, how it is possible for a member to tell when 'something' has **no owner** which is what a possessable is and which therefore you could own if you so wished.[33] Whereas:

> 'Possessitives' are a class of classes of objects which, when cases of the class are encountered or talked of, they're recognised to be **somebody's possession**' (Sacks 1995, 384).[34]

As such what we are dealing is the 'recognition problem' in which a valid question would be how do you know or ascertain that something is **owned by someone**.

The latter concept is critical in terms of authority in that, other than the teacher, students, LSAs or other visitors can also know or recognise that the lesson is hers.[35]

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[29] For instance, stating leisure preferences (during 'community and leisure' lessons) or choosing things to cook (during 'shop, cook and eat' lessons) are times that are set aside to encourage all of the students to make choices, state preferences, pursue interests and so forth. In keeping with the themes of this paper you might say that these opportunities are overseen and ratified.

[30] This matter is flagged up as it relates to the shift in the activities when the stage of the day is lesson time. This point relates to an interchange between A2 and Paul prior to the extract in which she is heard to tell him "you're in a lesson *now*".

[31] This type of utterance has been found by others in classroom settings (see Payne 1982; Hustler and Payne, 1982, 54ff).

[32] As Garfinkel (1967) illustrated long ago this distinction is often harder to find and maintain in practice.

[33] One such example that Sacks (Sacks 1995, 386) gave is the conversation between a boy and his parents where it is established that a crate that the boy intends to take home is no longer wanted (it is on a pile of rubbish awaiting burning) and as such becomes 'possessable'.

[34] Arguably Sacks' (1974) hearer's and viewer's maxims work in this fashion also.

[35] Notice, however, that ownership of a lesson may be consider to be of a different order to ownership of a car and may require an entirely different set of skills to detect or figure out (see Sacks, 1972; 1974). By which

Hence JB (a fellow student) hearably orients to the notion that lessons are owned by teachers (lines 19, 21, 34, 46). Thus students can also be said to understand and orient to the teacher's authority. The LSA also orients to the lesson as the teacher's possession, which gives them alone the right to make a start (barring unforeseen circumstances such as teacher illness etc). The LSA in line 35 encourages Paul to come back to the group and sit down and be ready to 'listen to Janice' (the teacher) and not anyone else. The teacher should therefore also be listened to and *now* is the time to do so. The LSA does not, in terms of who can start the lesson, have the same authority and can only 'piggy-back' or reinforce the authority of the teacher and ultimately defers to that order (Goodwin and Goodwin 1990).[36] In a different setting[37] Anderson et al. (1991) have talked of a similar phenomenon as 'decisions-that-I-can-make' and 'actions-that-I-can-take'. Evidently, there are manifest differences in terms of rights, responsibilities, duties and actions undertaken by the different staff strata, which are knowable and known, visible and seen by those present regardless of status or (dis)ability.

The question that runs throughout this paper is whether Paul also recognises and acknowledges the teacher's possession of the lesson and what will happen now, next or later? If not, then the following point from Sacks is relevant:

> The differentiation between the two classes, 'possessitives' and 'possessables,' gives us some rather important socialisation tasks. That is, coming to see 'possessitives' and coming to know how it is a possessitive can be acquired, free, has *got to be learnt*, that is perfectly plain (Sacks 1995: 386, my emphasis).

It is distinctions such as these that the students are required to learn in order to maximise their 'independence'. As such an essential component of this process is to follow instructions and take responsibility, which are requirements in the classroom as well as potentially in the workplace (Mencap 2001). One cannot last long in a job without participating or taking responsibility and so forth, which is a potential next step for students on this type of course.

If/then formulations

To link this notion of 'ownership' of a lesson as outlined above and student independence, I will briefly explore two utterances made by the teacher when trying to bring Paul back into the class or group. In effect they can be taken as exemplars of the independence issue as it arose as a distinctly practical and interactional matter in this setting. These

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I mean that to talk of 'owning' a lesson appears to be more abstract in nature and subsequently might be harder to grasp for those with learning difficulties.

[36] An exception within this type of lesson is that each LSA would be assigned one or two students to shadow, monitor and instruct, often outside the classroom away from the teacher. This division of labour meant LSAs would be expected to independently evaluate and correct student behaviour, as well as feedback to the teacher at the end of the session in front of the students.

[37] An air traffic control booth.

take the form of what Macbeth (1991, 297ff; 1994) calls 'If/then' formulations, which form a 'contingency pair'. For example:

'If [you carry on talking during quiet time]/then [detention after school maybe the result]'

The two 'if/then' formulations in the extract under examination can be found in lines 22–26 and 47–51 on the transcript.

```
22  T1  And if you're not prepared to take part in my lesson then we might as
23      well ring home and have you sent home.
24  PH  N::o.
25      (0.7)
26  T1  Well come and sit down then please (2.2)
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Table 4: Excerpt—lines 22–26

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47  T1  Well I need to start my lesson (.) n:ow. If you're not going to come
48      and sit down in this chair (0.2) then we might as well start without
49      yer.
50      (5.7)
51      ((PH walks back to chair))
```

Table 5: Excerpt—lines 47–51

The data here exhibits the if/then format in which the teacher says that if the student fails to join in (which is a base level measure for all students on the course) then he might be sent home. Paul strongly declines this offer in his follow-up reply, "No". The second formulation is in some senses softer as it involves the student missing out on some lesson activities whilst maintaining the opportunity to join in at any time (which he would not be able to do at home of course), but still contains the exclusionary composition that was discussed earlier in reference to being part of the cohort or class. Both 'if/then formulations are negatively phrased to emphasise the separation between the individual student ("you're not) and the rest of the group as he is refusing to join the class ("we might") (Watson, 1987). The emphasis on the cohort organisation over individual action is made plain here.

The issue of what independence constitutes in this setting is made vivid when the implementation of 'If/then' formulations is considered. What this type of action exhibits is how its usage makes it the student's prerogative to choose, from a limited number of options, what he wants to do (although going on the computers remains off the table as it were). This type of utterance moves towards what were considered to be higher level skills on the course such as understanding cause and effect, as well as making decisions

and behaving responsibly. Of course part of the student's act of choosing and weighing up the different courses of action is predicated upon understanding that any continuing misbehaviour is 'an upgrade, escalation [of tension] or [ultimately] risky business' that is not advisable given that, as Weber (Bendix 1977) said, the authority figure will finally prevail at the last following any prolonged resistance but may have to go to considerable length to do so (Macbeth 1992, 135). In this way it is possible to argue that he is deemed capable and 'more than able'[38] to make the decision for himself for it is he who has to restore the order to the classroom if he wishes to take part.

In many respects this line of analysis turns on whether or not he will merit the status of 'professional'[39] worker in today's class (line 7). The teacher is in effect setting PH a 'task' for the lesson which is to earn or prove he is worthy of such a status upgrade.[40] Arguably this is a reference to his behaviour in previous lessons (which the teacher makes explicit on lines 26–27) whereby his inability to settle at the beginning of lessons is utilised here as a barometer of his current poor "performance".[41] As demonstrated at line 53 PH is finally reintegrated (and reintegrates himself) into the class and the lesson that is underway.

CONCLUSION

While the content of the data extract presented here relates to a specialist educational course designed for adults with attributed moderate to severe learning difficulties and disabilities, the analytic 'lessons' go well beyond the singular setting (Macbeth 2014). In part what has been demonstrated is how authority (and indeed challenges to it) are produced in and as practical actions.

As mentioned earlier the Mencap (2001) designed ESA course recommended teaching the everyday living skills as part of 'practical activities and wherever possible within natural settings'. The intended or ideal 'outcome' of the ESA course was to enhance student independence 'outside' of the college setting (i.e. in their daily lives). However, the excerpt analysed here shows how the notion of 'independence' has been shown to have a particular meaning and practical import within this educational context. The concept of 'independence' should not be read as giving individual students carte blanche to do as they please in that the course taught and promoted following instructions, participating

[38] He is not ordered to do anything and as such he will have to take the blame if he continues to misbehave. The 'grounds' for his failings will be attributed to him and not his disability (Garfinkel 1956). However, it is worth noting that across this academic year only *one* student was actually sent home due to misconduct and misbehaviour in class.

[39] See Notkin (1972) for a converse example whereby the category of 'student' beautician is contrasted with 'professionals' in relation to client expectations of the service provided.

[40] The usage of the category 'professional' is akin to Watson's (1990) work on murder interrogations whereby the investigator refers to the suspect as a 'man of honour' and a 'smart man' which in that case acts as status upgrade that the suspect has to earn or achieve through the production of a confession as otherwise the upgrade will be proven to have been falsely applied and therefore an unwarranted compliment. Here Paul, the resistant student, must prove that the teacher's "professional" attribution is indeed an accurate and appropriate designation.

[41] This is a setting-specific example of a members measurement system (Sacks 1988/9).

in organised activities and the like (i.e. as they would in the workplace). These are instructional activities occurring in staffed classrooms as part of weekly timetabled subject lessons. At its core the college setting was an intrinsically 'instructional' or educational one in which the teaching, practising and repetition of practical tasks (e.g. cooking, shopping, making phone calls etc.) took place within a safe and staff supported environment. 'Independence' can therefore be seen/heard as something to be worked towards rather than accomplished or achieved entirely within any given lesson.

Of particular interest ethnomethodologically-speaking is about how what might be considered to be routine and everyday affairs are learned *within* classroom settings with 'deliberately false provisions' built in (i.e. college setting, staff supervision) (Garfinkel 1967; 2002; Macbeth 2010). This sequence shows how the students' enrolled are not treated as 'independent' and are not permitted to do whatever they want/when they want. However, the course runs without any explicit recourse to 'irony' (Watson 1998) or critique of the lessons as 'ersatz' or phoney creations by those present and therefore should be understood as situated in its own way and analysable as such (Macbeth 1996). The paper has explicated a series of what was referred to as 'lesson appropriate actions', which drew heavily on the notion of just how students 'find their place' within classroom activities and lessons. The order and social organisation of lessons is made visible, knowable, transparent and findable to all parties present (Lindwall and Lymer 2008). This paper has paid particular attention to the methods employed by the teacher (in conjunction with other parties) to bring about a co-ordinated opening of a 'cleaning' lesson. While there are notable asymmetries between parties within this setting (in terms of rights and responsibilities pertaining to what happens within the lesson), the position adopted throughout this paper indicates that such identity work is:

- Oriented to and made use of by those present (Watson 1986)
- Expressed/exhibited/displayed-in-action (e.g. utterances, gestures, spatial positioning etc.) (Macbeth 2000)
- Mutually-elaborating/mutually-constituting (Heritage 1984).

The practices and resources demonstrated by the teacher in this paper included:

- Cohorting techniques (e.g. assembling the individual students as a 'class-as-a-whole')
- Exhibiting the 'owning' of lessons (and the activities that comprise them)
- If/then formulations (e.g. independence and collectivising techniques).

In many ways these practices and resources ought to be recognisable and intelligible to any teacher, or indeed student (past or present) irrespective of the specifics of this setting, as a group-based educational lesson. That is, practical action in this setting is predicated upon the mundane and everyday methods available to teachers, LSAs and students. As

a cohort-based setting, it is not contingent on the specific individual diagnoses of any students' learning difficulties or disabilities.

A note on the 'unique adequacy requirement' of methods

In its purest form the 'unique adequacy requirement' (UAR) was a compelling simple and profound notion (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992). In order to be able to make sense of a set of practices within any given context the logic of familiarity with the scene and mastery of the related skills seems reasonable. However, in ethnomethodological studies of highly technical and sophisticated worksites this involved becoming a full-blown 'worker' in which the ethnomethodologist becomes a practitioner/analyst trained to similar standards (Jenkings 2018; Sormani 2014). However, in the context described here there is a fair amount of ambiguity about the relevance and application of UAR. For example, in a setting with a mix of different occupations or statuses whose unique adequacy should be pursued? For me, as an LSA, is an understanding of the teacher's work (un)achievable in this instance? In addition, given the wide range of learning difficulties within the student cohort, what level of knowledge or expertise would be adequate? Instead, the analysis presented here is a study of this *setting* and *sequence* rather than as a means of furthering knowledge about any disability in general. As such the focus must be on *this* classroom in terms of how the "praxiological curricula" and social organisation of these lessons and activities are collaboratively initiated, exhibited and (re)made by teachers, LSAs and students (Macbeth 2003). The interactions are hearably and visibly 'educational' and 'instructive' and do not seek to claim that the activities are anything but institutional (i.e. everyday daily living tasks at home etc.).[42]

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[42] See Björne (2020) and Svanelöv (2020) for studies that seek to critique the perceived discrepancies between ideal living situations (i.e. individuals with learning difficulties *should* be afforded independence and have rights to make their own everyday decisions) and actual living situations (i.e. how the social structures of group homes limit residents' preferences and choices).

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