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The Facilitator as Gatekeeper: A Critical Analysis of Social Order in Facilitation Sessions

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Abstract

The acceptance of the need to facilitate an experience through group discussion is well documented in adventure education literature. While there is a considerable amount of material on how to process an experience, few studies have sought to explicate the nature of leader–student interaction and the resultant social order in a facilitation session. Using an ethnomethodological approach, this paper analyses the organisation of talk as a way of studying social order in a facilitation session. Particular reference will be made to how the leader in this setting structures the interaction that serves to regulate participants' opportunities to contribute, and how he acts as a gatekeeper for the admissibility of knowledge. Drawing on transcripts of audio–recordings, the paper argues that practitioners may employ practices that potentially restrict participants' contributions. The analysis of how talk is structured in this facilitation session is not merely a study of "turn-taking". The findings call attention to how knowledge is articulated and whose knowledge is privileged in these settings, issues that are at the very core of adventure education theory, which is premised on the centrality of the learner's experience as the basis for valid knowledge.

Introduction

Using an ethnomethodological approach informed by the tools of Conversation Analysis, this paper will examine the nature of leader–student interaction which arises when a leader determines topic, allocates student turns–at–talk and evaluates student responses. In this paper, the term "facilitation session" refers to the organised discussion, prior to or after an activity, that has the intention of enabling participants to generalise what they have learnt to other life settings. Facilitation, as an organised discussion, is also referred to as debriefing, processing and reflecting in adventure education literature (Brackenreg, Luckner, & Pinch, 1994; Dickson, 1996; Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Priest & Gass, 1997; Quinsland & Van Ginkel, 1984). Priest and Naismith (1993) assert that the most common form of facilitation in adventure education is the use of the circular discussion method where the leader poses questions to the participants. While facilitation is widely accepted as an integral part of many adventure education programs it need not take the form of a verbal discussion. Other forms of facilitation include drama, dance, journal writing and painting (see Greenaway, 1991; Knapp, 1992). Priest and Gass (1997) detail six distinct approaches to processing adventure experiences and the method adopted by the leader in this study is but one of a range of possible ways to facilitate experiences.

Following McHoul (1978), Edwards (1980) and Hutchby (1996), I show how participants' orientation to features of a setting, through specialised turn–taking devices (e.g. restricting themselves either to asking questions or to giving answers), explain how power and knowledge are produced. Hutchby (1996) argues that the way participants design their interaction can have the effect of placing them

in a relationship where strategies of greater or lesser power are differentially available to them. The significance of this form of analysis is to "question the taken-for-grantedness, the essentialisms, and the naturalisations that are deeply embedded in educational theories and practices" (Baker, 1997: 50). In essence, what is the nature of the social order talked into being in a verbal facilitation session?

In the following sections a brief introduction to ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis is presented. Subsequently, a section of transcript from a facilitation session is analysed. This detailed analysis of turns-at-talk shows how knowledge and power are differentially available to the participants. In conclusion the reader's attention is drawn to the taken-for-granted practices that establish the social order in this setting. These practices may place the leader of facilitation sessions in a powerful constraining role that allows him to accept, modify, and reject student claims to "knowing" based on their experiences. The leader's ability to act as a gatekeeper to define contextually appropriate knowledge has important implications for practice. Understanding how the leader can shape knowledge production opens up opportunities for critical reflection and discussion and a possible re-evaluation of practices that are based on an educational theory that claims that the learner's experience is the basis for valid knowledge (Crosby, 1995; Joplin, 1995).

In this context adventure education refers to educational programmes that are conducted in an outdoor or wilderness setting using the experiential education paradigm which emphasises the importance of direct experience and reflection as key components in promoting learning. The term "leader" is consciously used as the descriptor of the person responsible for leading the facilitation session in this context. However, other descriptors are used extensively in the literature include "instructor", "teacher" and "facilitator", depending on the author's orientation or audience being addressed. In some cases, authors have used the terms interchangeably within the one paragraph.

An Analytic Approach to the Study of Conversations

This section provides a brief introduction to ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis and the key analytic tool of turn-taking as one way to approach the study of institutional talk.

Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis

Ethnomethodological studies focus on the methods that participants use to produce and make sense of their social world through interaction. The term ethnomethodology is attributed to Harold Garfinkel (1967) and has been defined as,

the body of common sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves (Heritage, 1984: 4).

What marks the ethnomethodological approach as distinct from conventional sociological approaches to phenomena, is its insistence on the examination of the common-sense and routine knowledge(s) employed by social actors as they ongoingly interact in social activities. One of the key concepts in ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis is the reflexive character of interaction. In other words, social actions are designed with reference to how they will be recognised and acted on by other participants.

The focus of ethnomethodological studies is on how people use language in the ongoing process of social interaction, rather than a concern with the words they use (Baker, 1997). From this perspective understanding language is not a matter of understanding sentences but of understanding actions, as utterances, which are interpreted in relation to their contexts (Heritage, 1984).

Conversation Analysis was developed by Harvey Sacks to further the ethnomethodological program using conversation as interactional data. Conversation Analytic studies are interested in the local, embodied, and accountable organisation of social interaction evidenced in talk (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). Sacks regarded conversation as a practically organised social activity where participants engage in commonly held sense making procedures that are analysable. The detailed examination of conversational interaction provides a rich source of data that resists simplification,

Focussing on the competencies that underlie ordinary social activities, conversation analysis attempts to describe and explicate the collaborative practices speakers use and rely upon when they engage in intelligible interaction (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994: 265).

The Concept of Turn-Taking

The concept of "turn-taking" as an organised activity is one of the central tenets of Conversation Analysis. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) established a model for turn-taking in conversation that emphasises the locally managed, interactionally controlled and recipient designed sensitivity of turns at talk in conversation which upholds the principle of "one party talks at a time". While specifically addressing the allocation of turn-taking in "ordinary" conversation they acknowledge conversation's place among other speech-exchange systems, (e.g., debates and courtroom settings). McHoul (1978) examines where on this continuum instructional talk in the classroom talk might be situated. The modifications to the rules of "ordinary" conversation developed by McHoul (1978) allow for, and require that, classroom settings be constructed on the basis of differential participation rights depending on participants membership of the social identity "student" or "teacher". In his study of classroom talk, he examined how participation rights are minimised or maximised through an analysis of turn-taking. McHoul's analysis of turn allocation in classroom settings provides a lens through which to interpret turns-at-talk in other instructional settings where leaders and students interact.

Study of Talk-in-Interaction in Educational Settings

Ethnomethodological studies of talk in educational settings are concerned with the detailed analysis of interaction to explicate how participants in these settings use talk and other resources to accomplish the phenomena and objects that are otherwise taken for granted (Baker, 1997). Using ethnomethodological principles, many researchers have sought to examine social action and social order in educational settings (see Baker, 1997; Heap, 1997). The methods of Conversation Analysis have been used to understand the nature of instructional talk and to explore and clarify a wide range of pedagogical, management and relationship issues in educational settings (Heap, 1997).

Talk-in-Interaction and the Analysis of Power

Miller and Silverman (1995) maintain that the concerns and methods of ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis are well suited to studying how power is organised in everyday life. Hutchby (1996), for example, explicates how the play of power in talk can be analysed from the fundamentally local, sequential perspective of Conversation Analysis. Hutchby argues that power is best viewed as the shifting distribution of resources which enable participants to achieve interactional effects on an unequal basis. From a Conversation Analytic perspective, notions of asymmetry and power

should be based on a close analysis of data to explicate participants' orientations to institutional features of the context displayed through turns at talk (Hutchby, 1996; Schegloff, 1991, 1992).

In his study of interaction in radio talk shows, Hutchby (1996) establishes the way in which the sequential organisation of participation is constructed in a way that creates an unequal distribution of resources for engaging in disputes between the host and the caller. He explicates how the allocation of turns and the ability to initiate topic, "incorporate a power relationship, if we conceive of power as a discourse phenomenon in terms of participants' differential potential to enable and constrain one another's actions" (Hutchby, 1996: 483). By focussing on the local management of talk-in-interaction, analysts can provide an account of how power comes to operate as a feature of institutional interaction.

Why use an Ethnomethodological Approach in the Study of Facilitation Sessions?

Heap (1990) maintains that the importance of ethnomethodological studies is that they inform us about the structures of phenomena and the consequences of those structures for realising ends and objectives. In this way the knowledge that is derived from ethnomethodological studies can make a difference to how we organise our practices and ultimately our lives on a personal and collective level (Heap, 1990).

If we render some activity or course of reasoning transparent in its structures and consequences, then we may thereby bring to reflection reasons for continuing or discontinuing doing the activity, or reasoning in that way. We may generate ideas as to how to do it differently (Heap, 1990: 45).

What has become apparent from the review of literature is that while there are many articles and books on how to conduct processing activities, there appear to be no ethnomethodologically informed studies investigating social order in adventure education facilitation sessions.

It is hoped that the analysis and discussion generated in this paper will be consequential for outdoor leaders in their decision-making regarding the continuation or modification of practices, which may be unrecognised or unappreciated to date. In the analysis that follows we attend to the nature of the social order that is evidenced in a facilitation session and the consequences of these practices for student creativity in selecting subsequent speakers.

Analysis

This section of transcript is from data collected on the first morning of a four day camp for year nine students conducted prior to a canoeing skills session. The majority of these students are fourteen years old and all from an independent boys' school in Australia where outdoor education is an integral part of the school's curriculum from years six to eleven. This programme consisted of two days canoeing on a local river, with an overnight camp, followed by two days at the school's residential centre. The students are all in the same year level but not necessarily from the same class. The specific focus of the programme was to encourage teamwork by providing activities that required co-operation and communication. Apart from the researcher's presence no modifications to a "normal" programme were enacted. The researcher is present and sitting with the group. All participants were provided with an information sheet relating to the research prior to the programme and had provided written consent.

This group was not studied because it contained any "special" characteristics, rather it was chosen based on issues relating to logistics, accessibility and institutional support. The students and staff are engaged in their "normal" activities associated with the school's outdoor education program. The "distinguishing feature" of this data is its "ordinariness"; this is recorded talk from actually facilitation sessions, it is not idealised nor invented. While being cautious to generalise from the specifics of this setting, I suggest that the analysis of this interaction illustrates the powerful work that "ordinary" facilitation talk performs in building a social order.

Transcription symbols:

(.) gap of 1/10 sec. (1.0) 1 sec gap

Underlined word which is stressed

[] overlapped word(s)

= an utterance that is latched, or a continuation of the previous turn at talk.

These transcription notations are based on a simplified version of those developed by Jefferson (Psathas, 1995) and are widely accepted in Conversation Analytic research. The audio-recording was listened to repeatedly to achieve as accurate a transcription as possible. As with all transcripts it is not possible to capture everything that occurred and the transcript will always remain a partial affair (Coates & Thornborrow, 1999).

Transcript

Scene: Fifteen students and two male leaders are seated in a circle on a river bank.

- 1 Leader so that we ah (.) so that we all understand what our responsibilities are why we're here (.) what I'd like each of you to do is tell me (1.0) um why (1.5) our school (1.2) has (.5) year nine camp (1.0) why are you here on year nine camp (.5) from the school's perspective not from your personal perspective we'll start, we're going to go round the circle so we'll start with (.5)
- 2 Tim Tim
- 3 Leader Tim (.) and if each person as Tim did could say their name that will help(.) Mr. Smith and I (.) to ah to learn (2.7) Tim
- 4 Tim to like to let us learn new stuff (.5) about the bush and all that kind of stuff
- 5 Leader okay so learn a bit about being in the bush
- 6 Tim yeah
- 7 Leader Great
- 8 Pete ah Pete yeah um [
- 9 Leader [Pete
- 10 Pete = to(.) get us to (.) sort of do things that we normally wouldn't
- 11 Leader (.5) okay so try new things, so be in the bush (.5) and learn about being in the bush, try new things
- 12 John I'm John [um]
- 13 Leader [John]
- 14 John = to (.5) try and get on a bit better with each other and stuff like spending time with each other
- 15 Leader okay so spend time with each other (.) so we learn how to get on with each other with with peers right Len
- 16 Len I'm Len um (1.5) so (.5) teach us about the bush and have fun stuff

- 17 Leader okay so teach ya how to have fun
 18 Len yeah
 19 Leader okay (1.5) that that's pretty appropriate
 20 Roger (2.0) Roger um (2.2) to get week off school
 Students [laughter] (.7)
 21 Roger =the teachers just don't like us
 22 Leader okay so you think that Mr oh Mr MacDonald (.5) has provided you this opportunity
 to give your teachers a break
 23 Roger yeah (faint)
 24 Leader yeah? do you really think that
 Students (general murmuring) (.7)
 25 Leader =do you think that's his high priority
 Students (muttering) (1.5)
 26 Roger it's like a (.) teach(.) it's like teachers and sickies we kind of get a (.7) a camp
 thing
 27 Leader so do your teachers actually get this week off or do they actually have [other
 things to do
 28 Student? [um they]
 29 Roger [ah we do] they get other
 30 Leader okay so (.) so is Mr MacDonald saying here you guys can have a week off from
 um year nine (house name) this week (1.2) really
 Students (murmuring) (3.5)
 31 Leader how bou you have a bit more of a think Roger (.5) okay, we'll come back.

In the section that follows I will pay close attention to Tim and Roger's turns at talk with particular reference to how the teacher uses each boy's utterance.

Tim's turn at talk

In turn 1 the leader opens the interaction by introducing the topic for discussion and determining the procedure for turn-taking, which is pre-allocated. Each student is to introduce himself and tell the leader, and the group, why the school has a year nine camp. The leader indicates that each student will speak and then the following turn will be allocated on the basis of position on the circumference of the circle. The leader clearly states the basis on which the students are to comment on why they are on camp.

Leader: From the school's perspective not from your personal perspective

Turn two. Tim states his name

Turn three. While there is no overlap in the leader's turn it follows closely on Tim's announcement of his name. The leader then issues a directive concerning the need for students to say their name. The leader indicates that Tim can continue by repeating his name. This public acknowledgment of the student's name by the leader occurs in initiation sequences for other new speakers.

Turn four. Tim offers up a candidate response; *to like to let us learn new stuff (.) about the bush and all that kind of stuff.*

Turn five. The leader's reply is a formulation of Tim's response in which he modifies the candidate response by deleting "superfluous" words; adding "*being*"; and conserving those words deemed worthy of revoicing, "*learn*" and "*bush*". Formulations can be used to articulate unequivocal displays of understanding by preserving relevant features of a prior utterance, deletion of irrelevant portions and recasting the prior utterance in a transformed manner (Heritage & Watson, 1979). The use of formulations by the leader allows him to "fix" or "publicly demonstrate" to the group the "correct interpretation" of a prior utterance.

"*Okay*" and "*so*" appear to function as a call for Tim to be able to confirm or disagree with the leader's statement.

Turn six. Tim appears to understand turn five as such a call. He agrees with the leader's voicing of his position about why the school has a year nine camp. This confirmatory stance to the leader's formulation is not unexpected. As Heritage and Watson (1979) note, in the "formulation–decision" adjacency pair there is an overwhelming preference for confirmation of the formulation as offered. It is an easier conversational option to agree with a formulation than disagree. In turn seven the leader's "*Great*" acts as a public acknowledgment of Tim's contribution as an acceptable basis for year nine camp. It also acts as an acknowledgment that Tim's turn is complete and that the next student may begin. What we are not aware of through the use of audio–tapes is the function of gaze and gestures in this situation.

This seven turn sequence is leader initiated and is an example of an initiation–response–evaluation format common in formal instructional talk in classrooms (Mehan, 1979). In this instance the leader's evaluation (turns 5 and 7) takes a two part format, first "*okay*" then "*great*". This brief interaction has established the level of response required to achieve confirmation of appropriate answers on the part of the students. Student answers are directed back at the leader who has the right of evaluation and confirmation of next speaker entry.

Roger's turn at talk. (20–31)

This extended exchange, turns 20–31, differs in several ways from the preceding turns at talk.

In turn 20, following a long (2.0) silence, Roger introduces himself, *Roger um* (2.2), and then he gives his explanation for why the school has a year nine camp, *to get a week off school*. In the previous turns, as soon as the student has announced his name, the leader has repeated it (see turns 3, 9, 13). Despite Roger's long pause (2.2) the leader does not repeat his name.

The laughter between turns 20 and 21 from members of the group would tend to suggest that they recognise this (Roger's) statement as a "wise crack" or "breach" of what might be considered an acceptable reply (Heritage & Watson, 1979). Roger continues with, *the teachers just don't like us*. The leader does not respond to Roger's assertion concerning the teachers' like or dislike of the pupils.

In turn 22 the leader uses okay possibly as an acknowledgment token rather than as an evaluation of the acceptability of Roger's reply which he goes on to question, *so you think that Mr oh Mr MacDonald (.5) has provided you this opportunity to give your teachers a break*

In turn 23 Roger affirms that this is his opinion. However his utterance *yeah* is issued faintly, suggesting uncertainty as to the acceptability of his response.

In turns 24 and 25 the leader again questions Roger

24 Leader: *yeah? do you really think that*

Students (*general murmuring*) (.7)

25 Leader: *=do you think that's his high priority*
(*muttering*) (1.5)

Immediately after each question from the leader there are "background" comments from other students. In turn 26 Roger responds with a justification for his answer, it's like a (.) teach(.) *it's like teachers and sickies we kind of get a (.7) a camp thing*. Here Roger is accounting for the reasonableness of his answer. In the following turn (27) the leader responds to this implied "idleness" of other staff by questioning the reasonableness of Roger's account; *so do your teachers actually get this week off? or do they actually have [other things to do?* The leader appears to reject the implied criticism of the school administration.

At the point of overlap, an unidentified student and Roger both make utterances

28 Student?: [um they]

29 Roger: [ah we do] they get other

Turn 28 is the first instance of a student "self-selecting"; in all other instances the leader has selected a student or the leader has self-selected. One reading of this utterance is that the student has "come to the aid" of Roger by offering the beginning of what would have been an appropriate response. The fact that we have two speakers talking at once is in breach of the "no overlap" rule (Sacks et al., 1974) and the pre-designated speaker, Roger, continues in his turn while the "intruding" student ceases. The unidentified student is not overtly censured for the utterance, but in discontinuing his talk he confirms Roger's right to the turn.

In turn 29 Roger acknowledges that, *they get other*, which acts as an acknowledgment that his earlier assertions may be open to revision. In turn 30 the leader states, *okay so(.) so is Mr MacDonald saying here you guys can have a week off from um year 9 (house name) this week (1.2) really?*. "Okay" acts as an indicator that leader has heard Roger's previous turn as a modification and he expands on the possibility that Roger may alter his position in the form of a question which is emphasised by the comment *really*.

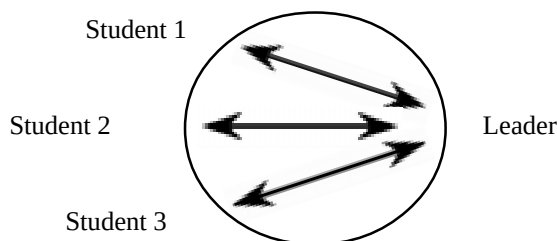
In the long pause that follows (3.5), Roger is possibly given the opportunity to reply in an acceptable manner, when this is not "taken up" the leader comes in with his final turn in this section; *how bou you have a bit more of a think Roger (.5) okay, we'll come back*. This long pause, without interruption or interjection by another student, may be explained by reference to the fact that Roger is the only student selected to answer this question and he may therefore take it that no other speaker, apart from the leader, will start a turn at this possible transition point (McHoul, 1978).

Discussion: The Social Order Established Through Interaction

In this small extract from a facilitation session it is possible to see how the leader is responsible for the direction of the talk as evidenced in his monopoly of the acts labeled as starters, elicitations, directives, informatives and evaluations, and in the restriction of students to the acts of acknowledging and replying (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). The format for this setting, sitting in a circle, and the pre-allocation of opportunities for students to contribute, creates a highly formal turn-taking system. Diagrammatically the flow of talk is represented in the following manner,

Figure I
Representation of flow of talk from leader to students.

(Note: for clarity only three of the fifteen students are represented here).



It is at the meeting point of the management of the student responses, indicated by the convergence of the arrows at the leader, that our examination of social order is focussed.

Students are effectively restricted to speaking only when their allocated turn arrives and to answering the topic set by the leader. The opportunity to "bid" for a turn out of sequence is denied through the physical structuring of the students and the turn allocation determined by the leader. This small extract is similar to "formal" classroom talk where the typical form of teacher–student relationships produces a predominance of restricted options for participants (Edwards, 1980). The leader's pre-allocation of rights for participation by students in this setting gives him "ownership" of the instructional talk (Edwards, 1980). Here the leader is able to initiate opening and closing sequences, evaluate responses and allocate next turns. As Edwards (1980: 241) states,

Only he can "direct speakership in any creative way". He selects himself as next speaker, or selects a pupil as next speaker, or accepts a pupil's bid for that turn....The power–relation is displayed through a general preallocation of turns, and especially of turns involving questioning, informing, and formulating. The teacher's control is exerted largely through his rights to "invite stories", to tell "stories", and to announce in so many words what these expositions have really been about.

In this setting there is little or no opportunity for creativity in selecting the next speaker (McHoul, 1978). The leader selects himself as next speaker, or permits the next speaker, allocated according to spatial position, to speak. This strong spatial constraint also restricts the leader in the selection of "next speaker" on the basis of the student's placement in the circle.

The turns at talk exhibit an initiation–response–evaluation sequence (Mehan, 1979) in which the leader has the opportunity to evaluate and formulate the response of the student and to "publicly" announce the preferred version of valued knowledge. As Edwards (1980: 245) states,

The meanings that are made public knowledge are those that the teacher has provided or sponsored as the transmitter of news, he is "entitled" to take up pupil contributions as pieces in the jigsaw being built, to deny them "existence" by ignoring them or translating them into more convenient form, to display them as representing a common understanding, or to formulate a failure to understand which has to be remedied by bringing pupils to (or back to) the appropriate meanings.

In this setting the leader's framing of the question establishes a basis on which to establish and make public the "official" frame of reference which forms the basis of *"why you are here on year nine camp"*. Through the use of formulations and the public revoicing of apparently "student created" knowledge, the leader is able to create a preferred version of reality. Student responses are given meaning in the context of school knowledge that excludes or transforms what is "irrelevant". The use of formulations is a powerful tool to confirm what is relevant for the students in this context. Heritage and Watson (1979: 159) have argued that formulations are used by participants in interaction who are "concerned to maintain concerted control over the cumulative sense and coherence of their collaborative productions".

The primary focus of this paper has been on the analysis of turn taking as a means of explicating how social order is built and maintained in this setting. This is not to deny the role that other interactional features, such as the leader's oriented-to right to determine topic and his ability to call for clarifications of student replies, play in the "working out" of power and knowledge configurations. For example, the use of the initiation-reply-evaluation sequence of interaction (Mehan, 1979), is premised on the understanding that there is a "right" answer that is known by the leader and against which student replies can be evaluated.

The use of pre-allocated turns at talk combined with the leader's ability to formulate and "grade" student responses is an example of the construction of a power relationship based on differential participation rights for participants based on their membership of the social identity as student or leader (McHoul, 1978). The explication of how power relationships are built and sustained necessitates a re-evaluation of existing literature on the role of the leader in the facilitation process. How free are students to draw valid and meaningful conclusions from their own experiences within this context? Similarly, are leaders really, as Chapman (1995 p. 239) suggests, "largely removed from their roles as interpreters of reality, purveyors of truth, mediators between students and the world"? Do the use of paraphrases so widely advocated in the current literature (Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Priest & Gass, 1997), actually operate as mechanisms of knowledge mediation through which the leader can formulate a preferred version of the student answer? These issues are at the very heart of adventure education theory and practice.

Conclusion

While acknowledging that this analysis is based on one small section of data, I contend that this segment is not atypical of other recordings, from different facilitation sessions, that constitute the larger corpus of data in the research project. Close attention to detail is one of the strengths of the analytic approach I have brought to the examination of this data. It reveals how the members in this setting use talk to accomplish what I take to be a version of facilitation. As Silverman (1994: 94) states, "the work of everyday life needs less a priori analytic elaboration than it requires fine-grained documentation and understanding".

The analysis of turn-taking draws on the rules developed by Sacks et al. (1974) for "ordinary" conversation and McHoul (1978) on classroom talk. While acknowledging that facilitation sessions take neither the turn taking allocation techniques of "ordinary" conversation nor "formal" classroom settings (eg. students do not bid for the right to reply because allocation in advance negates the necessity of bidding) these studies provide a conceptual framework to investigate the level of institutionality of talk in this setting. This paper makes no claims relating to "best practice" but it does call for reflection on practices engaged in by the leader in adventure education.

Some of these practices can be summarised briefly. The sequential organisation of participation is conducted in a way that places the leader in the role of a "gatekeeper". A leader has a central role in creating and limiting opportunities for discussion, for evaluating student contributions and in collaborating with students to construct and articulate acceptable knowledge in this setting.

These are not peripheral issues for adventure educators. They are central to the very basis of our conceptualisation of learning that espouses the learner's experience as the basis of valid knowledge (Crosby, 1995; Joplin, 1995). As Hovelynck (1999: 22) states, the issue that faces us is how to "facilitate forms of learning in which the participants remain the "agents" of their experience and their learning". While not providing a definitive answer, this paper has provided an account of the influential role that the leader has in what is often purported to be student centred discussion. By making the consequences of the leaders' actions more transparent it is hoped that practitioners will critically reflect on their practice with a view to exploring other avenues for facilitating learning. An understanding of "what we are doing" is a useful precursor to asking "what should we be doing?"

The analytic approach of ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis provides a different lens through which to understand the interaction and the social order established between leaders and students in experiential education settings, and in so doing provides further avenues for reflection and research. The study of talk from this analytic perspective may generate new ways of appraising present theoretical approaches to facilitation. An appraisal based not on an idealised version of how facilitation should look, but rather on an examination of current practice.

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