**Empowering words, disempowering actions: an analysis of interactions between staff members
and people with learning disabilities in residents' meetings**

Abstract

Background This study examined power dynamics in verbal interactions between care staff and people with learning disabilities.

Method Recordings of residents' meetings in a group home for people with learning disabilities were examined.

Results The analysis showed some of the ways in which power was exercised in verbal interactions between care staff and residents. It was found that staff adopted various techniques to guide the discussion and produce certain kinds of statements and decisions. It could be said that in these cases, the staff were having to decide between two or more conflicting institutional objectives.

Conclusion The effect was that staff contributions sometimes produced interactional patterns which were contrary to the goal of encouraging the residents to speak up and have more say in the management of their home.

Keywords

Intellectual disability, power, interaction, self advocacy, conversation analysis

Introduction

The recent UK government document 'Valuing People' (Department of Health, 2001), which set out the future priorities and principles for services for people with learning disabilities, stated that a major problem with current services was that people with learning disabilities often have little choice or control over their lives. As a result, it set out as a principle that people with learning disabilities should be encouraged to express and make their own choices, particularly in where they live and what they do. This was to be achieved through person-centred approaches to planning which focus on the individual concerned rather than the services involved, therefore enabling the needs and wishes of the individual to be the priority.

Although a great deal of effort in recent years has been put into involving people with learning disabilities in decisions regarding aspects of their lives and also improving information and communication, research suggests that lack of control and choice continue to be a problem in many services (e.g. Goble, 1999; Goodley, 2000). Whilst services attempt to address disempowerment through changing structures and service philosophies, an important and less manageable site of power relations in people's everyday lives is their everyday interactions with service workers, family members and the wider community. Hugman (1991) suggested that service providers control the interests of service users through the interaction of language and social relationships. A number of studies have highlighted how interactions between people with learning disabilities and staff members are often asymmetrical (e.g. Antaki, Young & Finlay, 2002; Cullen et al, 1983; Marková, 1991; Prior et al, 1979). Marková (1991) noted that in the ritualised routines of institutional life, interactions between staff and people with learning disabilities could diminish to the extent that it would appear that staff were merely interacting with objects. Leudar (1981) has suggested that because of inequalities in knowledge and status, people with learning disabilities are often placed in 'non-reversible roles,' with fewer opportunities to express attitudes and feelings openly. Prior et al (1979) reported that up to a third of all verbal interactions initiated by residents were ignored in a training centre for young people with learning disabilities. They explained that this type of response could result in extinction of such attempts to communicate.

Marková (1991) examined what would happen if an attempt were made to try to restore the balance of power in communicative partnerships between people with learning disabilities and non-disabled individuals. Tutors involved in the advocacy movement were asked to participate in group discussions with people with learning disabilities. The tutors were given explicit instructions to participate in the discussion in the same way as the other participants. They were also asked not to take on a didactic role but to maintain conversation only if necessary. It was found that despite the tutors' best intentions, didactic patterns and non-response persisted. It was reported that because the participants with learning disabilities made no attempts to initiate discussion, tutors resorted to directing conversation and in this way the imbalance of power was reconstructed as a vicious circle.

A number of articles have recently examined in detail the verbal behaviour of professionals and staff members in interaction with people with learning disabilities, and attempted to outline some of the effects

of workers' attempts to manage these interactions (e.g. Antaki, 2001; Antaki & Rapley 1996; Antaki et al, 2002; Rapley, 2004; Rapley & Antaki, 1996). These studies have illustrated a range of effects which are counterproductive to the official goals of the interactions. For example, Antaki et al (2002) illustrated that untrained care staff adopted a series of non-neutral practices in interviews designed to assess the satisfaction of service users with learning disabilities regarding the services they received. Staff were observed offering evaluative feedback on interviewee responses, suggesting advice on the basis of interviewees' answers, rejecting potentially valid answers, suggesting more elaborate accounts to the interviewee than they had offered themselves, and reworking their responses. The latter included upgrading neutral or mildly positive statements or offering neutral or even positive reformulations of possible complaints. It was suggested that these deviations could have occurred as a result of the interviewer intending to treat the recipient of care supportively and therefore being more inclined to acknowledge their general duty of care to the service user rather than their immediate task of evaluating that care. Rapley and Antaki (1996) provided extracts from assessment interviews between clinical psychologists and people with learning disabilities and showed how, through the adoption of non-neutral practices to pursue a perceived correct response from the service user, 'the interviewee is shepherd into producing pseudo-acquiescent responses' (p.213). These non-neutral practices occur through reformulating service user responses, shepherding them to a response which conforms to the interviewers 'guess or stereotype of the interviewees' beliefs' (p.216), and treating service user responses as irrelevant.

These studies reveal how despite the Government's continuing commitment and proposals and the good intentions of services to encourage empowerment for service users with learning disabilities, power dynamics persist through the imbalance of knowledge and status in interactions. This study aimed to use Conversation Analysis to examine these processes further in a different context: residents' meetings in a home for people with learning disabilities, which were set up to encourage empowerment.

Conversation analysis (henceforth, CA) is the study of social action as achieved through the medium of talk in interaction. Its genesis was in the dissatisfaction of some sociologists in the late 1960s with the then dominant quantitative methodologies of their discipline, which were silent on the active construction of the social world. In the forty years since the pioneering work of the group around Harvey Sacks (whose lectures were published posthumously as Sacks, 1992), CA has attracted enormous attention and flowered into a multidisciplinary enterprise attracting sociologists, linguists and psychologists, among others (for an account of the history of Conversation Analysis, see Heritage 1984; for a recent overview of its methods

and style, see Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). Its signal characteristics are a reliance on recorded data which can be minutely inspected; and an openness to the way the participants in a scene display their own understandings of what they are doing and saying, as evidenced in the exact organisation of their talk. The original sociological promise of CA to illuminate the way social structure is embodied in the detail of social action has been eminently fulfilled in a large number of both 'basic' and 'applied' research programmes.

The result is that the researcher interested in the way social participants conduct, in real time, their business with each other, now has a powerful armoury of concepts and insights with which to approach their chosen topic. 'Basic' CA research has been applied productively to a variety of institutional activities previously accessible only in retrospect (by interviews with participants) or in simulation, or through comparatively coarse contemporary observation. For example, CA has been used in research on how talk in interaction achieves business meetings (Boden, 1994), educational testing (Maynard and Marlaire, 1992) and survey interviewing (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000), to take a few notable examples and has yielded impressive returns. Within the field of research on learning disability, CA has been used to study the communicative competence of people with a learning disability (e.g. Wootton, (1989), the practices of their assessment (e.g. Antaki, 1999) and the manner in which they manage their identities in interviews (e.g. Rapley, Kiernan and Antaki, 1998).

"Power", of course, means many things in the social science literature, but one common thread throughout is the observation that different participants in a scene will have (and be held to) different rights to contribute. The virtue of taking this working definition of power is that it is available for public scrutiny, as it will reveal itself in the participants' own talk. This makes Conversation Analysis a particularly useful approach: as Hutchby puts it in a defence of CA in the analysis of power-asymmetry between host and caller in a radio- phone in, "By showing how participants display an orientation to institutional settings by engaging in certain activities and refraining from others, CA can [...] be used to illustrate how power, in the sense of differential resource distributions, can be linked to those orientations" (Hutchby, 1996, p 18-19).

Method

Data

The data consisted of audio footage, recording two residents meetings over two consecutive months at a privately run residential care home for people with learning disabilities in the South-East of England.

Residents Meeting

The residents' meetings are semi-structured, in that the staff holding the meeting follow an agenda planned by the staff and manager prior to the meeting. The agenda contains a list of items for discussion, such as

‘Day Centres- is everyone happy with the present arrangements and activities,’ ‘Advocacy Service- does everyone know what this is,’ ‘Daily Menus-are we all happy with the present menu,’ and ‘Fire Procedures- Do we all know what to do in case of fire?’ The meeting is attended by the residents and the staff on duty at the time. The same eight residents attended both meetings over two months, however except for one member of staff (Ann) who was present at both meetings, different staff attended each time. At the first meeting four staff members participated. At the second meeting two staff members participated. Residents’ meetings enable staff and service users to convene on a regular basis. There is no specific policy followed by the home regarding residents’ meetings, however a manager’s definition was obtained describing the objectives of the meeting. This is summarised below:

1. To empower clients
2. To discuss day-to-day issues/concerns that clients may have.
3. To offer a social venue to facilitate group interaction and communication with clients.

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Staff that held or participated in the meetings were also asked to give their perspective of the purpose of the residents’ meeting. One staff member described the meeting as, ‘A way of enabling clients to recognise their own worth by having a say in the running of their home and therefore putting power into their lives.’ Another staff member viewed the resident’s meeting as a place where clients could air their grievances and problems openly and discuss them as a group and as providing residents with the opportunity to make their own suggestions and contributions to future plans, for example regarding holidays and menu planning.

Permission

Before any data was collected, each staff member of the care home was sent a letter seeking his or her permission to participate in the study. The letter also described the purpose of the research as an investigation of communication and interactions between staff members and service users with learning disabilities. A more simplified version of the letter was given and read out to each resident of the care home. This was then left with a member of staff, who went over the letter with them a few days later. The letters were also used as consent forms, enabling staff and residents to indicate their willingness to participate prior to the commencement of the recordings (see appendix 4).

Service Users with Learning Disabilities

Six women and two men aged between 49 to 70 participated in this study. The service users all had been living in the residential care home for between ten months and eight years and had been labelled as having mild to moderate learning disabilities. Descriptions of each service users' verbal abilities were collected from the members of staff who took part in the investigation. These are summarised below.

Nat	Very fluent
Kat	Very fluent although poor pronunciation and problems with articulation when upset.
Lyn	Very quiet, speaks only if needs to communicate something. Repetitive speech particularly if upset.
Val	Very cheerful nature although needs to be given time to speak to be understood.
Kel	Most articulate of residents although does not tend to speak often.
Amy	Speaks through her nose but can be understood if listened to carefully. Becoming more incomprehensible.
Zac	Says very little although always very clear and understandable.
Tim	Knows what he wants to say but does not speak clearly. Very fast and repetitive speech, often difficult to catch.

Staff

Four female members of staff (Ann, Alyson, Jennifer and Melanie) and one male member of staff (Jay) agreed to participate in the study. All were between the ages of 41 and 66 and had been employed by the home as care assistants for between 10 months and 6 years. Two members of staff had completed a diploma in care; other staff had participated in various forms of in-house training such as first aid and manual handling. All staff had a duty of care to the residents.

Transcription

The recordings (each approx 1 hour long) were transcribed using a coarser version of the Jefferson notation used in conversation analysis (Atkinson and Heritage 1984) (see appendix 3 for description of conversation analysis notation), to show certain features present in the discourse. All identifying details were changed. The names of staff in the extracts used to support the analysis were capitalised.

Analysis

The analysis revealed different ways in which power relations were visible in interactions between staff members and people with learning disabilities. Throughout the recording, staff are seen to negotiate various roles with the residents, for example as chair of the meeting, teacher and supporter. Each of these roles implies different functions, all of which were seen repeatedly in all transcripts: responsibility for getting through the agenda and allowing everyone to have a say; checking and rehearsing residents' knowledge in important areas, imparting new knowledge where necessary; and eliciting participants' views and opinions on matters of importance to them. The latter two roles are determined partly by the agenda, which included items both on eliciting residents' views (e.g. Day centres: is everyone happy with the arrangements and activities?) and on checking their knowledge in various areas (e.g. "Do we all know what to do in case of fire?" "Update residents on procedures for night and day," "Do you know who/what your key-worker is?"). The staff roles in the residents' meetings can therefore be seen as similar to their everyday roles in the life of the home. In addition to these different roles, group members differ in their communicative abilities and this is another factor that staff have to negotiate. However, these will not be the focus of the paper. In the residents' meetings, the direction of the conversation was determined by the staff through the use of nominations, particular question types and attending to some utterances while ignoring others. In what we shall see, the effect of this leadership role led to conversational practices which were, in fact, at odds with the institutional objectives which the meetings were intended to serve.

Although many examples of these patterns were found throughout the transcripts, we have focused here on two main themes: non-uptake of utterances and producing affirmations of service philosophies. Staff control of the interaction through non-uptake was frequently observed and seemed to arise in different forms. For example staff members often nominated particular residents to speak with the result that the utterances of other residents were not acknowledged. In other instances, residents' utterances were acknowledged but then reformulated by the staff in such a way that the original statement or opinion was less of a challenge to the service. Producing affirmations of service philosophies involved inquiries which were tailored towards producing positive statements relating to the service. Various patterns, such as pre-sequences and the use of rhetorical questions (for example 'isn't it?') were used, which had the effect of shepherding residents towards particular responses. Staff were also observed providing clues to achieve certain answers.

1. Non-Uptake

Many situations were observed showing staff either ignoring or barely acknowledging residents' attempts to communicate. This was often seen when service users expressed concerns or showed preferences.

a. Pursuing Appropriate Responses at the Cost of Ignoring Dissatisfaction

The discussion in the long extract below concerns the item in the agenda, 'Any complaints or comments?' and is taken from group one. We have included extracts from this lengthy interaction because it illustrates the power of the group leader (a staff member) to determine which opinions, and whose opinions, get taken up in the group. We can see that Jay (a staff member) is leading the meeting, as illustrated by his raising agenda items, nominating speakers and by the fact that the other staff member (Ann) orients to this by telling Lynn that she should address her remarks to him (lines 628 and 637). Whilst going around the room asking if any resident has any suggestions, one resident (Lyn) repeatedly tries to bring up her complaint, which is effectively disregarded. It is important to see how it comes about that Lyn's complaint finds no uptake: it is through the leader's pursuit of a different agenda item, namely the 'round-robin' solicitation of responses to his question. Lyn's complaint is badly formatted for that.

(1a) Staff: Jay, Ann, Residents: Lyn, Kat, Val, Nat

600	JAY	We talked about our weekly shopping (1.1) and
601		er (0.8)the last thing we're gonna talk about is any
602		complaints of of comments. Anybody wants to change
603		anything, say anything? (0.8) Something Kathy would
604		like to say anything (1.8)or would like to see any changes?
605	Lyn	Jay
606	Kat	Nope
607	JAY	No
608	Kat	Nope

Notice that Kat's turn at line 606 is 'properly' formatted as a response to Jay's question. Lyn's turn at 605, on the other hand, is formatted as a pre-announcement. The very fact that she bids for Jay's attention

interactionally implies that she orients to the fact that she has spoken 'out of turn' - otherwise she would have no reason to have to make a point of catching his eye. Note also that Jay has made two different invitations to the group – initially he asks the whole group if they want to say anything (line 601-3), but when there is no response in the short period of silence immediately after, he then nominates Kathy.

At this point, Jay could, of course, choose to attend to Lyn's bid, but he does not. We do not say that he 'ignores it deliberately' (although it may seem so to Lyn). We prefer the reading that he chooses to pursue the line of business he has already put in motion, and for which he is accountable: namely, seeing if people around the room have any complaints or want to see any changes. This is how he proceeds:

609 JAY Are you hap [py the way things are in here(1.5)
610 Kat [ummm
611 JAY Err. (.23)Valerie would you like to see any
612 JAY changes (1)[What would you like to see.
613 Lyn [(I don't want to be retiring)
614 ANN umm (*To Lynda*)

At this point (line 613) Lyn makes the announcement she had prefigured in line 605: she doesn't want to retire (a reference to the loss of access to the day centre because of her age). But it is in competition with Val, who is now the nominated speaker:

615 Lyn [I don't want to be retiring
616 Val [I don't know
617 JAY You don't know, (0.9)you can always
618 think about it can' [t you?
619 Val [Yes yes yes
620 JAY Natalie? [Would you like see any see
621 any changes in here Natalie
622 ANN [Do you want to change anything? (*To Lynda*)
623 Lyn (retiring)

624 Nat I'm not saying.

625 JAY You're [not saying

626 ANN [(words) I'm not sure if

627 there is a [lot we can do about that.

628 JAY [You're not saying?

629 JAY But I think

630 Nat If I say anything I think

631 [I'd I'd get me[get my head bitten off

632 Lyn [I don't like retiring

633 ANN [Well you tell Jay (that)

634 Nat and I don't think I'm gonna have (to do that)

635 Kat And me (*To Jay*)

636 JAY [Yeah

637 Lyn [What?

638 ANN [That you don't like retiring

639 JAY Well I think it's a bit of this

640 is the best time where you can have your own say, (1.5)

641 [you know about the change you'd like to see [about the

642 Lyn [(words)

643 ANN [You can ask him in a bit

644 JAY things you want

645 Lyn What

646 JAY Like you [just said about the bingo that was a very good suggestion too

What we see is that Jay pursues his trajectory - which is institutionally quite proper - of going round everyone in the group, and making sure that they express themselves. To the degree that Lyn formats her interventions inappropriately by speaking out of turn in the question/answer round, she is 'ignorable'. Rather than attending to Lyn, Jay chooses to finish his questioning of Kat and Val and then move on to nominate Nat.

There is another member of staff present, and it is interesting that it is she (Ann) who attends to Lyn in a side-sequence or schism (Egbert 1997). It is distinctly *not* the main activity of the group. And even then, although Ann encourages Lyn to voice any issues she has (622), she responds to her with, ‘I’m not sure if there is a lot we can do about that.’

Between lines 647-57, Jay continues his effort to resolve Nat’s complaint by recommending that she use this time to make suggestions such as having a game of bingo. We take up the interaction again below in line 658, when Lyn again repeats her complaint, again using Jay’s name to attract his attention. Ann affirms it (660) and Lyn repeats it, but once more their attempts are not taken up; as before, Jay concentrates on the contributions of the others. In this case it is Val, who has taken up his suggestion that games are an appropriate topic for the meeting.

(1b) Staff: Jay, Ann, Aly Residents: Lyn, Val,

658	Lyn	Jay, (1.20) I don’t like retiring, (1.08)
659		I don’t like retiring at the moment.
660	ANN	[Lynda don’t like retiring (<i>To Jay</i>)
661	Val	[Play a game of, play a game of (1.89)[skittles.
662	Lyn	[I don’t like retiring
663	JAY	Did you (0.77) arrrh (<i>To Valerie</i>)
664	Val	Y’know place where the made [(in to some the grass)
665		are like to play a game of skittles
666	Lyn	[I don’t like retiring (mumbles)
667	JAY	Arrrh did you?
668	Val	Somebody else somebody made it for us.
669	ANN	[Have you decided where you want to go on holiday Zack?
670	ALY	[Can’t you do something else? (you [need to words)
671	Lyn	[Don’t like retiring
672	Lyn	Don’t like retiring
673	JAY	Would you like, Zack, (0.4)would you
674		like to say something to us?

675 Lyn He won't speak up.
676 JAY No? How about Kelly?

Instead of pursuing Lyn's utterance, Jay converses with Val about skittles (661-68), following his own earlier comment to Nat (646) that the types of things she might suggest here would be to have a game of bingo. During this time, Lyn's speech, in the face of (what must seem to her like) being ignored, becomes repetitive and she reiterates her complaint four times (662, 666, 671, 672). Jay not only does not take up Lyn's complaint, but does not even acknowledge she has spoken. Instead he repeatedly nominates other residents to speak.

In all of this we are seeing a staff member, in order to pursue one task, do something which has the effect of what Marková (1991) described as putting a resident into a non-reversible role. This may result in a debilitating effect on the speech of a person with learning difficulties (in this case, Lyn's behaviour begins to resemble 'echolalia'). In 673 Jay nominates Zack, a resident sitting beside Lyn (see fig 1 in Method). Zack does not respond to Jay however, consequently Lyn explains, 'He won't speak up' (675). Jay's response to Lyn (676) suggests that this time he has heard her speak. This is seen in the way he replies 'No,' to her explanation but rather than using this opportunity to ask Lyn if she has anything to say, Jay then nominates the resident sitting on her other side.

Following a brief exchange between Jay and Kelly. Lyn is finally invited to voice her opinions, and she repeats her complaint in line 685 in extract 1c below. Jay's aim of nominating each resident to speak has, as we have been seeing, contradictory effects. On the one hand it ensures each person has an opportunity to speak whilst on the other it interferes with spontaneous discussion and results in many valid (but out of turn) contributions being ignored. We should also note that many of Lyn's utterances often overlap with the speech of others (denoted by square brackets []), which is likely to be a further factor in their being ignored.

(1c) Staff: Jay, Ann, Residents: Lyn, Amy

680 JAY How about Lynda? (1.2)Would you like
681 to see some changes in here or or you hap[py the way things are

682 Lyn [Yeah,

683 Lyn I'm here

684 JAY Are you happy?

685 Lyn I'm here yes. (1.1)don't like retiring though

686 ANN She doesn't like retiring

687 Lyn No, don't like retiring.

688 JAY Arhh yeah. (3.)How about Amy?

689 Lyn [(words)

690 JAY [Amy, (2.)you alright?

691 Amy hmmm

692 JAY You Ok, (1.7)are you happy here?

693 Amy yes

694 JAY That's good. (2.7)The happiness is the

695 only thing that that (0.5) counts really

696 we should all be happy where

697 we are (1.6) [and er we should

698 all the other thing is we should

699 Lyn [(mumbles)

700 JAY always look for each other, (0.7) look after

701 each other and look for each other.

702 (1.7)Plus as members of staff, I think

703 we should be (.) so like we live here, we

704 shouldn't we shouldn't conduct as staff we

705 should be one of them as [well. (1.1)We should

706 Lyn [I don't like retiring

707 JAY work towards their benef there

708 well-bein [g.

709 Lyn [I don't like retiring that's all

710 ANN Well you've told Jay

711 BEN What's that?

712 JAY Arhh you don't want t [o retire, s'all right,
 713 BEN [(words)
 714 JAY you can stay here and then be with us.
 715 Lyn No I [don't like retiring
 716 Val [That's nice
 717 JAY Yeah that's nice isn't it?

Lyn's complaint is repeated by Ann (686) and reconfirmed once more by Lyn (687). Lyn finally has Jay's attention but despite this, his response is a brief acknowledgement that she has spoken, rather than an acknowledgement that she has a problem (688). After a hesitation, Jay then nominates Amy and using a non-neutral question form, asks her if she is 'happy'. Note here that the agenda states 'Any complaints or comments,' yet Jay departs from this neutrality in pursuit of confirming service users' happiness. This is in accordance with Marková (1991)'s discussion on the development of topic, where it is noted that tactical intentions can disrupt the natural progression of a topic. Therefore if a staff member engages in dialogue with preconceived notions of what is valid participation, then contributions estimated as unacceptable are rejected resulting in a 'monological dialogue' (p. 234). This is seen from line 694-708, where Jay explains how staff should not differentiate themselves from residents and should all work towards enhancing their quality of life. Throughout this monologue, Lyn continues to express her complaint, but Jay simply talks over her (706-709).

In line 710, in response to Lyn's perseverance, Ann says, 'Well you've told Jay.' Jay now repeats Lyn's complaint (712) but rather than take it up he reframes it and presents her retirement as a positive situation, as an opportunity for her to be with the others at home. Although she resists this positive reframing of her complaint, again stating she doesn't like it (715), Val affirms Jay's positive statement (716)), and Jay agrees with Val about how agreeable his response to Lyn's problem is (717). In this extended interaction, Lyn has stated she doesn't like retiring 14 times. Jay acknowledges her twice. The first time he quickly nominates another speaker, the second time he reframes her complaint as a positive.

b. Dealing with opposition

Making suggestions and speaking about preferences are the main objectives of the residents' meeting.

However, there is a tension between staff encouraging residents to make their own choices and shepherding them towards choices which the staff, for various reasons, might prefer. Some of these reasons may well be institutionally appropriate, but the effect nevertheless is directive, and contrary to the aim of encouraging free expression.

Extract 2a is taken from the second group meeting, and Ann is acting as leader. The discussion is about the Christmas party.

(2a) Staff: Ann, Residents: Kat, Val, Tim

- 774 ANN What do you think about that, have
775 a party here on the 22nd, have a disco in the evenings.
776 Kat umm, (-) [naw
777 ANN [So you can all dance with each other
778 Val Yes
779 Kat Na[w
780 ANN Ye:s there you are
781 Tim I would Ann, I would
782 ANN Valerie likes the idea, Kelly likes the idea
783 Tim I like it
784 ANN and Tim likes the idea
785 Tim Yeah (-)Yeah
786 Kat discos are
787 Tim good innit
788 (coughing)
789 Kat I'll lie upstairs
790 Tim (At Finedon, we had one)
791 ANN Well you'll still hear it up there

Note that in line 777 Ann, the staff facilitator, designs her turn as an extension of what she has been saying, in overlap with Kat's just-recognisable rejection of the offer of a party. This design masks Kat's rejection in two ways: it literally masks it aurally (it is difficult to hear) and it masks it interactionally, in designing the turn as if it was merely an extension of line 774-5, to which there had not yet been an answer. (It is as if Ann had not reached the end of her question, which is now extended to include the clause "so you can all dance with each other").

Val answers positively, and in the clear; then on line 779 Kat repeats her "na:w" but notice, again, that Ann comes in overlap and ratifies not the rejection but rather Val's acceptance. Now it may be that there are defensible institutional reasons for planning a party (it is culturally a positive event, encouraging association, recreation, and so on). But we shall see that in pursuing the goal of getting respondents to agree to it, the staff member is in danger of offending against another institutional goal, namely free expression of (even negative) opinion. Following Tim's agreement at line 781, Ann names the three residents who like the idea (782-84). However, Kat continues to oppose the idea, stating that she would lie upstairs (789). In response to this, Ann states that Kat would still hear the disco upstairs, which implies that the disco is inevitable with or without Kat's agreement (791).

(2b) Staff: Ann, Mel, Resident: Lyn

- 802 Lyn Ohhh I'm getting too old for it
- 803 ANN You're getting too old? (-) [You could listen
- 804 to it though couldn't you?
- 805 Kat [She wouldn't like it
- 806 Lyn [(I don't want to)
- 807 Kat [Too noisy
- 808 MEL You're never too old to do a
- 809 bit of dirty dan [cing
- 810 Lyn [No I don't [want to
- 811 ANN [No you can dance,
- 812 ANN [I'll dance with you Lynda.
- 813 MEL [Or Tim can dance

In line 802 above, Lyn also objects to the disco by stating that she is "getting too old". Though she has said nothing about dancing, Ann suggests this is the reason for her objection and she could instead listen to the music (803-4). Kat supports Lyn by saying she wouldn't like it and Lyn repeats her objection. Mel (another staff member) then suggests, 'You're never too old to do a bit of dirty dancing' (808-9), which Lyn again rejects. Notice three things about Mel's intervention. One, just as in the case we saw in Extract 1, it comes from a member of staff who is not the main mover at this point in the conversation. In that sense, Lyn's concerns are being 'relegated' to a secondary player. Secondly, this player is implicitly on one side, the side opposed to Lyn's interests - she makes common cause with Ann; Lyn is being faced now not only with the facilitator as a single person, but as someone with allies in the group. Thirdly, notice that Mel's suggestion ("You're never too old to do a bit of dirty dancing") is clearly 'ironical' or 'jocular'. Lyn would be within her rights to consider that her objections are not being met seriously, with serious rebuttals (let alone positive alternatives). Rather, she is being cajoled into changing her mind. One only cajoles someone if one does not respect their status or their right to think as they do - a child, say, or someone petulantly or irrationally hanging on to an idea that is ill-founded. Mel, then, although a case could as before be made that he is pursuing an institutionally appropriate line (of getting someone to do something "positive") is offending against an arguably superordinate institutional requirement to respect resident's opinions, and their right to make them and keep them.

However, Lyn's opinion is finally rejected by Ann, who contradicts her by saying "No you can dance, I'll dance with you Lynda," supported by Mel who suggests Tim might also dance with her. In this way, the objections of Lynda to the disco, which is at odds with the preference of both the staff and three of the other residents, is rejected and neutralized by the suggestions of the staff members. This sequence needs to be understood in the context of the dilemma that the meeting face here: the service philosophy of respecting individual choice among the residents is sometimes in conflict with the principles of majority rule in making decisions which affect the whole group (and is sometimes in conflict with decisions the staff would like to make for pragmatic reasons). Here however, rather than acknowledge that Lyn's and Kat's preference has been outvoted pure and simple, or pursue alternative activities that all residents agree to, their opinions are either ignored or are neutralized by staff suggesting 'fixes' which would allow the opinion to be over-ruled.

(2c) Staff: Ann, Mel, Residents: Zack, Tim, Lyn, Val

831 ANN [Would you dance Zack,
832 (-)If [we had a disco
833 Lyn [(Za:ck)
834 Tim [I would, I'd dance
835 Zac Can't
836 ANN You can't? I could dance with you,
837 I [could help you
838 Val [heheheheh
839 Tim I'd dance innit Ann?
840 ANN Yeah
841 Lyn He'd fall over
842 Tim I (know how they do it [words)
843 ANN [No I wouldn't let him
844 fall over
845 Tim No innit
846 MEL we'll put you on a [pair of skates Zack (-)
847 Lyn [(poor Zack)
848 MEL [you can ska(h)te around with me
849 Val [heheheheh (coughs)
850 Lyn No he'll fall over

In the extract above Zack is asked if he would dance at the disco (831) however he gives a negative reply: "Can't" (835). Ann repeats his response (836) but counteracts it by saying she could help him. Lyn, who was seen opposing the idea above, expresses concern that he may fall (841). Ann again attempts to neutralise this concern, saying she wouldn't allow him to fall (843). Mel also fails to take Zac's utterance seriously, suggesting they could put him 'on a pair of skates' (846). Lyn reiterates her concern (850). After this, both staff members become engaged in conversation with other residents.

The discussion tails off and leads into a lengthy one about Father Christmas. This lasts for approximately 60 lines, some of which is shown in extract 2d.

(2d) Staff: Ann, Residents: Val, Kat

904 ANN and Father Christmas came in
905 Lyn Oh yeah
906 ANN Ye:s see she'd almost forgotten hadn't you?
907 What did he give you?
908 Tim At the front door?
909 MEL Did you get a present Nat Lynda?
910 Lyn Yeah
911 ANN And what did you get? [(-) You hav:ent
912 forgotten. What did you get Lynda?
913 Tim [she's forgotten it
914 Lyn Slippers
915 ANN Slip:pers
916 MEL Is that the ones she keeps falling
917 out of? Oh ri [ght.
918 Kat [Yeah
919 Tim Got them on now Melanie, got them
920 On [now.
921 Lyn [No I don't
922 Tim (Got those shoes on)
923 ANN No those she had for her birthday.
924 ANN Anybody else got anything to say about
925 that then? (-)[No
926 Val [No
927 Kat [No
928 (Natalie re-enters room)
929 ANN So it's gonna be a disco at the party then

To end this topic, Ann asks if anyone wants to say anything else on the subject, and Val and Kat say ‘No’ (926-27). Following this consensus Ann returns to the Christmas party question and delivers her conclusion “So it’s gonna be a disco at the party then” (929). Although two of the residents have expressed strong disagreement with the idea of the disco, and a further person has said he would be unable to take part in the dancing, the decision is finalised. The dissenting voices are either ignored, are joked about, or their objections are neutralized with ‘enabling’ suggestions.

2. Producing affirmations of service philosophy

In having a duty of care and responsibility to people with learning disabilities, staff may experience a conflict when enabling them to make their own decisions. As mentioned previously, this may arise because the staff feel they ‘know better’ than the residents’ (see Rapley and Antaki, 1996). Alternatively they may have preconceived ideas of what the residents’ answers should be and therefore utilise various techniques to ensure that these responses conform to their expectations. Such patterns are often seen when staff are performing the role of educators, in eliciting the proper procedure to follow in the event of a fire, for example. The extracts below illustrate another context in which such direction takes: in producing a public voicing of the principles the service is supposed to embody.

a. Prompts

Researchers into the language used by teachers and others who are engaged in imparting information have often noted the pervasive use of conversational practices that provide for answers to ‘appear spontaneously’. These practices range from the provision of candidate answers (Pomerantz, 1988) to the use of pre-sequences which contain information relevant to the answer to an upcoming question (e.g. Antaki and Rapley, 1996). This latter practice is visible in the extract below. In it, Jay, the staff member, is finding out if Nat has the sense that she has the right to make choices in her life. In principle, Jay could simply ask this question straight out. But see how he leads up to it (he delivers it eventually at line 252), with pre-questions which are highly tendentious:

(3a) Staff: Jay, Residents: Nat

- 238 JAY Every Monday we go shopping (0.8) isn’t it Natalie?
239 Nat Yeah

238 JAY What do we do there?

239 Nat Ave coffee

240 JAY What else? (2.1)[Who buys the coffee for you?

241 Tim [getting cold in ere

242 Nat You

243 (Laughter)

244 JAY and it's free of charge isn't it?

245 Nat Yeah

246 JAY Yeah. What else do you do in there Natalie?

247 Nat Eh

248 JAY What do you do? (.)We do shopping.

249 Nat Yeah

250 JAY And who makes the choices there

251 Nat I do

252 JAY Exactly isn't it, the choice is yours and

253 Kathy's so that you can buy whatever you like

In the exchange above Jay asks questions that he appears to know the answer to (242). As well as using non-neutral questions ending in what Antaki et al (2002) termed 'confirmation- expecting tag questions' such as 'isn't it' (246), he also questions Natalie then provides an answer himself (250), clearly demonstrating the route he would like her responses to take. The questions guide Natalie into expressing how she has freedom of choice when she goes shopping. A public affirmation of a service principal is therefore produced, and Jay then closes the topic with the appropriate conclusion: 'exactly isn't it, the choice is yours and Kathy's' (254-55).

b. Providing candidate answers

Some of the methods utilised by staff to produce the voicing of particular constructions of the service include hinting or providing clues, and if these fail then suggesting a response themselves. All of these techniques are demonstrated in the example below. The extract shows a discussion relating to the following agenda item:

Key-workers

You all have a key-worker

Do you know what they are?

Do you know who your key-worker is?

At the beginning of extract 4, Kathy's suggestion regarding her perception of her key-worker's role, 'help', though repeated louder (380), is ignored. Ann's attention is instead directed towards the nominated speaker, Natalie. When she does not provide an answer, Ann proposes that key-workers are there to 'talk to' (381), which Natalie agrees to: 'yeah'. Natalie is then asked to describe her relationship with her care-worker (387). Her description 'all right' (388) is then upgraded into 'so she's a friend' by Ann (394), which again Natalie agrees to. The other staff member, Mel, then asks about another care worker (398-399). Kat says this person is a 'helper' (400), an echo of her earlier ignored suggestion that key-workers are there to 'help' (378, 380). Natalie repeats 'helper'. Mel then leads her into upgrading this description by suggesting another answer might be desirable 'yeah, but what do you always say, she is my _?' When Nat and Kat then repeat Ann's earlier suggestion that a staff member is a 'friend' (403-404), Mel receives it with a confirmatory 'Right', indicating the correct answer has been provided. Here we see, then, that the staff members use a series of leading questions, provide answers themselves, and ignore or treat as inadequate other legitimate answers, until they get to a public voicing of the statement that staff members are the residents' friends.

(4) Staff: Mel, Ann, Residents: Nat, Kat

- 375 ANN What's your relationship with your care-worker Natalie?
- 376 Nat Ees er I dunno
- 377 ANN What's ee there for?
- 378 Kat Help
- 379 ANN um
- 380 Kat HELP
- 381 ANN talk to
- 382 Nat yeah
- 383 ANN and do you go and talk to him?
- 384 Nat talk to her

385 ANN t her
 386 Nat yeah
 387 MEL What kind of relationship do you have with her, dear?
 388 Nat Alright
 389 MEL umm?
 390 Nat Sh [e she she's alright
 391 Tim [coughs
 392 MEL She's alright.
 393 Nat Yeah
 394 ANN so she's a friend
 395 Nat yeah she's a [friend
 396 ANN [yeah
 397 Nat say she's a friend
 398 MEL Right, so er the carer, the, night carer who comes on
 399 this evening, what is she to you? [(-)What relationship is that to you?
 400 Kat [Helper
 401 Nat helper
 402 MEL Yeah but what do you always say, she is (-) my?
 403 Nat Friend
 404 Kat Friend
 405 MEL Right

Discussion

The focus of this study was to examine verbal interactions between care staff and people with learning disabilities in the context of residents' meetings. One of the main items on the agenda was to allow service users the opportunity to express both dissatisfaction and preferences. It was found, however, that the power to acknowledge and act on these rested with the staff. We found that staff did struggle between conflicting requirements, and, in the extracts we showed, chose ways of proceeding which effectively left residents concerns unrecognized, or shepherded them towards reporting 'positive' experiences. Two main patterns were presented here: 'non-uptake' of legitimate contributions and producing affirmations of service philosophies.

Concerning the former, staff power was seen in the non-uptake of a complaint voiced repeatedly by a resident. This took the form of simply ignoring the complaint by nominating and addressing other members of the group, and when it was finally acknowledged by reframing the situation being complained about into a positive. The second set of extracts illustrated how the preferences of several residents regarding the Christmas party were neutralized through offering fixes. Although these fixes were not accepted by the residents, the decision was taken nevertheless by the staff member who was leading the group. In this extract the power to determine whose preference was legitimate and what the final decision should be rested solely with the staff members. The final extracts showed how residents were shepherded into producing particular statements that affirmed service philosophies: that of individual choice and 'friendly' relations with the staff (with the implications this has of equality and caring). These statements were produced through the use of leading questions to produce an account from which the principle was extracted, or through staff directly providing the answer and then asking questions that led the residents to voice it themselves.

Although space considerations meant that only a limited number of extracts were presented, the transcripts contained other examples which are not reported here. As further evidence that these patterns are not isolated instances, similar findings have been reported by Antaki et al (2002) in the context of individual interviews between staff members and service-users. Similarities are also found with the study reported by Marková (1991), who examined verbal interactions between a group of people with learning disabilities and a tutor.

The aim of this analysis is not to belittle staff members' attempts to facilitate discussion. We suspect detailed analysis of our own moment-by-moment behaviour would show embarrassing results. Facilitating discussion among people with differing communicative abilities is not easy, and is made more difficult when staff are juggling roles of teacher, enabler, representative of the service, and advocate. These roles lead to conflicting agendas across many situations. However, this type of analysis is worthwhile in that it illustrates the subtle ways the power is exercised in such situations, and therefore might sensitize workers towards their own behaviour and how it facilitates or impedes the autonomy of people with learning disabilities.

The White Paper, 'Valuing People,' (Department of Health, 2001) suggested that the lack of control and choice experienced by many people with learning disabilities could be ameliorated by making service users central to the planning process and increasing efforts to communicate with them. The residents' meetings were initiated as part of the progression towards these improvements. However, although staff members overtly offered opportunities for residents to voice concerns, inadvertently they sought endorsement of happiness and satisfaction of the service provided. Staff controlled the interaction through the use of particular types of questions, through nomination of speakers and through reformulation of the residents' utterances. The result was that legitimate complaints were sometimes barely acknowledged and at other times reformulated towards an opposite point of view. Relevant to this, French (1994) suggested that the relationship between carer and service user might consist of an imbalance of power due to the sense of appreciation the service user is constantly obliged to display. As a result, expressions of satisfaction are treated with approval and dissatisfaction with disapproval, leading to a situation of oppression that is difficult to challenge.

Examinations of how staff members treated residents' expressed preferences suggest that carers face a conflict between their roles of promoting individual decision making and their role of providing a duty of care, part of which would include assisting with decision making. The analysis found that though residents were consistently given opportunities to voice preferences, the choices to be made often appeared to be pre-ordained. It was observed that residents were not submissive in raising objections, however these were challenged with rejoinders from staff who used their assumed position of knowing what was better for residents to propel their arguments (see Rapley and Antaki, 1996). This is reminiscent of Dowson's (1997) discussion of empowerment issues within services, where he noted that empowerment may be viewed as something loaned by staff rather than given, for example when service users are allowed to make a decision that meets with the approval of staff.

The devices used by care staff to shepherd residents into producing specific answers were consistently observed with certain effects. These non-neutral practices include the use of yes/ no questions, which usually seek confirmation and therefore are easier to acquiesce to and at the best of times difficult to disagree with (Houtkoop and Steenstra, 2000). Similarly, care staff were also observed to use devices such

as clueing which are difficult to resist and help the respondent come up with the desired response. Moreover, residents were seen producing statements which if officially recorded would read for example as, 'I have choice.' Such a declaration embodying the mission of the residents' meetings would demonstrate that progression towards promoting choice and independence in the lives of people with learning disabilities is a success. However, closer inspection of the discourse would reveal the staff control of the interaction by providing their interlocutor with information through a pre-sequence, which would eventually lead to the inevitable statement.

Though the various forms of power identified by the analysis were not inconsequential and were observed frequently in the data, one would hesitate to generalise the findings as an example of what takes place in other groups. The verbal behaviour of staff and professionals might be influenced by the type of training they have received. In addition, many self-advocacy groups are run by people with learning disabilities, where we would expect many of these role conflicts to be absent. However, recognition of the subtle ways disempowerment can occur between people with learning disabilities and their supporters can only further the aims of increasing choice, control and autonomy.

In summary the rationale behind the resident's meetings were to empower the client, facilitate group interaction and discuss the issues and concerns of the client. Though this goes part of the way to meeting the new Government proposals, the analysis exposed ways in which unequal power relations between service users and care staff undermined the objectives the residents' meetings set out to achieve. Through the negotiation of conflicting roles as provider of care versus promoter of independence, staff members were seen to tailor their questions and rework service user answers. The implications of this were that answers, opinions and feelings were constructed, which the respondent did not originally submit.

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Appendix

Notation

The transcription symbols used in this study are an abbreviated set derived from Gail Jefferson's full system (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, p. ix-xvi)

(.)	Just noticeable pause
(0.3) (2secs)	Examples of exactly timed pauses
wo(h)rd	'Laughter' within words
lo:ng	Stretching of the preceding sound
(word)	Transcribers guess at an unclear part of the tape.
°soft°	Speech noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk
Over[lap	Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech
[over	denote the start of overlapping talk

Figure 1

Diagram Showing Seating Position of Each Staff and Resident at First Resident Meeting

Figure 2

Diagram showing Seating Position of Each Staff and Resident at Second Resident Meeting