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Depersonalizing Troubles in Institutional Interaction: Routinizing in Parent-Teacher Conferences

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Comments

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Abstract
This article advances our understanding of institutional interaction by showing when and how it can be advantageous for professionals to treat addressed-recipients as non-unique. Examining how teachers talk about children-as-students during parent-teacher conferences, this investigation illuminates several specific interactional methods that teachers use to *depersonalize* the focal student's trouble, delineating as among these the novel practice of "*routinizing*"—citing firsthand experience with other similar cases. Analysis demonstrates how teachers use routinizing to enact their expertise, both *responsively* as a vehicle for attenuating and credentialing their advice-giving to parents/caregivers, and *proactively* to preempt parent/caregiver resistance to their student-assessments/evaluations. This research thus reveals how *routinizing* licenses teachers' authority vis-à-vis the focal student's trouble by making salient the epistemic basis for their claims.

Keywords: institutional interaction, conversation analysis, criticism,
student troubles/problems, epistemics, parent-teacher conferences

Introduction

Interactions between professional representatives of social institutions and their lay clients are asymmetrical. From the client's perspective, the focal case is *unique*, while the professional's organizational perspective (e.g., in education; healthcare) regards that case as comparatively *routine* (Drew & Heritage, 1992, pp. 3, 50-51). But are there specific interactional practices through which involved participants manage and display their orientations to this asymmetry? This article answers this question by illuminating several practices for *depersonalizing* a case, paying special attention to the sub-practice of "*routinizing*"— constituting the focal case as non-unique by citing firsthand experience with other similar cases. Analysis demonstrates that, through this practice, professionals parlay the asymmetrical properties of institutional interaction, showing when and how it can be advantageous to treat one's addressed-recipient as *non*-unique.

Many professional institutional representatives must talk about children as part of their work. This is particularly true for teachers, who often talk about children-as-students to students' parents/caregivers, including during school pick-up time (Hayano, 2023/this issue), back-to-school, open house and parent evening events (e.g., MaClure & Walker, 2000), and parent-teacher interviews (Baker & Keogh, 1995) and conferences (Pillet, 2001; Pillet-Shore, 2003; 2012; 2015a; 2016; Caronia & Dalledonne Vandini, 2019; Caronia, 2022). Centering on parent-teacher conference encounters, this article focuses on sequences of interaction in which participants discuss a potential or actual *trouble* with the student's academic performance, behavior, or effort. The student-trouble can be mutually-ratified (e.g., when both teacher and parent/caregiver acknowledge the student is struggling with math), or merely anticipated (e.g., when the teacher displays an expectation that the parent/caregiver will challenge the student's report card grades). Data show that, during these sequences, teachers regularly use multiple methods for depersonalizing the focal student's trouble, shifting away from referring to the specific case by situating it as among others.

This article makes two contributions that advance our understanding of institutional interaction. First, it provides a data-based overview of the larger class of *depersonalizing methods* that speakers use when discussing a trouble. Second, it describes the novel practice of *routinizing*, both contextualizing it as distinctive among other depersonalizing methods and elucidating how teachers use it to enact—or *do*—their *expertise*, neutralizing the default assumption that parents/caregivers have epistemic primacy regarding the focal child-as-student. Analysis reveals that teachers routinize *responsively* as a vehicle for attenuating and credentialing their advice-giving to parents/caregivers, and *proactively* to preempt parent/caregiver resistance to their student-assessments/evaluations. This article thus demonstrates that *routinizing* licenses teachers' authority vis-à-vis the focal student's trouble by making salient the epistemic basis for their claims (cf. Pomerantz, 1980:187 on "type 1 knowledge"; Stivers et al. 2011).

Data and method

This study is part of a larger project for which I conducted three years of IRB-approved 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 fourteen teachers and 61

parents/caregivers discussing students ranging in grade level from preschool (aged ~4 years) through 7th grade (aged ~12 years). 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/non-cohabiting 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 non-native but fluent English-speakers. This study examines traditional conference interactions during which focal students are not invited to participate.

I analyzed my data using the procedures, framework and body of literature associated with the interdisciplinary field of conversation analysis, beginning and proceeding with repeated examination of recordings and the making of detailed Jeffersonian transcripts that enable the graphic representation of fleeting details of participants' visible and audible social actions (thereby forestalling averaging and idealization; Heritage, 1984a). I collected sequences of interaction in which conference participants discuss a trouble with the focal nonpresent student's academic performance, behavior and/or effort. Consistent with the conversation analytic goal of uncovering and documenting systematic practices of human social conduct, I discovered teachers to regularly use several practices for *depersonalizing* the focal student's trouble during these sequences—interactionally situating the specific case as among others (Pillet-Shore, 2016). I closely examined over 40 sequences showing teachers depersonalizing the focal student-trouble to delineate several depersonalizing sub-practices (explicated below), one of which I term *routinizing*—citing firsthand experience with other cases like the focal case. To develop the details of this article's analysis, I analyzed 20 sequences showing teachers *routinizing*.

Background
Parent-teacher interaction

Previous research demonstrates that, during parent-teacher interaction, participants time and design the same sequence-initiating action (e.g., a student-criticizing utterance) differently sensitive to their own displayed orientations to their salient social identities: when delivering utterances that praise or criticize the focal student, there is a marked contrast between *when* and *how* parents versus teachers each perform these actions. This contrast is embodied in the structural preference organization (Heritage, 1984a; Pillet-Shore, 2017; Schegloff, 2007a) outlined in Table 1 (and exemplified in Excerpt 1; also see Pillet-Shore, 2015a; 2016 for detailed evidence and analyses).

Table 1. Preference Organization of Parent-Teacher Interaction (Pillet-Shore, 2016:37)

	PRAISING STUDENT	CRITICIZING STUDENT
TEACHER	preferred	dispreferred
PARENT/CAREGIVER	dispreferred	preferred

Whereas teachers praise students with preferred design—articulating student-triumphs straightforwardly, fluently and without delay, parents treat their articulation of student-triumphs as dispreferred—working to either avoid praising students altogether or to delay, qualify and account for their student-praising utterances (Pillet-Shore, 2012; 2015a). Given this article's

focus on how conference participants manage their discussion of student-*troubles*, however, the reciprocal finding is most relevant: while parents routinely criticize students/their own children with preferred design—straightforwardly, fluently and without delay (Pillet-Shore, 2015a), teachers systematically delay, qualify/mitigate and/or account for their student-criticizing utterances, treating their articulation of student-troubles as dispreferred (Pillet-Shore, 2016).

Courtesy of the complementarity built into this preference organization, parents and teachers can often tacitly collaborate to produce sequences in which a parent is first to state a particular student-trouble (Pillet-Shore, 2015a). While this enables participants to forestall conflict (Pillet-Shore, 2016), this does not mean that teachers entirely escape their institutional obligation to articulate student-troubles. As part of the *extra* interactional work that they do to manage the dispreferredness of these sequences (Pillet-Shore, 2016:45), teachers regularly depersonalize the focal student-trouble by situating it as among others. Before exemplifying how teachers depersonalize student-troubles during parent-teacher conferences, the next section provides an overview of extant work relating to depersonalizing in a variety of interactional contexts.

Depersonalizing in interaction

A few previous studies explore phenomena pertaining to depersonalizing in interaction. Taking a sociological and theoretical approach, Timmermans and Tavory (2020) trace the processes of generalization (and specification) in recorded racist encounters. They discuss the term "upshifting" as a move "up" toward generalization, arguing that "upshifting" is a common semiotic strategy in everyday social life whenever a specific person "becomes an example of a 'type' of people" (ibid: 303).

More directly relevant to the present article's focus on talk about a trouble, however, is previous conversation analytic work examining various methods speakers use to depersonalize in advising and counseling encounters. In their study of British residential health-visitor encounters with first-time mothers, Heritage and Sefi (1992:369) find that health-visitors can make "factual generalizations" about other mothers as a less explicit method of delivering advice/recommendations to their current recipients. Examining teacher training advising conferences, Waring (2017) describes how mentor teachers do what she calls "going general," observing how they do pronoun shifts (e.g., from 'you' to 'we') as they point out problems and propose solutions to depersonalize their advice and invoke larger pedagogical principles. Building upon this study, Antaki & Bloch (2020) analyze how telephone health helpline call-takers can present medical advice to callers without personalizing it, instead proffering it as a matter of in-principle, impersonal, established procedure. And relatedly, Svinhufvud, Voutilainenm, & Weiste (2017) examine how university counselors "normalize" in response to students' problem descriptions by labeling troubles as 'normal' or 'commonplace.'

In an earlier study of parent-teacher conference interaction comparing how teachers deliver student-praise versus student-criticism, Pillet-Shore (2016) elucidates several depersonalizing methods[1] that teachers use when discussing student-troubles. First, anticipating Waring's (2017) aforementioned finding in mentor teacher advising, Pillet-Shore (2016:45-46) demonstrates that teachers recurrently *obfuscate responsibility* for student-troubles by omitting

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[1] Pillet-Shore (2016) appears to apply the term "routinizing" too broadly, as if synonymous with this article's term "depersonalizing." The present article addresses this issue by more clearly conceptualizing *the larger class of depersonalizing methods* as constituted by several distinct sub-practices, and then delineating *routinizing* as among these.

explicit reference to the focal student—including through use of ellipsis, passive or ergative (non-active) construction, and pronoun shifts (e.g., switching from using a third-person singular pronoun 's/he' or possessive 'her/his' to instead using the definite article 'the' or first-person plural pronoun 'we'). In addition, Pillet-Shore (2016) discusses three other depersonalizing methods through which teachers situate the focal student's trouble as among others: *normalizing*, *invoking membership categorization devices*, and *likening themselves* to the focal student in terms of the salient trouble. The next section refines Pillet-Shore's (2016:46) analysis by conceptualizing and describing the larger class of depersonalizing methods that teachers use when discussing a student-trouble, delineating and exemplifying several sub-practices to analytically contextualize and differentiate *routinizing* as among these.

Depersonalizing methods in parent-teacher interaction

Excerpt 1 shows how a teacher depersonalizes by *obfuscating responsibility* for the focal student's trouble through pronoun shifting (with arrows -> pointing to the start of the target action and **bold** indicating target utterances). After Teacher (T) announces that she has a pile of category report documents "for all the subjects" to show the focal 4th grade student's legal guardian Grandma (GM), she pulls out a document on the student's "writing" at line 3. During the silence at line 4, Grandma starts to look at this writing document. Just as Teacher starts to name the next document's subject at line 5, Grandma indexes her continued orientation to writing at line 6.

```
(1) [07a]
01  T:    We have 'e:m for all thuh su:bject[s.
02  GM:                                      [O:ka#:y.
03  T:    Here's one fer: writing? ((puts doc in front of GM))
04        (1.0)/((GM looks at/touches writing doc))
05  T:    (Then/An') here'[s one- ((T mobilizing next doc))
06  GM:                   [*His wri:ting skills. ↑°Wel-° An'=
07        ((*lateral headshake; T retracts next doc))
08  GM:   =he's-? d- uhhuh! [.hh °W'l° I think they're=
09  T:                      [Yeah.
10  GM:   =te:rrible.*But what I'm seeing he:re,it's: uh:¿
11               ((*lowers hand to doc))
12  T:    *This:? is an indicator that= ((*points to doc))
13        =he's really watching me= ((T, GM gazing down at doc))
14        =in cla:ss?=Cause we go over all th[is dee oh el=
15  GM:                                       [Mkay,
16  T:    =bufore he se:es i[t.
17  GM:                     [pt!
18  T:    .hh So, (.) that to me:, (0.3)
19        He's- (.) wi:th me?
20        He's wa:tching? He's lea:rning?
21        [He's reme:mbering?
22  GM:   [ptch! °Okay,°
23  T:    .hh An' then when I: give him a: (0.4)
24        >test at thee end a thuh we:ek.< He recalls
25        [what it was thet=
26  GM:   [°Oka:y.°
27  T:    =we ta:lked about. .hh Now if we looked at (.) his
28     -> (.) actual writing? Yesh.You're righ[t.We'r:e=
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29 GM:                                              [Yeah.
30  T: -> =We'r:e (0.3) >havin' a li:ttle bit a difficulty
31        there.
```

The timing of Grandma's delivery of her criticism of the student's writing at lines 6, 8 and 10 enables Teacher to later agree with her at line 28, thus exemplifying the holistic preference organization outlined above in Table 1: Teacher and Grandma tacitly collaborate to produce this as a preferred sequence in which Grandma is first to articulate the student's trouble with writing. And, considering Teacher's actions from lines 12 through 31, observe how Teacher prioritizes explicating the part of the writing evaluation document that shows a positive student-evaluation (lines 12-27), consistently using the pronoun 'he' to explicitly refer to the focal student as the agent responsible for doing the praiseworthy actions of "wa:tching", "lea:rning", and "reme:mbering." But as Teacher starts to articulate the part of the document that shows a negative/critical evaluation of the student's "actual writing" at line 28, she *obfuscates responsibility* for this student-trouble via pronoun shift, switching from 'he' to 'we.' Teacher's use of 'We' at lines 28 and 30 avoids directly referring to the specific student as the agent responsible for his writing trouble (Pillet-Shore, 2016:36-39; 46).

Another depersonalizing method that teachers use when discussing student-troubles in parent-teacher conferences appears related to Svinhufvud, et al.'s (2017) aforementioned finding about how university counselors *normalize*. In Excerpt 2, Teacher launches the topic of the 3rd grade student's math performance at lines 1 and 2. Teacher's utterance implies an unfavorable assessment through the formulation of the student as metaphorically "hangin' on." Precisely timed to start in overlap with Teacher's first negatively-valenced word ("hangin'"), Mom (M) does a rollercoaster hand gesture. This gesture and subsequent talk display her prior knowledge of the student's math trouble (Pillet-Shore, 2015a:384), thus enabling Teacher to agree with her at line 5. Teacher responds to Mom's uptake by *normalizing* the trouble (Pillet-Shore, 2016:46-47), pursuing a 'no problem' trajectory by extending its scope to "evrybody."

(2) [04]
```
01  T:    As far as ma:th go:es, he's- (.) he's
02  T:    [*hangin' on.
03  M:    [((*M 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  M:    [°It's (.) like this.° It's up (.) and down.
07  T:    Wh[ich is::(.) if you feel bette:r (.)=
08  M:      [It's:: (.) erratic.
09  T: -> =I- >I shoulda wrote a note home< to thuh
10        parents.Because that's happening with (0.7)
11        evrybody.with this math program.
```

At line 7, Teacher self-initiates self-repair (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977) to interpolate an account for why she's producing the prospective portion of her utterance, and then next inserts a self-admonishment (at line 9) regarding her failure to provide advance notification of this issue to all members of Mom's category. By generically invoking "thuh parents" and stating, "that's happening with (0.7) everybody," Teacher enacts a shift from the focal case to the universal, normalizing[2] and mitigating this student-trouble by implicitly blaming the math program.

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[2] Excerpt 7 also shows a teacher "normalizing."

Teachers can also depersonalize a focal student-trouble by *invoking the student's membership in a particular social category*. Pillet-Shore (2016:48-50) shows how teachers use "membership categorization devices" (Sacks, 1972; Schegloff, 2007b) as accounts to explain/excuse the focal student's trouble by treating it as an expectable characteristic of category members. This is exemplified in Excerpt 3, which shows the opening of a conference between Teacher and the 4th grade student's legal guardian Grandma. At line 4, Grandma characterizes the focal student as a "messy little bee," hearable as both a gender-neutral term of endearment for, and criticism of, her grandson. After Teacher produces two countervailing characterizations of the student (at lines 5 and 9), Grandma returns to her grandson's messiness at line 11, claiming persistent though unsuccessful efforts to remedy this student-trouble. At line 13, Grandma converts her student-criticism into a complaint with her vocalized out-breath (Pillet-Shore, 2015b; 2018). In response, Teacher invokes the student's membership in a particular gender category.

```
(3) [07b]
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 bo:y?
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)thhh.
```

Teacher's utterances at lines 14 and 17 activate the student's gender as a commonsense, stereotypical account for his messiness, proposing that this student-trouble is an expectable product of category members.

Another depersonalizing method that Pillet-Shore (2016:50-52) shows teachers to use when discussing student-troubles is *likening themselves* to the focal student in terms of the salient trouble. In Excerpt 4, Teacher does this toward the end of the conference between the focal kindergarten student's Dad (D), homeroom teacher (T1), and math specialist teacher (T2). When T2 arrived about twenty minutes into T1 and Dad's already in-progress interaction, she noted that the student is 'easily distracted' and 'very social', but then moved onto recommending math activities that Dad can do with the student at home. After moving to close her math presentation to Dad by delivering a praising summary assessment of the student (line 2), T2 first confirms Dad's upshot at lines 5 and 7, and then returns to her single aforementioned student-criticism at lines 10-12. Immediately after articulating this student-trouble, T2 says "but" and shrugs her shoulders, embodying her stance toward it as of little significance. At line 15, T2

continues her in-progress utterance by shifting from the student to herself, *likening herself* to him in terms of this specific trouble.

```
(4) [35]
01  D:    So: um: (.)
02  T2:   Very good [student.
03  D:             [He is:: (.) at least at or above <where
04        he> should be=
05  T2:   =Absolutely. ((T2 nodding))
06  D:    °Ok[ay°
07  T2:      [Yeah
08  D:    °(Wa[nted to make s:ure,)°
09  T1:       [In all areas.=[((clap)) hih huh
10  T2:                     [Right,=An' thee only th-
11  T2:   Thee only thing- as I say thih- he can be
12        [distracted and he's very social but (0.5)/((shrugs))
13  T1:   [((T1 clears throat))
14  T1:   An' fer [me: jus' so you kno:w what   hhh huh heh heh
15  T2: ->        [I TALKED my way through schoo:l s(h)ohhh
16  T1:   £I know I [did too.
17  T2:            [hih hh   Yih hih!
```

At line 15, T2's announcement/admission claims *particularistic comembership* (cf. Erickson & Shultz, 1982) with the student in terms of his talkativeness, depersonalizing this student-trouble to minimize its significance.

Thus far, we've seen how speakers generally, and teachers particularly, have multiple methods for depersonalizing a focal trouble,[3] metaphorically 'taking a step back' and away from referring to the specific case to interactionally situate it as among others. With this wider analytic context of the larger class of depersonalizing methods in hand, we can now consider the distinctive practice of *routinizing*.

Routinizing as a distinctive depersonalizing practice

Excerpt 5 shows a speaker *routinizing* by citing firsthand experience with other cases like the focal case. At line 6, Teacher routinizes as he responds to the student's legal guardian Grandma's uptake of his immediately preceding sequence-initiating utterance. At lines 1 and 2, Teacher articulates the focal 7th grade student's trouble through a negative observation (Schegloff, 1988) that is epistemologically "cautious" (Drew & Heritage, 1992:45; Heritage, 1997), telling only what he's observed to be fact from his point of view as the collector of student work—note that he does *not* assert that the student isn't *doing* any work, thus avoiding an accusation that could occasion a defensive response from Grandma. Teacher's caution pays off: after Grandma nods at line 3, displaying her prior knowledge of this student-trouble (Pillet-Shore, 2015a), she parlays the implicit distinction between the student's *doing* his work versus *turning it in* to Teacher at line 5. With her *and*-preface (Kim & Kuroshima, 2013), Grandma positions her utterance as an affiliative upgrade on the severity of the problem that Teacher just articulated. Starting at line 6, Teacher responds to Grandma's uptake by *routinizing*,

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[3] Though the various depersonalizing methods reviewed in this article cover a substantial range of resources that I have observed teachers to use during parent-teacher encounters, future research is needed to determine if there are additional methods.

interactionally constituting the focal case as non-unique by citing his direct experience with other cases of "kids who have" the same trouble.

```
(5)  [01]
01  T:     Pro:blem (0.2) is:: (.) >thet he's not
02         (turning/turned in) any work.<
03         (0.5)/((GM nodding))
04  T:     [And that's-
05  GM:    [And thuh wors:e thing is he's do:ing it.
06  T: -> Is- okay, >cause I'fve had a couple kids who have and
07         thuh parents are tellin me,< .hh (0.2) [I'fve=
08  GM:                                            [We've-
09  T:     =see 'im doin thuh work? an (0.3)
10  GM:    (It happens-/Am hav[ing-)
11  T:                        [ih- it kills me thet (.) he's not
12         getting °credit for i[t°.
13  GM:                         [With all his classes like
14         Ma[::th   he'll bring home his packet=
15  T:       [Really?
16  GM:    =an' he'll go like (.) missing (0.2) seven assignments
17         an' I'm going (.) ↓we did those seven assignments
18         where are they.
19  T:     °Mmhm°
20  GM:    ↑I don't kn[o::::w¿ huh huh
21  T:                [As- I- I haf:: one student who I:
22         >the girl who- jus' had er< ca:rd signed off, .hh her
23         mom fo:und (.) >what she described as< a ne:st. ov:
24         (.) assignments thet had been comple:ted. (.) an' jus'
25         (0.5) tucked away.
26  GM:    Mmhm,
```

At lines 6-12, after first accepting Grandma's preceding response, Teacher rushes to deliver an utterance that he formulates (with ">cause") as an account, not only mentioning "a couple" other students "who have" the same trouble as the focal student, but also quoting[4] "thuh parents" of those other kids. Teacher thus *routinizes* the focal student's trouble (at lines 6-12, continued at lines 21-25), treating both the *focal nonpresent student* and *copresent recipient Grandma* as non-unique—as among others. Doing this action here enables Teacher to affiliate with, affirm and credential Grandma's preceding claim by reference to his experience with other 'cases like this,' helping to make sense of the focal student's trouble in a less threatening way.

Teacher's work to extend the scope of the focal trouble to other students and their parents/caregivers apparently occasions Grandma's reciprocal move—starting at line 13—to extend the scope of her grandson's trouble beyond Teacher's English class to his other classes (since this student has multiple teachers and class periods throughout the school day). Thus, Teacher's routinizing actions engender a sequence through which Teacher and Grandma collaboratively co-construct the nature of the student-trouble—exchanging information from their respective epistemic territories (Heritage, 2012) and confirming a shared social reality (Pollner, 1974)—to arrive at a common understanding of the problem before moving onto

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[4] While Teacher quotes other parents as telling him, "I'fve see 'im doin thuh work?" it is (perhaps designedly) equivocal whether the next portion of Teacher's utterance (at lines 11-12) is continued reported speech, or constitutes a footing shift (Goffman, 1981) such that he is the animator, author and principal of this talk.

formulating possible solutions. Through his routinizing actions, Teacher proffers affiliation, positioning himself as 'on the same side' as Grandma.

I term this practice *routinizing* because, across all cases in my data set, this most accurately describes the action of constituting the focal case (the student, her/his trouble, and the current addressed-recipient parent/caregivers) as *non*-unique by mentioning past, professional experience with other 'like' cases. Considering the previous overview of other depersonalizing methods, we can now observe how Teacher's utterances at lines 6-12 (continued at lines 21-25) are indeed distinctive: Teacher does *not* "go general" (Waring, 2017), "obfuscate responsibility" (Pillet-Shore, 2016), or pursue a 'no problem' trajectory by "normalizing" (Pillet-Shore, 2016; Svinhufvud, et al., 2017) or "likening himself" (Pillet-Shore, 2016) to the student in terms of the salient trouble. Teacher also does not trade upon a cultural stereotype by invoking the student's membership in a particular social category as an account for his trouble (Pillet-Shore, 2016:48-50). Rather, Teacher *routinizes* by *citing his firsthand experience with other cases like the focal case*.

To further demonstrate what is accomplished through the practice of routinizing, the next two sub-sections show how teachers: (i) routinize *responsively*, and (ii) routinize *proactively*.

Routinizing responsively

When teachers routinize *responsively*, they are expanding upon the parent/caregiver's just-expressed concern about, or trouble with, the focal student. While Excerpt 5 showed a teacher initiating the larger sequence/topic with a student-*criticizing* utterance—after which the caregiver displayed an agreeing, provisionally affiliative stance, Excerpt 6 shows Teacher launching the sequence with a student-*praising* utterance (Pillet-Shore, 2012; 2016), after which Mom articulates a student-trouble.

In Excerpt 6 at lines 1-4, Teacher launches conference business with a favorable summary assessment of the focal 1st grade student. Mom then responds, first with "O:h" (line 3), treating Teacher's prior assessment as an informing (Heritage 1984b; Pillet-Shore, 2012; 2016); and then by delivering an utterance (at lines 5-6) that commandeers Teacher's projected multi-turn-constructional unit (hereafter TCU; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) turn by proposing a counter-version of her daughter. By beginning line 5 with "Which," Mom indicates that her incipient talk will provide further information contextualizing—and yet contradicting—Teacher's prior favorable summary assessment of the child-as-student. After Teacher's continuative "Really?" at line 7 (a newsmark that encourages further elaboration; Heritage 1984b), Mom criticizes and complains about the focal student's behavior at home (from lines 8-11). Starting at line 13, as Teacher works to account for and reconcile the two contrasting (home versus class) versions of the focal student, she routinizes, treating this as a non-unique, one-among-others case by citing her firsthand experience with "other parents" who "say that to:o".

(6) [23]
```
01 T:    .hh Well lemme begin by saying that Skyler is such a
02       sweethear[t.Like she's such .h She's=
03 M:             [O:h.
04 T:    =su:ch [a doll:.
05 M:           [<Which is so funny.> .h Becuz she's not
06       °like that at home.°
07 T:    Really?=
08 M:    =Yeah. She's like al- I thought we wer- that was: (.)
09       she was gonna be thuh one we had pro:blems with in
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10          school becuz .hhh she's like a boy at home:.Like she
11          doesn't listen to us, she- I mean she's cra:hehezy:.
12 T:       [W    O   :   :   w,
…           ((1m12s omitted during which M, T discuss small dog
            on M's lap, and T's injured finger))
13 T: ->    .hh But yih kno:w¿=It might be- >An- an' other parents
14          say that to:o.They're like god.I'm so happy they're
15          angels in here because they're not like that at home.=
16 M:       =Yea[h.
17 T:           [.hh But it's like it's deh- a di:fferent
18          environment.[I think.
19 M:                   [Yeah.
…           ((25s omitted during which M, T discuss class v. home))
20 T: ->    =.h Well hang in there¿=An' yih kno[w:=What I t- tell=
21 M:                                          [hhhh
22 T:       =other parents to:o is .hh <let them kno:w.> (.) like
23          thet we've talked¿ [Yih know¿ An' .h (0.3) I've said=
24 M:                          [Okay.
25 T:       =how wonderful they are here¿
26          (0.3)
27 T:       An' I'm so surprised tih hear that they're not that
28          same way at ho:me?
29 M:       (Mmhm,/Right.)=
```

Line 13 is an interactional fulcrum where Teacher starts routinizing by citing firsthand experience with other similar cases: using the simple indefinite present tense, she mentions both what "other parents" 'say' to her as an *input* (lines 13-15), and then what she 'tells' them as an *output* (lines 20-28), thereby constituting the student, her trouble, and the current addressed-recipient Mom as non-unique—as among others.[5] By conveying to Mom that she's heard—and dealt with—this student-trouble before, Teacher indexes her credentials to affiliate with and affirm Mom's version of the student, apparently to reassure Mom (conveying 'You're not alone'). Furthermore, Teacher's choice to ostensibly report "What I t- tell other parents" embodies a less direct way of conveying advice to this particular parent. Since giving unsolicited advice is a dispreferred social action (Heritage & Sefi, 1992), Teacher uses *routinizing* to attenuate and license her advice-giving to Mom (at lines 22-28), positioning it as something she "tells" other parents in a continuous, ongoing way.

       The practice of routinizing thus enables teachers to parlay their experience with other 'cases like this,' enacting their expertise by making salient the epistemic basis for their claims (cf. Pomerantz, 1980:187; Stivers et al. 2011). By drawing upon their "universalistic" organizational overview perspective (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003:43; Waller, 1932) afforded by their access to all of their past and current students, teachers are able to claim epistemic primacy (relative to parent/caregivers' "particularistic" knowledge of only their own child/ren), licensing their authority regarding the focal student's trouble. While Excerpts 5 and 6 showed teachers using this practice toward the beginning of each conference encounter, Excerpts 7 and 8 show how teachers can also routinize responsively deeper into the interaction.

       In Excerpt 7, the 1st grade student's Dad (D) initiates the sequence at lines 1-2 with a

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[5] During Excerpt 6, in addition to routinizing, Teacher also uses another depersonalizing method—obfuscating responsibility—by switching from her consistent use of the pronoun "she" to refer to the focal student Skyler (lines 1-4, during which her student-assessing utterances are positive) to instead using the pronoun "they" (lines 14-15, and lines 22-27).

polar question that registers (Pillet-Shore, 2021) a potential student-trouble: some reversed numbers that he sees on a sample of the student's writing. Mom adds to Dad's first pair part at line 3 as Dad continues his turn at line 4. At line 5, Teacher responds, her first TCU confirming Dad's candidate answer that indeed this type of number reversal is common among 1st grade students. Teacher's utterances at line 5, 12 and 15 *depersonalize* the student-trouble by explicitly "normalizing" it (Svinhufvud et al., 2017). But it's in the second TCU of Teacher's response, starting at line 7, that she also does *routinizing* by using the frame, "I tell parents." Though she could have said "Very common in first grade. Don't worry until second grade," Teacher interpolates "I tell parents," which works against the otherwise default assumption that her talk is designed (only) for her current addressed-recipients Dad and Mom. Citing what she 'tells parents' generally enables Teacher to convey that this is a *perennial* issue that comes up in other conferences, with other parents, about other students.

```
(7)  [17]
01 D:     >Is this common too¿='cause I know she does
02        r- (.) she r:e:verses a lot,
03 M:     Fi:[ves,
04 D:        [Like thuh twos and fi::ves,=
05 T:     =[Very common in first gra#de.
06 D:     =[(An' then also-) Okay.
07 T: ->  I tell parents don't worry until
08        s[econd gra#de.
09 M:      [(Her fives are all)
10         [((M traces reversed 5 with finger on table))
11 T:     [Yeah. Esses ((Ss)), bees ((Bs)), dees ((Ds)),
12        pees ((Ps)), cues ((Qs)), .hh rilly rilly normal¿
13        .hh If it comes tuh second grade and she's still
14        doing it, .hh then there's a little bit of concern,
15        But right no:w it's: yeah. Very- very normal.
16 M:     Okay.
```

Teacher's "I tell parents" frame at line 7 uses the simple indefinite present tense to present her emergent utterance as a matter of *standard operating procedure* (cf. Antaki & Bloch, 2020)— that is, she's not just telling *this* Dad and Mom to not worry until second grade; rather, she tells this—as a regular *output*—to parents categorically and generally *as a matter of routine*. Teacher thus uses routinizing to enact her expertise and license her authority to advise about this potential student-trouble, situating the current parents alongside her other students' parents, and the focal student alongside her other students.

Excerpt 8 shows another teacher routinizing responsively. After the 4th grade student's Mom expresses a trouble with the focal student by announcing her son's "difficulty" reading Harry Potter and then assessing it as "a hard book," Teacher agrees, rushing to routinize with her "I bin telling parents" frame (at lines 6-7).

```
(8)  [15]
01 M:     He  has       difficulty. We're reading [>thuh=
02 T:                                              [°Myeah°,
03 M:     =Harry Potter¿[An' he has difficul- That's a hard book.=
04 T:                   [.hh O:h.
05 M:     =[I think.
06 T: ->   [tch!Yihknow what? It is a hard book.>I bin telling
07         parents [it's no:t that easy.
```

Teacher displays that she's not just telling this Mom that Harry Potter is a "hard book"; rather, she uses the present perfect continuous tense, "telling" parents this categorically as a regular output or matter of routine, and thereby counteracting the otherwise default assumption that her talk is designed only for her current addressed-recipient. Doing this enables Teacher to both *enact her expertise* from second position (Raymond & Heritage, 2006:683) by claiming that this is an issue that has already come up with other parents, and perform a stronger agreement (Pomerantz, 1984) with Mom by claiming to have independently made this assessment of the book (through her use of the perfect-progressive aspect "I've been").

Routinizing proactively
        Teachers can also routinize *proactively* in first position, as they are launching a student-centric topic about which they display that they're anticipating parental resistance. Teachers regularly do this as part of a multi-TCU turn, courtesy of parents' continuers (Schegloff, 1982).
        In Excerpt 9, Teacher begins displaying the 4th grade student's report card document to Mom and Dad as she launches conference business at line 1. This conference is occurring in December, halfway into the academic year, and the school has just adopted a new report card system transitioning away from the former use of traditional letter grades ('A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'F', with e.g., a 'C' indicating 70-79%) to now using state standards-based grading ('Exceeding', 'Meeting', 'Approaching', or 'Below Standards', with e.g., a 'C' indicating 'Meeting Most Standards'). Mom responds to Teacher's announcement at line 1 with the quick receipt "Yes" to display her prior knowledge (Heritage, 1984b:305; Pillet-Shore, 2015a) of the new report card system. As Mom and Dad look at the report card (lines 2-9), Teacher mobilizes and briefly shows them another document summarizing the state standards upon which the focal student's report card grades are based. After Mom's continuer at line 9, Teacher articulates her first assessment of the focal student at line 10—an overall summary assessment. (Over the course of this sequence, Teacher oscillates between personalizing and depersonalizing: she refers to the focal student specifically with "HE" at line 10, but then mentions other "parents" and "their kids" at lines 11 through 21, and then returns to referring just to the focal student at line 23.) It is as part of delivering a subsequent TCU in this multi-TCU turn that Teacher routinizes starting at lines 11 and 13.

```
(9) [16]
01 T:    This is a new report card.= ((T placing doc on table))
02 M:    =(M:) Yes.= ((T facing doc to M, D, who look at it))
03 T:    =So, (.) u::m: (0.3) .hh (.) Basically it's just
04       standard based¿=*uh (.) based=
05                   ((*T mobilizing standards doc))
06 T:    =o[n (a-/all-) (.) (all thuh)=
07 D:      [((throat clear))
08 T:    =(known/new) standards thuh s:tate has written up,
09 M:    Mmhm, ((T quickly showing standards doc to M))
10 T:    So:: (0.5) HE is meeting all standards. Which is a
11    -> good thi(h)nghh! .h[h >I mean I'm-< An' I've=
12 D:                       [Mmhm,
13 T: -> =been telling parents if: (.) a lot of parents
14       hav:e (.) freaked out about sees? ((Cs)) (.) (tsh-)
15       Cause their kids have never gotten a see?
16       .hh [But they're meeting=
17 D:        [Mmhm,
```

```
18 T:    =standards: with a see, and so that's not a bad gra#de.
19 D:    [Mm[hm,
20 M:    [Mm[hm,
21 T:       [That's okay. They're where they're supposed to be.
22 M:    [Mmhm.
23 T:    [.hhh An' uh So ↑I think *he's doing really well.
24 D:    Mmhm¿ ((*T gesturing with pen to report card doc))
```

At lines 10-11, Teacher continues her turn by adding a TCU that translates her previous standards-based evaluation into a vernacularly-accessible assessment. Producing within-speech laugh particles on the TCU-final word "thi(h)nghh," Teacher's laughter invites Mom and Dad to also laugh (Jefferson, 1979), and displays her orientation to her translating action as potentially problematic and delicate (Lerner, 2013; Pillet-Shore, 2012), since transparently 'good' grades usually require no account.

Continuing her in-progress turn by adding yet another TCU, Teacher self-initiates transition space repair starting in the middle of line 11. Through her 'I mean'-prefaced utterance (Maynard, 2013; Pillet-Shore, 2012:198), she works to manage how her recipients understand her previous comment. While Teacher starts this next TCU in the present tense with "I'm-," she does another self-repair to re-start her utterance to instead use the perfect-progressive aspect ("I've been"). Thus, rather than "telling" the projected portion of her utterance directly to her current recipient-parents, Teacher's grammatical shift enables her to ostensibly report what she has been telling other parents, generally as a regular *output* or *routine*—an indirect way of conveying her perspective to these particular parents to *preemptively* manage—and socially control—their response.

Through yet another self-repair in the midst of line 13, Teacher informs her current recipients of a regular or *routine input*: that "a lot of parents hav:e (.) freaked out about sees?", referencing her experience with conferences like this, during which 'people like you' have reacted negatively. Teacher's "freaked out" formulation is hearable as an implicit complaint about past parents' reactions to this new report card. Using these previous parents who "hav:e (.) freaked out about sees" as a strawman, Teacher goes on to refute their mistaken perspective, working to *preempt* her current recipient-parents from "freaking out" or otherwise resisting or reacting negatively by treating the student's grades as problematic. Teacher thus uses the action of *routinizing* to enact her expertise—by claiming that this is an issue that has already come up with other parents, Teacher is able to license and attenuate her advice that implicitly coaches *these* parents on how to respond to the report card.

Up to this point, all data excerpts have shown how teachers can routinize as a way of affiliating with and reassuring parents/caregivers about some student-trouble. But Excerpt 10 exemplifies how a teacher can also routinize to apply pressure to the recipient, motivating the teacher's subsequent provision of advice and resources to the current parent so she does *not* react 'like the others.'

At line 1, Teacher is starting to discuss the student's performance in math in some detail (after Mom and Teacher have earlier discussed the student's report card generally) by displaying several math-related documents to Mom, including results from a summary trimester test. At a place of possible sequence completion (at/after line 11), Teacher starts to routinize at line 12, citing her firsthand experience with other "parents" of students exhibiting math trouble.

(10) [09]
```
01 T:    Um. (0.7) Here's thuh ma:th?
```

```
02 M:    Oka:y,=
03 T:    =Math s[cores?
04 M:          [.nhh ((sniff))
05 T:    A::n' it's thuh math thet we're: (1.5) we have a concern
06       about.=
07 M:    =Right.
…        ((39s omitted during which M, T discuss trimester test))
08 T:    I think it- it pretty much correlates¿ tih that standard
09       number right there¿ but tells you in words (.) what
10       exactly they are?
11 M:    pt! Oka:y?
12 T: -> .hh Now. Um, O:ne thing I'm finding i:s thuh parents
13       are saying I don't know how tih help¿
14       (.)
15 M:    Mmhm?
16 T:    With: thuh math?
17 M:    Mmhm,
18 T:    An: I- (0.7) Lemme show ya s(h)omething.
…        ((18s omitted, T looking for/finding student books))
19 T:    .hhh But this is a resource b(r)ook?
20 M:    [ptch! Oka-
21 T:    [He cin bring this ho:me [at any point in=
22 M:                             [I-
23 T:    =ti[me¿=Have you seen this?=
24 M:       [Oh.Okay.
25 M:    =Ok[ay,Yes I ha:ve.
26 T:       [.h h h h      But if he has trouble, e:r you
27    -> don't understand, like some people were having °a°
28       f:it about these symbol things?
29       (0.6)
30 T:    They're in here.
31       (.)
32 M:    Oka:[y,
33 T:        [Decimals and percents¿And this is on thuh test
34       on Wednesday?
35       (.)
36 T:    So: some a these lin:e¿ Here. These line
37       things?=[An' these cubes?
38 M:            [Uh huh?      Right.
39 T:    These funny: (.)
40 M:    Yes[:.
41 T:       [Marks?
42 M:    Uh huh,=
43 T:    =°Here it is.°
44       (0.8)
45 M:    O:h.
46       (0.3)
47 M:    Oka:y,
48 T: -> And see that's what everybody's saying tih me.
49       ↑Oh. [You mean it's here?
50 M:         [↑Oh.
51 M:    Oka:y,
52 T:    Ye:[ah.
53 M:       [Got it. [Okay.
54 T:               [So:  Th- (0.4) This cin: come home.
```

Through her utterances at lines 12-16, Teacher routinizes by using the present continuous verb tense to formulate what "the parents" categorically "are saying" to her as a regular or routine *input*. Teacher uses her routinizing utterances to *preemptively* and *indirectly offer advice and recommendations* to this Mom for how she can improve her support of the focal student. At lines 26-28, Teacher shifts from referring to the focal student and her current recipient Mom to invoking "some people" who "were having °a° f:it about these symbol things?", again without Mom enacting any challenge or resistance to this issue, referencing her experience with conferences 'like this' during which 'people like Mom' have reacted negatively. Teacher's choice of the formulation "having °a° f:it" is hearable as a complaint about previous parents' reactions to the math program, and Teacher uses these previous "people" to enact her expertise and attenuate advice, coaching *this* Mom on how to better help her child in math at home. It's remarkable that, even when Mom responds to Teacher's preceding informing/advice-giving at lines 45 and 47 with sequence-closing change-of-knowledge and acceptance tokens (Heritage, 1984b; Schegloff, 2007a), Teacher continues to expand this sequence by explicitly routinizing Mom's response at line 48, using the present continuous verb tense to delineate what Mom has just said as a *regular or routine input*: "And see that's what everybody's saying tih me."

Thus, Excerpt 10 shows how Teacher uses *routinizing*: to at first (at lines 12-13) *indirectly offer Mom advice* about 'how to help' the focal student with math, without asking this Mom if she knows how to help; and then (at lines 27-28) to *preempt this Mom from complaining* about the math symbols (parlaying her experience with past parents who've "had a fit" about "these symbol things"); and finally (at line 48) to 'go meta-' by explicitly fitting Mom's change-of-knowledge state response (at line 45) into a larger set of cases ("what everybody's saying to me") as a means of justifying the fact that Teacher has just 'schooled' this Mom over an extended sequence (without Mom having indicated a need for help).

Conclusions

To advance our understanding of institutional interaction, this article has shown when and how it can be advantageous for professional representatives of social institutions to treat the addressed-recipient's case as non-unique. Examining how teachers talk about children-as-students during parent-teacher conferences, this study has demonstrated that, during sequences of interaction in which conference participants discuss a trouble with the focal student's academic performance, behavior, or effort, teachers regularly *depersonalize* that trouble by situating the focal case as among others. After exemplifying several specific *depersonalizing methods* that teachers use, this article analytically contextualized and delineated as among these the novel interactional practice of "*routinizing.*"

Data have demonstrated that teachers *routinize* by citing firsthand experience with other 'cases like this,' often describing what other parents 'say'/'have said' to them as an *input*, and/or what they 'tell'/'have told' other parents as an *output*. This practice enables the teacher, speaking as an institutional professional, to convey that her/his emergent utterance is not composed for the addressed-recipient alone—rather, it's part of a routine. Analysis has elucidated how teachers use routinizing to license their authority regarding the focal student's trouble by making salient the epistemic basis for their claims, thereby *enacting their expertise* and performing their "professional vision" (Goodwin, 1994) vis-à-vis parents/caregivers. Routinizing has thus been shown to be a vehicle through which teachers attenuate and credential their solicited or

unsolicited advice-giving to parents/caregivers, and work to preempt parent/caregiver resistance to their student-assessments.

Teachers' *routinizing* requires an organizational overview perspective afforded by an asymmetrical property of parent-teacher interactions: for parents/caregivers who only have access to their own child(ren), the focal child's trouble is a *particular* circumstance—*unique and personal*. Teachers, however, have epistemic and experiential access to all their past and current students, enabling the focal student's trouble to be *one case among other cases*. Though previous literature suggests that this asymmetry—constituting the difference between teachers' "universalistic" relationship with their students, versus parents' "particularistic" relationship with their children—may *engender* tension and conflict between interactants (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003:43; Waller 1932), the foregoing analysis has demonstrated the counterintuitive finding that teachers can parlay this asymmetry to *forestall* conflict: teachers can use *routinizing* to affiliate with and reassure parents/caregivers about some student-trouble (conveying 'You're not alone'), and/or to apply pressure to the current recipient to '*not* be like the others' as a means of preemptively managing and socially controlling parents' response to their assessments of how the student is doing in school.

By providing a data-based overview of multiple *depersonalizing methods* that teachers particularly, and speakers generally, use when discussing a trouble, this article contributes to several lines of scholarship. Its findings advance conversation analytic work on institutional interactions, particularly those involving professionals who must advise their clients (e.g., in education; healthcare). More broadly, this article's findings have implications for sociological investigations of the methods that institutional professionals use to interpret, process and handle clients and cases (e.g., Sudnow, 1967; Waegel, 1981). This study has thus paved the way for future work to investigate when *routinizing* specifically, and *depersonalizing methods* more generally, are useful in other interactions—both institutional and casual.

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