English Teaching: Practice and Critique May, 2012, Volume 11, Number 1
http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/files/2012v11n1art2.pdf pp. 26-42

Ethnomethodology and literacy research: A methodological "road less travelled"

CHRISTINA DAVIDSON
Charles Sturt University, Australia

ABSTRACT: This article examines ethnomethodology in order to consider its particular yet under-used perspective within literacy research. Initially, the article outlines ethnomethodology, including its theoretical position and central concepts such as indexicality and reflexivity. Then, selected studies are used to illustrate the application of the methodology and related research methods to the examination of literacy and literacy instruction. This section delineates a number of constraints on the application of the methodology. These include respecification of topic as practical accomplishment, bracketing by researchers of a priori interests and background information to produce unmotivated looking, and meticulous analytic attention to locally produced social phenomenon often only made visible in fine details of transcripts. Ethnomethodology's contribution is discussed then in light of criticisms concerning the overly restricted nature of the methodology, or some versions of it. It is concluded that despite ongoing critique, the application of ethnomethodology to literacy research may: reveal taken-for-granted ways literacy lessons are accomplished, lead to the description and explication of social actions that constitute literacy instruction, and enhance existing theoretical models of literacy learning and teaching.

KEY WORDS: Ethnomethodology; conversation analysis; social interaction; literacy; English.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnomethodology is a research methodology that originated in American sociology during the 1950s. Harold Garfinkel first developed the approach which was considered controversial at the time because of its critique of the use of theory and quantitative methods of analysis in mainstream sociology (Hester & Francis, 2000). From the beginning, and throughout its development over decades, Garfinkel intended ethnomethodology to result in a program of research that would provide an alternate sociology (Garfinkel, 1967, 1991), one that would attend to the organisations of "commonplace everyday activities" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. vii). That program continues today, and still attracts criticism despite the substantial body of work that has been produced.

Ethnomethodology's program (Garfinkel, 1967) now encompasses a range of everyday and institutional settings (Freebody & Freiberg, 2011): medical and therapeutic, legal and judicial, educational, laboratory and other scientific practices, media, service encounters, air traffic control rooms, political, family and so on. Research interests are as diverse as public thinking in a Tibetan monastery (Liberman, 2007), "the interactional significance of personal pronouns in the talk of airline pilots" (Nevile, 2001, p. 57) and young children's pretend play (Butler, 2008). Within education, ethnomethodological approaches have been used to examine such things as how lessons get done interactionally (Mehan, 1979), the intersection of common-

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sense and formal knowledge in subject lessons (McHoul & Watson, 1984), the situated accomplishment of children's reasoning during testing (Jennings & Jennings, 1974), and how power and authority is produced during exchanges between teachers and their students (Francis & Hester, 2004).

The body of ethnomethodological work that addresses literacy and literacy education is small. Nevertheless, existing work includes the examination of small group reading lessons (McDermott, 1976), what counts as reading in classroom lessons (Freebody & Freiberg, 2001; Heap, 1985,1990,1991); assessment in reading lessons (Heap, 1980), everyday literacy practices in and out of school (Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995); writing process (Brandt, 1992; Heap, 2000), writing lessons (Davidson, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009a); interpretive frames in student writing (Austin, Dwyer & Freebody, 2003); production of stories in a language learning classroom (Durán & Szymanski, 1995), reading of texts as practical reasoning (McHoul, 1982) and how talk about literature accomplishes reading of novels (Austin, 1997).There are a very small number of studies of literacy practices with computer technology including the social accomplishment of children's use of the computer for editing of written work (Heap, 1992) and ways that digital literacies are socially organised and accomplished during computer use in the home (Davidson, 2009b, 2012).

In Australia, a number of academics have produced a body of work that specifically addresses school literacy/the teaching of English. Peter Freebody (Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995; Freebody, 2003) and the late Carolyn Baker (Baker, 1991, 1992, 1997a, 1997b; Baker & Freebody, 1989a, 1989b, 1993) were particularly productive, influencing the work of a number of researchers during the 1990s and early 21st century. Still, it is safe to say that ethnomethodology is not a research approach that is widely understood or widely employed to research literacy education or English instruction in schools. However, existing research work suggests its potential for making more of a contribution to these fields and the approach has certainly been more widely used in the area of adult second language instruction and learning (see, for example, Lee, 2007; Mori, 2002).

The purpose of this article is to provide an examination of ethnomethodology and its application to literacy research, in particular to consider the specific constraints that the methodology employs and to understand how the methodological approach can powerfully inform literacy education. The following section presents the theoretical position of ethnomethodology and concepts that are central to its research approaches. A small number of studies from literacy research in school classrooms are then used to illustrate the application of methodological constraints. The discussion that follows addresses some of the ways that constraints allow for particular insights and applications that might be pursued in the future. The conclusion addresses aspects of the taken-for-granted that the application of ethnomethodology has and can address.

THEORETICAL POSITION AND CENTRAL CONCEPTS

The development of ethnomethodology and its variants was influenced by philosophical perspectives including phenomenology (Schutz, 1967, 1970) and ordinary language philosophy (Wittgenstein, 1968), by functionalist sociology (Parsons, 1949) and interactionist sociological perspectives (Goffman, 1981). The

historical development of ethnomethodology and details of these influences have been well documented (see Heritage, 1984; Sharrock & Anderson, 1986). Accounts with specific reference to education are also available (see Freebody et al., 1995; Watson, 1992). In this section, I will draw out some key aspects of ethnomethodology's theoretical perspective and related concepts that come to bear on the application of ethnomethodology in research, as will be illustrated later in this article in its examination of literacy research employing ethnomethodology. Information here is "stripped back" due to space constraints in this article. However, this section will provide the necessary theoretical and conceptual information for the reader to consider what counts as literacy from the ethnomethodological perspective, and to engage with the argument about the ways that ethnomethodological constraints may productively inform the fields of literacy and literacy education.

Ethnomethodology produced a sociology that was focused on the examination of the everyday ways (methods) of sense-making of people (members, or members of society) as they produced the reality of their everyday existence. This is sometimes referred to as an interest in members' "practical action and practical reasoning" ((Hester & Francis, 1997, p. 97). Ethnomethodologists oppose views of the social world that reduce people to judgemental dopes (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 68) or mere actors in a social world where "order, meaning and structure...are fundamentally hidden from ordinary view" (Macbeth, 2003, p. 241). Instead, Garfinkel urged that sociology needed to attend, in the first instance, to the competent ways that people bring about their social worlds. He asserted that these could be found in the accounts that members provided of their activity to others during everyday interactions, rather than in theoretical interpretations produced from within sociology (Garfinkel, 1991). For Garfinkel, members' accounts documented understandings and meanings and made these available for inspection by others.

An ethnomethodological "version of reflexivity" (Lynch, 2000, p. 26), was developed by Garfinkel and predates many current usages and definitions of the term "reflexivity" (Lynch, 2000; Macbeth, 2001). For Garfinkel and fellow ethnomethodologists, reflexivity refers to "accounting practices and accounts" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 1) or "the descriptive accountings of states of affairs" (Heritage, 1984, p. 136) that people provide for each other. In other words, members display their understandings of the actions of others through actions. These actions in turn are available as an account for others such that "our accounts of the world reflexively constitute the very affairs they speak of" (Macbeth, 2001, p. 49). According to Garfinkel (1967, p. 4), "members' accounts are reflexively and essentially tied for their rational features to the socially organised occasions of their use for they are *features* of the socially organised occasions of their use." The "essential reflexivity of accounts" (MacBeth, 2001) is a taken-for-granted aspect of social interaction and in that sense is unremarkable (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 8) for members.

Ethnomethodologists hold a particular view of context and the examination of it. Central to this view is indexicality or the notion that the intelligibility of language is tied to the circumstances for its use (Maynard & Clayman, 1991, p. 392). Indexicality is central to members' organisation of local action, and is therefore a topic for investigation by analysts. In this sense then, Garfinkel once described the term "ethnomethodology" as referring to "the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing

accomplishments of organised artful practices of everyday life" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 11). The analytic work of ethnomethodologists, then, is to seek to understand "the situated organisation of tasks and projects of every kind" (Macbeth, 1996, p. 271) as these occur in everyday life. This includes the conduct of sociological analyses itself since it is argued from an ethnomethodological perspective that "numbers that appear to be hard facts" are themselves the result of the application of "common-sense understandings of everyday life" (Douglas, 1970, p. 7) by social scientists.

Ethnomethodologists thus address context as something that is known already to participants. That is, aspects of settings relevant to members are those aspects that are *made* relevant by them; they are oriented to by members and this orientation is "findable" in the actions they produce during interactions with each other. According to Schegloff (2007), researchers must establish members' orientations to aspects of context and show how these orientations have consequences for the course of on-going interaction. Establishing relevance and consequentiality in the talk of participants is a particularly challenging thing to do, and frequently requires examination of very fine details of social interaction. Thus a researcher attempting to understand, say a literacy lesson, would seek to discover what participants made relevant in the lesson, how they did that and what were the consequences for participants' interactions as a result of those orientations. In so doing, researchers would draw on their own "members' resources" to discern aspects of interaction.

Over the years, a number of variants of ethnomethodology have developed. Two of these are membership categorisation analysis (MCA) and conversation analysis (or CA). Both of these were developed initially by the work of Harvey Sacks (1995). Conversation analysis (CA) requires meticulous attention to recorded data and examines the sequential accomplishment of actions and activities during social interaction. Sacks developed this work out of an initial interest in how people "did things" through talk. This interest led to influential publications with two colleagues – Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson – on the turn-taking system of ordinary conversation (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977). This description of the "speech exchange system" for ordinary conversation (Sacks, 1995, p. 235) laid the groundwork for all CA research. After the untimely death of Sacks in 1975, those colleagues and others continued to develop CA such that it is now considered to be the prime "arm" or form of ethnomethodology. Increasingly, detailed transcriptions became the focus for analysis and Jefferson developed a notation system specifically for this form of analysis (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1999). [A list of Jefferson notation symbols is provided as an appendix.]

Membership categorisation analysis was formed by Sacks in his early work and prior to the development of CA. Though CA became the focus of attention for Sacks and his colleagues, MCA has been developed further in more recent times (see, for example, Jayyusi, 1984; Lepper, 2000). The analytic interest in MCA is on categories, category attributes and category bound activities, as these relate to overall membership categorisation devices. For example, the membership categorisation device "family" may encompass membership categories such as mother, father, sister, baby and so on. An early consideration by Sacks was of a child's story: The baby cried. The mummy picked it up. Sacks' analysed this story to show, for example, how it is possible to hear the mummy as the mother of *the* baby (and not the mummy of some other baby). Sacks (1995) argued consequently that it is through applying

categories that "children learn to order their word into culturally recognisable form" (Lepper, 2000, p.20).

Some researchers have mounted arguments in the literature that ethnomethodological work should employ both CA and MCA together (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002; Hester & Francis, 2007). Others combine the approaches without justification, thus appear to take it as unproblematic. In the section that follows, studies selected employ one or both of the approaches. Studies have been selected in order to illustrate ethnomethodological approaches to literacy and literacy education, not to suggest that these are the only ways of doing ethnomethodology. For example, no ethnomethodological studies employing ethnographic techniques have been included here, although these are employed by some ethnomethodologists (see Weidner, 1974).

ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL STUDIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The studies presented here will be used to illustrate constraints that are often imposed in ethnomethodological research. Constraints include respecification of topic as practical accomplishment, bracketing by researchers of *a priori* interests and background information to produce unmotivated looking, and meticulous analytic attention to locally produced social phenomenon often only made visible in minute details of transcripts.

Storytelling as occasioned collaboration

From an ethnomethodological perspective, terms such as shared reading or shared writing are viewed as glosses for interactional encounters accomplished in local settings, and what researchers must do is "tease out" what constitutes them through close description of their accomplishment *in situ*. Thus, instructional strategies familiar to educators can be made strange through respecifying them as courses of action produced reflexively by members during interaction.

Hester and Francis (1995) provide an example of the way researchers employ this facet of the ethnomethodological approach, in their analysis of storytelling in an infants classroom. In the introduction to the article, Hester and Francis state their position on examining storytelling:

> In adopting an ethnomethodological approach our concern is not to theorise about storytelling lessons in general; rather it is to describe how this particular storytelling is accomplished....Our focus, then, is what is happening interactionally on this occasion in order to construct a detailed analytical description of *this* storytelling lesson (p. 66)

The authors emphasise that in focusing on just *this* lesson, their study provides "an investigation of the actual practices" (p. 66) involved in the particular storytelling lesson, rather than practices that are described in theory or in pedagogical approaches to telling or reading stories. Actual practices in the Hester and Francis study include "cohort assembly work" (p. 66) and the recruitment of children as "occasioned participants or co-tellers of the story" (p. 66), and the "interactional, collaborative accomplishment of the end of the story and the lesson" (p. 66). These practices are

described in detail giving attention to ways that interaction between the teacher and children produces the storytelling through talk about written text and images.

In just those few comments from the authors, it is possible to see and draw out some of the ethnomethodological character of the study. For example, activities that occur are referred to as accomplishments, that is, members do things interactionally. So the storytelling is accomplished or produced by the students and their teacher. To do this, the class must first be cohorted, and this is done in and through the words and actions of the teacher and the children.

> Teacher.((r.v.)) Right sit down in your places ()
> ((noise of children settling)) (11.0)
> Teacher.((r.v.)) Right on the floor Steven with everyone else please ()
> ((noise of children settling)) (24.0)
> Teacher.((r.v.)) Right sh:: () are we ready?
> Children. ((r.v.)) Yes ()
> (Hester and Francis, 1995, p. 68)

The work that is accomplished is to do "being the class" or being "one" in order for the literacy lesson to occur. Actions that produce cohorting are often taken-for-granted yet are integral to "doing" this type of lesson so that it is recognisably the lesson that it is to all participants. Although literacy educators may recognise classroom literacy activities that they are familiar with when reading the full analysis, the authors do not make recourse to labels such as "predicting" or "shared reading"; instead they focus on describing what happens interactionally and so reveal taken-for-granted practices (for scrutiny). Further, the authors address how actions in the lesson show rights and responsibilities of the teacher and of students. So, they find moral work in the classroom in relation to who does what *interactionally*. Moral work is an important focus for ethnomethodological studies. In the above transcript, for example, the teacher's question produces a "cohorted" answer from children. That is, interactionally the children supply the talk that the teacher's turns require. Further, talk requires that the class "pass judgement on the actions of characters, their rationality, and so on" (Hester & Francis, 1995, p. 72) and the teacher provides acknowledgement of these rights in her responses to the children.

The transcript in the entire article does not record the names of particular children who speak in the left hand column of the transcript (where identities of speakers are indicated); many ethnomethodologists do not refer to classroom participants by name, and, in fact, many researchers are not present when recordings are made so cannot identify specific children. The ethnomethodological position for some is that if names are made relevant in the conversation – through use – then they will be recorded in the transcript. Otherwise, they will not. Researchers may draw instead on a category pair such as teacher-student or teacher-child to name participants (Baker, 1997b). The omission of names *by* participants during classroom interaction could be a feature that is constitutive of certain classroom interactions and, therefore, may become a finding of analysis if documented using category pairs.

Reading and writing lessons and the production of classroom knowledge

Reading and reading lessons have been a focus for ethnomethodological work. Some argue, in the introduction to their work, that ethnomethodology allows them to avoid

pitfalls that reading theory induces in many studies of childen's reading (Freebody & Freiberg, 2001; Heap, 1985, 1991). For example, Freebody and Freiberg assert that "the problem with reading" (2001) is that reading has been given an inordinate degree of attention and that "much theorising about reading, and the conduct and outcomes of much of the research that support it, have been tailored to institutional contingencies" (2001, p. 223). The authors argue that actual reading practices need to be recovered and that in order to do this:

> effort needs to be made to strip away, and hold in temporary abeyance, the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical filters that have come to interpose themselves between observers and what it s that is significant when people teach and learn "reading" (Freebody & Freiberg, 2001, p. 224).

Further, Freebody and Frieburg take terms that are well known in the area of reading, and early literacy, for example "instruction in blending" and "code instruction" (Freebody & Freiburg, 2001) and they establish that in order to understand what these words actually describe we need to examine them procedurally in the classroom. Thus, they conclude that when reading is respecified and described *in situ* it is possible to see that "the institutional contingencies of contemporary schooling have set limits on what we can typically understand as the nature of effective reading – what it is, what counts as its appropriate display" (Freebody & Freiburg, 2001, p. 231).

Heap (2000) similarly argued, in the area of writing instruction, that ethnomethodological examinations of lessons *in situ* enabled the respecification of theories of models of writing. Specifically, Heap outlined the Hayes and Flower (1980) information-processing model of writing and then used his analysis of a classroom writing activity to argue for the insertion of an aspect of interaction into the model. That is, Heap showed that learning to write was a thoroughly social activity rather than the combination of cognitive processes that were represented in the model.

As these studies of reading and writing lessons illustrate, researchers working from the perspective of ethnomethodology have been able to argue for expanded understandings of reading and writing practices (Brandt, 1992; Macbeth, 2001) and of theories that inform them; for example that a cognitive view of writing must be expanded to include the social interactions that writing exhibited in practice (Heap, 2000).

The social accomplishment of help in a writing lesson

Central to ethnomethodological studies is the notion of respecification. This treats some concept, problem or notion as a local matter for members to address rather than a problem for sociologists. I employed respecification in a study of an independent writing lesson in a kindergarten/Year One classroom (Davidson, 2005, 2007a, 2011). Using conversational analysis, I established how children and their teacher were "demonstrably oriented" (Macbeth, 1996, p. 252) to help in the lesson, and how this orientation had interactional consequences (Schegloff, 2007) when peers helped each other in ways determined by the teacher. The following brief excerpt from one analytic section of that study shows how I set out to establish the teacher's orientation to help rather than telling (by spelling words). Note that the development and use of

detailed transcripts that recorded words and other paralinguistic features of talk and interaction was essential to the study and to the provision of evidence, for readers, in the reporting of it.

> The teacher’s interaction with Melodie begins with a yes/no interrogative prefaced by a turn-initial marker (now). This question makes an answer relevant and requires agreement from Melodie that she is helping Wayne. The teacher’s question has followed her observation that no interaction is currently occurring between the two students and proposes a course of action. The rising intonation indicates a possible turn transition point although Melodie does not respond (2) (therefore avoiding the provision of a negative response since she isn’t *visibly* helping Wayne).
>
> 1 Teacher: now (0.2) are you helping (0.2) Wayne write like?
> 2 (0.4)
> 3 Teacher: don’t tell ↓him (0.2) just help him >okay Melodie?<
> 4 ((Melodie nods/Wayne watching))
> 5 ((teacher nods))
>
> The gap in talk can be heard as a delay in response where a preference agreement might have begun but a negative response appears probable (Schegloff, 2007, p. 71). The teacher then speaks again thus avoiding what may be, eventually, the production of a dispreferred response by the student. The teacher’s multi-unit turn (Ford, 2001) directs and constrains Melodie’s projected activity to “not telling” and “help”. The design of the turn provides a negation followed by an elaboration (Ford, 2001), which expands on the first action and encompasses a distinction between “telling” and the provision of activity that is “just help”. The use of the word “just” hearably rates help as *less than* telling and as *not* telling (3). (Davidson, 2011)

Here, the analysis makes use of technical terms such as turn-initial marker, preference agreement, and dispreferred response. These terms form part of the technical vocabulary of conversation analysis and may be off-putting for those not familiar with the concepts and their application to the analysis of interaction. There is a considerable body of literature in CA that has examined features such as these in conversation, and this literature must be drawn on in studies where these features also become the focus for analysis.

In the rest of the analysis, I went on to establish some of the ways that the orientation to help restricted the interaction between the two students (Melodie and Wayne) as it occurred over several minutes. A transcript of the entire extended sequence was analysed on a turn-by-turn basis and discernible features of the interaction described. Importantly, the children were shown to use questions and answers to avoid telling, and to do this in ways that were similar to the teacher’s use of questioning in the writing lesson. While the use of questioning is a familiar practice in literacy classrooms, the analysis suggested that questioning and the use of the known answer question enabled children to constrain their activities in ways determined by the teacher and this resulted in trouble (Schegloff, 2007) in the interaction between them. The overall study (Davidson, 2005) illustrated ethnomethodology’s unmotivated looking and bracketing of theoretical perspectives on writing since it began with recordings of writing lessons in an early-years classroom but not with a specific problem in mind; the focus for the study emerged through the application of the various ethnomethodological techniques. Consequently, “help” was shown to be oriented to and consequential in the writing lesson. The study examined its social accomplishment.

Everyday literacy practices

Arguably the largest ethnomethodological examination of literacy practices was conducted in Queensland schools in a project funded by the Australian Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). Led by Peter Freebody, then a professor at Griffith University in Queensland, the study was designed to describe literacy practices in low socio-economic primary school classrooms (Years 1 and 3). The ethnomethodological part of the study design employed MCA and CA to examine interviews with teachers and classroom literacy events. The researchers applied the principles of ethnomethodological conduct outlined by Lee (1991, pp. 224-225) in order to bracket preconceptions and theoretical propositions until the development of analytic points. Bracketing when applied to the study of every literacy practices required that the researchers: suspend general questions regarding the interplay between literacy achievement and "background" factors such as ethnicity, disadvantage and son on, until after the analysis; view social activities as jointly produced and observable; explore what people actually do in their everyday talk-in-interaction rather than pre-empt routines; take everyday action as the accomplishment of orderliness; and culture as "embedded in and built by courses of everyday action" (Freiberg, & Freebody, 1995, pp. 188-189).

This study's examination of classroom practices in "disadvantaged" classrooms involved comparison with literacy lessons from "non-disadvantaged" classrooms. The ethnomethodological analysis produced powerful findings about the ways in which schools may produce educational disadvantage or advantage through classroom interactions. For example, the researchers found that a similar behaviour was assessed differently in those two settings during classroom interaction; a student's failure to answer a teacher's question in one setting was taken to be "poor attention" and in another to be "daydreaming", and so on. In particular, the researchers documented a range of trouble that occurred during interactions in literacy lessons. Interactive trouble included epistemological trouble (where the answerer could not produce the answer to a teacher's question); organisational trouble (such as difficulty identifying who is the next allocated speaker); reasoning trouble (differences in the reasoning practices between particular sites such as in school and at home); pedagogical trouble (occurring when answers to questions do not reflect the preferred theory of literacy or learning); relational trouble (disjunctures in the reciprocation of relationships) and stylistic trouble (a teacher's preference for certain forms of expression without explanations given for those preferences). One of the major conclusions of the study was that "[for] teachers, the problem is which theories are demonstrably dysfunctional because they promote practices which do not make literacy learning available and hearable to their students" (Freebody et al., 1998, p. 44).

DISCUSSION

Ethnomethodological studies may exhibit variation in approaches. In the previous section I have considered four studies that have drawn upon the perspective of MCA and CA, two variants of ethnomethodology. These studies illustrate a number of the constraints that ethnomethodologists may employ in the conduct of research studies. A number of criticisms of these have been posed in the literature. Here I raise some of

those briefly and then draw out the potential of ethnomethology for research in literacy education in the future.

Atkinson (1988) particularly targets conversation analysts, arguing that they have transformed ethnomethodology into "an approach with a more structuralist and behaviourist flavour" than was originally intended for ethnomethodology. In relation to the ethnomethodological bracketing of theory and disregard for intentionality of participants, Atkinson points out that transcripts themselves are "inescapable theorized representations (Atkinson, 1988, p. 454) and that the sequential analysis of conversation analysis is "a limited view of the temporality of social life" (Atkinson, 1988, p. 451). Hester and Francis (2000) have outlined a number of other criticisms. They state, for example, that ethnomethodological disinterest in mainstream sociological problems and issues and wider structural and contextual concerns has always left it open to strong criticism from within the field of sociology. Further, the methodology has been heavily criticised for its focus on micro-details, which appears to reflect an interest in sociological trivial (Hester & Francis, 2000).

From the ethnomethodological perspective, the painstaking description that ethnomethodology provides is intended to reveal taken-for-granted ways that people accomplish their activity. In this way, researchers can get at what is taken-for-granted – how teachers and students do these things interactionally in order to bring about literacy lessons or events, for example. Ethnomethodological research has resulted, now, in a corpus of work that provides understandings about the interactional accomplishment of lessons. In particular, descriptions resulting from conversation analytic studies have been important. Many of these studies consider the conversational machinery (Sacks, 1995) of instruction – the IRF or question-answer-evaluation sequence. This has been shown to predominate in classroom lessons and in classroom literacy lessons (Freebody, 2003) during instruction of the cohort. Rather less examined are interactions between students in groups or one-to-one with their peers during independent reading and writing activity. Many more studies are needed of the ways that children accomplish their activity interactionally (Davidson, 2007a, 2009a), especially when they instruct other children, or work collaboratively or interact to solve problems.

Llewellyn and Spence (2009) have argued that ethnomethodological studies, and conversation analysis in particular, may "help us think differently about practice and, more specifically, about the interplay between practice and ordinary activity" (p. 1420). They point out that the distinctiveness of ethnomethodological studies, in relation to practice, is that the orderliness of practical matters is first and foremost a phenomenon for members (or people). So that:

> How some word, utterance or gesture embodies (or does not) a particular practice is studied as something that is available to members. Whether and how someone is acting within the parameters of a particular practice is something people monitor, participate in and can take a position on in real time interaction. Moreover, it is precisely because these parameters are "oriented to" and locally managed that organisational activities and settings, such as job interviews or university lectures, are practically reproduced as familiar organisational things. (p. 1420)

Drawing on this argument, I make the point here that studies of the local organisation of literacy events enables understandings of the ways that practices (such as

collaborative story-telling or shared reading or writing) are accomplished locally on an *ad hoc* basis, in ways that are very specific to "just this" occasion but also in ways that may be exhibited across a range of classrooms. For example, ethnomethodological studies of teacher-led whole class literacy lessons confirm that questioning is social action that is produced relentlessly by teachers in lessons. Teachers also produce directives which powerfully oblige compliance from students.

The situatedness of literacy is an understanding central to contemporary accounts of literacy learning and literacy use across varied contexts. What ethnomethodology offers up is a way to consider *how* people situate literacy practices on the occasion of their use and how this reflexively constitutes the practice as what it is (on just *this* occasion). Studies of literacy classrooms will focus on the specific in the local context and will lead to descriptions of ways students and their teachers situate their practices in that local context as the ongoing social activity that the occasion requires and produces (to be what it is). Although there are some detailed accounts of children's literacy practices in and out of school, the increasing use of digital technologies, for example, requires more thorough descriptions of how children's social actions and interactions situate and accomplish digital literacies in homes and communities, and how talk and interaction situate digital literacy practices of teachers and students in classrooms. While we know that children are now engaging in a wide range of digital literacy practices, we have few detailed descriptions of the social actions that constitute those practices.

Recordings and the detailed transcription and analysis of classroom interactions during literacy lessons reveal much about the ways that teachers *and* students mutually accomplish their literacy learning and use. So, while many current approaches to literacy instruction foreground teachers' practices such as scaffolding and explicit teaching, for example, the ethnomethodological analysis of interactions to date establishes how classroom literacy instruction is founded on the mutual accomplishment of activity through talk and interaction. This reveals and emphasises the competence of students in the construction of their social worlds. This competence is also taken for granted in many studies of classroom instruction, and indeed on a daily basis in many classrooms.

An emerging perspective in the field is that ethnomethodological examinations of classrooms conducted by practitioners themselves may enable useful insights into practice (Anderson, 2011). Practitioner research employing the approach is certainly an under-examined and under-developed aspect of the methodology (but see Edwards-Groves, 1998, for a study that incorporated conversation analysis and action research in a collaboration between researcher and practitioners). It may be the case then that unmotivated looking, and the bracketing of theories and background knowledge, could be potentially powerful tools in the hands of practitioners but that remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the self-imposed constraints employed by ethnomethodology are not for the faint-hearted. At the same time, rigorous attention to recordings and transcripts, together with bracketing and respecification, are some ways that ethnomethodological

studies have employed so as to examine and describe deeply taken-for-granted aspects of literacy and literacy learning. The application of ethnomethodology to literacy research has the on-going potential to: reveal taken-for-granted ways that literacy lessons are accomplished, lead to the description and explication of social actions that constitute literacy instruction, and enhance or inform existing theoretical models of literacy learning and teaching.

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck him. - And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 50)

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Manuscript received: March 1, 2012
Revision received: May 4, 2012
Accepted: May 18, 2012

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

[[	Utterances that begin at the same time
[	Overlap in speakers’ talk
]	Indicates point where simultaneous talk finishes
=	Talk between speakers that latches or follows without a break between
( )	Used to indicate length of silences, pauses and gaps e.g. (0.2)
(.)	Indicates micro intervals
:::	Indicates that a prior sound is prolonged e.g. li::ke
-	Word is cut off e.g. ta-
><	Talk enclosed within symbols is said at a faster pace than surrounding talk
?	Rising intonation
¿	Rising intonation that is weaker than ?
↑	Marked rising intonation
↓	Marked falling intonation
!	An animated tone
un	Emphasis with capitals indicating greater emphasis e.g. NO
:::::::	Emphasis and prolongation indicate pitch change e.g. stra:::p indicates stress on word but no change in pitch; stra::p pitch rise
CA	Upper case indicates loudness
°	Indicates softness e.g. It’s a ° secret °
hhh	Indicates in-breath
(it)	Indicates that word within parentheses is uncertain
( )	Empty parentheses indicate that word/s could not be worked out
(( ))	These are used to indicate verbal descriptions e.g. ((sits down)) (adapted from Atkinson and Heritage, 1999)