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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Being a “Good Parent” in Parent–Teacher Conferences

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This research advances our understanding of what constitutes a “good parent” in the course of actual social interaction. Examining video-recorded naturally occurring parent–teacher conferences, this article shows that, while teachers deliver student-praising utterances, parents may display that they are gaining knowledge; but when teachers’ actions adumbrate student-criticizing utterances, parents systematically display prior knowledge. This article elucidates the details of how teachers and parents tacitly collaborate to enable parents to express student-troubles first, demonstrating that parents display competence—appropriate involvement with children’s schooling—by asserting their prior knowledge of, and/or claiming/describing their efforts to remedy, student-troubles. People (have to) display competence generically in interaction. By explicating how parents display competence, this article offers insights for several areas of communication research.

Keywords: Institutional Interaction, Parent–Teacher Conferences, Epistemics, Criticism, Student Troubles, Preference Organization, Self-Presentation, Parent Involvement, Competence.

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How does one display that one is “good” at one’s job, particularly when one performs much of that job outside of direct observation by others? This is a persistent problem for parents. As embodiments of the family institution, parents must periodically interact with representatives of other social institutions (e.g., teachers within schools; pediatricians within clinics). And during these interinstitutional encounters, they inescapably present the kind of parent they are—how they *do* the job of “being a parent.”

This article examines one such interinstitutional encounter: the parent–teacher conference. The official, explicitly sanctioned business of the parent–teacher conference is for teachers and parents to assess the student and formulate strategies for student improvement. Traditional conference interactions (during which focal students

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are specifically not invited to attend or participate) are organized around teachers' presentation of up-to-date evaluations of student progress, with participants working to achieve mutual understanding about and basic agreement over these evaluations. As teachers have usually already recorded their evaluations in some form (e.g., assignment/test scores/grades in the teacher's grade book; letter/number grades on the report card), participants do not treat these as subject to negotiation, changeable by virtue of what happens during their conference. What parties *do* treat as subject to negotiation is the unofficial interactional business of the conference: participants' evaluations of each other, including their assessment of one another's relative responsibility for student-troubles.

Since the 19th century, school relationships have been based on the social control and surveillance of students (Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1984). But the school, as Foucault (1977, p. 211) noted, "must not simply train docile children; it must also make it possible to supervise the parents, to gain information as to their way of life, ... their morals." Since the late 1960s and 1970s, governments have come to mandate the need for a strong "partnership" between teachers and parents through which they achieve greater mutual surveillance and accountability, engendering their social control over one another (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997). "Parents monitor teachers, and teachers monitor parents to monitor the pupils" (Crozier, 1998, p. 128). During parent-teacher conferences, participants observably behave in ways suggesting they are each practically and tacitly using their interaction as an occasion for doing key "presentation of self" or "impression management" work (Goffman, 1959), offering "moral versions" of who they each are as "parent" or "teacher" in the course of their talk about the known-in-common child-as-student (Baker & Keogh, 1995; Pillet-Shore, 2012). This article focuses on *parents'* work to display themselves to be "good parents" to teachers.¹

Previous accounts of what constitutes a "good parent" vis-à-vis the school present an ideal type or model parent from the teachers' perspective. Based upon teachers' comments, these accounts suggest that a "good parent" is one who creates a cultural milieu at home that reinforces the teacher's classroom efforts (e.g., a parent who monitors the child's completion of homework in a way that engenders the child's own self-discipline and sense of responsibility; Crozier, 1998; Lareau, 1989; Robinson & Harris, 2014). But a general empirical finding of a body of social scientific research is that all identities are collaboratively constructed, moment-by-moment, through communicative practices—"being" any aspect of one's self or identity is best analyzed and understood as an ongoing social, interactional accomplishment (Goffman, 1959; Sacks, 1984; Zimmerman, 1998). This article builds upon this research tradition. Being a "good parent" is not some objective social fact that exists exogenous of a person's interactions with others. Rather, any particular parent must do work when interacting with others—including teachers—to coconstruct her/his identity as a "good parent." This article examines video-recorded naturally occurring parent-teacher conferences to demonstrate empirically that participants display their *own* understandings of what it takes to do "being a good parent" during a

regular sequence of interaction: sequences in which at least one participant *criticizes* the focal nonpresent student.

Participants do the action of "criticizing" a student by producing an utterance that reflects unfavorably on that student, taking up a negative stance toward and/or treating as a trouble requiring remedy some issue about that student's academic performance, behavior, and/or effort. Although both teachers and parents deliver utterances that criticize students in this broad sense of the term, there is marked contrast between *how* and *when* they each do so. On the one hand, teachers systematically delay, qualify, and/or account for their criticisms of students (Pillet, 2001; Pillet-Shore, 2014). The conversation analytic (CA) term for these properties of turn/sequence construction is "dispreferred" (Heritage, 1984a; Schegloff, 2007). On the other hand, when parents criticize students—their own children—they routinely do so without delay or mitigation, as this article demonstrates. The CA term for this alternative straightforward turn/sequence construction is "preferred" (Heritage, 1984a; Schegloff, 2007).

This article shows how parents and teachers use the complementarity of their actions to tacitly collaborate to produce preferred sequences in which the parent is first to express a particular student-criticism/trouble. These sequences are structurally preferred because, through them, parties maximize the likelihood of affiliation (cf. Heritage, 1984a, pp. 265–280) and minimize the likelihood of face threat (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967; Goldsmith, 2000): When the parent articulates a student-trouble that the teacher had been planning to mention, the teacher can avoid doing the dispreferred action of explicitly criticizing the student and instead agree with and build upon what the parent has already said. And when the parent is first to articulate a student-trouble, she/he thereby displays prior knowledge of that trouble—a key method through which parents present themselves as competent, involved caregivers who are credible perceivers, and fair appraisers, of their own children.

The two main analytic sections of this article demonstrate these findings. The first section examines parents' actions in the immediate interactional environment of teachers' student assessments, showing how parents treat teachers' student-praising utterances *differently* than teachers' student-criticizing utterances. Data demonstrate that, while teachers deliver student-*praising* utterances, parents may display that they are *gaining knowledge*. But when teachers' actions adumbrate student-criticizing utterances, parents systematically display *prior knowledge* of the student-trouble.

Building upon these findings, the second main section of this article elucidates the details of how teachers and parents tacitly collaborate to enable parents to express student-troubles first. The first of two subsections shows that conference participants treat a speaker's articulation of a student-trouble as occasioning the relevance of that speaker's claimed/described *effort to remedy* that trouble, offering evidence that parents can display that they are appropriately *involved* with the student's schooling through the regular methods of *asserting their prior knowledge of, and/or claiming/describing their efforts to remedy*, the articulated student-trouble. This section concludes with a negative case analysis that explicates what happens when a parent

does not accomplish this display of involvement, providing strong evidence that these methods are indeed critical to presenting oneself as a "good parent" during the parent–teacher conference.

Data and method

For this study, I conducted 3 years of fieldwork in four different public and private schools from three different school districts in a large metropolitan area in the western United States. In addition to doing ethnographic interviewing and observation, I video-recorded 41 naturally occurring parent–teacher conferences (each of which is 30–70 minutes in duration) involving 14 teachers and 61 parents/caregivers discussing students ranging in grade level from preschool through seventh grade. The academic standing of the students discussed in the conferences varies widely, ranging from students earning an "A" or equivalent grade to a student earning an "F" in the teacher's class. Many different parent/caregiver and family types are represented, including biogenetic and adoptive parents/caregivers, grandparents with legal custody of the children, single parents, married/cohabiting parents, and divorced/noncohabiting parents. All conference interactions were conducted in English. Participants are demographically diverse in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity, and several participants are nonnative but fluent English-speakers. Each conference occurred as part of the schools' and teachers' regular conference schedule.

I analyzed my data using the procedures, framework, and body of literature associated with the interdisciplinary field of conversation analysis (CA). CA is a data-driven methodology tailor-made for the analysis of recorded occasions of naturally situated interaction. Analysis begins and proceeds with repeated examination of recordings and the making of detailed transcripts that enable the analyst to discover and represent in graphic form fleeting details of participants' visible and audible social actions (thereby forestalling averaging and idealization; Heritage, 1984a). Recordings also allow other researchers direct access to the data for independent verification of findings. The goal of CA is to uncover and document systematic practices of human social conduct. Toward this end, I collected every sequence in which at least one conference participant *criticizes* the focal nonpresent student by producing an utterance that reflects unfavorably on that student, displaying a negative stance toward and/or treating as a trouble requiring remedy some issue about that student's academic performance, behavior, and/or effort (e.g., motivation, neatness, and responsibility). I examined each sequence on its own terms while at the same time examining them as a collection. To develop the details of my analysis, I closely examined 50 such sequences. I juxtaposed this collection with a collection of 40 sequences in which at least one conference participant *praises* the focal student by delivering an utterance that reflects favorably on that student, including positively valenced assessments of and statements of favorable facts about the student (see Pillet-Shore, 2012).

How parents respond to teachers' student-praise versus student-criticism

To fully appreciate the import of parents' behavior when teachers project delivery of a student-*criticism*, it is helpful to first understand how parents behave when teachers deliver student-*praise*. Analysis of parents' actions in the immediate interactional environment of teachers' student assessments shows that they treat teachers' student-praising utterances *differently* than they treat teachers' student-criticizing utterances.

The primary difference is embodied in parents' responsive state-of-knowledge displays. On the one hand, Pillet-Shore (2012) shows that parents may receipt teachers' student-praising utterances as informings—displaying that they are “just now” *gaining knowledge* from teachers about something that reflects favorably on their children. On the other hand, the data in this article demonstrate that parents systematically receipt teachers' student-criticizing utterances in ways that *claim prior knowledge* of teachers' just-delivered formulations of their children's shortcomings.

Excerpt 1 shows Teacher (T) delivering an utterance that *praises* the focal sixth-grade student, positively assessing his performance on a recent project by announcing that he earned the highest letter grade possible.

Excerpt 1 [03]

01 T: Right now he got a project in an I'm sure he got
02 uh "A" if not "A+."
03 M: -> Oh good.

At line 3 Mom (M) responds with an “oh-plus-assessment turn structure,” using her “Oh” to express that she has “just now” *gained knowledge* (Heritage, 1984b) from Teacher's just-preceding utterance.

In contrast, Excerpt 2 shows Teacher delivering an utterance that *criticizes* the focal third-grade student, citing a nonpresent reading specialist teacher's (“she” at line 1) description of the student's problematic tendency to “r:ush through” his work without first reading instructions.

Excerpt 2 [04a]

01 T: She says at times Ryan will jus: r:ush through
02 thing[s:..
03 M: -> [↑Yup.

At line 3 Mom responds by quickly (in terminal overlap with Teacher's preceding turn) deploying the receipt object “↑Yup,” constituting a strong claim of *prior knowledge* (Heritage, 1984b, p. 305) about this trouble with her son.

Excerpt 3 shows the contrast between one parent's responses to the teacher's student-praising versus student-criticizing utterances over the course of a longer sequence of interaction. While Excerpts 1 and 2 showed teachers assessing students without simultaneously displaying supporting documentation to parents, Excerpt 3 shows Teacher delivering a series of assessments of the first-grade student while presenting documents to Mom. Teacher first produces praising assessments of the

student's academic performance at lines 1 through 20 as she and Mom gaze down at the student's grades on the midyear (December) report card.

Excerpt 3 [10a]

01 T: As far as math, she's doin' really well,=
 02 ((T and M gazing at report card))
 03 T: =She's met all thuh standar:ds, *um: This is our:: (0.4)
 04 ((*T shifts gaze to test, placing it over report card))
 05 T: You've seen thee other tests. But this
 06 [was just one tes:t of like all=
 07 M: [Yeah.
 08 T: =of thuh skills, A[n' she gotta hundred percent,
 09 M: -> [Oh okay.
 10 M: -> Okay.=
 11 T: =Yih know. Mone::y, (.) Numbers before an' after::,
 12 .nhh pt! *Countin:g (.) two four six ei:ght, Ti:me,=She
 13 did really we:ll, ((*M nodding, mouth closed))
 14 -> (0.9)
 15 T: Ti:me, and then patterns.
 16 M: -> Oh ok[ay.
 17 T: [So 'is is good.*She's doin' well on tha:t,=
 18 M: -> =Okay, ((*T removing math test, placing off to side))
 19 T: *An' then social science an' science. She's doing
 20 wonderful. ((*T points to, M and T gaze at report card))
 21 M: -> O[kay,
 22 T: [So as far as academics:, I would jus' keep on doin:g
 23 *everything you're doin'. ((*T gazes at M))
 24 M: -> Okay, ((M sustains gaze at report card))
 25 T: >An' then *jus' as far as behavior, >she pretty much<=
 26 ((*T pointing to, and M gazing at behavior on report card))
 27 T: =has a four, (.) all thuh way down. I mean she jus:
 28 she's she's (a/uh) p- (.) like perfect. *huh hih=
 29 ((*T gazes at M; M sustains gaze down at report card))
 30 T: =[hih hih >.hh I mean if we had- there's jus' like=
 31 M: -> [h h h! Except she t- hih .hh hhh
 32 T: =yihknow¿S[he always is= ((T lifts hands away from report card))
 33 M: [heh ((M gazing toward T))
 34 M: =Yeah.=
 35 T: =right there *participating,=yih know. Never do:es
 36 anything. ((*M and T in mutual gaze))
 37 M: -> O:kay. ((T and M shift gaze to report card, T points to "3"))
 38 T: °Right? Th[ee only° three, manages=
 39 M: -> [She talks. ((M and T gazing at report card))
 40 T: =>class ti(m)e-?< .hh *↑Yea:h, >She gets a little
 41 chat[ty¿ ((M and T in mutual gaze))
 42 M: -> [Yea:hhh [hih hih hih hih shih
 43 T: [Yih know,
 44 T: She's six. She can do that¿

From lines 1–18, Teacher and Mom engage in a sequence about the student's successful performance in math. Rather than claiming prior knowledge about her daughter's math success, Mom withholds talk to allow Teacher to produce her praising assessments with multiple turn-constructual units (e.g., at lines 1–5; 11–15; 17). And Mom says, "Oh okay." at line 9 and line 16, using her "Oh" to register Teacher's just-preceding utterance as an informing from which she has gained knowledge.

After Teacher and Mom collaborate in closing down the math assessment sequence (at lines 17–18), Teacher points to two more columns on the report card that correspond to her evaluation of the student in two more subject areas (social science and science) as she delivers another praising summary assessment (at lines 19–20). Up through line 24 while Teacher is producing student-praising utterances,

Mom displays readiness to *close this sequence* and move on to a next topic/sequence, both audibly (e.g., at lines 10, 18, 21, and 24 with her "Okay" sequence-closing acknowledgment tokens; cf. Schegloff, 2007) and visibly (the video shows Mom keeping her mouth firmly closed from lines 11–15 as she deploys gentle nods as continuers [Schegloff, 1982], passing an opportunity to produce a full responsive turn at talk). But as soon as Teacher's talk starts to adumbrate a *less favorable, more critical* assessment of the student's in-class "behavior" at lines 25–30, Mom starts behaving differently (at line 31), moving to *expand the sequence* and *display prior knowledge*.

As Teacher runs her finger down the behavior column and says ">she pretty much < has a four, (.) all thuh way down.," she chooses to gloss over the one "3" grade in the column (noted at line 38; this report card uses numerical grades, 1 through 4, with 4 being best). But because Teacher and Mom have concurrent visual access to the report card document, Teacher can see that Mom is seeing all of the grades, including this one "3" grade. At line 27, Teacher displays her orientation to her own glossing action as a trouble-source with her "I mean"-prefaced utterance, self-initiating self-repair in that turn-constructual unit's transition space (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977). Teacher continues to repair her in-progress talk as she says, "I mean she jus: she's she's (a/uh) p- (.) like perfect.huh hih," doing a repair insertion of the word "like" before "perfect" as a way of embedding an implicit acknowledgment of the one "3" grade while at the same time minimizing its importance and moving for sequence closure. Teacher then laughs, using her laughter to both invite Mom to also laugh (Jefferson, 1979) and to index her orientation to her glossing action as interactionally problematic and delicate (Pillet-Shore, 2012; cf. Haakana, 2001).

In overlap with Teacher's subsequent beats of laughter at line 30, Mom subtly accepts her invitation by producing one breathy/nonvocalized laugh token at line 31. But at this moment Mom is also persisting in holding her gaze fixed downward on the report card document—a way of tacitly resisting closure of this sequence. Because Teacher is gazing directly at Mom and can see where her eyes are directed, Teacher self-initiates further self-repair (line 30). It is in overlap with Teacher here that Mom starts to articulate a criticism of the student's "behavior" by delivering an intended exception to Teacher's preceding "she's like perfect" assessment: "Except she t- hih .hh hhh" (her "t-" sound about to become "talks"—see line 39). Mom times her talk to coincide with the moment it looks and sounds like Teacher might move to account for that one "3" grade. At lines 30–31, Mom and Teacher produce their talk in overlap competition (Teacher's talk extends beyond the initial three to four beats that represent "quick resolution," thus displaying that she is pursuing some interest; Schegloff, 2000, p. 24) until Mom drops out just at the moment that Teacher does a gaze and gesture shift, lifting her hands and gaze up and away from the report card to embody her simultaneous lexical move *away* from the specific grades to instead reiterate her bird's eye view praising assessment of the student ("She always is right there participating,=yih know. Never do:es anything [wrong]," lines 32 and 35–36).

At line 37, Mom accepts Teacher's preceding talk by producing a sequence-closing "O:kay" acknowledgement token.

But at the start of line 38, Teacher looks down to the report card and starts pointing to the behavior column grades again. Mom's gaze follows Teacher's pointing gesture, and the video shows Mom's lips gearing up to start talking simultaneous with Teacher's "°Right?" At line 39, Mom says, "She tAlks." not only in overlap with Teacher's "Thee only°," but timed so her articulation of this student-criticism (accounting for that one "3" grade) comes one beat *before* Teacher herself, for the first time, explicitly mentions that "three," grade. (Recall also that Mom is here delivering the negatively valenced exception she had started to deliver at line 31.) By visibly (via pointing) and grammatically ("Thee only°" signals an upcoming exception) projecting her move back to the one "3" grade, and also by first reading text printed on the report card itself ("manages > class ti(m)e-?<"), Teacher delays her own delivery of an account for why the student received that one less-than-perfect grade, thus facilitating Mom being the *first* to articulate this (albeit mild) student-criticism.

Thus, this sequence shows Mom treating Teacher's student-praising actions *differently* than Teacher's one relatively unfavorable, student-criticizing action. While Teacher is delivering *praising* assessments of the student, Mom *displays that she is gaining knowledge* and/or *moves for sequence closure*. But as soon as Teacher's actions hint at a *critical* assessment of the student, Mom *demonstrates her prior knowledge* of the trouble with her daughter's behavior by being first to articulate it. Indeed, this extended excerpt shows how Teacher and Mom *tacitly collaborate* to produce a sequence in which the *parent* is *first* to articulate the student-criticism. The timing of Mom's delivery of "She tAlks." enables Teacher to subsequently *agree* with her at line 40, and then deliver her own downgraded re-formulation of it. And at line 42 as Mom agrees with Teacher and then laughs—using her laughter to invite Teacher to also laugh (Jefferson, 1979)—Teacher initially declines Mom's invitation to laugh so she can first say, "She's six. She can do that;" (line 44), supplying a normalizing account for the student's conduct—her talkative/chatty behavior is positioned as simply an expectable product of her age.

Excerpt 3 thus shows how Mom and Teacher achieve a structurally "preferred" sequence that minimizes the likelihood of face threat and maximizes the likelihood of affiliation. Mom's action of being first to express a student-criticism allows Teacher to avoid doing the dispreferred action of explicitly criticizing the student (Pillet, 2001; Pillet-Shore, 2014)—which, in Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, would threaten Mom's positive and negative face respectively by implying a criticism of Mom and making a remedy relevant from Mom—and instead agree with Mom and then reassure her that her daughter's behavior is normal for her age. And by being first to articulate this criticism, Mom displays prior knowledge of this student shortcoming—a key method through which she presents herself as a "good parent" vis-à-vis Teacher. In doing so, Mom conveys to Teacher that she is an involved caregiver who not only actively monitors her

daughter, but also is able to recognize and report her daughter's shortcomings by reference to her own values that are aligned with those of the teacher and the school.

A central finding of this research is that the tacit collaboration observable between the teacher and parent in Excerpt 3 is a robust, regular phenomenon, as data in the next section demonstrate.

The preference for parents to criticize students

It is through a systematic structural preference organization that teachers and parents manage to collaborate to produce sequences in which the/a parent criticizes the student first. Teachers produce student-praising utterances as preferred actions, performing them straightforwardly and without delay (Pillet-Shore, 2014; e.g., see Excerpt 1: lines 1–2; Excerpt 3: lines 1–3 and 19–20). In contrast (as mentioned earlier), teachers produce student-criticizing utterances as dispreferred actions, delaying and/or mitigating them (e.g., see Excerpt 2: line 1; Excerpt 3 starting at line 25; Pillet, 2001; Pillet-Shore, 2014). Reciprocally, parents treat their articulation of student-praising utterances as structurally dispreferred (e.g., see Excerpt 4): They recurrently work to avoid articulating favorable comments about their own children, and when they do deliver a student-praising utterance, they systematically delay, qualify, and/or account for it (Pillet-Shore, 2012, pp. 192–193). The findings presented in this section complement Pillet-Shore's (2012) findings about how parents manage student-praise: This section demonstrates that conference participants treat parents' articulation of student-criticism as preferred. Building upon the analysis of Excerpt 3, this section shows that parents produce their student-criticizing utterances without delay or mitigation, working to express them before the teacher articulates a criticism of the student in that particular area. Data demonstrate that these actions enable teachers to subsequently agree with parents, and parents to display prior knowledge of student-troubles, thereby presenting themselves as competent, *involved* parents who are credible perceivers, and fair appraisers, of their own children.

Excerpt 4 exemplifies these findings. Teacher is displaying "category report" documents to the focal fourth-grade student's legal guardian Grandma (GM). After announcing that she has a pile of these documents ("e_m" at line 1) for all the subjects—with each document showing a detailed evaluation of the student's performance in a particular subject category—Teacher pulls out a document on the student's writing (line 3), placing it on the tabletop in front of Grandma. During the silence at line 4, Grandma starts to look at this writing document as Teacher mobilizes the next category report document. Just as Teacher is starting to name this next document's subject at line 5, Grandma indexes her continued orientation to the writing document. At lines 6–8 and 10, Grandma expresses a criticism of the student's writing *first*, offering her own negative assessment specifically before Teacher articulates her assessment of the student's writing.

Teacher facilitates Grandma being first to articulate this criticism by delaying her own delivery of additional details about the writing evaluation document (e.g., at line 4).

Excerpt 4 [07c]

01 T: We have 'e:m for all thuh su:bject[s].

02 GM: [Oika#:y.

03 T: Here's one fer: writing? ((T placing document in front of GM))

04 (1.0)/((GM looking at, touching writing document))

05 T: (Then/An') here'[s one- ((T mobilizing next document))

06 GM: -> [*His wri:ting skills. ↑°Wel-° An'=

07 -> ((*GM doing lateral headshake; T retracts next document))

08 GM: -> =he's-? d- uhuh! [.hh °W'l° *I think= ((*GM brings palms to chest))

09 T: [Yeah.

10 GM: -> =they're te:rrible. *But what I'm seeing he:re,it's: uh:¿

11 ((*GM lowers hand from chest to document))

12 T: This:? is an indicator that he's really watching me

13 in cla:ss?=Cause we go over all th[is dee oh el=

14 GM: [Mkay,

15 T: =bufore he se:es i[t.

16 GM: [pt!

17 T: .hh So, (0.4) that to me:, (0.5) he's- (0.4) wi:th me?

18 He's wa:tching? He's lea:rning? [He's reme:mbering?

19 GM: [ptch! °Okay,°

20 T: .hh An' then when I: give him (a:/u:h) (0.4) >test at

21 thee end a thuh we:ek.< He recalls [what it was thet=

22 GM: [°Oka:y.°

23 T: =we talked about. .hh Now if we looked at (.) his

24 -> (.) actual wri:ting? Yesh.You're righ[t.We'r:e=

25 GM: [Yeah.

26 T: =We'r:e (0.3) >havin' a li:ttle bit a difficulty

27 there.

As she says, “His wri:ting skills.” at line 6 Grandma conveys that she is en route to criticizing the student's writing both through her prosody and her simultaneous negative stance-marking lateral headshake. But as she continues to look down at the writing document, she says, “↑°Wel-°,” displaying that she has just seen something on the document that disagrees with the negative stance she was about to express toward her grandson's writing.

Inspecting the turn design of Grandma's utterance at lines 6, 8, and 10, we can see that she is treating her articulation of a criticism of her grandson's writing differently than her articulation of a favorable, praising assessment. On the one hand, Grandma produces her talk *criticizing* the student's writing skills (e.g., “°W'l° I think they're te:rrible.”) fluidly and without mitigation or qualification, displaying her orientation to her own expression of this student-criticism as preferred. On the other hand, Grandma produces her talk that projects her delivery of a *praising* comment (“An' he's-? d- uhuh!”; “But what I'm seeing he:re,it's: uh:¿”) with a series of speech perturbations (cutting off her in-progress talk each time it projects student-praise; Pillet-Shore, 2012; cf. Lerner, 2013; Schegloff et al., 1977), ultimately suppressing her articulation of a favorable assessment altogether via trail-off. Grandma thereby displays her reluctance to articulate the projected praising assessment of her grandson that she sees on Teacher's document. Through her work to avoid explicitly stating a favorable assessment of the student, Grandma displays her orientation to her own

explicit articulation of student-praise as a dispreferred social action (Pillet-Shore, 2012).

After Teacher first explicates the part of the writing evaluation document that shows a favorable evaluation of the student (lines 12–23), she points to and explicitly acknowledges the part of the document that shows an unfavorable evaluation of the student's "actual writing" (midway into line 23). Teacher designs her utterance at line 24 as *an explicit agreement* (through her "Yesh.You're right") with Grandma's prior assessment (which also works to further delay her own explication of this student-criticism). Excerpt 4 thus shows how Teacher and Grandma collaborate to produce this as a preferred sequence in which Grandma is first to articulate a student-criticism that Teacher had been planning to mention, thereby maximizing the likelihood of affiliation and minimizing the likelihood of face threat. The timing of Grandma's delivery of her criticism of the student's writing enables Teacher to agree with (and later build upon) what Grandma has already said, and also enables Grandma to display prior knowledge of this student-trouble based upon her own independent observations and evaluations of her grandson. Grandma thereby presents herself to Teacher as an active, involved monitor of her grandson, one who recognizes his shortcomings by reference to her own standards/values, which are aligned with those of the teacher and school. Through these actions, Grandma shows Teacher that she is a reasonable, credible perceiver—and fair appraiser—of her own grandson who is willing and able to publicly articulate his troubles (in other words, she is showing herself to *not* be 'blinded by love').

Excerpt 5 shows a similar pattern. At line 1, Teacher launches a new topic of discussing the focal fourth-grade student's "benchmark math test" with the student's Mom and Dad as she displays the corresponding document to them. At lines 3 and 4, Mom articulates the student's trouble with math first, immediately claiming prior knowledge after Teacher names this topic and specifically *before* Teacher explicitly articulates how the student performed on this math test.

Excerpt 5 [06]

```
01 T: This is thuh: benchmark math test.
02 (0.4)/((T, Mom and Dad gazing at math test document))
03 Mom: -> We kne:w she had- waz struggling
04 -> [a little with thuh ma:th.
05 T: [ptch! An' so what- (.) Mister Farley has do:ne, (.) i:s
06 here you see a check mark in:: a [category.
07 Mom: [Mmmmm,
08 T: .hh An: (.) he's saying thet (.) °uh° thuh statistics
09 probability: (0.4) strai:nd of thuh (.) standards.
10 -> (0.4) are what (.) she is- is struggling with.
```

At line 2, Teacher delays her articulation of details about the math document and what it shows to be the student's current weaknesses in math, allowing Mom to deliver her utterance at lines 3 and 4. Although Teacher initially appears to disattend Mom's preceding utterance as she starts explaining that the math specialist teacher's

("Mr. Farley's") checkmarks on the document indicate areas in which the student is weak (at lines 5–6), Teacher ultimately recycles the negatively valenced word "struggling" (at line 10) from Mom's utterance (at line 3) in which she had been first to articulate this student-trouble.

Unlike Excerpts 3, 4, and 5 that showed parents being first to explicitly articulate student-troubles while looking at teacher-displayed student-evaluating documents, Excerpt 6 shows a parent expressing a student-trouble without the aid of such documentation. At line 1, Teacher launches the topic of the third-grade student's math performance. Precisely timed to start in overlap with the very first word of Teacher's utterance that implies a critical assessment of the student ("hangin'" at line 2), Mom does a hand gesture, lifting her right hand off of her lap to perform an up/down rollercoaster motion. Through this gesture, Mom embodies a display of her prior knowledge of the student's math trouble timed to the moment that Teacher's in-progress talk projects her articulation of an unfavorable assessment.

Excerpt 6 [04b]

01 T: .hh An' as far as ma:th go:es, he's- (.) he's
 02 T: [*hangin' on.
 03 Mom: -> [(*Mom starts to lift her right hand to do an up/down
 04 -> rollercoaster gesture)
 05 T: [There's- It's- Y e: a h.
 06 Mom: -> [°It's (.) like this.° It's up (.) and down.
 07 T: Wh[ich is::(.) if you feel bette:r (.)=
 08 Mom: -> [It's:: (.) eratic.
 09 T: =I- >I shoulda wrote a note home< to thuh parents.Because
 10 that's happening with (0.7) evrybody.with this math
 11 program.

By designing her utterance-in-progress at line 1 as a compound turn-constitutive unit ("An' as far as ma:th go:es," is hearable as a preliminary component that projects a final component; Lerner, 1991), Teacher provides an opportunity for Mom to collaboratively complete (in some form; here Mom does this via gesture at lines 3–4) the final assessment component. Teacher further facilitates the timing of Mom's gesture with her speech perturbations ("he's- (.) he's") that project her delivery of a delicate, negative student assessment. The timing of Mom's gesture enables Teacher to subsequently agree with her (at line 5). At lines 6 and 8, Mom complements her preceding hand gesture with utterances that demonstrate her prior knowledge about her son's math trouble, after which Teacher normalizes this student-trouble. Thus, even without having visual access to Teacher's student-evaluating documents, Mom demonstrates that she is closely monitoring Teacher's in-progress talk for incipient student-criticism so she may express it *first*.

Thus far, this article has demonstrated that conference participants collaborate to produce preferred sequences in which parents assert prior knowledge of student-troubles. The next subsection shows that, in addition to *asserting prior knowledge*, parents also display orientation to a social norm that they should *claim/describe their efforts to remedy* those student-troubles.

The expectation for parents to claim remedial efforts

During sequences in which conference participants discuss some student-*triumph*, parents recurrently *move to close* the sequence (e.g., by producing sequence-closing acknowledgement tokens; see Excerpt 1: line 3; Excerpt 3: lines 10, 16, 18, and 21; Pillet-Shore, 2012). During sequences in which participants discuss some student-*trouble*, however, parents observably orient to a social norm or expectation that they should *move to expand* that sequence. Parents systematically use their sequence-expanding utterances to claim or describe their efforts to remedy that trouble. This finding can be seen during sequences initiated by teachers or parents.

Excerpt 7 shows a sequence initiated by a teacher. After Mom demonstrates her prior knowledge of the trouble with her daughter's behavior by being first to articulate it (line 39), she moves to expand this sequence starting at line 45.

Excerpt 7 [10b] (continuation of Excerpt 3)

38 T: °Right? Th[ee only° three, manages=
 39 M: -> [She tAks. ((M and T gazing at report card))
 40 T: =>class ti(m)e-?< .hh *↑Yea:h, >She gets a little
 41 chat[ty¿ ((*M and T in mutual gaze))
 42 M: [Yeahhh [hih hih hih hih shih
 43 T: [Yih know,
 44 T: S[he's si|x. She can do that¿
 45 M: -> [.hhh [She gotta get in other people's hhh=
 46 M: -> =[hm bu(h)sine(h)ss.
 47 T: [ehhih hih hih hih hih .hh Yea[h.
 48 M: -> [.hh! "No you can't¿
 49 -> No. No. You can't [do that." nh! hah .hh ((mocking tone))
 50 T: [Yeah. Exactly.
 51 T: [So,
 52 M: -> ["Olivia, Be quiet. They cin do whatever they want."
 53 ((said out of side of mouth, lips barely moving))
 54 M: [Yeah.
 55 T: [hih hih hih hih (Oh good,)

Mom constitutes her sequence expansion with three components: (a) she specifies what is complainable about the behavior (lines 45–46), drawing upon the idiomatic expression "mind your own business" (cf. Drew & Holt, 1988); (b) she does "being her daughter getting into other people's business" (lines 48–49), gazing at an imaginary person (not Teacher) as she animates her daughter talking to that person; and (c) she does "being an embarrassed parent" (line 52), shifting her eyes to the corners of their sockets and speaking out of the side of her mouth through clenched teeth as she animates herself negatively sanctioning and attempting to socially control her daughter subsequent to her complainable behavior. Through her sequence expansion, Mom not only demonstrates prior knowledge of this student shortcoming; she also performs a sample of her efforts to fix it, thereby displaying her disapproval of her daughter's complainable behavior.

Showing a sequence initiated by a parent/caregiver, Excerpt 8 constitutes the opening of the conference encounter. At lines 1–2, Grandma introduces herself to Teacher as she walks into the room. In her very next utterance, Grandma embeds a criticism of the focal fourth-grade student Tony, thereby demonstrating prior

knowledge of this student-trouble. Grandma then moves to expand on this topic at line 11.

Excerpt 8 [07a]

01 GM: I'm Sally Ann McFarland. I'm: yeah Tony's
02 grandma.
03 T: Why hello:. Welcome, Come on i:n,
04 GM: -> nhhhhh You have my les- messy little bee. hhhh!
05 T: Oh he's: (0.4) he's a good guy.
06 GM: He- He's (a/uh) s- th[u- >one a thuh sweetest kids=
07 T: [He's-
08 GM: =there ever was but<[.hh
09 T: [He is <so sweet at hea:rt,>
10 (0.4)
11 GM: -> Fer years I've tr(h)ied tih get him tih get ne:ater.
12 T: mpt! Yeah. He's==
13 GM: -> =<A:n' it just uohhhh!> [°I dunno,°
14 T: [Typical boyy?
15 GM: .hhh
16 (.)
17 T: [(A guy thing?)
18 GM: [I've always thought- Well I've always thought boys
19 could be neat too. B(hh!)uh I gue(hh!)ss no(h)thhhh.

Grandma's negative characterization of her grandson at line 4 is simultaneously hearable as a term of endearment for, and a term of complaint about, her grandson, the phrase “little bee” mitigating the embedded criticism of him as messy. At line 5, Teacher produces an alternative positive characterization of the student, proposing that he is more accurately described with the formulation “good guy” (her “oh”-preface asserting her independent epistemic access to the student; Heritage, 2002). Teacher thereby disaffiliates with Grandma's student-criticizing action (by minimizing the importance of his alleged messiness) while also subtly affiliating with Grandma by disagreeing with the potential self-deprecating import of her preceding talk (Pillet-Shore, 2012). After initially conceding (at lines 6 and 8) to Teacher's positive assessment of her grandson, Grandma returns to the topic she introduced at line 4, claiming her persistent though as-yet-unsuccessful efforts to remedy this student-trouble at line 11. At line 13 Grandma enacts her strong disapproval toward her grandson's messiness—“uohhhh!” is a vocalized out-breath that does complaining (Pillet-Shore, 2008, 2015a). Through her work to invoke her remedial efforts, Grandma conveys to Teacher that this student-trouble is not the result of negligent parenting.

Excerpt 8 thus shows how a parent/caregiver initiates a student-criticizing sequence and then works to expand the sequence to claim her efforts to remedy that student-trouble. By criticizing the student at such an early point in the interaction (i.e., during the conference opening, before participants' joint launch of the “official business” and before Teacher has articulated any assessment of the student's performance), Grandma thereby displays the *type of stance* she is prepared to take up toward the student: Grandma adopts a more critical stance toward the student than Teacher, thereby showing Teacher that she is prepared to be receptive (rather than resistant or defensive) to subsequent student-criticism. Grandma's early student-criticizing actions also prepare grounds for subsequent talk, as evidenced by Excerpt 9.

Excerpt 9 shows the talk that transpires between Teacher and Grandma immediately after Excerpt 8. At lines 24–27, Teacher solicits Grandma’s perspective on the student. Prefacing her response with “Like I say,” Grandma connects her in-progress talk back to the criticism she launched within the first few seconds of this conference (Excerpt 8: line 4), metaphorically “cashing in” on her earlier “investment” of preemptively criticizing her grandson. Starting at line 29, Grandma uses her response to articulate criticisms/concerns about the student’s messiness and responsibility. Being the first to articulate these student-criticisms, Grandma is clearly demonstrating her prior knowledge. But she expresses much more than her mere concerns/criticisms during this sequence—she also includes her *efforts* to improve the student in these two areas.

Excerpt 9 [07b]

20 T: Well. (.) U:m, (1.2) So does ↑he (0.6) live with yo:u?

21 GM: Yes he does.=

22 T: =He does.=

23 GM: =Yeahp.He’s lived with us all his li[fe.

24 T: [And- an’ what- (0.4)

25 what cin you tell me,are you havin’ any:: °uh° concerns

26 that chyout want to share with me;Or

27 questio[ns that chyout have before we::

28 GM: [U::m,hhh

29 GM: -> Like I say just with his (.) m:essiness.I work on that

30 -> >all thuh time.<.hhh Um his responsibility, And I’m

31 -> so:: much trying to push that.If he’s late on an

32 -> assignment er sumpin’, .hhh (0.3) ehe can’t come tih

33 -> me: in thuh morning an’ say “hey.I fergot tih do

34 -> this.[I gotta do it inna hurry.”

35 T: [Uh huh,

36 T: -> Good fe[r you.

37 GM: -> [An’ get me tih help him. “N:o Tony. You shoulda

38 -> done that last night.”

39 T: -> Good.

40 GM: -> >An’ so many times I’ve thought “Qh.I bet she thinks

41 -> I’m a <rea::l f:lake.”> .hhh B’t I jus:t try tih make

42 -> him- like those papers that he lo:st? .hhh I took that

43 -> backpack, I: dumped it out, I went through every page in

44 -> thuh books.(an,) .hhh >So what he started doing when he

45 comes in on Monday,hhh .hhh he makes a copy.

... ((21 lines of transcript omitted in which GM describes how

... Tony now makes copies of his assignments to avoid loss))

46 T: That sounds like a good pla:n.

47 GM: Ye:ah.=

48 T: =(°That’s neat.°)>.hh (w’I’m glad to ↑meet chyout.=

49 GM: =I’m glad to meet chyout too;

50 T: *Um [I HAVe, ((*T picks up report card document))

51 GM: -> [>tchh Like I SAY I kept tellin’ thu- Tony.=.hhh Yer

52 -> teacher’s gonna think I’m °°a°° complete flake.

53 T: -> N[o no::,

54 GM: [(F(hh)er (hh)‘he(hh)ese [thi(hh)ngs) °°hah hah°°

55 T: [I think it’s wonderful that

56 he has such: (u:h/a:) supportiv:e (0.4) .hh (uh/a)

57 [supportive place to be.That’s:: That’s what’s=

58 GM: [°hhh°

59 T: =im[portant.

60 GM: [W’ll we try.

At lines 29–30, Grandma reinvoles her criticism/complaint about her grandson’s “messiness,” immediately rushing to claim her ongoing remedial effort (“I work on that > all thuh time.<”). After naming her next concern as “his responsibility” and

once again claiming ongoing effort to improve this aspect of her grandson, she delves into a more detailed description of her efforts. Grandma uses reported speech at lines 33–34 and 37–38 to perform a conversation between herself and her grandson, displaying a sample of her parenting to Teacher. Teacher expresses approval for Grandma's described parenting by positively assessing (at lines 36, 39, and 46) her effort with her grandson.

At line 48, Teacher moves to close the preceding sequence. As Teacher starts to mobilize the student's report card at line 50, however, Grandma resists Teacher's move to launch a new topic/sequence by starting to talk in overlap with her, speeding up and increasing her volume at line 51. Teacher yields the floor to Grandma, allowing her to reinvoke a key issue from the preceding sequence: whether (or not) Teacher "thinks" Grandma is a "flake." As Grandma delivered her utterance at lines 40–41 (the "she" at line 40 refers to Teacher), Teacher produced no visible or audible response; thus, by recycling many of the same components of that utterance at lines 51–52, Grandma compels Teacher to respond this time around. Starting at line 53, Teacher disagrees with Grandma's "flake" self-deprecation and then compliments Grandma by crediting her for providing the student with "such a supportive place to be."

This sequence of interaction vividly exemplifies parents'/caregivers' manifest concern with what teachers think of them as parents: Grandma displays her inference that Teacher is judging her based upon how the student is performing. One of the findings of this research is that conference participants treat a speaker's articulation of a student-criticism/trouble as occasioning the relevance of that speaker's claimed/described effort(s) to remedy that trouble. Excerpt 9 shows Grandma reporting her remedial efforts as a method of securing Teacher's endorsement that, indeed, she has presented herself as a "good parent."

Thus, during sequences in which conference participants criticize students, parents can display that they are appropriately *involved* with the student's schooling by *asserting their prior knowledge of*, and/or *claiming/describing their efforts to remedy the articulated student-trouble*. For parents and teachers, these constitute regular methods through which parents can do "being a good parent" during the parent–teacher conference. Further evidence that these methods are critical to presenting oneself as an involved parent is observable in the one case (in this project's data corpus) that shows a parent *not* using these methods.

Negative case analysis: The exception that proves the rule

The following two excerpts originate from a conference in which the third-grade student's Mom does not clearly *assert her prior knowledge of*, or *claim/describe her efforts to remedy* the student's troubles. Near the beginning of this conference, Teacher topicalizes the fact that Mom "didn't respond to thuh parent homework," a form Teacher sent home to all parents on which she asked them to write their thoughts/concerns about their child's progress in her class. By not completing and returning this form to Teacher in advance of the start of their conference, Mom passed an opportunity

to express the student's troubles first, thereby forgoing the opportunity to display her prior knowledge via writing.

Teacher subsequently articulates the student-trouble/criticism shown in Excerpt 10 at lines 1–4 and 6, invoking the discrepancy between the quality of the student's work completed at home and the higher quality work product she obtains from the student in the classroom. Since Teacher is criticizing the work that the student does at home—Mom's domain—this utterance is hearable as a complaint that makes a remedy relevant from Mom (cf. Schegloff, 2007). That is, after Teacher reaches utterance completion at lines 4 and/or 6, Mom *should* claim/describe her (past/present/planned) efforts to remedy the student's trouble with homework. At lines 5 and 7, however, Mom instead delivers tepid "Yeah"s.

Excerpt 10 [14a]

01 T: Thuh quality of work that comes i:n (0.2) indicates
 02 one level of achievement(/./)
 03 (.)
 04 T: And it's no:t where Cathy i:[s.
 05 M: -> [Yeah.
 06 T: It's lower than that.
 07 M: -> °Yeah.°=
 08 T: =And so: um somehow perhaps between thuh two of us we can
 09 help her understand thet .hh ↑she needs tih take some
 10 ti:me with this.
 11 -> (.)
 12 T: Um: An' also if you remember homework is a reinforcement
 13 of (thuh) skills that we'r:e lea[rning in school.
 14 M: -> [Yeah.
 15 T: So:: I want her tih kno::w tha:t (.) yihknow nouns
 16 that end in Y need to be changed tuh I and add E S.
 17 .hh And use that in her writing. (And if/Cause) she doesn't
 18 do thuh homework which may seem silly to her, (.) .hh
 19 but it's a reinforcement of that.
 20 M: -> [Mri:ght.
 21 T: [And then it does'n't transfer into her
 22 -> writing.°=So. .hh Do you um: sit down and work with
 23 -> he:r:zon [her homework? Or how's:
 24 M: [pt! A:s much as I can.Or my: or: my
 25 other daughter Maggie 'il. You know if I'm not home.=
 ... ((6 lines omitted))
 26 T: -> And so how are you: with rega:rd t#u:h spending
 27 time with Cathy_=[(I mean) are you working every:=
 28 M: [O:h.No- No pro:blem,
 29 T: =(not) every hour of eve[ry da:y, or are you huh! .hh!=
 30 M: [huh! hhh!
 31 M: =Well she's uh: she's uh handful.hhh! [huh huh
 32 T: [Yea:h.
 33 M: She definitely is uh handful. .hhhh ((cough cough))
 ... ((40 lines omitted; T asks about time student spends on homework))
 34 T: -> .hh Are y[ou a b l e: t o : : check it over?=
 35 M: [>tch!Yeah.I need to check it more.I do need=
 36 T: -> =[That would be helpful;
 37 M: =[to check it more.Yeah.

At lines 8–10, Teacher begins to more explicitly formulate what her prior utterances were aiming for: that remedial action by Mom is required. But at line 11, Mom passes on another opportunity to either report on her own remedial efforts or promise future efforts to improve her daughter's homework trouble. Teacher then explicates the importance of homework (lines 12–13, 15–19). But after Mom delivers another

"Yeah" at line 14 and a "Mri:ght" at line 20, Teacher takes up a new course of action.

Starting at line 22, Teacher asks Mom questions that surveil Mom's level of hands-on *involvement* with the student's completion of homework, thereby displaying her orientation to this information as missing up to this point. In response to Teacher's first question at lines 22–23, Mom invokes her other (18-year-old) daughter's role in their family division of labor when Mom is not home. With her follow-up question starting at line 26, Teacher more directly probes Mom's efforts with the student. Rather than moving to expand this sequence (e.g., by detailing her efforts with her daughter), Mom moves to close it through her responses at lines 28, 31, and 33.

Teacher subsequently asks Mom additional questions (not reproduced above) about how much time it takes Cathy to complete her homework, and if she has "a quiet place to do it." Mom responds by saying, "Yes. She does. And that's: but- then like- uh lotta times < I can't see her > do(h)ing (h)i(h)t?." This admission precipitates Teacher's utterance at line 34, in which she explicitly formulates the remedial effort from Mom that she had been driving at throughout the preceding sequence.

Excerpt 11 shows how Teacher and Mom bring their discussion of the student's homework trouble to a close. After describing her own efforts to remedy the student's homework trouble in the classroom (at lines 6–13), Teacher explicitly states her recommendation for improvement, focusing *not* on improving *the student's* conduct around homework, but rather focusing on improving *Mom's level of involvement and parenting efforts* vis-à-vis the student's completion of homework (lines 15–16, 18, and 20).

Excerpt 11 [14b]

- 01 T: Thee only thing. (.) Other thing. That really concerns me
 02 here is she has °inconsistent effort in turning in her
 03 homework. [An' having it complete.
 04 M: [pt! Yeah.
 05 T: .hh Um: >You know.< She'll turn in a page that has: two
 06 sentences. written °on it.°>An' I'll say ["well wait.
 07 M: [nnh
 08 T: I don't know of any paragraph that's: two sentences
 09 long. [Cathy: "hh huh
 10 M: [Yeah.
 11 T: .hhh An' so many times I'll have her stay in at recess.
 12 "You know what? You need to do now what you should
 13 have done last week."
 14 (0.5)
 15 T: -> .hh U:m but if- It would very much help I think.
 16 -> <If you could> for a while, (.)
 17 M: Yeah. I a[m going to. Definitely.
 18 T: -> [Just just
 19 M: -> [I di- <I didn't know this wa:s uh?> .shh
 20 T: -> [Connect. A little bit closer than
 21 T: pt! Um well that's [(.) thuh good thing about=
 22 M: [h h h h h
 23 T: =[fparent teacher conferences. I [tthink;
 24 M: [Myeh heh heh heh heh heh [Yeah? heh heh heh

Teacher treats her recommendation (starting at line 15) as a dispreferred, delicate action through her series of speech perturbations, and also through her trail-off at

line 20 (Lerner, 2013), abandoning her talk so she does not explicitly state the projected portion of her utterance ("than you have been") that would have explicitly formulated Mom's up-to-now problematic parenting vis-à-vis homework. Mom quickly accedes to Teacher's request at line 17 and then—tellingly—at line 19 Mom confesses, "<I didn't know this wa:s uh>." Mom is offering this as an account for why she has *not* worked to remedy her daughter's trouble with homework—because *she did not have prior knowledge* of this trouble; rather, she has learned about it from Teacher during this conference. Mom still displays that she is oriented to the social norm that she *should* have already known about this trouble by treating her admission as delicate (Lerner, 2013), doing a trail-off at the end of line 19 and producing a "shh" sound right where her preceding syntax projected her delivery of an explicit formulation of the student-trouble of which she was unaware. Teacher uses her smile voice during her utterance at line 23, and Mom uses her laughter at line 24 as a sign of and partial remedy for (Pillet-Shore, 2012; cf. Haakana, 2001) the preceding delicate sequences through which Mom is exposed as *not* already knowing about nor working on a remedy for this student-trouble.

Concluding discussion

This article has shown how, during naturally occurring parent–teacher conferences, parents work to display to teachers that they are "good" at their job of "being a parent" by asserting their prior knowledge of, and/or claiming/describing their efforts to remedy, specific student-troubles. Through these methods, parents present themselves as not only *knowledgeable*, but also *reasonable* and *credible*—demonstrating that they are willing and able to publicly articulate the student's shortcomings. These communicative practices convey *competence*,² showing parents to be involved enough in the student's schooling to have already independently recognized that the student has a problem, and attempted to remedy it, thus implying that the student-trouble is *not* due to negligence.

Each time parents in my data set use these methods—concomitantly displaying appropriate involvement in their children's schooling—teachers' subsequent talk formulates plans for remedying the student-trouble as a joint effort entailing *shared teacher-parent* responsibility. In contrast, the one negative case in this study's data set (Excerpts 10 and 11) makes transparently visible the interactional consequences of a parent *not* using these methods: The teacher interrogates the parent's degree of direct involvement with the student's completion of homework, and then issues a recommendation for remedying the student-trouble that solely targets the *parent* for correction. The teacher's recommendation—embodying both a directive and advice—threatens the parent's "face": It threatens both her "positive face" by implying that she lacks knowledge and/or competence, and her "negative face" by obliging her to follow the recommended course of action (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goldsmith, 2000; Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Lim & Bowers, 1991). Thus, when parents do "being a good parent" by asserting their prior knowledge of and/or claiming/describing their

efforts to remedy a specific student-trouble, they thereby preempt the possibility that teachers will treat them as solely responsible for the trouble and its remedy.

These findings about parents' manifest concern to display themselves to be "good parents" within an American school/educational context resonate with findings of other work investigating parents' interactional conduct in different cultural and institutional contexts. Most notably, in their examination of initial interactions between British community nurses and first-time mothers during nurses' visits to mothers' residences 10 days after their babies' birth, Heritage & Sefi (1992, pp. 366–367) observed mothers to respond to nurses' talk in ways showing their orientation to the nurse as evaluating their "competence as a mother," judging their "knowledge" and "vigilance in baby care." Analysis of the present study's data set suggests that U.S. parents (often but not always mothers) of school-aged children orient to teachers in a strikingly similar way to how UK mothers of newborn children orient to community nurses.

This article's findings thus have implications for several lines of interpersonal communication research, including workplace/organizational, family, education, and language and social interaction areas. Displaying that one is "good" at one's job is something not only parents, but people, generically do and have to do in various settings. By explicating precisely how parents display their competence to teachers, this study offers insights potentially relevant for workplace communication research on role-oriented exchanges (e.g., how workers can demonstrate job competency to fellow team members and supervisors). This research also contributes to family communication scholarship by advancing our understanding of what constitutes a "good parent" in the course of actual social interaction. Extant studies examine cultural/social expectations and ideologies, focusing on abstract notions of either "the good mother" (including the rhetorical construction of "good mothering"; e.g., Hays, 1996; Johnston & Swanson, 2006) or "the good father" (e.g., Coakley, 2006). This article complements this work by elucidating concrete communicative practices used in situ by many types of caregiver. In doing so, this article also contributes to education and home-school communication literature, complementing prior studies of "parental involvement" (e.g., Robinson & Harris, 2014) by examining specific sequences of parent–teacher interaction during which parents enact their everyday involvement with their children's education.

This article also advances language and social interaction scholarship, extending conversation analytic work on "preference" by: (a) documenting the discovery of a systematic preference organization operative during parent–teacher interaction (in which teachers delay, qualify, and/or account for their student-criticisms, whereas parents criticize their own children straightforwardly and without delay or mitigation); and (b) showing how the structural regularities of talk-in-interaction are impacted by participants' orientation to salient situated identities. This study has demonstrated that being a member of the category "parent" or "teacher" impacts *how* that participant designs her/his actions in terms of timing and composition, thus showing that preference organization is sensitive not only to the action being

implemented and the design of an utterance, but also to participants' relevant social identities.

While Pillet-Shore (2012) demonstrates that parent–teacher conference participants treat utterances that *praise* nonpresent students as implicating praise of parents, the present article suggests that participants treat utterances that *criticize* nonpresent students as implicating criticism of parents. The preference for *parents* to criticize their own children seems to be a specific manifestation of the more general preference for the person responsible for a negatively valued referent to be first to call attention to it (rather than allowing a nonresponsible person to interactionally “register” it first) (Pillet-Shore, 2008, pp. 46–52, 2015b; cf. Schegloff, 2007).³ Thus, much as it is better for the maintenance of “face” (Goffman, 1967) and social solidarity (Heritage, 1984a) if a dinner host/cook is first to comment upon the fact that the main course is overcooked, it is likewise better for the maintenance of all involved parent–teacher conference participants’ “face” if the parent is first to comment upon her/his child’s shortcomings.

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Notes

- 1 Though this study’s data set also includes cases of teachers doing “being a good teacher,” due to space constraints this article focuses only on parents’ work to display themselves to be “good parents” to teachers.
- 2 There may be two orders of competence involved during these sequences: a display of competence as a parent, and a display of discourse/pragmatic competence in knowing how to participate in these student-assessing sequences.
- 3 This seems to be related to the preference for self-repair (over other-repair) in conversation (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977).

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