

Collaborative ethnography of one master's level module brings attention to students' common pace; not taking turn from others; and teachers' refrain from giving direct answers

David Hay, Alexander Wilson

King's College London, London, United Kingdom

Research Domains

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Abstract

Attention to "*the person who learns*" is a vital axiom of human learning (Jarvis, 2006) but difficult to reconcile with higher education which attaches measure to a persons' work. In question is the extent to which exclusive focus on learner work-production may be cause of pervading speed, precarity, competition and performativity in universities (Kinchin & Gravett, 2022; Taylor 2020). The difficulty, which this paper overcomes by presenting novel ethnographic data from one masters-level Land, (i.e., British Army) education course, is not just to "imagine" how the situation might be changed, but to furnish cases where group and personal accomplishments of learning are realised differently already. The pedagogical devices by which this Land module is achieved as a single interaction schedule are shown involving *all* participants in taking/giving turn. We discuss implications relevant to higher education generally, including collective regulation of inclusive pace; and teachers' refrain from giving direct answers.

Full paper

While there is a long and sometimes troubled history of university researcher's ethnography of "*things military*" (Mohr, Sørensen, & Weisdorf, 2021), there is still much that universities can learn from critical (and empathetic) ethnographic scholarship of military officer education (Mei Jansen & Kramer, 2019), not least because of how this differs to the higher education mainstream. As Delamont & Atkinson (2018) explain, one reason novel educational research is difficult in universities is that we researchers know the situation all-to-well already, having been students, teachers, researchers, and examiners, ourselves. In such familiar settings, making genuine, critical, account of 'good' is not so easy.

In this paper, we report collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) of one module taught in partnership between academics at one UK University and Directing Staff of the Defence Academy, UK. Case study occurred between the 3rd - 14th July, 2023. The module is "*Exercise Euro Owl*": a battlefield study of the WW2 Normandy campaign between D-Day (June 6th) and retreat of German forces across the Seine on August 30th, 1944. The students are Major (rank) for whom this module is the last in a compulsory six-month, mid-career, masters-level, education programme: Intermediate Command and Staff Course

(Land). The module is historical and contemporary, includes visits to war graves; and a service of remembrance; focusses on historical controversies of leadership, urban warfare, atrocities, and enduring war; and takes doctrine of all-arms task organisation for a centrepiece. In Normandy the course comprises visiting historic sites (called “stands”) where the students as well as military and academic staff give speeches (“briefs”). Student coursework also includes a battle planning exercise in which contemporary capability/formation are simulated on the (historic) ground.

The data comprise: 1) classroom teaching observations (prior to departure), and (in Normandy) sketches, field notes, audio of naturally occurring speech, and interviews; 2) multimodal text analysis (Kress, 2010) of the pocketbook and other course materials; and leading into the co-analysis and co-writing here, 3) interviews and focus groups with students and academic/military teachers/course leaders. The analytical approaches include ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) and conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). We also draw on work by Lave and Wenger (1991).

The discussion focusses on the interaction order and the way the course achieves its pedagogy through instantiation of events in-and-of the individual and the group at once. Collective *pace* is shown to be emergent whereby to “*get ahead*” is as much a problem as to “*fall behind*”. A variety of formal and informal pedagogical devices differentiate successive speech thematically and the turn-based schedule of the pocketbook (a significant pedagogical design) requires that successive interactions happen side by-side: each person has a “*stand to give (or take)*”; and stands need not overlap, repeat, or reproduce each other since they never stack (above/below), but follow one another. Thereby, eventually the whole *procession* is a single piece: one account accounting for *these* members, *on this one occasion*. Teacher *versus* learner distinctions fade away and the emerging learning outcome includes acknowledgement of “*another person’s turn*”.

Beneath the schedule of the “educational design”, however, interaction with the land (and historic landscape), which is underpinning for a Land based (Army), emerges simply as the “grounded order”, through which intertwining of cognition, physical/sensory and emotional exigencies occur among those for whom defence with arms is an ongoing professional concern. This *becomes* our analogue of human learning generally: brought to light in study of inclusive ordering of Land based education.

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