A Conversation Analytic Study
of Parents' Evening

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Submitted for the degree of PhD
2002

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Abstract

This research describes the interactional structures by which a teacher and parents of children in a British Junior school initiate parents' evening meetings.

Utilising tape recordings of 17 parents' evening meetings, this study applies the analytic methods of conversation analysis. Working from detailed transcripts of the tape-recorded data, conversation analysis examines the way in which interactants construct their conversational activities. It seeks to highlight the accomplishment of specific tasks made relevant by the participants, as well as the way particular interactional settings are created and maintained. This research also examines several features relevant to the meetings as institutional encounters.

The study focuses on the opening sequences of the parents' evening, and provides a description of a consistent structural organisation designed to deliver an initial report on the child by the teacher.

The description of this structural organisation is used as a context within which to analyse several conversational features. These include the methods by which the participants enter into a state of talk, the role of written records during the meetings, the use of syllogism in the delivery of the children's results, and the formats utilised in the presentation of different results.

There are three main findings.

1.The delineation of the basic activities carried during the opening stages of the parents' evening meetings. The description of these activities show how, despite the asymmetrical positions of the participants in terms of access to written records and rights to initiate the meetings, the interactions are collaboratively produced by the teacher and the parents.

2. Many earlier observations regarding institutional talk are also evident during parents' evening, including participation frameworks invoked and caution displayed by professional interactants.

3. The role of intonation and the invocation of local physical resources in institutional settings are identified, whilst earlier work on news announcements is developed.

Acknowledgements

*"The best description of reality
does not need to mimic its velocity"*

Ian McEwan, Enduring Love
(Vantage, 1998)

Introduction

Introduction

Using Conversation Analysis (CA) as its methodological and theoretical basis, this thesis examines the opening sequences of parents' evening meetings for children in Year 6 of a British Junior school. Since these opening sequences mark the stage at which parents first engage with the teacher, the research focuses on the way in which the transition from preamble talk to the institutional task of relating the details of the child's written report is carried out. As part of this focus, the research also examines the techniques by which the first topic of the written report is introduced.

The initial impetus behind this particular choice of topic derived from a realisation that a gap existed in discussions of parents' evenings. Despite the assumed importance of parental involvement with a child's school, any actual consideration of the skills utilised in conducting the officially constituted (and most commonly occurring) sites of school-home interface were missing. Furthermore, whilst the relationship between school and home is routinely presented within policy advice as an important element in a child's educational career[1], this importance is not generally reflected in the teacher-training curriculum. Indeed, the teacher-as-practitioner often has to engage with the difficulties of meeting parents 'on the job'. Although it is not the role of research to examine the normative standards of 'good' or 'bad' communication, I sought to highlight specific aspects of the communication process taking place between educational practitioners and their clients. In this way I hoped to enable discussion and understanding between the two parties involved in parents' evenings.

As mentioned above, the research has been carried out using Conversation Analysis as its prime methodological perspective, making use of audio tape recordings of the parent-teacher interactions and detailed transcriptions of the results. In marking a boundary between the professional and non-professional spheres of school and home, parent-teacher interactions were of interest to me because they informed those areas of CA that have, as Maynard and Clayman point out, looked at how particular conversational practices are "specialised, simplified, reduced, or otherwise structurally adapted for institutional purposes" (1991: 407). I was also particularly interested to examine the way in which the documentary realities of institutional talk, such as

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[1] In the UK, this can particularly be seen in the attention given to such initiatives as "Home-School" partnerships (cf. www.standards.dfes.gov.uk).

documents pertaining to a child's academic achievements, were "talked into being" (Heritage, 1984), thereby allowing for an examination of whether such realities are "evoked, manipulated and even transformed in interaction" (Heritage, 1997: 162).

In Chapter 1, the **Ethnographic Background** for the research is examined, including the role played by the National Curriculum in the assessment of pupils, and the impact this has on the parent-teacher meetings. This chapter also introduces Conversation Analysis as the analytic framework for the research, as well as providing an overview of the aims of the study.

In Chapter 2, **The Natural History of the Research,** I present some of the biographical and analytical issues that influenced the methodological choices made during the writing of this thesis. I not only describe the factors behind my choice of parents' evenings as a topic, but how the final thesis was developed over the course of my research.

Chapter 3, **Parents' Evening Meetings: An Overview of the Trajectory,** outlines the repeated reporting structure utilised by the class teacher. This structure consists of several stages: *Preamble: Agenda Statement, Focusing Statement: Reporting Statement: Contextualising Statement: and Upshot Statement.* From this overall structure, Chapters 4 to 8 go on to consider several specific aspects of the delivery of the report on the child as the first topic introduced by the teacher.

In Chapter 4, **Getting Into a State of Talk,** the lexical and intonational features of the movement from the preamble talk to the start of the reporting structure are considered. These features include the interactional components that facilitate the development of a state of talk within the parent's evening meetings, as well as the way in which these actions reflect the task orientation of the teacher.

Chapter 5, **Talking Written Documents Into Reality,** extends the analysis of the opening sequences of the meetings to assess the techniques by which the report document is implicated in the talk. These techniques fall into two broad categories: straightforward spoken referencing of the report documents, with the teacher providing an explicit description of the action of looking at the written record; a combination of the action description with the audible manipulation of the documents themselves.

The delivery of the report itself is considered in Chapter 6, **Syllogism and Report Delivery**. As well as describing the way in which participation status and the construction of the child influences the report delivery, this chapter also outlines the logical structures used to imply the consequence of the child's result, via referencing of an 'externally' moderated national average.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine the final stage of the reporting structure, **Upshot Statements for Non-Achieving** and **Achieving Results**. It is during these statements that some form of upshot regarding the child's result is delivered, either in the form of a goal proposal, or as an assessment of the result.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, the **Conclusion** discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the research, focusing on its relevance to three different audiences: academic practitioners within CA, educational practitioners (Teachers), and parents.

Chapter One

Ethnographic Background, Research Objectives, Data and Methods

1.0 Parent-Teacher Meetings in UK Junior Schools

As well as looking at the ethnographic background of the parent-teacher meetings, this introductory chapter will not only outline the aims and objectives of the study, but also introduce Conversation Analysis (CA) as the analytic framework of the research. It must be stressed that the sense of context alluded to here relates to that level of background information required by a non-educationalist audience in order to locate these meetings within the more general set of encounters between teachers and parents that might occur during a child's academic career[1]. The actual turn-by-turn instantiation of any wider context remains to be seen.

Section 1.1 looks at the general context of Junior Schools within the UK, as well as the role played by the National Curriculum in the assessment of pupils. The impact of the National Curriculum on the parent-teacher meetings is also discussed.

In section 1.2 the specific ethnographic details of the parents' evening meeting setting are examined, including the logistical and physical arrangements of the meetings.

Finally, section 1.3 provides reflections on the parents' evening data, and an overview of the aims of the study. It also introduces Conversation Analysis (CA) as the analytic framework for the research, including its utility in outlining the specific institutional nature of the parents' evening talk.

1.1 Junior Schools in the UK

As in many other countries, the compulsory education system in England and Wales consists of two stages, *primary* and *secondary* education. Although the actual particulars differ from country to country, these two stages roughly correspond to the age ranges 5 to 11 years old (primary), and 12 to 16 years old (secondary). Of these two stages, the data for this research comes from a school within the primary education sector, which in England and Wales is subject to one of two further subdivisions. Whilst in some Local Education Authorities primary education consists of First and Middle Schools[2], in other areas, including the one from which the data for this research stems,

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[1] This is especially important in terms of delineating the primary school setting for this research, given the secondary school focus of other studies of parent-teacher interactions (cf. Baker and Keogh, 1994, 1995; Walker, 1998; MacLure and Walker, 1998, 2000; Bastiani, 1988).
[2] First Schools cater for children between the ages of 5 and 8, whilst Middle Schools deal with children between the ages of 8 and 12.

primary education comprises of *Infant Schools*, catering for children between the ages of 5 and 7, and *Junior Schools*, which deal with children between the ages of 7 and 11.

1.1.1 Parents' Evenings and the National Curriculum

A common feature of compulsory education, both in the UK and elsewhere, is the ongoing series of meetings between teachers and parents colloquially known as *parents' evenings*. Whilst the interface between home and school can take place on many different sites within a school, matters relating to curriculum and assessment during a child's educational career have perennially been dealt with during these officially sanctioned meetings. It should be noted that such meetings do not deal purely with curriculum and assessment, since it is often the case that the parents' evening meetings constitute the sole point of contact between parents and the teachers of their children. This is reflected in the official guidance offered to teachers in the UK regarding parent's evenings, one example of which describes these meetings as "one of the best opportunities teachers have to communicate with parents, tell them about concerns, and enlist   their   help   in   motivating   and   educating   children" (source:www.standards.dfes.gov.uk, 2001).

In recent years the utility of these meetings has been directly linked within UK schools to the assessment regime of the *National Curriculum*. The National Curriculum applies to pupils of compulsory school age in the majority of schools[3], and is organised on the basis of four *Key Stages* (KS), reflecting different points in a child's academic career. This is summarised in table 1.a, below:

Table 1.a - National Curriculum Key Stages				
	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Child's Age	5-7	7-11	11-14	14-16
Year Groups	1-2	3-6	7-9	10-11

(Source: www.nc.uk.net, 2001)

The National Curriculum applies to all aspects of the curriculum (although English[4], Mathematics, and Science are deemed to be *core subjects*), and introduces attainment

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[3] The National Curriculum applies to pupils of compulsory school age in community and foundation schools, including community special schools and foundation special schools, and voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools (source: National Curriculum website, www.nc.uk.net, 2001).

[4] In the data for this thesis, the teacher, to reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the pupils, generally referred to English as "language".

targets that set out the "knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage" (Education Act 1996, section 353a).

1.1.2 Parents' Evening and the Academic Timetable

Although the minimum requirement for reporting to parents of Key Stage 1 and 2 children is once a year (source: www.dfes.gov.uk, 2001), for the school in this data the parents' evening meetings were scheduled to take place three times a year, corresponding to the autumn, spring, and summer terms[5]. Whilst this level of incidence might vary between schools, most follow a similar pattern, especially for those year groups that coincide with the end of a particular key stage.

In terms of this data, the teacher and children involved in the parent's evening meetings are from Year 6 of Junior School[6]. This coincides with the attainment and testing regime of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 2, which is reflected in the provision of parents' evening meetings during the lead up to the taking of the KS 2 examinations (see below for more on this aspect of the meetings). The importance of KS 2 can also be seen when considering that Year 6 is the final year of Junior School before Secondary School, the period of a child's academic career known as "secondary transfer". A child's performance at the end of Key Stage 2 is therefore of particular importance since it can often influence various aspects of a child's secondary school career[7].

1.2 Details of the Parents' Evening Setting

This section examines the actual logistical and physical arrangements of the parents' evening meetings. On a general level, these meetings took place on a single late afternoon/evening (after normal school hours), and were carried out across the school as a whole (i.e. not purely for Year 6 students). Despite the introduction of subject setting

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[5] The third meeting in this schedule was generally deemed to be optional, depending upon whether the teachers or parents feel that there is any aspect of the child's work that needs looking at prior to their KS 2 examinations.

[6] Further to the description of Infant and Junior Schools outlined above, it should be noted that the first year of Infant School (ages 5 to 6) is Year 1. Following this numerical designation through a child's primary school career (Year 2: ages 6 – 7, Year 3: ages 7 – 8, Year 4: ages 8 – 9, Year 5: ages 9 – 10), it can be seen that Year 6 deals with children between the ages of 10 and 11.

[7] Attainment at KS 2 can influence both the choice of secondary school (at least for those children being put forward for schools that exercise some form of selection procedure), and the different ability groups children might be 'streamed' into once they get there.

in Year 6, the meeting format was the same across the school: each set of parents attending met only their child's class teacher[8].

1.2.1 The Impact of Subject Setting

At the time the data was collected (March 1998), a new element had been introduced to the testing and attainment regime of the National Curriculum. For the first time the school engaged in the practice of *setting* for two of the three core curriculum subjects, placing children into different classes for English and Mathematics based on their level of ability. This grouping according to ability contrasts with the *class teacher* format of primary education, wherein a single teacher teaches all elements of the curriculum to a mixed ability class. Whilst this format continued (and indeed continues) to apply for the majority of the curriculum, in the case of English and Mathematics the children in Year 6 were placed into four different sets[9]. This reflected both the operational and staffing considerations of the school (there were four teachers in Year 6, who had their own mainstream class, plus one set each in English and Mathematics), and the attainment targets prescribed by the National Curriculum, which are reflected in table 1.b, (below).

Table 1.b - National Curriculum Attainment Targets & Level Descriptions	
Range of levels within which the great majority of pupils are expected to work at KS 2	2-5
Expected attainment for majority of pupils at end of key stage	4

(Source: www.nc.uk.net, 2001)

With regard to this particular Year 6, the children were grouped into four different sets for English and Mathematics that corresponded to the strictures of the National Curriculum attainment targets, as set by government on a national level. This set format is outlined in table 1.c, below[10]:

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[8] Obviously, for those parent(s) with more than one child at the school, several interviews were arranged. But in each case, these meetings involved solely the child's class teacher.

[9] Although Science was subject to a KS 2 examination, the children were not grouped into different sets for the teaching of this particular subject.

[10] Note that there are two sets for children of average ability, with one set each for children above and below the stated average.

Table 1.c – Set Format	
Ability of Set	Corresponding Expected National Average Level
Above Average	Level 4 and 5
Average	Level 3 and 4
Average	
Below Average	Below Level 3

In purely structural terms, the impact of the National Curriculum and setting for different ability levels could be seen to have two particularly relevant consequences for the implementation of the parents' evening meetings.

First of all, it meant that whilst a specific *class teacher* would be responsible for the majority of any given child's curriculum based learning, that teacher might not necessarily also be a child's *set teacher* for either English or Mathematics (or both). Secondly, the imminence of the forthcoming KS 2 examinations towards the end of the summer term meant that a series of 'mock' SAT examinations[11], conducted a month prior to the parents' evening meetings, were used to provide both school and parents with an indication of each child's current level of attainment. It is important to point out that these factors are only of direct relevance if they are attended to within the talk. However, any consideration of the respective roles of class teacher and set teacher, as evident in and through the talk displayed within this data, must be placed against two important correctives: it is the same teacher conducting every meeting, and all of the children concerned are in her *class* (as opposed to any *set* for English or Mathematics that she might take).

1.2.2 Timetable of the Meetings

The meetings were organised by prior arrangement, with the school inviting all parents to attend by a letter sent home via the children. A timetable was then established on the basis of the number of parental replies received, with each set of parents being allocated a time to attend. On the evening studied for this research, the actual timetable, posted on

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[11] Whilst these examinations are officially known simply as Key Stage (1, 2, 3, 4) examinations, it has become common amongst UK teachers to refer to them as 'SAT's'. Whilst this acronym originally referred to the 'Scholastic Assessment Test' used in US education, within the UK educational milieu it is generally taken to stand for 'Standard Assessment Test'.

the door of the room where the meetings were being held, included the names of twenty children, with one extra being added when a mother who had not replied to the invitation attended. According to the displayed timetable, the meetings were scheduled to take place over three hours, with each meeting being allocated a ten-minute 'slot'. The order of the meetings, however, was not immutable, with some rearrangement of the meeting order taking place as the evening progressed. Given the late arrival of one parent and a marked variance in the running times of the various interviews, the meetings actually occurred over a period of 3 ½ hours.

1.2.3 The Setting of the Meetings

The meetings themselves were conducted in the classroom of the teacher (and children) involved, with those yet to be seen waiting in the corridor outside[12]. There were no specific strictures on the attendance of the pupils themselves[13], and in several cases siblings of the pupils were also present in the room. On one occasion (transcript Pt 1/ e 05.1), the Deputy Head teacher entered the room subsequent to the start of the meeting, and left after a discussion with the teacher. For each interview, the teacher went to the door of the classroom to invite the next group of parents inside, with the interviews then being conducted at the teacher's desk. The teacher sat to one side of the desk (*not* behind), with the parent(s), children, and siblings (where these latter two were present) arranged on chairs in front of her.

In terms of the tape recording of the interviews, the recording device was set on the desk and operated by the teacher. At the teacher's request, the researcher was not present in the room, but sat outside in the corridor with the waiting parents. Signs indicating that the meetings would be recorded were posted both on the door of the classroom, and beside the researcher, and stated that anonymity would be preserved and that the parents had the opportunity not to participate. When the parents were invited into the room, the teacher asked them if they consented to the interviews being recorded, and in the majority of cases switched the tape recorder on and off at the beginning and end of each interview according to their wishes[14].

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[12] Examples of the children's work were set up on a table outside the room, which some of the parents examined, both pre- and post- meeting.

[13] Of the 18 meetings that were recorded, the pupils themselves were present on eight occasions.

[14] As the analysis in Chapter 5 outlines, on one occasion the tape recorder was left running between interviews. It should be stressed, however, that the consent of the parents was still elicited by the teacher prior to the start of the meeting itself.

1.3 Data and Methods

In this section I raise some questions regarding the parents' evening data, as well as providing an overview of the aims of the study. I also examine Conversation Analysis as the analytic framework for the research, focusing on its value in delineating the specific institutional nature of the parents' evening talk.

1.3.1 Brief Reflections on the Parents' Evening Data

At this point, certain aspects of the data sample should be addressed, not least because if it is ignored the lack of sampling variety within this data has ramifications for the overall implications of the analysis. Whilst none of the factors described below fully address the issue of what problems studying the meetings of only one teacher might cause, they are referenced here in order to outline the practical exigencies that both influenced the original data collection, and the subsequent analysis. A fuller discussion regarding these issues takes place in Chapter 2, A Natural History of the Research, (below).

The first influential factor that should be noted in terms of the size of the data sample relates to the actual attendance levels of the parents and children involved in this particular set of parents' evening meetings. Equally important, the co-operation of parents was sought before carrying out any tape recording, with each group of parents being given the option to opt out of the research. Thus, of the twenty sets of parents originally scheduled for a meeting, only one did not attend. With the inclusion of the latecomer (see above), twenty meetings were conducted on the evening, of which two parents declined to be recorded. The data presented in this thesis consists, however, of 17 meetings, since translation difficulties meant that one interview had to be omitted[15].

Further to the actual attendance of the parents and their consenting to being recorded, the question of access to the meetings in general was also influential in terms of the amount of data that was gathered for this research. When these parents' evening meetings were originally recorded, my access to the data, as agreed with the head teacher of the school involved, was restricted to the recording of only one teacher in the school. Since I did not want to jeopardise those rights I had already gained to conduct

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[15]The mother who had arrived late had very little English, which meant that large parts of the interview were conducted in her native Turkish, with an elder (i.e. non-pupil) son acting as interpreter. Sadly, the services of a translator regarding any subsequent transcription of this meeting were not open to the researcher at the time.

my research, I decided not to make any representations regarding the recording of any other Year 6 teachers.

Whilst these issues were of little consequence in terms of the original MA thesis, returning to the data for my PhD research raised new concerns regarding both the lack of sampling variety, and the lack of any external validity, for the parents' evening data. Indeed, having recorded the meetings of only one teacher, I was concerned by my lack of comparative data, either from another parents' evening by the same teacher, different teachers at the same school, or from another school altogether. The utility in having access to a larger database was obvious, especially in terms of examining interactions between professional and non-professional participants. Whilst cautious of "any indications of a distributional kind" (Heritage and Sefi, 1992: 360), in their examination of meetings between health visitors and mothers of newborn children Heritage and Sefi were confident that from the seventy instances of advice-giving sequences they had collected, "many of the main ways in which advice giving is managed" (ibid) were represented. Equally, Silverman (1997) examined many different counselling centres, and found very different kinds of formats being used.

Practical exigencies, however, meant that I was not able to expand my database to include comparative examples. Access to both the original school and other Junior Schools was problematised by my moving to another part of the country, whilst constraints of time meant that attempts to seek access to other educational sites would have diverted from the valuable analysis the data I did have was yielding. Indeed, the fact that the data I had collected was producing important and interesting findings allowed me to feel that conclusions could still be reliably drawn from my limited data, not least because as Silverman points out, case-study research (such as examining parents' evening meetings) "derives its validity not from the representativeness of its samples but from the thoroughness of its analysis" (1993: 169). Equally, a repeated coherent structure at the beginning of the parents' evening meetings was becoming increasingly evident across the data, which in turn influenced the decision to concentrate the analysis on the opening sequences of the meetings. Choosing this focus was influenced by the way CA is driven by the results of actual interactions, following Sacks' oft-quoted maxim to "pose those problems that the data bears" (1992a: 471). This in turn meant that the details of the opening sequences of the parents' evening meetings contained enough of interest regarding the various aspects of institutionality

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examined in this thesis, in and of themselves, to justify a narrowing of the analytic gaze[16].

1.3.2 The Aims of the Study

The professional-lay nature of the parents' evening meetings informed the initial research problem of this study, not least because the conduct of such institutional interactions have in the past been associated with the differential exercise of power by the interactants (see Chapter 2, The Natural History of the Research, below, for more detail on the development of this research). In the case of parents' evening meetings, both the teachers and the parents *could* claim a level of 'expert' knowledge with regard to the subject of the interaction, namely the child. In other research on secondary school parents' evenings, this dual claim to competency meant that the authority of the teacher was not beyond challenge (cf. MacLure and Walker, 1998; 2000), a situation that stimulated this analysis of how the child-as-topic is constructed and organised in terms of normative and educational standards.

As Baker and Keogh (1995: 263) point out in their study of parent-teacher interviews in secondary schools, the 'home-school relationship' is "an important and pervasive abstraction" within educational literature. Indeed, as MacLure and Walker (1998: 4) state, "the creation of a productive partnership between schools and parents has been an enduring aspiration of policy makers and politicians". However, despite its stated importance within the educational milieu, studies of the actual interactional conduct of parent-teacher meetings are few and far between. Whilst this might be due to such meetings being "taken to be essentially a public relations exercise where nothing much is accomplished" (Baker and Keogh, 1995: 264), a necessary corrective can be found in Mehan's description of what he calls the "methodological irony" (1979: 4) at the centre of research on education. As he points out, "what are lacking in most discussions of the influence of schools are descriptions of the actual processes of education" (Mehan, 1979: 5). This being the case, Mehan suggests that since educational facts are constituted in interaction, "we need to study interaction in educational contexts, both in and out of school, in order to understand the nature of schooling" (1979: 6)[17].

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[16] As noted above, a fuller discussion of issues relating to sample size takes place in the next chapter.
[17] See also Baker and Keogh's (1995) discussion of this absence in educational research, following Mehan's description of it.

Having located the relevance of parents' evening meetings within the educational milieu, the main objective of this research is to address Mehan's 'methodological irony' regarding research on education by providing descriptions of the actual processes of interaction in educational contexts. As part of these descriptions, the research aims to examine the displayed relationships of the relevant parties to the parent-teacher meetings. These relationships are constituted both in terms of those participants actually present during the meeting, and those non-present actors who are demonstrably attended-to as having been influential in the constitution of the results that form the basis of the meetings *qua* parents' evenings. Although the analysis of the parents' evening meetings is informed by what Psathas has called "unmotivated looking" (1995: 45 – see Chapter 2 for more details), further to these two broad objectives, a more detailed account of the aims and objectives of this research can be made, a summary of which appears below:

- What interactional tools/actions are utilised during meetings between parent and teachers? What structural features are evident during the conduct of these interactions?

- To what extent can the features of these interactions be seen to construct the specific institutional entity "parents' evening"?

- How is the relationship between the teacher and the parents constructed, especially given the normative expectation of a dual claim to competency?[18]

- How is the child-as-topic constructed?

1.3.3 CA and the Study of Parents' Evening Meetings

Given the two broad aims for the research outlined above (the explication of the interactionally relevant identities evident in parents' evening meetings, and the need for the study of actual instances of parent-teacher talk), Conversation Analysis (CA) has been chosen as the method by which to analytically address the conduct of the parents' evening meetings. Not only does the official interaction between parents and teachers reflect the growing body of work on professional and institutional talk within this methodological position, CA also provides the best means of generating knowledge on this topic. Both of these assertions can be seen if when considering Heritage's (1984)

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[18] It is important to note that in terms of the methodological focus of this research (see next section for more details) Conversation Analysis does not look at the exercise of power within interaction in any crude way, but examines instead "how people achieve whatever they do achieve by focusing on the social organization of members' mundane practices" (Silverman, 1998: 58).

outline of the three underlying assumptions regarding CA: the structural organisation of talk, its sequential organisation, and the empirical grounding of any analysis based on its methodology.

In examining the talk-in-interaction of teachers and parents, it is possible to study the organised patterns exhibited by the talk, as oriented to by its participants. This is important both in terms of theory construction, and with regard to the difficulty involved in seeking the 'reasons' behind any interaction. As Heritage points out, any interactional patterns that are discerned "stand independently of the psychological characteristics of particular speakers" (1984: 241). The sequential organisation of the participants' actions allows for a continual focus upon the substantive aspects of an interaction, in that any communicative action is both "context-shaped" (Heritage, 1984: 242) by its reference to the context in which it takes place, and "context-renewing" (ibid), with every current action not only contributing "to the framework in terms of which the next action will be understood" (ibid), but also functioning to renew "any more generally prevailing sense of context which is the object of the participants' orientations and actions" (ibid). Finally, the use of detailed transcripts, based upon tape recordings of the meetings, means that *a priori* speculation is avoided in favour of the empirical conduct of the speakers being "treated as the central resource out of which analysis may develop" (Heritage, 1984: 243)[19].

1.3.4 Conversation Analysis and Institutionality

Given the specific focus of the data collected for this thesis, an analysis of the larger-scale sequential configuration of the talk opens up a consideration of just how any given example of talk-in-interaction is constituted by its participants as attending to some form of overarching institutional 'reality'. As Drew and Heritage point out, "the institutionality of an interaction may manifest itself...in its overall structural organization" (1992: 43), which for this data allows us to see how two (or more) individuals discussing a child known in common can be said to be constructed as "parents' evening" talk. At a basic level the delineation of institutional talk within CA stems from a simple comparison with what can loosely be termed ordinary or everyday conversation. As Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) highlight in their examination of the organisation of turn taking within conversation, many features of talk, including turn order, turn size, what speakers are going to say, and the relative distribution of

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[19] These fundamental assumptions of CA will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

turns, are neither fixed nor specified in advance. In comparison, Drew and Heritage indicate how "many kinds of institutional encounters are characteristically organized into a standard "shape" or order of phases" (1992: 43).

This is not to say that the achievement and construction of structure is solely the preserve of those examples of talk that take place within what can broadly be defined as institutional settings. Equally, in making the comparison between 'everyday' forms of talk and those occurring in 'institutional' settings, it is important not to reify the qualities of either 'type' of interaction. Indeed, Zimmerman and Boden (1991), in their introduction to a collection of studies examining structure-in-action, state, "structure...is accomplished in and through the moment-to-moment turn-taking procedures of *everyday talk* in both mundane and momentous settings of human intercourse" (1991: 17 – my emphasis). The focus instead must always remain on the actual details of the talk, as constituted by its participants, and what their conversational actions can demonstrably be seen to *do*. In this way, neither the exigencies of an assumed institutional influence, nor a conscious methodological 'blindness' towards such aspects of talk, can be introduced at the expense of the other. As Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) state during their characterisation of the turn-taking organisation for conversation as being both context-free *and* context-sensitive, "it remains the case that examination of any particular materials will display the context-free resources of the turn-taking system to be employed, disposed in ways fitted to the particulars of context" (1974: 699).

This constant consideration of the various contexts of talk, without correspondingly 'taking the eye off the ball' in terms of the generalisable aspects of talk-in-interaction, thereby provides an excellent basis from which to examine the specific institutionality of the parents' evening meetings. Whilst it is clear that the "instantiation of structure is...a local and contingent matter, one that is endogenous to interaction and shaped by it" (Zimmerman and Boden, 1991: 17), these features can also reflect the "task-related standard shape" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 43) being oriented to by the interactants. Orientation by the participants to a specific task (or set of tasks) is therefore reflected in the overall organisation of an interaction, the characteristic format of which can demonstrably be seen as a consequence of a particular set of constituent actions with an 'institutional' source. The occurrence of these distinctive action sequences, of which

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there are many examples[20], must not however be seen as a result of pre-set rules or procedures, but as the accomplishment of specific activities managed on a turn-by-turn basis by the interactants.

1.4 Summary

This chapter has sought to provide the reader with some background contextual information relevant to this thesis, as well as introduce the research methodology. Section 1.1 examined the general context of Junior Schools within the UK, and described the impact of the National Curriculum on both the assessment of pupils, and the parent-teacher meetings. In section 1.2, an overview of the aims of the study was presented, including a brief introduction of Conversation Analysis (CA) as the analytic framework for the research. Finally, section 1.3 described the nature of the data used, together with key information about the setting in which the data was collected.

In the chapter that follows (Chapter 2), the natural history of the research will be outlined, providing both an elaboration of the analytic approach used, and a description of the research process.

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[20] With so many examples of such institutional talk within CA, a brief overview will have to suffice: the management of news interviews (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Greatbatch, 1988, 1992), the structure of classroom lessons (Mehan, 1979), doctor-patient consultations (ten Have, 1987, 1991; Heath, 1981, 1984, 1992; Maynard, 1989, 1991, 1992), and courtroom/legal proceedings (Maynard, 1984; Atkinson, 1992).

Chapter Two

A Natural History of the Research

2.0 There and Back Again: A Natural History of my research

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ethnographic background to, and research objectives of, my study of parents' evening meetings in a UK Junior school, as well as undertaking a brief discussion of why Conversation Analysis (CA) was chosen as the methodological focus for the research. I stated that I saw CA not only as the best way to analytically address the phenomenon of parents' evenings as an example of talk-in-interaction, but also because it afforded an insight into the 'institutional' nature of the meetings, based not upon *a priori* sociological assumptions, but on the orientation of the participants to a specific set of tasks. Since this discussion was by no means comprehensive as either a methodology chapter or a literature review, it falls to this chapter to engage more fully with these aspects of the thesis. Following Silverman's (2000) suggestions on writing up qualitative PhD research[1], however, I decided to eschew the conventional presentation format of such chapters, opting instead for a 'natural history' chapter that incorporated discussions of both the CA literature, and its methodological focus, via a description of my "thinking *in process*" (Silverman, 2000: 236 – original emphasis) throughout the course of this research.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to set out some of the key theoretical assumptions of CA underpinning my analysis of the parents' evening data. These assumptions will be examined in the way that they were reflected in the personal context of my research topic, the development of my analysis through trial and error, and the highs and lows of the research process (cf. Silverman, 2000: pp. 236-7).

In section 2.1, I provide some biographical background, outlining briefly how I came to CA as an analytic perspective.

Whilst the biographical theme is continued in the next section with a description of how I came to the parents' evening data, the main aim of section 2.2 is to further the discussion in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1) regarding the contingent factors that determined the use of this particular data-set. This section will also examine the choices that influenced the final presentation of the data in this thesis.

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[1] As well as, of course, his personal suggestions as the supervisor of this thesis.

Finally, in section 2.3 the analytical development of the thesis is outlined, starting with the many topics of interest that arose during the initial analysis. I then move on to examine the various travails of the analytic process, including how some of the difficulties I felt I had with CA as a methodology were assuaged by the Billig-Schegloff (1999) debate, before outlining the final structure of the thesis and the factors that influenced it.

2.1 Finding a Focus: The Impact of CA

In order to outline both how this PhD thesis was undertaken, and the sociological assumptions that accompanied me at the time, it is necessary to briefly outline my early academic career. I will also briefly outline the theoretical underpinnings of Conversation Analysis in this section.

2.1.1 A brief biographical account

I started my undergraduate study at City University, London, in 1994. The degree was a B.Sc (Hons) in Sociology and Media Studies, chosen not only on account of some spurious advice I had received concerning the 'higher status' of a joint honours degree, but also because the Media Studies component meant that the course would necessarily focus on those cultural products invested with meaning, and therefore relevant to, most people on a day-to-day basis. Although it is not necessary to go into explicit detail regarding the development of my somewhat humble "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959) during this time, for the purposes of this brief biographical outline it is important to note that by the end of my period of undergraduate study I was greatly vexed by issues surrounding the tendency within the various schools of sociology towards reductionism.

The basis for this concern can be broadly represented by examining the focus of my final year project at City University, which took as a general theme the role of the media as "moral entrepreneurs" (cf. Becker, 1963; also Cohen and Young, 1973, and Cohen, 1980) in the creation and imposition of labels and stereotypes on a societal level. Whilst the project itself consisted of a comparative study of the reporting, by two contemporaneous newspapers, of two similar crime stories from the 1950s and the 1990s[2], my background reading included a consideration of the macro/micro sociology

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[2] The study examined the reporting in the *Daily Mail* and *Times* newspapers of the Rillington Place murders by John Christie in the 1950s, and the Cromwell Road killings by Fred West in the 1990s.

debate. Within the context of the research at the time, this debate was typified by the friction between neo-Marxist treatments of the categorisation and labelling of deviance, and those of broadly interactionist approaches.

Crudely put, the source of this contention could be found in the way Marxist preoccupations with the impact of class interest on ideas of what is constituted as legal and illegal were seen as incommensurate with the micro-sociological examination of the 'world of the other' (cf. Mead, 1934) afforded by interactionist approaches that gave due allowance for human agency. Although the various arguments from either perspective are more sophisticated than this gloss, at the end of the course I was thoroughly disaffected with both positions.

On the one hand, the Marxist perspective, in common with other mainstream schools of sociology, tended to incorporate the subject of human agency into an overarching sociology of system. On the other hand, theoretical and methodological perspectives foregrounding the ways in which humans give meaning to their social lives via the manipulation of symbols seemed to me to be prone to a reductionism on an individual level, subsuming communal processes in a welter of subjectivity[3]. Added to this dissatisfaction with where to rest my sociological focus, my own personal experience of travelling to The British Library's Newspaper Library and reading the various original newspaper sources archived there left me with a sense of detachment from the materials I was studying. I had serious doubts as to the veracity of my own reading of the print and claims made regarding it, based mainly on the realisation that I had little idea how contemporary readers may or may not have engaged with the texts.

In a multiplicity of competing theoretical perspectives, I was beginning to lose sight of what was 'worth' examining, or indeed if I had anything that I could usefully add which connected with the concerns of everyday life. My general sense of dissatisfaction had not, however, dimmed my belief in the validity of studying the social world, especially with regard to the examination of the naturally 'given' or 'taken for granted'. Indeed, I found great comfort in the position adopted by Berger and Luckmann in my favourite book of the time, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), in that "the analysis of the role of knowledge in the dialectic of individual and society, of personal identity and

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[3] Once again, it must be stressed that this is not only a very old debate within sociology, but is also purely a subjective account of how I felt at the time, rather than a detailed exploration of the various positions.

social structure, provides a crucial complementary perspective for all areas of sociology" (208). Although Berger and Luckmann specify language as one of the key areas of sociological enquiry, I had yet to adopt that focus myself. Instead, I concentrated on the fact that despite the difficulties I had with sociology, its enduring importance rested in the way it made as its proper object of inquiry (anachronistic gender specification notwithstanding), "society as part of a human world, made by men, inhabited by men, and in turn, making men, in an ongoing historical process" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 211). It was in this frame of mind that I decided to broaden my knowledge of research methodologies, and gain some practical research experience in the meantime, by undertaking an M.A. in Sociology with special reference to Qualitative Research at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 1997.

2.1.2 Introduced to CA

Whilst the course acquainted with me a wide range of research methodologies, it was my introduction to Conversation Analysis (CA) during this period that most caught my sociological imagination. As the course began to contextualise more clearly my previous misgivings as part of the ongoing debate within sociology regarding the 'theory relative' activity of defining social structure (cf. Silverman, 1993), I was taken by ten Have's statement that "CA refuses to use available 'theories' of human conduct to ground or organize its arguments, or even to construct a 'theory' of its own" (1999: 27).

In setting forward "a different conception of how to theorize about social life" (ibid: 28), CA also moves away from invoking "obvious" (ibid) social-structural factors when explaining social phenomena, since whilst the concept of social structure is an important element in sociological inquiry in general, "the problem becomes one of not allowing it to take on an analytic life of its own" (Zimmerman and Boden, 1991: 5). The way in which many sociological analyses allow social structure to 'take on a life of its own' is memorably summed up by Sacks in his analogy of society being viewed by the social sciences as a piece of machinery where much of what takes place is random, and it is worth quoting at length:

> "Such a view suggests that there are a few places where, if we can find them, we will be able to attack the problem of order. If we do not find them, we will not. So we can have an image of a machine with a couple of holes in the front. It

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spews out some nice stuff from those holes, and at the back it spews out garbage. There is, then, a concern among social scientists for finding "good problems," that is, those data generated by the machine which *are* orderly, and then attempt to construct the apparatus necessary to give those results."

(Sacks, 1984a: 21-22)

The search for 'good problems' is not only carried out mainly in terms of reference to 'big issues' regarding large-scale institutions, but also necessarily imposes order on the phenomena being studied. Rather than carry out a search for order based on the analyst's conception of what this order might be, CA proposed an examination of how individuals orient to (and therefore display) that order themselves: "whatever humans can do can be examined to discover some way they do it, and that way will be stably describable. That is, we may alternatively take it that there is order at all points" (Sacks, 1984a: 22).

Not only did I find the movement away from fruitless theoretical debates between opposing theories refreshing, I was also impressed by the methodological focus that CA afforded. In focusing on the order found at all points within 'what humans do', CA delineated its field of study, since as Sacks pointed out, it is possible that "detailed study of small phenomena may give an enormous understanding of the way humans do things and the kinds of objects they use to construct and order their affairs" (1984a: 24). Indeed, this focus meant that the question of social structure took on a new relevance for me, since in examining the ways in which interactional parties display their identities relative to one another, *and* how it matters to them, CA necessarily deals with the "senses of "who they are" that connect directly to what is ordinarily meant by "social structure"" (Schegloff, 1991: 48).

2.1.3 Further Aspects of CA

So, having offered the possibility of an escape from sociological analysis mired in the arguments of its various "armed camps" (Silverman, 1993: 203), I had also been impressed by the methodological utility in CA's underlying assumptions and the way in which it analysed data. Further to the questions raised during my earlier sociological experience, I found that CA began to provide answers to my concerns.

In the first instance, CA's examination of ordinary talk is underpinned by three fundamental assumptions, outlined by Heritage (1984), which provide a robust and coherent way of both interpreting conversational data, and generating it. Although I have already briefly examined these assumptions in the previous chapter, I will examine them again here in terms of the 'answers' CA provided to the misgivings I had encountered in my academic career. These assumptions are outlined below:

(1) interaction is structurally organized;

(2) contributions to interaction are contextually oriented; and

(3) these two properties inhere in the details of interaction so that no order of detail can be dismissed, a priori, as disorderly, accidental or irrelevant

(Heritage, 1984: 241)

The first of these assumptions provides the 'engine' that drives any analysis of talk-in-interaction, and reflects the assertion by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson that within most sociological enquiry, investigators consistently focus upon "some particular outcome or product of the operation of turn-taking, interpretably relevant to some other problem – but not the organization and operation of the system that allowed or produced such an outcome" (1974: 698). For CA, its central analytic resource rests in the assertion that not only are "organized patterns of stable, recurrent structural features" (Heritage, 1984: 241) grossly observable within social interaction, they are also seen to be oriented to by the participants. The suppositional psychological motives of the interactants become analytically redundant, replaced instead by a focus upon the competences speakers bring to talk. The defining distinction in CA's analytic focus rests with Sacks' assertion that he did not want to order the various aspects of conversational work, but rather "to see whether there's some order to it" (1992a: 622).

Although this stance provides an empirical focus on talk in its own right, it can also be criticised for focusing too closely on the structural features of talk at the expense of those who utilise them. As Hutchby and Wooffitt point out, it appears to "pay little attention to participants as subjects" (1998: 35). The corrective to this position can be found in the second assumption outlined above, namely the impact of, and orientation to, contexts within talk. I use contexts in the plural here because CA moves away from the view held by other sociological positions, which Drew and Heritage (1992; see also

Heritage, 1984) describe as the 'bucket theory', in which "some pre-established social framework is viewed as "containing" the participants' actions" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 19). So, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson highlight the way that the structural resources used in conversation "have an appropriate sort of general abstractness and local particularization potential" (1974: 700), which can be summed up as the twin features of being *context-free* and *context-sensitive*. For Sacks *et al*, the focus of their particular study, the organisation of turn-taking, is context-free inasmuch as it is seen to operate across a whole range of diverse situations, but is context-sensitive in the way in which the particularities of any type of interactional organisation are "always 'situated' – always come out of, and is part of, some real sets of circumstances of its participants" (1974: 699).

Heritage further refines this position, stating, "it is assumed that the significance of any speaker's communicative action is doubly contextual in being both *context-shaped* and *context-renewing*" (1984: 242). In the first instance, every contribution to an on-going sequence of actions "cannot be understood except by reference to the context – including, especially, the immediately preceding configuration of actions – in which it participates" (Heritage, 1984: 242). As a direct result of this, the context-renewing aspect of talk can be found in the way "the context of a next action is repeatedly renewed with every current action" (ibid), which in turn means that each action "function[s] to renew (i.e. maintain, alter or adjust) any more generally prevailing sense of context which is the object of the participants' orientations and actions" (ibid). Thus "*a context of publicly displayed and continuously updated intersubjective understandings is systematically sustained*" (Heritage, 1984: 259 – original emphasis) within talk, thereby making these understandings available as an analytic resource.

The final fundamental assumption outlined by Heritage indicates how in CA, "every effort is made to render empirical analyses answerable to the specific details of research materials and...to avoid their idealization" (1984: 243). In terms of my own previous misgivings regarding sociological research, this meant that CA could be said to have its own inbuilt sense of sociological 'relevance', due to its central goal, "the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction" (Heritage and Atkinson, 1984: 1). The concern with the details of actual talk and real-world data means that CA treats talk-in-interaction "as an object of analysis in its own right, rather than simply as

a window through which we can view other social processes or broader sociological variables" (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998: 21). This view stems in part from the way in which CA considers talk the "primordial site of human sociality and social life" (Schegloff, 1987: 101).

On a personal level, CA provided an empirical focus that more than adequately dealt with my previous worries regarding the problems of subjectivity and individualistic reductionism. Since "the empirical conduct of speakers is treated as the central resource out of which analysis may develop" (Heritage, 1984: 243 – see also Schegloff and Sacks, 1973, and Schegloff 1980), CA provided a rigorous "data-driven" (Heritage, 1984: 243) level of analysis, based upon recordings of "naturally occurring materials" (ibid: 238). The focus on naturally occurring recorded data overcame the problems I had perceived in the gap between my own reading of such cultural artefacts as newspapers, and the engagement of other people with the texts. It did this by focusing both on how the actual participants made the talk relevant to themselves and their co-participants, and in the way recording interactions acts as "an essential corrective to the limitations of intuition and recollection" (Heritage, 1984: 238). Of equal importance at the time was my feeling that tape recording naturally occurring conversations for use as data within CA offered a remarkable level of freedom regarding what sources such data might be taken, given the fact that my disenchantment with other forms of sociological analysis had left me bereft of any particular topic or area of interest. I was particularly taken by this quote from Sacks' lectures:

> "So I started to play around with tape recorded conversation, for the single virtue that I could replay them...It wasn't from any large interest in language, or from some theoretical formulation of what should be studied, but simply by virtue of that; *I could get my hands on it*, and I could study it again and again"
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> (Sacks, 1992a: 622 – my emphasis)

Having found a research methodology that I began to feel addressed my dissatisfaction with other methodologies and theoretical positions I had encountered, the question therefore became one of "what data could I get my hands on?"

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2.2 Coming to the Parents' Evening Data

Having begun to engage with CA as a methodology, I started to cast around for some data. At the time of this initial search (for my MA dissertation in early 1998), I was working part-time for a company that carried out charity fundraising over the telephone, to my mind an ideal site for garnering conversational data on two counts: the calls were frequently recorded for monitoring purposes, and telephone data formed the basis for many of CA's foundational studies[4]. However, despite the freedom offered by CA's refusal to define what constitutes 'important' data, the problem still remained that as a junior researcher, I was necessarily restricted in terms of what data I would be allowed to 'get my hands on'. So it proved with the call centre data, leaving my final decision regarding what data to make use of open to more contingent factors.

2.2.1 Hoping to be 'Relevant'

Although the need for some 'theoretical formulation of what should be studied' was no longer an over-riding consideration, I still inclined towards sociological research that could be said to be of practical relevance. On one level, this was due to my own lack of confidence in my ability to add anything of worth or interest to the cumulative fund of interactional knowledge that ten Have has typified as the aim of "pure CA" (1999: 8). But it was equally due to a reaction against the ongoing dismissive view within the British media to sociological research, claiming it is irrelevant and badly conducted[5]. Fortunately, I found that both concerns were addressed within CA.

Questions regarding the wider applicability and relevance of conversation analytic research could in the first instance be countered by CA's assertion that talk-in-interaction is a pervasive and central feature "in every setting of human affairs, at all levels of society, in virtually every social context" (Zimmerman and Boden, 1991: 3). Not only does the primacy of mundane conversation provide the "richest available research domain" (Heritage, 1984: 240), it also "uses the practices found in ordinary conversation as a baseline from which to analyse institutional talk" (Silverman, 1993: 134). Added to this, Silverman (1993), in his discussion of the contribution social

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[4] The most obvious example of which being Sacks' data gleaned from calls to a Suicide Prevention Centre.

[5] Although many examples could be cited, this brief quotation from an article by Will Buckley in the *Observer* newspaper of 30th May, 1999 serves as a case in point:

> "Here we go again. Yet more supposed research (this time from the sociology department at Edinburgh University) claiming that men are lousy parents, incapable of spending more than 15 minutes a day with their children... Crap dads are back on the agenda because yet another bored sociologist has made a few phone calls and cobbled together some stats."

science could make to wider society, highlights CA's role in offering a new perspective to participants within institutional settings. He states that "researchers ought *not* to begin from normative standards of 'good' and 'bad' communication" (1993: 192), but should focus instead upon understanding "the *skills* that participants deploy and the *functions* of the communication patterns that are discovered" (ibid – original emphasis).

2.2.2 The 'Problem' of Parents' Evening

It was with these issues in mind that I happened across the parents' evening data. At the time my partner was a relatively new primary school teacher, and her exposure to the realities of parents' evening lead to her assertion that such meetings had not been directly addressed within her teacher-training course. This difficulty with parents' evening from the teacher's perspective chimed with further anecdotal information from my own parents[6], whose experience of such meetings tallied with the 'public relations exercise' view outlined by Baker and Keogh:

"[Parents' evenings] are understood and talked about as ritual or ceremonial encounters, in which teachers go through routine expressions of interest and academic diagnosis, and which parents attend in order to show their "interest" in their children's schooling."

(Baker and Keogh, 1995: 264)

As was briefly discussed in Chapter 1 (cf. section 1.3.2, above), part of this characterisation involves the view that parents' evening meetings are events in which 'nothing much was accomplished' (cf. Baker and Keogh, 1995, and above), which as Baker and Keogh point out "is an invitation, if not provocation, to ethnomethodological inquiry" (1995: 265). It should equally be remembered, however, that Baker and Keogh's assertion as to the image of such meetings stems from their understanding of "educational folklore" (1995: 264), and that this characterisation cannot be said to be true in every parents' evening situation. Indeed, some parents find these occasions very helpful opportunities to review their child's academic progress. But this in itself provides further justification for examining the meetings. Handy and Aitken, in their study of the organisation of the primary school, point out that whilst there exists for all schools "a bond between them and the families and communities they serve" (1994: 246), in practice the situation is not that simple. As they point out,

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[6] In particular, that of my mother's memories of attending parents' evening meetings.

"Some parents are over-anxious and expect more from the school for their child than is realistic. But sadly too many other parents abdicate once their child is at school. Teachers know that the parents whom they really want to see, to know, and to help are often the ones who never come to school."

(Handy and Aitken, 1994: 246)

Given both this variation in parental attitudes to their childrens' schooling in general, and teacher's views of parents' evening meetings in particular, it is perhaps unsurprising that the assorted sections of the school community, be they teachers, parents, or children, regard parents' evening in such different ways. With the question of what parents' evening "means" being such a contentious one, the need to examine what goes on during them seemed to me to be particularly relevant.

On a less purely analytical level, the importance of home-school links within educational policy[7] contrasted with my partner's anecdotal evidence that the skills required for the management of the main site of this interface were learned 'on the job'. Although the criteria by which all teacher training courses in the UK are judged, the *National Standards for Qualified Teacher Status*, stress the need for primary education trainees to be "familiar with the statutory assessment and reporting requirements and know how to prepare and present informative reports to parents" (1998: 10), it represents only one of the many areas addressed by the teacher training curriculum[8]. Equally, if individual teachers' experience of parents' evening meetings, both in terms of initial teacher training, and with regard to subsequent professional development, can vary, parental experience of such meetings is similarly open to many arbitrary factors that can influence their view of the meetings in an unnecessarily negative way. I therefore felt that an examination of parents' evening meetings could in some small way

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[7] At the time of my MA dissertation, this importance was highlighted in the government White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (1997), which pointed to the need to bring about more family learning schemes, home-school contracts in all schools, and better information for parents.

[8] The problems of trying to 'fit everything in' to the teacher training curriculum were outlined to me by Susan Sidgwick, Lecturer in Education in the Department of Educational Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She states, "on the Goldsmiths' secondary PGCE [Postgraduate Certificate of Education] we believe that while general principles and issues regarding relationships with parents can be taught in college, the practical skills need to be acquired in context, and students are therefore required to participate in parents' evenings in their schools, under the supervision of their school-based tutor from whom they will receive guidance and feedback. However, the skills involved are unlikely to be formally taught...the expertise required of teachers today is very high and wide-ranging. It is widely accepted that this expertise cannot possibly be developed in the course of a one year PGCE, and that many skills need to be targeted in the induction year and beyond" (personal correspondence).

reflect Silverman's assertion regarding the role of social sciences in increasing people's options:

"By attending to the fine detail of interactions, we come to respect the practical skills of the participants. The role of the social scientist is not to be more knowledgeable than laypeople but, instead, to put an analytic method at their disposal."

(1993: 189)

2.2.3 'A Little About a Lot' or 'A Lot About a Little'?

Having had these meetings drawn to my attention in this way, I began to consider their use as the basis for my dissertation. My ongoing unofficial pastoral role at my partner's school[9] meant that I had already built up a rapport with the head teacher, so approaching him with a proposal to record some parents' evening meetings was straightforward enough. Once the process of the research was explained and agreed upon[10] he was happy for the recording taking place, with one stipulation: my access was restricted to the recording of only one teacher in the school, namely my partner. Not wanting to risk what rights to conduct the research I had already gained, I decided not to make any representations regarding the recording of any of the other Year 6 teachers. This did not unduly worry me at the time, since this restriction sat well with the time frame within which I could gather, transcribe, and analyse the data for my MA dissertation. As it transpired, I only used a single meeting for the dissertation, leaving me (so I thought) with a surfeit of data.

It was a desire to expand upon this initial analysis that prompted me to apply for funding to undertake PhD study, and once the surprise of actually winning an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) award had worn off, I began to consider whether or not my data corpus was adequate for the task at hand. Indeed, I had initially considered the possibility of getting more data[11]. However, the analyses undertaken for the MA dissertation proved to have barely scratched the surface of the data that I had gathered. Furthermore, a lengthy re-examination of the data was combined with the

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[9] For example, helping on school trips *etc* when requisite numbers of parents were not available.

[10] I was especially keen to stress to him that the very nature of the research meant that it lacked a firm initial hypothesis.

[11] In terms of my initial proposal to the funding body, I had posited the fact that there were clearly demarcated times when the parents' evening meetings took place within the academic year as a way of broadening my database.

equally lengthy process by which my rather crude initial transcriptions were replaced with ones of far better quality (see section 2.3, below, for an overview of this stage of the research). Once this process had been successfully negotiated, however, I began to be concerned by my lack of comparative data, either from another parents' evening by the same teacher, different teachers at the same school, or from another school altogether.

As has already been stated in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1, above), the utility of having a large database is obvious, not least in terms of providing distributional comparative data. For qualitative research studies in particular, the question of sample size is linked to considerations of both generalisation and validity, especially when set against the larger and supposedly more representative sample populations used in quantitative survey research. Although necessarily on a smaller scale in terms of data gathering, the advantages of having a large database in Conversation Analysis (CA) research has also been highlighted, since as Peräkylä points out, "in order to be able to achieve a position where he or she can observe *the variation of the phenomenon* (such as the delivery of [a] diagnosis) in any reliable way, the researcher needs a large enough collection of cases" (1997: 206-original emphasis). This question of testing variations between several different cases of interactional phenomena also draws attention to the need to generalise from case studies to wider populations, especially important given that interactional and conversational forms are deemed to be part of a wider set of socially and culturally attended-to practices.

Practical exigencies, however, meant that I was not able to expand my database to include comparative examples. In the first instance, the link to the original school was lost when my partner and I moved to another part of the country, a situation exacerbated by the retirement of the head teacher who had initially granted access to the parents' evening meetings. Furthermore, whilst my partner remained a primary school teacher, we had moved to an area where the primary education system involved First and Middle Schools, rather than the Junior Schools of the original data.

Given both the time constraints of my research schedule, and the valuable analysis that the data had already yielded, I made the decision not to widen the scope of the research. Indeed, Silverman points out that a common error amongst apprentice researchers is to take on a research project beyond their limited time and means in an effort to say

something 'important'. I opted instead to generate an interesting analysis by hopefully saying "a lot about a little" (1993: 3). However, in another work on carrying out qualitative research projects, Seale points out that "theories generated from single cases should always be seen as fallible propositions that might be modified in the light of further experience, however impeccable the logic that ties them to the single setting in which they were generated" (1999: 112-113). As is already clear from the introductory chapters, this study relies upon data drawn from a single case, and examines only one teacher, who is not the set teacher, on a single evening at a particular stage of the school year (i.e. subsequent to the mock SAT examinations). The question therefore arises as to how a lack of sampling variety might have skewed the data, and just what this means for the overall analysis.

As has already been outlined above, the nature of the data sample was primarily shaped by pragmatic considerations, which in turn leads us to Silverman's rather pertinent question: "are there any grounds other than convenience or accessibility to guide us" (2000: 104) in the selection of cases for study? In providing the answer to this question, Silverman outlines the utility of "purposive sampling" (2000: 104) in qualitative research studies, a technique that allows a researcher to choose a particular case for study because it exemplifies some attribute or practice in which they are interested. Whilst parents' evening meetings constituted a process that I was interested in, Silverman's conception of purposive sampling involves outlining a typology that indicates the universe of cases potentially available within a specific topic for research[12]. As Silverman points out, such an approach "demands that we think critically about the parameters of the population we are interested in and choose our sample case carefully on this basis" (ibid: 104).

Rather than merely being influenced by practical concerns (the question of further access notwithstanding), how would constructing a typology of parents' evening meetings have impacted upon my own study? Table 2.a (below) provides just such a typology, and whilst the number of examples is for illustration purposes only, it does provide some indication of the range of cases that could have been selected.

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[12] Silverman's use of a typology in this way is borrowed from a study by Stake (1994), which looks at interactive displays in a children's museum (cf. Silverman, 2000: 105-105).

Table 2.a – A typology of Parents' Evening Meetings			
	Educational Stage		
Type of Teacher	Junior School – SAT Year	Junior School – Non-SAT Year	Middle School-SAT Year
Set Teacher	1	2	3
Class Teacher	4	5	4
Both Set and Class Teacher	3	2	1

Applying these considerations to the parents' evening data, we can see how focusing upon a single teacher has certain limitations in terms of generalising the findings of this research to a wider population. Without wanting to foreshadow in too much detail the findings of the data chapters that follow, it can be argued that the conversational techniques utilised by the teacher in this research are unique to her, and therefore not easily extrapolated to the parents' evening practice of other teachers. Equally, the fact that the teacher in the data was a class teacher rather than a set teacher could have been an important influential factor, with set teachers perhaps doing things differently in such meetings by dint of the fact that they are dealing with the specificities of their curriculum area. Furthermore, the entire format of the meetings might have been different at another stage of the academic year, even if carried out by the same teacher studied in this research. Finally, whilst the parents' evening meetings for children in Year 6 of a Middle School also take place in a year when SAT examinations take place, the fact that secondary transfer only becomes relevant in the following year could have an impact on the way the meetings are conducted[13]. In short, various permutations in the actual accomplishment of parents' evening could be hidden by the fact that the data sample consists of a single teacher on a single parents' evening.

How, then, should this research be seen in terms of both sampling variety and external validity? Indeed, given the tension between the specific difficulties associated with the gathering of the data and the ideal research design outlined above, can this study say anything useful about the phenomenon that has been studied? I believe the answer lies in seeing this research not as attempt to provide categorical 'truths' about all parents' evenings in general, but as an attempt to raise questions about such meetings by looking

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[13] As we saw in Chapter 1, above, First Schools deal with children between the ages of 7 and 11, whilst Middle Schools deal with children between 8 and 12 years of age. If we overlay the National Curriculum Key Stages format (see table 1.a, above) on these two systems of primary education, we can see that whilst the KS 2 examinations take place at the same age, the period of secondary transfer within the Middle School system takes place a year later than that of the Junior School system.

at a single case in detail. To some extent, raising questions in this way relies upon the perspective within CA that "*social practices that are possible*, that is, *possibilities of language use*, are the central objects of all conversation analytic case studies on interaction institutional settings" (Peräkylä, 1997: 215-original emphasis). This element of *possibility* can be taken too far in terms of ascribing a certain level of universality to the findings of studies into conversational and interactional phenomenon[14], but as Seale points out, "readers must always make their own judgements about the relevance of findings for their own situations" (1999: 108). The corrective, he suggests, is simple: "threats to such transferability are dealt with most adequately if details, or 'thick' descriptions of the 'sending' context (or the 'sample'), are provided" (Seale, 1999: 108). This study can therefore be seen as being *exploratory* rather *definitive*, examining the achievement of routine by a single individual in a specific setting in such a way that further analytical possibilities are opened up.

2.3 The Development of the Analysis

As has already been stated above, my initial engagement with the parents' evening data took place within the context of my MA dissertation. Although I subsequently came to realise the deficiencies in this initial analysis, and sought to correct them during my doctoral research, the findings of the MA (such as they were) formed the basis for my research proposal to the ESRC. Although the majority of the proposal focused upon CA's methodological relevance to the ESRC's theme area of Communication and Learning, it did include the following research problem:

> "Whilst these meetings would seem to fall distinctly into the category of professional-lay interactions, with the attendant problems associated with the differential exercise of power by the interactants, in this situation both the parents and the teacher can claim a level of 'expert' knowledge with regard to the subject of the interaction, namely the child. The research problem to be addressed is that of what impact this dual claim to competency has upon the joint construction of context by the parents and teacher as the two most powerful interactants."

Aside from some of the more obvious difficulties related to the unproblematic application of concepts such as 'power' and 'claims to expert knowledge', this research

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[14] Cf. Seale's (1999) warnings re the potential ethnocentrism of CA and other qualitative studies.

proposal conflicted with CA's stated aim that analysis should always begin with what Psathas (1990: 45) has called "unmotivated looking". As I have already discussed above (section 2.1.3), this can be linked to the data-driven nature of CA, and is summed up by Sacks with the assertion that "when we start out with a piece of data, the question of what we are going to end up with, what kind of findings it will give, should not be a consideration" (1984a: 27). So, despite the stated aims (however limited) of the research proposal, at the start of the MPhil/PhD course I endeavoured to come to the data 'anew', without the constraint of wondering where I was going to 'end up'.

2.3.1 Where To Go Next

However, this course of action presented its own problems: once your looking is unmotivated, you are faced with the 'kid in a candy store' dilemma, in that *everything* is interesting and seemingly worthy of further analysis. By way of illustration, I outline below some of the topics produced by my 'unmotivated looking'[15]:

- Forecasting by the teacher as topic management
- Construction of relative areas of experience
- The making of safe complaints, with reference to Drew and Holt, 1998: use of idioms to formulate complaints
- The positioning and use of laughter, with reference to Jefferson, 1979, and Sacks, 1992a + b
- Caution: Sacks, 1992a; lecture 13, 1969 – proverbs and maxims
- Caution: with reference to Bergmann, 1992 – litotes
- Assessments: Pomerantz, 1984a – agreeing/disagreeing with assessments
- Assessments: $1^{st}/3^{rd}$ party, and expert/lay – organisation of second assessments
- Footing (ref. Goffman): investment in statements, educational 'teams' and family 'teams'
- Character and location of questions and informings
- Pursuing, monitoring, and aligning to responses: reference Pomerantz, 1984b
- The teacher as 'ventriloquist'
- Formulating the child's experience (Peräkylä and Silverman, 1991); Avoiding moral descriptors of the child (Pomerantz & Strong, but not Maynard)

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[15] Coming as it does from my research diary, workbook, and supervision notes, this overview is not intended as a detailed exegesis of the substantive elements of my initial research findings, but instead aims to provide a sense of the various topics from which this final thesis stems. The referencing of other studies is used purely as a guide to my thinking in process during the early stages of this research, and as such is not intended to represent fully formatted citations.

- 'So' and 'now' prefaces

- Positioning and functioning of the teacher's use of 'we' as a categorising term

- Comparisons between *English as second language* parents: impact of presence of the child during such meetings

Despite each of these topics having a strong case for forming the basis of the study[16], I was beginning to lose sight of just how to tie them together in a coherent whole. This marked the beginning of a struggle that typified my experience during the writing of this thesis, based around the problems associated with what I have viewed as the 'telescoping' of the analytic gaze. As a default action, CA applies the analytic telescope, engaging in a level of minute analysis of interactional features in which it is not possible to handle too much data at once. Nevertheless, the nagging doubt remains that in looking through the telescope, some broader aspect of the phenomenon being examined is missed. Put down the telescope, however, and not only does the detail disappear, but the tendency to make claims based on wider sociological features opens you up to the very same criticisms of holistic reductionism that I had previously disavowed.

Of course, the central issue of this struggle is one of discipline, not only in terms of focusing on one or two analytic concepts at a time, but also with regard to allowing the details of the talk to go where they will. As Sacks has pointed out, "it ought never to be a matter of concern to anybody who's doing a piece of description which way it comes out, as long as it comes out some way" (1992a: 472). In terms of dealing with the initial flurry of 'interesting' topics outlined above, discipline was imposed by moving away from the consideration of these individually interesting features, framing them instead with regard to the overall structural organisation of the meetings. As I have already discussed above, the structural organisation of interaction means that CA deals with and explicates "patterns of stable, recurrent structural features" (Heritage, 1984: 241, and above) within talk. It was therefore from an examination of the trajectory of the reportings on the child, fitted to both the search for parental response by the teacher, and how the form of the response shaped the unfolding trajectory, that a framework for the research began to come about.

Although implicit within the research topic as a whole, the question of the specific institutionality of parents' evening had remained in the background during the early

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[16] Indeed, the majority of these topics are, at the very least, touched upon in the final thesis.

period of unmotivated looking, to some extent influenced by my feelings about the initial (and limited) analysis of my MA dissertation. In that instance, I had attempted to look at the institutional nature of the parents' evening meetings following Drew and Heritage's (1992) analysis of such talk. But in failing to heed their warnings about making attempts at "synoptic description" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 21), I felt that I had applied (to my mind at least) a far too 'mechanistic' interpretation of what constitutes institutional talk. Whilst I had avoided the topic of institutionality for fear of making the same mistake, returning to it via an examination of the overall structural organisation of the talk meant that I could focus on the three broad features that Drew and Heritage propose "may contribute to family resemblances among cases of institutional talk" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 21):

1. Goal or *task orientation* by the participants conventionally associated with the institution in question.
2. Participants' orientation to *constraints* on allowable contributions to the business at hand.
3. *Inferential frameworks* particular to specific institutional contexts.

                                        (Adapted from Drew and Heritage, 1992: 22)

One ramification of this change in emphasis was the increased focus on just one section of the parents' evening meetings, which at the time caused me some concern in terms of the 'telescoping effect' outlined above. Although identified during my initial unmotivated looking, the sequential structure evident at the start of each parents' evening meeting was placed to one side as I analysed the various elements of the talk outlined above. Subsequently focusing on the question of task orientation, constraints, and inferential frameworks lead to an analysis of the opening sequences of the meetings, and the repeated coherent structure found there.

The problem of shifting the analytic gaze in this way became one internal to the meetings themselves, in that I began to be concerned that by looking purely at the start of the meetings I would be missing important aspects of the meetings as a whole[17]. I began to feel, however, that the particulars of the opening sequences of the parents' evening meetings were significant enough in terms of the different aspects of

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[17] This worry was compounded by the fact that other CA studies of parents' evening meetings, in particular Baker and Keogh (1995), Walker (1998), and MacLure and Walker (2000), had looked at a variety of features across the overall organisation of the meetings.

institutionality examined in this thesis, in and of themselves, to justify a contraction of the analytic gaze. Rather than worry about what was being 'missed', I decided to 'tell the story' of the movement from the start of the meetings, with their assortment of topical and sequential proceedings, to the reporting on the child as first topic of the parents' evening meeting. In this way I hoped to explicate the various aspects of institutional task orientation, constraints, and inferential frameworks that were evident during the meetings.

2.3.2 Further Developmental Difficulties

Having decided upon a focus for the thesis, I set about outlining the overall sequential features of the parents' evening meetings. On a purely practical level, the regulation imposed by a strict sequential analysis of the meetings meant that I was able to proceed more quickly with my scrutiny of them. But whilst the work I produced for my upgrade from MPhil to PhD could be said to be an exemplar of the 'say a lot about a little' approach, I began to feel that the analysis I was undertaking had become sterile and removed from the actual lived practices of the people I was studying.

On a basic level, I felt that my upgrade chapters could be seen as a consequence of applying the analytic telescope to too great an extent. I had produced two chapters totalling over 37,000 words on the movement from the preamble talk to the agenda statement, dealing in great detail not only with the lexical and sequential features of the participants' turns-at-talk as this movement was carried out, but also the sequential and intonational features of the various utterances involved. Although proving that no level of interactional detail is too insignificant to be considered, I began to feel that by looking at such interactional elements as the incidence and work of the internal intonational contour of 'okay' statements[18], I was carrying out the sort of 'professionalised' CA analysis described by Lynch (1993)[19]. This criticism revolves around the perception that CA practitioners transform the practices and competences of ordinary conversationalists into "positive 'facts' for conversation" (Lynch, 1993: 235), thereby positioning these competencies as elements within a rigidly defined speech exchange system. For Lynch, this definitional thrust within CA will necessarily lead to an estrangement between the analyst and what they are attempting to study:

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[18] See Chapters 4 and 5, below, for more details.
[19] See also Lynch and Bogen (1994), and Livingston (1987).

"by distinguishing the analytic competencies of members of the conversation-analytic community from the vernacular competency of ordinary conversationalists described, conversation analysts have segregated their technical reports from the communal practices they describe."

(1993: 245)

As one who had initially been attracted to CA because of the rigour it provided in the face of the reductionism of other sociological methodologies, it was particularly frustrating for me to think that what I had ended up producing were technically reductionist analyses that dealt more in the form of the speech exchange system being utilised than in the content of the lived work of the speakers. Indeed, although Lynch argued that CA had started as a natural history of ordinary language under Sacks, I had never been enamoured of Sacks' assertion that "sociology can be a natural observational science" (1992a: 802) in close relationship with the biological sciences[20]. To my mind, the need for analytic rigour in studying the lived practices of everyday people did not presuppose a scientific, or indeed scientistic, stance, but the criticisms of CA as providing overly formal, technical understandings of talk were beginning to ring true.

Fortunately, my lowest point in terms of these difficulties more or less coincided with the Billig-Schegloff debate (1999), which although dealing with a broader set of concerns than that of vernacular vs. analytic description of talk-in-interaction, helped me to reformulate my own position with regard to the type of analysis CA demands. With reference to an earlier article by Schegloff (1997)[21], Billig takes issue with CA's stated aim of studying participants in their own terms, asserting that this claim should actually be seen as a "realist tale" (1999a: 546) that is "rhetorically examinable" (ibid). Billig stated,

"Although participants are ostensibly to be studied 'in their own terms', they are not written about in such terms. Instead, analysts use their own terms to accomplish this observation of participants' own terms."

(1999a: 546)

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[20] Cf. Sacks, 1992a: 26-31 (lecture 4, Fall 1964), 95-103 (lecture 12, Winter 1965), and 802-805 (Introduction, 1965).
[21] And subsequent reaction by Wetherall (1998).

Not only did this chime with my own misgivings about the overly 'technical' nature of CA's analysis, it also positioned the "specialized non-vernacular vocabulary of analysis" (ibid: 547) involved in 'doing CA' as attending to interactional matters that the actual speakers being studied did not.

Billig (borrowing from Sharrock and Anderson, 1987) cites the reason for this estrangement between CA and the concerns of those it studies as being rooted in CA's "'stock idea' that conversations are organized and orderly" (1999a: 547). This in turn means that CA, in attempting to demonstrate this underlying organisation, will necessarily "disattend" (Billig, 1999a: 547) to the context of the talk as expressed through the concerns of its participants: "analysts, in writing of the participants, impose their own terms" (ibid). Although Billig goes on to link this supposedly fundamental flaw in CA's focus to several other aspects of its methodological practice that I neither recognised nor agreed with[22], I was starting to worry that an aspect of CA I had initially embraced as a corrective to the *a priori* rationalisations and unjustified claims of other methodological positions was in fact leading me to become the kind of CA analyst that Kitzinger (2000) had, in a slightly different context, warned about treating conversational devices in a mechanistic and overly deterministic manner.

Luckily, Schegloff's (1999a) replies to these criticisms reasserted my confidence in CA and its methodological effectiveness. In the first instance, Schegloff's assertion that the entire debate dealt not with what CA was 'pointing at', but with an examination of the 'finger' doing the pointing (1999a: 559-560), lead me to re-evaluate the seemingly sterile examination of sequence and structure within CA as tools for analysis, rather than strictures[23]. Although specifically dealing with Billig's (1999a) rather crass assertion that when examining situations of gross abuse and injustice CA's focus on such conversational features as turn taking assumes a naive equalitarianism, the following statement by Schegloff helped me to differentiate the problems I had associated with an overly 'technical' sequential examination from the actual utility of carrying out such an examination:

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[22] These include a discussion of the "foundational rhetoric of CA" (Billig, 1999a: 548), the "rhetoric of 'ordinary conversation'" (ibid: 549), and an underlying "participatory rhetoric" (ibid: 551).

[23] As Schegloff stated in his specific rebuttal of Billig, "My aim is to set the record straight and to allow those who are more interested in the world than in the finger to examine it with the tools which CA provides" (Schegloff, 1999a: 560).

"If interaction is produced within a matrix of turns organized into sequences, etc., and if it is from these that motives and intensions are inferred, identities made relevant, stances embodied and interpreted, etc., how else – when confronted by the record of singular episodes – are we to understand their genesis and course...?"

(1999a: 562)

Having located the pragmatic grounds for examining sequential features of talk, (i.e. if certain actions are being carried out in a specific manner, why not examine them in these terms?) Schegloff goes on to position the kind of analysis carried out by CA as something to be exploited, rather than as something that should be viewed as a restriction. Indeed, he states that "those committed to analysing forms of inequality and oppression in interaction might do better to harness this account of turn-taking organization as a *resource* for their undertaking than to complain of it as an ideological distraction" (Schegloff, 1999a: 563 – original emphasis).

The exchanges of the Billig-Schegloff debate allowed me to realise (or indeed, re-realise) that if the analysis of a given example of talk-in-interaction captures what is important for the participants, the technical vocabulary used in the analysis is not important as such. Indeed, it is simply the tool by which such aspects of the interaction are exposed. Rather than conflating the rigour of CA's approach with a sterile 'technical' form of analysis, I was instead returned to the need for discipline within analysis: not discipline as a formalised epistemology, but discipline as "an Occam's razor with which to cut through the quandaries of indefinite perspectivalism" (Schegloff, 1999b: 581). As Schegloff points out in terms of Billig's (1999b) assertions regarding CA's epistemological and methodological naivety,

"If such a leverage is available to us – perhaps distinctively for talk in interaction, and surely for conversation, with its built-in mechanism for each party's display of their understanding of what has just been going on – then it is self-indulgent not to accept the disciplining of analysis which makes it possible."

(1999b: 580)

2.3.3 Finally 'Getting A Grip'

Although in retrospect my problems with CA's analytic gaze were not a major impediment to the ongoing course of the thesis, trying to find a way to put flesh on the seemingly bare bones of structural and sequential analysis did cause me great consternation at the time. Indeed, looking back it amuses me that I had problems with both poles of the argument: remove the analytic telescope and I felt that important detail was missing; apply the focus too tightly, and I started to 'drown' in the self-same detail I had sought. So, having overcome this difficulty by viewing the source of my problems as a resource, I was able to return to my consideration of the sequential features of the parents' evening meetings, confident that a compromise between these two extremes would allow for a rigorous analysis that was not at the expense of the actual lived practices of the people I was studying.

Whilst the structural features of the reporting structure evident across the beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings provided the hook from which to hang my analysis, the application of the compromise position outlined above meant that the 'discovery' of this reporting structure would not in itself be the focus of the thesis. I therefore began to consider which elements of this overall structural organisation needed to be drawn out within my analysis. As shall be seen in subsequent chapters (and indeed, as the Introduction to the thesis has already intimated), I decided to focus on three broad areas, which in turn were subdivided into five separate topics (corresponding to Chapters 4 to 8, below). Although this separation was to some extent arbitrary, especially given the overall 'fluid' movement of the trajectory of the reporting structure, I felt that the loss of some of the detail of the structure as a whole enabled me to open up the analysis of the various features of the talk[24]. This lead to a focus on three broad analytic areas, which reflected various points in the trajectory of the meetings, dealing firstly with the movement from preamble to the reporting structure 'proper', then the delivery of the actual report on the child, followed finally by the upshot of the results as worked through by the teacher and parents. Despite this focus, however, it was still not all plain sailing in terms of producing the final thesis.

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[24] The presentation of two conference papers during the final year of my research helped to influence this decision, since in both cases I dealt with the overall structural details of the parents' evening meetings. Although interesting in their own right, an examination of the structural details of the meetings was not as interesting, to my mind at least, as some of the features that went towards the construction of the structure. Of course, the need to gloss details of your research can also be seen as one of the hazards of presenting research in a public forum.

The first of these areas, the movement from preamble to reporting structure, was split into a consideration of how the parents' evening participants co-operatively accomplished the creation of an institutionally focused activity, as well as an examination of the role that the manipulation of non-conversational objects (i.e. the written report on the child) played in this work. Whilst utilising many of the sequential and intonational aspects of the talk outlined in my upgrade work, the focus of the general examination of the movement from preamble to reporting was widened to incorporate other elements in the co-ordination of 'getting into a state of talk', such as the way in which rights to being either a producer or receiver of the 'first topic' of the meetings are locally constructed (see Chapter 4 for more details). For the second analytic topic, I was partly inspired to focus on the audible manipulation of documents within the parents' evening meetings by those sections of the Billig-Schegloff exchanges that dealt with CA's supposed deliberate reluctance to deal with 'extra'-conversational elements. Although in no way intended as an attempt at synthesising the methodological positions of CA and Critical Discourse Analysis (see Billig, 1999a + b, and Schegloff, 1999a + b, for more details), I hoped in some small way to show that CA's specific methodological focus could deal rigorously with supposedly exogenous interactional elements.

The delivery of the actual report on the child, as one of the three broad areas of analysis within this thesis, was not subject to any further subdivision. But whilst the initial focus on the delivery of the report via reporting and contextualising statements remained (see Chapter 6 for more details), I had to amend what I originally thought would be a relatively straightforward examination of the sequential details of this stage of the talk. Indeed, the initial analytic focus, based around an explication of the technical details of the use of syllogism in the delivery of the reporting and contextualising statements, proved to be insufficient, especially when a major change in the direction of the analysis for the subsequent stage of the talk (the upshot of the report on the child) took place. Although this change in direction is examined below, in terms of the delivery of the report on the child, the question of 'good' and 'bad' news valence became more relevant to this stage of the talk, thereby expanding the scope of the analysis.

The final area of analysis revolved around the production of the upshot for the results, which very early on had suggested an examination divided between those results below the national average level (see Chapter 7 for more details), and those results above the

national average level (see Chapter 8 for more details). The initial view of this stage of the meeting was in terms of its delivery as an assessment of the prior result, which in turn was linked to the role of these assessments as good or bad news. Maintenance of a consensual environment between teacher and parents was seen to be the main goal of these assessments, and as such was set against the format of news delivery outlined by Maynard in his forthcoming book, *Bad News, Good News, and the Structure of Everyday Life*, in which any bad news valence is 'shrouded', whilst any good news valence is exposed. Within this initial analysis, these formats of news delivery were subverted. Thus, the 'bad news' results (i.e. below national average) were subject to a neutral delivery, whilst the 'good news' results (i.e. above national average) were presented with tacit negative elements that implied the child 'could do better'.

Changes in this analysis came about after I sent draft copies of the respective chapters dealing with these 'assessment statements' to Professor Maynard himself, who very kindly provided a commentary on what I had written. He pointed out that whilst a consensual environment was being maintained, he did not feel that it was "happening by virtue of agreement in assessment" (Maynard, personal correspondence). Indeed, what I had glossed as assessment statements did not strictly act as evaluative statements, but instead could generally be heard as the provision of achievement or goal proposals. Viewed in this way, the final stage of the reporting structure could be seen as attending to the institutional task orientation of the teacher by 'doing encouraging', and as such did not get formed up or received as good/bad news in the first place.

Coming as it did relatively late in the course of my research, this change in emphasis highlighted both the constant need to update and improve ones analysis, and the way in which changes to one part of a research project necessarily impact on other parts of the analysis. Not only did this reformulation change my initial analysis of the final stage of the reporting structure (now described as upshot statements), it shifted the focus of the analysis of the reporting and contextualising statements. In contrast to the subsequent goal proposal work, the work done during these prior stages of the talk could be seen as the negotiation of both the method by which the child's result is produced within the SAT testing regime, and the potential valence of this news.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to show the genesis of this thesis, starting from my initial sociological background and my introduction to Conversation Analysis. I have set out some of the key theoretical assumptions of CA, as reflected in the development of my 'thinking in process', as well as the personal context of my research topic. The contingent manner by which I came to the parents' evening data was set against the question of its relevance, my approach to the data being positioned in terms of CA's distinct approach to the study of social interaction. Finally, I have sought to outline the way in which the research has progressed, indicating some of the difficulties I encountered on the path to presenting the finished version of the thesis.

This natural history does not pretend to present a systematic and detailed account of the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of CA. The reasons for not providing such an account are twofold. First of all, since many other synopses of Conversation Analysis already exist[25], I have sought to provide an overview of the characteristics of CA as a methodology via my own engagement with them. Secondly, as a methodological position relying upon the meticulous examination of the empirical details of naturally occurring talk-in-interaction, the adequacy of CA is most amply demonstrated by its analytical application in practice. It is with this latter point in mind that the data chapters of this thesis are introduced, starting with a description of the overall trajectory of the beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings.

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[25] Other than the many excellent published synopses of the underpinnings of CA (e.g. Heritage, 1984; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; ten Have, 1999, Silverman, 1998, to name but a few), the overview provided by Peräkylä in his unpublished PhD thesis (1991,Goldsmith's College, University of London) remains a prime example at this level.

Chapter 3

Parents' Evening Meetings: An Overview of the

Reporting Structure Trajectory

3.0 Overview of the Reporting Structure

In this chapter the features of the overall structural organisation of the parents' evening talk will be outlined in more detail. Further to the information regarding the ethnographic context of the parents' evening meetings provided in Chapter 1 (above), this chapter will attempt to situate the various aspects of the teacher's method of reporting to the parents within the environment of the beginning sequences of the meetings.

As this chapter's main aim is to explore the general organisation of the beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings, paying particular attention to the way participants jointly construct and move between its different stages, it is not intended to provide anything more than a gross characterisation of the trajectory of these meetings. In subsequent chapters, four particular stages of the meetings will be outlined: the preamble stage, reporting statement, contextualising statement, and the upshot stage. There will be a consideration how the participants "get into a state of talk" (Chapter 4) and talk written records into reality (Chapter 5) during the preamble, present the report on the child as a syllogism (Chapter 6) during the reporting and contextualising statements, and how assessments and goal proposals are delivered (Chapters 7 and 8) via the upshot statement.

3.0.1 Overview of the Chapter

Section 3.1 outlines the basic structure of the beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings, as well as briefly discussing several important factors relating to the analytic consideration of this structure.

In section 3.2, the various trajectories of the meetings are examined[1]. Section 3.2.1 starts the analysis by examining those meetings in which every stage of the reporting structure, as outlined in table 3.a below, is delivered to the parents during the presentation of the child's result. Section 3.2.2 examines changes to the delivery sequence of the reporting structure, describing those meetings in which either the reporting statement and contextualising statement, or the contextualising statement and

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[1] In terms of presentation of data, CA's transcription conventions are outlined in Appendix A, below. Modifications to these conventions regarding the specific details of intonational contour, based upon the adaptation of Jefferson (1984) outlined in Heritage (1984) and Gardner (1997), are discussed in Chapter 4.

the upshot stage, are transposed. Finally, section 3.2.3 looks at those meetings where various stages of the reporting structure are not delivered.

3.1 Pattern Of Reporting

The basic structure of the beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings consists of seven possible phases. Underlying each stage is an orientation to a particular interactional task relating to the movement from the relatively unfocused talk of the preamble, to the initiation of the parents' evening 'proper' and the delivery of the initial report on the child[2]. Thus, the teacher (henceforth T) indicates that the report-focused part of the meeting is about to start, introduces the first curriculum topic up for discussion, provides operational information regarding the name of the set teacher, delivers both the result and its concomitant national average level, and offers up either an assessment or a goal proposal relating to the child's result.

The basic structure of the possible beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings is outlined in table 3.a, below[3]:

Table 3.a – Basic Structure of the Possible Beginning Sequences of Parents' Evening Meetings	
Stage of Reporting Structure	Description
Preamble	Period between turning on of tape recorder and start of agenda statement
a: Agenda Statement	First topic to be examined is announced
b: Focusing Statement	Set teacher for subject in question is announced
c^{1}: *Reporting Statement*	Child's result is delivered
c^{2}: *Contextualising Statement*	National average (level four in all subjects) is delivered or inferred
c^{3}: *Upshot Stage*	Goal proposals/assessments for the children's work are introduced
*: *Topic Transition*	Teacher moves on to new topic

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[2] As pointed out in Chapter 1, the transcripts presented in this research cover the making of the first report on the child. As the meeting continues, subsequent reports relating to other areas of the curriculum are delivered.

[3] Note that the delivery order of these stages is subject to changes (for a further discussion of this point see section 3.1.1, below, as well as section 3.2.2 onwards for further analysis). Please also note that whilst the topic transition stage of the talk has been constituted in various different ways, it is not subject to any specific analysis within this thesis (see section 3.1.1), and as such has not been given a numbered designation as per the other possible stages of the reporting structure.

As was noted in Chapter 2, the specific analytical focus for this study is the opening sequences of the parent-teacher meetings, which means that subsequent to the topic transition cited as the last of the seven stages, the meeting continues. Five of the stages (a to c^3) are specific conversational actions carried out by the teacher[4], whilst the preamble contains a variety of conversational features. Note also that the U*pshot Stage* generally consists of several conversational utterances by T, unlike the agenda to contextualising statements, which are generally delivered as single utterances.

3.1.1 Important Aspects of the Reporting Structure

Before looking in more detail at the trajectory of the opening sequence of the meetings, several general factors will be considered here.

Firstly, it should be remembered that whilst table 3.a (above) outlines a particular set of conversational actions, it should not be seen as an attempt to classify the range of activities carried out during the parents' evening meetings. Whilst Drew and Heritage (1992) point out that opening sequences (along with closing sequences) are among the few exceptions within talk-in-interaction that can be organized into a standard order of phases, conversations in general do not "progress through some overarching set of stages" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 43). Indeed, it is rather the case that as Drew and Heritage say, "the locally contingent management of "next moves" in conversation, and the options speakers have even within particular sequences or activities, ensure there is no "standard pattern" for the overall organization of conversations" (1992: 43). The sequence of actions outlined in table 3.a should therefore be seen as the product of locally managed routines, rather than a strict adherence to any prescribed or pre-determined set of influential factors.

The second factor to be considered relates to the fact the overall reporting structure only covers the opening period of the parents' evening meetings. As noted above, in terms of the recordings from which this data stems, the beginning of the reporting structure coincides with the initiation of the tape recording by the teacher taking the meeting[5]. Whilst the actual composition of its stages are subject to some level of variable application (see below for a discussion on this aspect of the talk), the conclusion of the

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[4] Note that for the latter six stages of the reporting structure, the symbols included in table 3.a (i.e. a, b, c^1, etc) will be used in the transcript to designate which stage has been delivered. All talk prior to the making of the agenda statement constitutes the preamble.

[5] As the analysis in Chapter 5 outlines, the one exception to this was the occasion when the tape recorder was left running between interviews (cf. Extract 5.7).

reporting structure comes subsequent to the delivery of the report and its corresponding upshot, when the teacher introduces a new topic for discussion. Because the opening stage of the parents' evening meeting has been chosen as the focus of this research, the actual details of this topic transition are placed to one side. This means that this point of the talk is presented in a similar way to the preamble, in that it is not offered up as a specific conversational action carried out by the teacher[6].

Finally, it should be noted that since the construction of this reporting format is a product of the locally managed routines of the parents' evening interactants, table 3.a (above) represents its fullest exposition. Whilst for some meetings this means that not every stage of the reporting structure is produced[7], five points within the overall structure of the opening section of the meetings remain constant: the *preamble*, the *agenda statement*, the *report statement*, the *upshot statement*, and *topic transition*. In terms of the actual turn-by-turn production of the reporting structure by the teacher, this means that the agenda, reporting, and upshot statements are always present.

3.2 Trajectory Overviews

Having considered the general features of the opening sequences of the parents' evening meetings, this section provides a description of the trajectory of the meetings, and the various ways in which they are co-produced. Section 3.2.1 will examine meetings in which the full reporting structure, as presented in table 3.a, is delivered. Section 3.2.2 will move on to look at similarly full expositions of the reporting structure, but ones in which the delivery sequence of several of the stages vary.

3.2.1 Fullest Exposition of the Reporting Structure

Each of the meetings described below involve the fullest exposition of the reporting structure, delivered in the sequential order outlined in table 3.a (above). Whilst there is variability in the topics discussed, the amount of time taken in discussion, and the number of participants who take part during the preamble section of the talk, it is always T who initiates the meeting 'proper' via the delivery of an agenda statement. It

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[6] See Chapter 2, The Natural History of the Research, for a full discussion of the methodological choices that influenced the shape of this thesis.

[7] In terms of highlighting the overall structural organisation of institutional interactions, this contrast between the fullest account of an attended-to structure and its actual production on a turn-by-turn basis bears a comparison to Byrne and Long's (1976) description of doctor-patient consultation meetings. Whilst they found that the meetings displayed six distinct stages, these did not often take place in full (note, however, that Byrne and Long's non-CA study looked exclusively at the conduct of the professional during doctor-patient consultation meetings).

should also be noted that for every child concerned, T is *not* the set teacher involved in teaching the initial curriculum topic up for discussion, whether it be mathematics (transcripts 3.1 to 3.5) or English (transcript 3.6). In every meeting the children concerned have attained level three for the specific curriculum topic, which as pointed out in Chapter 1 (above), has an attendant national average of level four. Finally, it is clear that whilst the level of recipiency and verbal involvement from the parent(s) varies greatly between each extract[8], the reporting structure is delivered in its entirety without need for repetition or repair on the part of T.

In transcript 3.1[9] (below), the initial stage of the preamble talk involves a discussion between T and the mother (henceforth M) regarding the mother's non-appearance at a previous meeting. The movement away from this topic is marked by the production of three initiatory utterances across lines 16 to 20, followed by the agenda statement at line 22. As T introduces the various pieces of information relating to each stage of the reporting structure (who the set teacher is, the child's result, the national average level), M displays varying levels of recipiency. In contrast to the straightforward flow from the agenda to the contextualising statements, T's delivery of the upshot contains several elements, including a characterisation of a goal (line 31), a reiteration of the child's result at line 33, and an assessment of the result (line 35). T finally moves onto the next part of the written report at line 39.

Transcript 3.1 (Pt1/ s 11.1)

M = Mother

1.	T:	- ↑ you=
2.	M:	= as(h)alright
3.		(.)
4.	T:	ri:(h)gh::t
5.		(0.7)
6.		° okay °
7.		(1.3)
8.		I didn't (°d°)et to see you last time did I?
9.	M:	no I didn't u-=
10.	T:	=uh Ha ha ha
11.	M:	° I don't ° know what happened, I forgot all about it ° well it- ° (.)
12.		it ma [de (me too late)

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[8] For example, whilst transcript 3.1 sees the mother provide a response token (RT) subsequent to every stage of the reporting structure produced by T, transcript 3.5 sees only a single mild acknowledgement (line 11) throughout the entire sequence.

[9] See Appendix A, below, for an outline of the method of transcript designation used in this thesis.

13.	T:	[she y'know what she's li::ke, (.) she didn't bring the thing home
14.		I don't think, .hhh
15.		(.)
16.		ERM::,
17.		(2.0)
18.		° uri:ght °
19.		(2.5)
20.		° okay ° ((even quieter than previous utterance))
21.		(3.4)
22. a→		>Right <(.) we'll start having a look at ma°ths::: °
23.	M:	° mm °
24. b→	T:	Erm: she's in Mr D's set for maths
25.	M:	yeah =
26. c^1→	T:	= (t) .hhu she's working at level th↑ree::,
27.		(1.1)
28. c^2→		now the national average is level four.
29.		(0.6)
30.	M:	[(° yeah °)]
31. c^3→	T:	[.hh] so that's what we want°u° to aim at
32.	M:	yeah:
33. c^3→	T:	but she's at a three, so
34.		(1.0)
35. c^3→		that's u- [th] at's okay,
36.	M:	[(that's it)] she got one (more a few) =
37.	T:	= y↑eah
38.		(1.0)
39. *		(tsk) she works quite hard...

In moving away from the topic of the previous meeting, T's initiatory statement "ERM::," (line 16) hearably marks a boundary within the talk in terms of its brighter, 'attention grabbing' intonation. Having marked this boundary, T effects a stepwise transition into the reporting structure via the extended 'erm → right → okay' sequence across lines 16 to 20, thereby appearing to *not* peremptorily move into the reporting proper. The impact of inter-turn intonational contours on this stage of the talk can also seen, since the 'high → low' intonational movement from "ERM" to "uri:ght" (line 18) mirrors the topical movement that T is attempting to carry out, marking the transition from a less formal interactional environment to a more formal one.

The delivery of the agenda statement at line 22 sets up mathematics as the first in a series of topics ("we'll *start* having a look at maths"). It also presents the movement into the discussion of this topic as an inclusive action by both participants, as can be seen with the use of the prefacing term "we'll". Following the agenda statement, T can be heard to provide the name of the set teacher (line 24). Whilst the agenda statement outlines the first topic offered up by T for discussion, the subsequent focusing statement introduces the information regarding who is the set teacher for that curriculum subject. In basic terms, these stages of the talk reflect the two complementary aspects of any given curriculum area, namely what the topic is, and who is responsible for teaching it.

The reporting statement is delivered using a formulation that places the child within an ongoing trajectory of work (line 26). The "working at" formulation avoids presenting an essentialist picture of the child and their work, since the child can by implication reach a better level of attainment. Subsequent to this, the contextualising statement provides both the name of the criteria by which the result is judged, and its numerical component (line 28). Whilst markers of sequential implicativeness incorporated into T's talk, as well as M's repeated recipiency (see below), maintain the momentum of the meeting, they can also be heard to set up an implicative relationship between each stage of the reporting structure. This is particularly important in the case of the reporting and contextualising statements, since the application of a "now" preface (beginning of line 28) positions the contextualising statement as the result of a logical progression from the reporting statement.

This logical progression represents a *syllogism*, in that a conclusion can be drawn from two given propositions. Presenting the report in this way indicates how the report and its associated national average are being managed as the consequence of objective conditions. This is underlined by the turn transition point (TTP) opened up subsequent to the production of the contextualising statement (line 29), which in turn points to the co-production of the reporting structure by both T and the parent (M in this case). Having cautiously taken up the invitation to provide recipiency offered by the TTP at line 29 with a very quiet possible hearing (line 30), M upgrades her recipiency with a more straightforward receipt token (line 32), before producing an extended gloss of the upshot of the syllogism (line 36). Just as T can be heard to present the child's result as the consequence of objective conditions, providing the requisite pieces of information regarding the result and the national average whilst leaving open their upshot, so M can

be heard to respond in kind, receipting the information and the upshot statement, before producing her own gloss of what the result means.

As has already been noted above, the final element of the reporting structure involves an upshot stage containing several elements, including a characterisation of a goal (line 31), a reiteration of the child's result at line 33, and an assessment of the result (line 35). The characterisation of a goal ("so that's what we want°u° to aim at") is formulated generically, but is hearably applicable to the child in question as T's turn-at-talk continues. Equally, the assessment of the result ("that's okay") can be heard as a comparative statement, both by dint of its positioning, and with regard to what it refers to. In having provided a remedial goal proposal, T has affected a good news exit from the report on mathematics, before moving on to the next stage of the written report.

Transcript 3.2 (below) exhibits a similar set of features, although the initial stage of the preamble talk involves a reference by T to the meetings being recorded (line 3). Once again, the movement away from the initial topic is marked by the production of three initiatory utterances (lines 6 to 10), and followed by an agenda statement (line 12). In contrast to the straightforward flow of the agenda to contextualising statements, T produces an extended upshot stage across lines 21 to 22, before moving onto the next part of the written report at line 24.

Transcript 3.2 (Pt1/ 1 01.1)

M = Mother

1.	T:	° yeah °
2.		(1.2)
3.		°.hh ° we can be the guinea pigs (.) see if it works,
4.		(.)
5.	M:	ye° s °
6.	T:	.hh r:(hh)ight h .h
7.		(2.1)
8.		° ho:kay °
9.		(7.9)
10.		ri:ght,
11.		(0.6)
12. a→		>if: we: ,< (0.7) talk about her maths: first
13.	M:	°yea(h)°
14. b→ T:		.hh okay so she's in: Mr D's set (0.8) y[eah?

15.	M:	[°yeah°
16. c^1→T:		.hh urm and he says that- (0.4) >she's working at-< (0.9) .h level three
17.		(0.6)
18.	M:	yea::h.
19. c^2→T:		the::: n:ational average, (0.7) is level four
20.	M:	yea::h
21. c^3→T:		so that's what they- (0.6) we want them to be achieving >so she's< working
22.		at level three, >so she's-< (0.5) ↑she's not too bad =
23.	M:	(°yeah°) ((unclear, but sounds like an agreement token))
24. * T:		= she's okay, .hh umm he says that her work is very neat...

In terms of overall intonational contour, T's initiatory statement "r:(hh)ight" (line 6) carries out the same work as "ERM" was heard to do in transcript 3.1, in that it marks a boundary within the talk. The internal downward contour of this utterance should be viewed in the same light as the 'high → low' intonational movement *between* utterances seen in the previous transcript, since it marks a shift from the preamble talk, to the reporting on the child. In this instance, it can also be heard to downgrade the 'seriousness' of the potentially problematic prior sequential matter of having the meetings recorded. Added to this, a stepwise movement into the reporting structure proper can once again be seen.

The agenda statement (line 12) and focusing statement (line 14) are also subject to a similar production format as that seen in the previous transcript. That T treats these details as straightforward and unproblematic is reflected in the inclusive elements of the agenda statement ("if we"), the affirmatory "okay" at the beginning of the focusing statement, and the overtly alignment implicative "yeah" at its end (line 14). Whilst there is no prefacing term linking the reporting statement and the contextualising statement as in transcript 3.1, the sequential implicativeness of the child's result followed by the national average level still allows T to provide all the information the parent needs in order to draw for herself a conclusion regarding the child's level of attainment. Equally, the multiple elements within T's extended turn-at-talk (lines 21 and 22) outlining an upshot of the result are similar to the previous transcript, although in this instance T repairs from invoking a nebulous "they", to a more institutionally focused and inclusive "we" during her characterisation of a remedial goal for the child.

During the preamble of transcript 3.3 (below), the audible manipulation of documents occurs at lines 4 and 6. This is forecast by T at line 3 via a spoken reference to having to search through documents in front of her. The preamble talk also contains a different set of actions to those seen in the previous two extracts, since rather than talking at any length to the parent, T engages in a discussion with the Deputy Head teacher, which has ramifications for the subsequent delivery of the agenda statement (line 12). A similarity with transcript 3.1 (above) is evident at line 21, where M provides her own gloss of the child's result.

Transcript 3.3 (Pt 1/ e 05.1)

M = Mother; C = Child; DH = Deputy Head teacher (subsequently leaves)

1.	T:	O:khay:
2.		(1.9)
3.		° (tk) righ:t lemme find me notes: °
4.		(4.4) ((paper shuffling))
5.		° .hh °
6.		(7.2) ((paper shuffling))
7.		↑ hello::
8.		(0.7)
9.	DH:	° hiya °

:

: ((DH and T discuss forms that are to be given to the parents))

:

10.	T:	thanks ((DH leaves))
11.		(1.1)
12. a→		.hh ri:ght, (.) maths:
13.		(0.5)
14. b→		.hh she's in: er Mr D's set (.) > for maths <
15. c^1→		.h a::nd she's working at level three
16.		(0.5)
17.	M:	°kay°
18. c^2→T:		.hhh (tck) (nand) the national average is level four.
19.		(0.5)
20. c^3→T:		so that's what we're aim ↓ ing at =
21.	M:	= she's a °be-° bit behind
22. c^3→T:		so that's what we want them to get (.) yeah
23.	M:	° mmh [m °
24. *	T:	[.hhh er:and he says she works well in class...

Whilst T produces an initiatory statement ("O:khay:") at line 1, she also displays that she is not adequately prepared to start the meeting, with her statement at line 3 orienting to the need to find the correct report document for the child concerned. This statement provides an account for both the prior delay regarding the sorting of documents, as well as forecasting any delay to come, accompanied as it is by audible paper shuffling (lines 4 and 6). The fact that this audible document manipulation takes place across a distinctly lengthy period, added to the disruption caused by the side sequence between T and DH, means there is a long gap between T's first initiatory utterance, and the subsequent agenda statement at line 12. Not only does this highlight the validity of document sorting as a non-accountable activity for T, it also highlights the part played by the silence of M in facilitating the shift from the preamble to the reporting, since despite the amount of time it takes for T to restart the meeting, M does not attempt to initiate any conversational actions of her own.

The sound (and obviously sight) of T sorting through written reports before being able to start the meeting also have an impact on the subsequent stages of the reporting structure. On a practical level, the delay caused both by this action, and the side sequence by T and DH, is attended to by the reformulation of the agenda statement at line 12. This is delivered in a truncated and straightforward manner ("maths:") in order to get to the report on the child as soon as possible. But T's earlier spoken reference to searching the documents, accompanied by the sound of the documents being manipulated, also reflects on the focusing statement (line 14). By making explicit reference to the action of 'looking' at the written documents in front of her, T indicates that she is *not* personally the source of the report on the child. This is underlined by the invocation of the set teacher's name. T's accountability for the child's below national average result is therefore framed in the light of this implied role of the set teacher. It can also be seen to assert the respective professional and lay roles of teacher and parent, since only T has direct access to the report documents.

The upshot stage (lines 20 and 22) is unlike that seen in the previous two transcripts, in that it consists of a reiteration of a generically formulated characterisation of a goal. The utility of this reiteration becomes apparent when considering M's statement at line 21 ("she's a °be-° bit behind"), which provides its own gloss of the upshot of the news forecast by the reporting and contextualising statements. Unlike T's preceding characterisation of a goal ("so that's what we're aiming at" - line 20), which frames the

result as a level of attainment that can be improved upon, this gloss introduces a negative connotation, framing the result as the child 'falling behind'. That T is once again able to affect a 'good news' exit from the below national average report is apparent in the way she reformulates her earlier goal proposal and appends a confirming "yeah" at the end of the turn in order to formulate her second goal proposal as being in agreement with M's exhibited understanding.

There are three elements of interest in transcript 3.4 (below), starting with the receipt token at line 5 with which M acknowledges the document T has handed to her[10]. There is a change in the formulation of the reporting statement, based around a self-repair by T, as well as an extended sequence during which T attempts to construct a good news exit from the goal proposal that M has glossed as "oh she's okay?" (line 26).

Transcript 3.4 (Pt1/ m 12.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

1.	T:	.hhh R(hh)ight
2.		(1.1)
3.		okay.
4.		(9.2) ((rustling/sorting of papers))
5.	M:	° thank you ° (hha)
6.		(1.1)
7.	T:	um::,
8.		(0.6)
9.		ri:ght
10.		(0.7)
11.	a+b→	s:tart w [ith her language. Mr D::
12.	M:	[° y(h)es: (mm) °
13.		(0.4)
14.	c^1→ T:	(t) .hhh Okay >she works:-< (.) she's working at level three:,
15.	M:	°yeah°
16.	T:	.hh
17.	M:	°°m:hm°°
18.		(.)
19.	c^2→T:	the national average (.) is level four.
20.		(1.7)
21.	M:	o(u)h=
22.	c^3→T:	= so that's where we want her to be,

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[10] Note that these documents are the same ones discussed by T and DH in the previous transcript. See Chapter 4 for more details.

23.		(0.7)
24.		> but sh- < it's a level three. so :,
25.		(0.6)
26.	M:	oh she's okay:? or [(low-) (.)](level?)
27.	T:	[↑ mmmm, that's] oka- > no b-< that's okay::, =
28.	M:	yeah?
29.	T:	= that's oka [y:
30.	M:	[(mmh?)
31.		(0.4)
32.	T:	you know? it's (.) > it's not < .hhh =
33.	M:	° okay °
34.	T:	= as good as we'd like her [to be:,
35.	(M):	[°( )°=
36.	M:	= (° oh [nou °)](° yeah? °)
37.	T:	[bu-] hhh
38.		(0.5)
39.		you- (.) > you know < she's not aw:ful,
40.		(0.8)
41.		.hhh =
42. *	M:	= last time: [(.) you said =
43.	T:	[hhh
44.	M:	= she's not,
45.		(0.8)
46.		very good in the clas(h)s
47.		(0.6)
48.	M:	what about ° now? ° (.)° is:, °
49.		(0.4)
50.	T:	TO [o much of this =
51.	(M):	[( )
52.	T:	= talking I'm afrai::d…

M's statement at line 4 acknowledges receipt of a document that has been passed to her, which underscores the way in which both participants attend to T's lead role in initiating various actions. T has not only already produced a 'right → okay' initiatory sequence across lines 1 to 3, but subsequent to the passing of the document, she can resume her initiatory build-up. Meanwhile, M defers to T's initiative in carrying out these actions.

At line 14, T produces a reporting statement that provides an indication of how the teacher actively avoids presenting the child as being 'stuck' at any given level of

attainment. In common with each transcript examined so far, T uses the formulation "working at" to position the child within an ongoing trajectory of work. Thus, by implication, any current level of attainment can be bettered. This is underlined by the statement at line 14, since the essentialist description of the child, "she works", is repaired to the more fluid "working at" formulation.

The upshot stage starting at line 22, can initially be seen to be constructed in a similar way to that seen in transcript 3.1, with a generically formulated goal proposal ("so that's where we want her to be") followed by a reiteration of the child's result (">but sh-< it's a level three so" – line 24). Like transcript 3.3, M can then be heard to provide a gloss of the result's upshot ("oh she's okay? or low level?" – line 26), which diverges from the implication of more work contained within T's goal proposal. Whilst this gloss appears to be based around M's confusion as to what the result 'means'[11], and as such does not provide as much of a negative connotation as that seen in transcript 3.3, it still problematises T's attempts to affect a good news exit from this stage of the report. T can therefore be seen to be careful to avoid engaging in any overt criticism of the child, and instead sets up an extended sequence that reiterates and reformulates the goal proposal ("it's not as good as we'd like her to be" - lines 32 and 34) and assessment elements ("she's not awful" – line 39) previously seen during the upshot stage. In this way, T defers to the category of "favourable things" (aims), whilst downplaying the unfavourable aspects of the child's performance (non-achievement of national average). It is perhaps also due to this less than straightforward exit from the initial report on the child that when M raises a new but related topic at line 42 ("last time you said"), T aligns to it as such, rather than seeking to initiate topic transition herself.

In transcript 3.3 (above), silence on the part of M facilitated the movement into reporting structure, since M placed herself into the role of recipient by not attempting to initiate any conversational actions of her own. Transcript 3.5 (below), on the other hand, shows that parents' evening participants do not always orient to the implied forecast of T's initiatory utterances and audible document manipulation. T's ongoing management of parental recipiency can also be seen, with utterances at lines 12, 15, and 19 all working to maintain the momentum of the reporting structure.

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[11] An early indication of M's possible confusion can perhaps be found at line 21, where she produces an ambiguous newsmark subsequent to the delivery of the contextualising statement.

Transcript 3.5 (Pt1/ z 09.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child; S = Sibling

1.	T:	.hhhh r:(hh)ight
2.		(7.5) ((background talk between child and father/child and sibling))
3.	T:	(° o:kay:: .hh°) ((paper shuffling))
4.		(7.2)
5.	C:	( ) ((addressed to parents/sibling))
6.		(1.2)
7.	T:	.hhh ↑ RI:ght:::: um::::
8.		(0.9)
9.	a→	(tk) maths > I'll start with the maths <
10.	b→	.hh she's in Mrs G's set
11.	M:	(yes she is) =
12.	c¹→T:	= YEP (0.4) and she's working at (.) a level three
13.		(0.5)
14.	M:	Ok[ay
15.	c²→T:	[.hhh now the national, (0.6) av'rage is level four:,
16.		(0.5)
17.	c²→T:	so we want her to be aiming for a level four:.
18.	M:	le [vel four
19.	T:	[Okay? =
20.	M:	= okay
21. *	T:	.hhhh um:: she says she rushes with her work.

Although T produces an 'attention grabbing' initiatory utterance at line 1 ("r:(hh)ight"), the background talk between the family continues. This highlights the role of co-participants in making the written records relevant to the talk, since without any accompanying spoken reference to it (as in transcript 3.3), the production of audible document manipulation can be treated merely as 'background' work without any wider implicativeness.

Once the reporting structure is initiated, at line 12 T produces an agreement token ("YEP"), which both latches to M's prior statement (produced in agreement with the focusing statement at line 10), and is of a louder production volume than the surrounding talk. Given both the prior sequential environment of background talk from the family, and M's agreement with the focusing statement being produced as something more than a simple response token (such as "yes" for example), this can be

heard as an attempt to continue with the reporting without a) opening up the possibility of further, tangential talk on the part of M, and b) appearing not to be rude. T does this by formulating the start of the next stage of the reporting structure (the reporting statement) as an agreement with M's displayed knowledge of who her child's set teacher is.

A similar orientation to keeping the meeting 'moving' can be seen at the start of the next stage of the reporting structure (line 15). Here T cautiously begins to produce the contextualising statement in overlap with M's prior response token. Equally, when M repeats the numerical component of T's prior goal proposal at line 18 ("Level four"), T ensures that any discussion further to the good news exit provided by the characterisation of the goal is avoided by 'coaching' the parent as to the sought-for response ("Okay?" – line 19). This work by T can, however, be set against the way in which both the stepwise format of the reporting structure, and the potential turn transition points (TTP) opened up after every stage of T's report delivery, appear to be designed to invite parental recipiency. Despite T's orientation towards not appearing to be 'lecturing' the parents by allowing for recipiency on their part, the imperative to continue on with the meeting seems to over-ride other considerations[12].

Transcript 3.6 highlights the robust nature of the reporting structure, as well as T's attention to the imperative to keep up the momentum of meeting. Whilst all of the stages of the reporting structure are present, they are delivered against a background of minimal recipiency from the parents. Indeed, apart from a continuer from M at line 11 ("mm:hmm"), neither parent nor child makes any verbal response to T's delivery of the report on the child.

Transcript 3.6 (Pt1/ r 04.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child

1.	T:	-for his research .hhhh
2.		O:kay
3.		(0.8)
4.		am I running behind a lot?
5.		(1.5)
6.		° probably ° .hhh ° oka:y °
7.		(0.8)

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[12] And as such could be seen as a potential consequence of the timetabling of the meetings.

8.		Right
9.		(0.5)
10. a→		we'll start with his maths, .h [hh-
11.	M:	[mm:hmm
12. b→	T:	he's in Mr D's set-
13.		(1.1)
14.	T:	a::nd
15.		(1.3)
16. c^1→		he's working at er level three,
17.		(0.5)
18. c^2→		.hh now the national average is level four.
19.		(1.2)
20. c^3→	T:	.hh °urm s̲o̲° (1.2) he needs to do a bit of work to get up to that,
21.		(0.8)
22.		erm
23.		(1.5)
24. *		he says althou::gh .hh A's concentration can be...

Indications that T is mindful of the timetable of the meetings are clear at line 4, where she asks the question, "am I running behind a lot?" Her ongoing caution in presenting the report can also be seen, since having gained no response from the parents, T recasts the question as self-addressed, thereby making the lack of parental response non-accountable.

The parental non-recipiency continues throughout the meeting, aside from the continuer at line 11 outlined above. Despite this, the reporting structure is produced in a similar way to the meetings already examined in this section, with such features as the "working at" formulation of the reporting statement (line 16), and the syllogistic contrast between the child's result and the contextualising statement, being evident. The stepwise format of the meeting is also maintained, opening up TTP's in which the parents *could* respond should they choose to do so. As a complement to this cautious, stepwise format, "and" (line 14), "now" (line 18), and "so" (line 20) prefaces are once again heard to link the various stages of the reporting structure, presenting a 'non-lecturing' presentation of the child's result. The overall effect of these features adds up to a robust reporting structure that gives enough coherence to the overall trajectory of the meeting to allow for continued movement, without appearing to move peremptorily from stage to stage. This is especially important given the potentially 'difficult' silence on the part of *both* the parents.

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Whilst the reporting structure allows for the continuance of the meeting in the face of the parental non-recipiency, it can also be seen to be flexible in response to various other local eventualities such as talk between T and the parents that veers slightly 'off topic'. In the case of the final meeting of this section (transcript 3.7, below), T is able to maintain the trajectory of the reporting structure, despite initiating a brief side-sequence regarding the child's reaction to T being moved between sets ("went down a group didn't he and he wasn't best pleased I don't think" – lines 8 and 10) subsequent to the focusing statement. Whilst all of the elements of the reporting structure are present, changes to the reporting and contextualising statements (lines 15 and 17 respectively) reflect the sensitivity of the reporting structure to local contingencies within the parents' evening meetings.

Transcript 3.7 (Pt1/ co 17.1)

F=Father

1.	T:	-et your best speaking voice (° on °)
2.		(n).h:hh ER:M: (.) ° right > let's have a look < °
3.		(4.6) ((paper shuffling))
4.	a+b→	.hh ↑Ma:ths: (.) he's got Mrs G hasn't he.
5.		(0.7)
6.	F:	right yeah
7.		(0.6)
8.	T:	(tch) °went down a group didn't he° and he was [n't best pleased =
9.	F:	[sright
10.	T:	= I don't [think
11.	F:	[no
12.	T:	.hhhh BU: [t (.) his sats results,
13.	F:	[°no°
14.		(1.1)
15.	c^1→T:	level three,
16.		(0.8)
17.	c^2→	working up to a level four
18.		(0.8)
19.	c^3→T:	°o°kay, (.) .h > so we < want him to get to a level four.
20.		(0.7)
21.		e::rm:
22.		(0.9)
23.	*	°and° > she says < that he's very eager to please...

Having introduced both the agenda for the talk and the information regarding the set teacher (line 4), the discussion regarding the child's "group" can be heard to delay the delivery of the report on the child. T attends to this delay by dispensing with the reporting and contextualising statements in as brief a manner as possible, whilst still providing a measure by which to judge the child's result. Although the reporting statement (line 15) is truncated, the incorporation of something similar to the 'working at' formulation seen in previous meetings during the contextualising statement ("working up to a level four" – line 17) means T is still able to provide a non-essentialist picture of the child.

Whilst this in turn means that the contextualising statement does not make any explicit reference to the national average level, its application as a measure by which to judge the child's result is still implied. Changing the format of the contextualising statement in this way can therefore be seen to reflect the ongoing importance of framing the result in terms of an ongoing trajectory of work that can by implication reach a 'better' state. At the same time, T is able to supply the requisite information to the parent in an easily understandable format. Furthermore, a good news exit from the report is still achieved, despite the earlier changes to the reporting structure.

3.2.2 Changes in Delivery Sequence

Whilst all of the meetings examined so far have involved the production of every stage of the reporting structure outlined in table 3.a (above), in some cases the actual delivery order of the structure is changed. Indeed, the first three transcripts examined below provide evidence of the flexibility of the reporting structure. Although every stage outlined in table 3.a is present, the reporting and contextualising statements are transposed. In the case of transcripts 3.8 and 3.9 (below), this change in the delivery sequence can be related to the nature of the result being delivered to the parents, with transcript 3.9 also being influenced by the parent pre-empting T's agenda statement. For transcript 3.10, the implication of the child as a participant leads to the reversing of the reporting and contextualising statements. In transcripts 3.11 and 3.12 there are further changes to the delivery sequence, although in both of these cases it is the contextualising statement and upshot stage that are transposed, with T producing an upshot element (a goal proposal in transcript 3.11, and an assessment statement in 3.12) prior to the delivery of the national average level.

A change in delivery sequence also occurs in transcript 3.8 (below), where at line 22 T produces a contextualising statement subsequent to a focusing statement (line 20), and prior to the reporting statement at line 24. Unlike meetings examined previously, the child's level of attainment is described as "level two stroke three".

Transcript 3.8 (Pt1/1 10.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

1.	T:	.hhh ohh:
2.		(1.3)
3.	M:	° thanks ° =
4.	T:	= sorry about this
5.		(0.5)
6.		.hh behind ↑as usual.
7.		(0.7)
8.	M:	you're not ° too bad (you' re [finish) °
9.	T:	[I'M Not too bad > I've got- <
10.		° it's terrible ° I was about seventeen minutes behind and > ° I was ° <
11.		(1.3)
12.		but somebody didn't turn up hhh [hu hh hu =
13.	M:	[> huhuhuu <
14.	T:	= (hca-) so:: .hhh (.) ri:ght
15.		(4.3)
16.		er::m: .hh
17.		(5.4)
18.		(tsk) .hh ° okay.°
19.		(1.2)
20. a+b→		ri::ght ↑m::aths:: ((said gently)) (.) °> i- she in Mrs G's set?, <°
21.		(0.7)
22. c²→.		(t)hh an:::d, (0.9) we're aiming for level fours,
23.		(0.6)
24. c¹→		.hh and for her maths she's a level two stroke three.
25.		(1.0)
26.	M:	°ri:ght°=
27. c³→T:		= so we really want to get that up to a three.
28.	M:	° okay °
29. *	T:	.hhh um: she says that- shes:: (.) very weak...

The preamble talk of transcript 3.8 sees T and M engaging in a discussion about the late running of the meetings. This follows a self-deprecatory statement by T (line 6), which downgrades the importance of this potentially problematic situation by framing it as a

laughable matter. Like transcript 3.3, the time taken over this preamble talk could be linked to the truncated format of the agenda statement (line 20), but in general terms the format of transcript 3.8 is similar to those meetings examined above.

This general level of similarity also extends to the making of the reporting and contextualising statements, inasmuch as the coherent ongoing trajectory of the meeting is maintained by the application of 'and' prefaces at lines 22 and 24. Differences, of course, can be seen in the placement of the contextualising statement (line 22) prior to the reporting statement (line 24). Added to this, the contextualising statement, although implying the sought for level of national average, does not actually make specific reference to it as a judgement criterion. Irrespective of the positioning of these stages of the talk, however, the sequentially implicative relationship between the two elements of the national average contrast still holds, with a factor 'external' to the meeting (the imposition of the national average) accounting for the method of assessment. Equally, T is still able to link the national average contrast into the upshot stage of the meeting, with a "so" preface setting up a subsequent goal proposal ("so we really want to get that up to three" – line 27).

The utility of changing the order of the reporting and contextualising statements can be found in the nature of the result being delivered by T. In terms of the national average criteria outlined in Chapter 1, a level 2/3 result represents a level of attainment at the bottom end of the National Curriculum assessment scale (see table 1.a, above). As such, this potentially represents a hearably more delicate piece of information than a level three result. The reversal of the previously seen 'report → national average' presentation format can therefore be heard as less antagonistic on two counts. Unlike previous transcripts where the actions of the child (i.e. their SAT result) are introduced as the central factor of the syllogism, with other elements being introduced in reference to these actions, in this transcript the child is not positioned as the pivotal aspect of the contrast sequence. Secondly, that the specific reference to the 'national average' is replaced by a formulation that can be heard as an affiliative 'we' (teacher and parent)[13] means that the subsequent contrast of the child's result is produced as a goal that both adult parties share for the child.

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[13] As well as, to some extent, an institutional 'we' in terms of teacher and school.

Added to this, the "two stroke three" result (line 24) is of a less straightforward nature than the criteria by which the results have previously been judged, especially bearing in mind its formulation mirrors the more technical language of the written format. Since these factors mean that the parents may potentially be unsure as to the implications of such a result, T attends to the possibility of interactional difficulty by shifting the elements of the reporting structure. In particular, she introduces the concept of 'levels' as a judgement criterion, before moving on to the less straightforward "two stroke three" result.

Similar influences are at work in transcript 3.9, although M's attempt at line 3 to initiate the discussion of the child's academic progress can also be seen to have an impact on the delivery of the report.

Transcript 3.9 (Pt1/ n 08.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

1.	T:	.hh ° okay: °
2.		(1.8)
3.	M:	(so u-) ow's he been progressing
4.		(0.5)
5.	T:	↑ alri:ght, [↑ yeah:
6.	M:	°a[s he?°
7.		(0.6)
8. a→	T:	↑yeah, (.) > let's have a look- ° that's ° his maths. <
9.	(M:)	(.hh)
10.		(1.1)
11. b→	T:	(tch) <u>Right</u> he's got Mrs G:: .hhh h for his maths <u>an</u> his language hasn't he
12.	M:	yea [::h
13. a→	T:	[so his ↑<u>maths</u>::,
14.		(1.0)
15. c^2→	T:	The <u>nat</u>ional average level is: (.) level four:.
16.		(0.7)
17.	M:	°yeah:° =
18. c^1→	T:	= er and he's working at a two stroke three:
19.		(0.8)
20. c^3→	T:	so we really want to get that up to a three, =
21.	M:	= (° ok °) (.) ye [ah:
22.	T:	[most definitely,
23.		(1.0)
24. *		(tck) .hh <u>um</u> she says: that...

M's attempted initiation of talk on the child (line 3) is interesting for several reasons, not least because it highlights the fact that parental silence in the face of T choosing and introducing the first topic for discussion can in no way be assumed. Instead, it can be interpreted as a locally relevant conversational strategy by which parents defer to T's attempts to mark the shift from the preamble talk to the reporting structure. M's intervention also highlights the impact of institutional task orientations on both sets of participants, since rather than asking a question such as "how is he doing?", M's enquiry "(h)ow's he been progressing" (line 3) hearably makes use of institutionally relevant categories and language. Finally, it raises problems regarding T's delivery of the report on the child, since M's direct question has forced T to make a personal assessment ("↑alri:ght, ↑yeah:" – line 5). So, before she can introduce those elements of the reporting structure that mitigate her role in the delivery of the result, such as implicating the set teacher, or highlighting the impact of the national average as a judgement criteria, T has to provide an assessment for which she might subsequently be held personally responsible.

In order to repair this potentially problematic situation, T tentatively lays claim to the subsequent turns-at-talk. She does this by implicating the written document containing the report on the child as something specifically 'noticeable', as is evident in the way she combines a self-repair with an exhortation to look at a specific item ("yeah, let's have a look- that's his maths" – line 8). This acts as an effective way to both re-focus the meeting on the delivery of the report, and highlight T's role in delivering the first discussion topic as the only person with access to the written record. Having done this, T then produces the focusing statement (line 11) as a question relating to knowledge known-in-general by all the participants. M's concurrence allows T to reiterate the agenda statement and thus reassert the institutional focus of the talk based upon the contents of the report document.

Given these earlier conversational actions, the utility of constructing the announcement and assessment of the child's result via a stepwise progression can be seen, irrespective of the relative positioning of the reporting and contextualising statements. Put simply, the result can be placed in a more cautious context, which in turn mitigates the previous potential difficulties. Set against T's induced assessment at line 5, the upshot statement at line 20 is hearably more cautious. Had T constructed the upshot in an alternative

manner, perhaps by saying 'so *I* think that needs to get up to level three', her earlier assessment of "alright yeah" could easily be called into question, since "doing alright" is not necessarily on a par with 'child needs to do *X* amount of work'. In terms of the points raised above regarding the understanding difficulties related to the 2/3 result, the provision of a goal proposal as an upshot not only offer a good news exit from the report on the child, but also 'detoxifies' any potential sources of interactional difficulty.

Transcript 3.10 (below) is the only example of a child present at the meeting being implicated both as an overhearing audience *and* as the subject of the talk itself. It is this factor that leads to the reporting and contextualising statements being transposed. The invocation of the child's name at line 3, via a negative assessment designed to be heard as ironic and humorous in tone ("H? ooh she's awful"), sets up a two-tier level of reporting, in which two reporting statements are hearably directed at two different audiences (lines 25 and 29).

Transcript 3.10 (Pt1/ af 15.1)

F = Father; C = Child

1.	T:	(n).hhhh(a) o:̲kay
2.		(0.8)
3.		H̲? ooh. she̲'̲s̲ aw:::ful
4.		(0.9)
5.		ourgh,
6.		(1.7) ((papers rustling))
7.		let's find her. (.) .hhh okay.
8.		(0.7)
9.		.hhh
10.		(2.7) ((papers rustling))
11. a→		° o̲:kay ° ((said softly)) (.) ↑ma̲:ths̲:
12.		(0.6)
13. b→		>i- she in Mrs G's set- <
14.		(1.5)
15. c^2→		(tch) .hhh A:::Nd̲ (0.9) (u)national average (.) is a level fou:r
16.		(0.8)
17. c^1→		(tk) for these sats. = ↑now this says level ↑three::
18.		(1.6)
19.		↑is that ri:ght?
20.	C:	I'm bad int I, (hhh)
21.		(.)
22. c^1→T:		.hhh Level three: working towards a level four

23.		(.)
24.	F:	(oh is it)
25. $c^3 \rightarrow$T:		SO we want to °u° to a level four::. I'm surprised at that,
26.		(1.2)
27.	F:	(t).hh she only works at a ( ) I don't know why.
28.		(0.7)
29. $c^3 \rightarrow$T:		(tch).hh you should be level four:.
30.		(.)
31.		.hh well
32.		(0.9)
33. *		she lacks confidence...

Whilst the grounds for implicating the child as a participant of the meeting remain ambiguous[14], T can be heard to continue to orient to her throughout the rest of the transcript, which in turn leads to the changes in the delivery sequence. In particular, two ascription formats are utilised by T in delivering the result, the first directly addressed to the child (line 17 and 19), whilst the second, addressed to the parent (line 22), follows a pattern similar to the 'working at' formulation of earlier extracts. The flexibility of both the reporting structure and the syllogistic thrust of the report-national average contrast mean that T can introduce the relevance of the national average before the two-tier report is made. This dual presentation of the reporting structure also continues with the making of the proposal statement, since at lines 25 and 29 goal proposals designed for the two different 'audiences' of father and child are delivered.

In transcripts 3.11 and 3.12 (below), subsequent to the delivery of the reporting statement (lines 24 and 9 respectively), T produces elements of the upshot stage of the talk. In the case of transcript 3.11, the statement at line 24 is similar to the goal characterisations seen in previous meetings, whilst in transcript 3.12 T produces an assessment of the child's result ("which is good" – line 11). It is only after these two statements have been produced that T introduces the fact of the national average (lines 26 and 12 respectively).

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[14] As discussed in Chapter 5 (below), the implication of the child could reflect the differential treatment by T of fathers attending parents' evening meetings on their own, as opposed to single mothers, who are routinely treated in other professional-parent interactions as 'experts' on the child (cf. Silverman, 1987). Also discussed in Chapter 5 is the possible impact of the father being a non-native English speaker, with T co-opting the child into the talk as a way of covering for any potential understanding difficulties on the part of the father.

Transcript 3.11 (Pt1/ g 07.1)

M = Mother

1.	T:	° I'm taping my interviews is that al:right? °
2.	M:	yes that's fi[ne
3.	T:	[thanks ((All the above away from microphone))
4.		.hh u:hm: ((T and M sit down))
5.		(1.0)
6.		ri::ght
7.		(1.3)
8.		did you decide on a school in the end?
		:
		((Extended sequence: T and M discuss secondary school choices))
		:
9.	T:	...she's: er:: (0.5) pretty self motivated [int she? =
10.	M:	[m:mm
11.	T:	= so,
12.	M:	M:mm
13.		(2.8)
14.	T:	° ri:ght. °
15.		(1.4)
16.		.hhh ok:ay,
17.		(4.2) ((shuffling papers))
18. a→		maths:.
19.		(1.2)
20. b→		↑ i:n Mrs H's set?
21.		(0.7)
22. c^1→ T:		(t) .hh(a) she::::: i:s midlevel four,
23.		(1.0)
24. c^3→T:		so > is level four < we want
25.	M:	mm
26. c^2→T:		° okay, ° (.) that's >the national aver°age°<
27. *		.hh she Tries hard
28.		(0.8)
29.		erm ° bu- ° sometimes she likes to...

Transcript 3.12 (Pt1 / f 06.1)

F=Father

1.	T:	↑u:m ° ri(h)ght° ((paper shuffling))
2.		(1.8)
3. a→		↑maths: (.) o:kay.

4.		(1.2)
5.	b→	u:m:, >she's in< Mrs G's set.
6.		(0.6)
7.		and she's
8.		(1.4)
9.	c^1→ T:	working at level fou:r,
10.	F:	[(°yes°)
11.	c^3→T:	[> which is good that's u- we
12.	c^{2+3}→	that's the national average- that's where we want them to be< ° .hhh °
13.		(0.5)
14.		urm:, (0.9)
15.	*	she says that she- (0.5) thinks B find it's a bit hard...

Unlike previous meetings in which the delivery sequence of the reporting structure has been modified, both transcript 3.11 and transcript 3.12 involve the delivery of results that are equal to the national average level of four. Although some aspects of the reporting structure reflect the fact of the child having achieved a result on or above the national average[15], for the moment it will suffice to note that the impetus for modifying the production order reflects a strategy of information provision on the part of T. This is in contrast to those attempts in transcripts 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10 to downplay possibly 'difficult' results.

This information provision is reflected in the way the contextualisation statement does not have the same syllogistic thrust when removed from the sequentially implicative structure of reporting statement followed by a contextualisation statement outlined in table 3.a[16]. Instead, delivering the upshot stage prior to the contextualisation statement has made the contrast provided by the national average 'surplus to requirements', at least in terms of providing an implicit judgement of the result. The national average level can now be heard in terms of T telling the parent(s) all that they 'need to know' about the relevant aspects of the child's result, before moving on to the next stage of the report.

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[15] For example, the truncated agenda statement in both meetings, as well as the straightforward formulation of the reporting statement in transcript 3.11, line 22. Changes in the reporting structure of results above the national average will be examined below.

[16] Or, indeed, the transposition of the reporting and contextualising statements seen in the previous three meetings.

3.2.3 Truncated Reporting Structures

In the final section of this trajectory overview, meetings in which various stages of the reporting structure have been omitted are examined.

In transcript 3.13 (below), there are several modifications to the reporting structure, including the omission of a focusing statement, an extended contextualising statement (lines 36 and 38). There is also a discussion between T and M subsequent to the good news exit from the report, which replaces what in other meetings has been the point at which topic transition takes place (lines 40 to 49). Whilst the changes to the reporting structure are indicative of T's attention to different tasks within the delivery of the child's result, the participation of M underlines the collaborative achievement of the parents' evening talk.

Transcript 3.13 (Pt1/c 03.1)

M = Mother; B = Baby; C = Child (subsequently leaves)

1.	M:	mm > huh-huh- [huh<
2.	T:	[uhuh – huh
3.	M:	he's a bit smelly: (.) though
4.	T:	is he? =
5.	M:	=he's decided to [° um ° ( ) =
6.	T:	[owh:: nice
7.	M:	= fill [imself up
8.	T:	[° .hhh u-> ha-ha- [Ha<
9.	M:	[mm heh (° alright smelly? °) ((to child))
10.		(0.3)
11.	T:	aowh: dea:r
12.		(0.4)
13.		° .h ° ri:ght
14.		(3.0) ((paper shuffling))
15.		ws:: (.) Richard bef [ore you then ° Colin? °
16.	M:	[((coughs))
17.		(1.2)
18.	C:	( ) ((away from microphone))
19.		(0.8)
20.	M:	° I don't know (.) uh hu-hu °
21.		(0.7)
22.	T:	no: =
23.	M:	= no (.) we wer- we were before (0.2) ° ( ) °
24.	T:	° oh °

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25.		(2.5) ((paper shuffling))
26.	T:	these were all supposed to be in order and now I can't find his notes (tsk)
27.		(1.5) ((paper shuffling))
28.	T:	° hhhh °
29.		(3.4) ((paper shuffling))
30. a→	T:	right. let's have a look at his science ° while I'm looking for this °
31.		.hh ((sniffs))
32.		(1.1)
33. c^1→T:		↑ <u>science</u> (.) he came out with a level <u>fo:ur</u>
34.		(0.6)
35.	M:	mmm =
36. c^2→T:		= so they're supposed to be aiming at level fo:ur [(.) =
37.	M:	[°mmh°
38. c^3→T:		= that's what the national average is >so that's goo<u>d</u> <
39.		(0.9)
40.		e: rm and he's very interested in that
41.		(.)
42.	M:	yea [h
43.	T:	[you know .hh [erm
44.	M:	[he said that's one of his favourite su [bjects so
45.	T:	[yeah he's
46.		<u>very</u> interested
47.	M:	[hmm
48.	T:	[puts me on the spot plenty of times
49.	M:	mha ha .hh hh .hh
50. *	T:	E:::RM (0.8) .hhh so what we're doing (0.3) tonight we've got (.) two: (.) quizzes...

During the preamble talk of transcript 3.13, the lexical and audible implication of the
written record is applied in various contexts, the most important of which in terms of
the delivery of the reporting structure relates to T's statement forecasting that she is
experiencing difficulties finding the requisite report document for the child in question
("these were all supposed to be in order and now I can't find his notes" – line 26).
Subsequent to this, the agenda statement at line 30 provides mitigation for the choice of
science as the first curriculum topic discussed, whilst a focusing statement is omitted
altogether. That T places the topic of science into a secondary position in terms of an as
yet unnamed alternative topic ("let's have a look at his science °while I'm looking for
this°" – line 30) provides some evidence that she is working with a hierarchy of
'important' topics in terms of which topic is introduced first, given the routine choice of
mathematics (in 15 of the 17 meetings presented in this research) as the topic with

which to start the parents' evening meeting proper. Having started with science, however, the omission of a focusing statement simply reflects the operational realities of the child's academic life, since T *is* the teacher who takes their science lessons.

Like transcripts 3.11 and 3.12 (above), the child having achieved the national average level in the curriculum subject under discussion changes the role of the contextualising statement. The initial contrast provided by T ("so they're supposed to be aiming at level four" – line 36) implicitly presents the result as an achieving one, with the subsequent reference to the national average once again providing supplementary information regarding the source of this implied 'good' result. The difference in this case rests in the way that mention of the national average sets up a sequentially relevant upshot in the form of an assessment statement ("that's what the national average is so that's good" – line 38), thereby making explicit what had only been implied before.

Following this relatively straightforward presentation of the result as 'good news', T and M embellish the 'goodness' of the news by engaging in an extended discussion over their shared knowledge of the child's interest in science. Subsequent to this, T eventually effects a change of topic in terms of what other educational resources are being offered to the parents and children (line 50). This discussion between T and M is interesting for two reasons.

In the first instance, it marks a change from the minimal level of recipiency/talk from any parent seen during the previous transcripts once the reporting structure has been initiated. The role of both T and M in effecting the 'good news' exit from the report on the child in this transcript provides evidence for viewing the parents' evening talk as a collaborative achievement. This is not to say that the relative 'silence' of the parents should be heard simply as a 'dearth' of talk, despite the extreme example of transcript 3.6 (above), since transcript 3.9 indicates how a complete absence of extended parental turns-at-talk cannot be assumed. Equally, the avoidance by the parents of the invitation to recipiency inherent in the stepwise construction of the reporting structure should not be discounted in terms of how it helps to facilitate the reporting trajectory. But the role of 'silence' in constructing the parents' evening talk remains an abstract consideration, in that it asks us to consider the impact of something that is not there: the collaborative accomplishment of the talk is more easily appreciated in transcript 3.13.

The second point of interest relates to the fact that there is no evidence internal to the meeting to suggest there is anything special about science as a 'good news' topic. Despite this, T and M produce positive characterisations of the child, marking a difference from those meetings in which remedial goal proposals follow the presentation of results below the national average. It can also be seen as different from transcripts 3.11 and 3.12, where the implication of the children having achieved the requisite result is immediately followed by the introduction of a new topic from the report by T.

This difference could be seen as a simple artefact of the different ramifications of achieving and non-achieving results, in that the palliative effect of an optimistic goal proposal for the 'bad news' of a below level three result does not necessarily apply to a child who has attained the requisite level four. But as the meetings described below indicate, an unproblematic ascription of 'good news' is not applied in other meetings where results on or above the national average are delivered.

In the early stages of transcript 3.14 (below), the changes to the reporting structure could be said to reflect Maynard's (forthcoming: ms 211) assertion that "good news needs relatively little build-up, preparation or forecasting". Not only are both the agenda statement (line 5) and reporting statement (line 7) markedly truncated, there is no focusing statement, despite T *not* being the set teacher for the curriculum topic up for discussion. That the achieving result is not being treated as good news can, however, be seen in the production of the contextualising statement (line 9) and upshot stage (line 11), the combination of which act to urge further achievement on the part of the child.

Transcript 3.14 (Pt1/ y 18.1)

M=Mother; C=Child

1.	T:	.hhh o:k(h)ay,
2.		(1.7)
3.		(tch) ri:ght.
4.		(4.3) ((papers shuffled; chairs moved))
5.	a→ T:	maths:
6.		(1.4)
7.	c¹→	(tk) level ↑four,
8.		(0.6)
9.	c²→	> so we < want him to be a level four. .hh [h Erm: (.) high=
10.	M:	[mmm

11. $c^3 \rightarrow$ T: = level four (.) .hh so, (.) .hhha > if he < works a bit harder he could get a <u>five</u>

12.   M: yes he told me

13.   (0.4)

14.   T: good

15.   (0.5)

16. *   he does not always concen<u>trate</u> (.) neatness is deterior<u>ated</u>...

Although the minimal provision of information regarding the agenda and reporting statements could be heard in terms of Maynard's description of good news delivery, the overall trajectory of the reporting structure during this meeting delivers the result in a neutral way. There are none of the features seen in the delivery of the level three results, such as the invocation to jointly 'look' at the first topic, or the 'working at' formulation, with only the sound of paper shuffling at line 4 potentially implicating the written record as the source of the report. The lack of any mitigating features during T's talk regarding her role in the production of the result can also be seen in the omission of the focusing statement. Although T is not the set teacher for the curriculum topic under discussion, she does not specifically position herself as the deliverer of the report. This could be linked to the way such factors in mitigation of the result are not needed when the child's result has attained the national average, although it is interesting to note that the previous two meetings where level four results were recounted (transcripts 3.11 and 3.12, above), the name of the set teacher *was* included.

Like transcript 3.7, the contextualising statement (line 9) implies the national average level without explicitly mentioning it. In this case its similarity in formulation to the remedial goal proposals seen in previous extracts, added to the subsequent re-presentation of the child's result ("<u>high</u> level four" – lines 9 and 11), makes it hearable as a clarification of the result, which in turn sets up an upshot stage as goal proposal (line 11). It is here that the result gets framed as one that requires further work on the part of the child. Having gained a display of M's understanding that further work is required ("yes he told me" – line 12), T subsequently appends a confirming "good" (line 14), before moving on to a verbatim reiteration of the next stage of the written report.

Similar work takes place in transcript 3.15 (below), although in this instance the clarification of the result (lines 16 and 18) takes place subsequent to the reporting statement (line 14). Indeed, the work of providing this clarification is carried out in preference to delivering a contextualising statement, which in the case of a result above

the national average is surplus to requirements. Whilst the result attained in this meeting is a level five, and as such constitutes one of the top results within the range of levels within Key Stage 2 (see Chapter 1, table 1.b, above), the clarification details and contextualising statement add some texture to the result by framing it as not being as strong as it could be.

Transcript 3.15 (Pt1/ mi 13.1)

M=Mother; F=Father; S = Sibling

1.	T:	uh [ha ha ha,
2.	M:	[uh ha(hh)
3.		(0.3)
4.	T:	well it's alright I sound like a thick northerner on em [so =
5.	M:	[uh ha(hh)
6.	T:	= I wouldn't worry [.hhh
7.	M:	[and I'm a right cockney:
8.	T:	uh ha ha ha .hhh
9.	M:	(.hhhh) .hha
10.	T:	.hhh ↑ri(h)::ght (.) erm::
11.		(0.5)
12. a→		↑Maths:
13.		(1.2)
14. c¹→		level fi:ve
15.		(1.2)
16. c¹→		downwards. (.) we've got he:re
17.		(0.9)
18. c¹→		so (.) (n) .hhhh u:m:: (.) > so he's < a level five by three marks:,
19.		(0.5)
20.	M:	yea(p)=
21. c³→T:		= right? So we want to > get him < (.) to be a def °initely level five°
22.		.hhh um::
23.		(1.1)
24. *		(tsk) ↑C must allow ↑ those round him to concentrate (.) it says…

Despite the preamble talk of this meeting having involved alignment between T and M based on jointly produced and reciprocated laughter (lines 1 to 9), once the reporting 'proper' starts, M only displays recipiency at line 20. Although this silence on the part of M and the father (henceforth F) can be perceived in the same light as that of the parents in the meetings examined above (i.e. that parents defer to T's attempts to present the reporting structure), it must also be set against the way T not only continues with the

neutral format of reporting previously seen in transcript 3.14 (above), but also presents the result as being worthy of response in its own right. Not only do the markedly long gaps within the stepwise format of the reporting structure invite, as potential turn transition points, a response from the parents (lines 13 and 15), but the clarifications of the result at line 16 ("downwards we've got here") and line 18 ("so he's a level five by three marks") provide an indication that T deems further elucidation of the result as necessary. This neutral delivery can also be set against the lack of any focusing statement, despite T *not* being the set teacher for the curriculum subject being discussed. Since the result being discussed is above the national average, none of the mitigation elements seen in previous meetings, such as explicitly outlining the source of the report, would strictly be necessary. Given the role of the set teacher remains factually important, its omission in this meeting can also be heard as an indication that T assumes a level of knowledge on the part of the parents that was not the case in previous 'below level four' meetings.

Although the clarification and representation of the result sets up a subsequent goal proposal (line 21) in much the same way as transcript 3.14 (above), the presentation of the result during this meeting also appears to actively encourage the provision of an upshot from the parents. The robust nature of the reporting structure means, however, that despite not eliciting any expanded response T can still frame the result as one that requires further work on the part of the child.

Transcript 3.16 (below) also sees the child's result presented as being worthy of a response in its own right, as indicated by the response pursuit from T ("okay?" – line 22) that follows the straightforward presentation the agenda and reporting statements (lines 18 and 20 respectively). Although the result in this meeting is level five, T then goes on to produce an extended contextualising statement (lines 24 to 28). It is only after the recipiency of the parents is gained regarding the national average that T produces at lines 31 and 32 a similar clarification of the result to transcript 3.15 ("level five and she's put downwards he was level five by three marks"). This subsequently leads once again to the provision of goal proposal urging further achievement (line 34).

Transcript 3.16 (Pt1/ j 16.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

1. M: °(dunno)° eh > ↑ hu- hu h[hh
2. T: [>you talk to him< =

3.	M:	= ° thank you °
4.	F:	° (you sit over there) °
5.		(1.2) ((sounds of movement))
6.	T:	ri:ght
7.		(1.7)
8.		Mr Jackson
9.		(0.2)
10.	F:	>yup<
11.		(0.8) ((papers shuffled))
12.	T:	.hhhh
13.		(1.2)
14.		° where's me no [tes °
15.	F:	[((coughs))
16.	T:	° o:kay: °
17.		(1.1)
18. a→		>right< ↑ma:ths::,
19.		(0.8)
20. c^1→		↑ulevel five,
21.		(0.8)
22.		okay?
23.		(0.7)
24. c^2→		so- > you know < the:- (.) [level four (.) =
25.	M:	[hmm
26. c^2→T:		= is the average,
27.		(0.4)
28. c^{2+3}→		national average that's what we want them to get, yeah?
29.	F:	[right ° yeah ° [yeah
30.	M:	[° yeah °
31. c^1→T:		[(n).hhhha level five and she's put downwards => he was < level five
32. c^1→		by three marks (.) (tch) o [kay:, =
33.	(F):	[(tsk)
34. c^3→T:		= > so we < want to make that a (1.1) deadlevel five if we can.
35.	M:	° ye [ah °
36. *	T:	[(n).hhh um: good allround (.) participates well...

Since the achievement of a level five result negates the utility of the national average as a way of implicating a 'forward looking' goal proposal (i.e. level four has already been reached), its introduction in this meeting is similar to that seen in transcripts 3.11 and 3.12, with the contextualising statement providing information as to the assessment regime of the National Curriculum. Unlike transcripts 3.11 and 3.12, however, the

delivery of this information takes place before any upshot of the result is produced, and as such cannot be heard as telling the parents 'all they need to know'. Given the unreceipted response pursuit at line 23, it could be heard as an attempt to deal with an understanding difficulty on the part of the parents. This interpretation is, however, problematised by the lack of other evidence within the transcript to indicate any such difficulty. Furthermore, the beginning stages of the reporting structure in this meeting are similar to that of transcript 3.15, and a comparable lack of parental recipiency during that meeting did not lead to the provision of a contextualising statement.

Two possible solutions to this puzzle can be posited, although in both cases the explanations begin to stray beyond CA's analytic boundaries. In the case of transcript 3.16, the audio-only nature of the data could mean that some visual indication of parental uncertainty escapes our analytic gaze, but is oriented to by T. That it was not necessary in transcript 3.15 to produce a contextualising statement, despite the similarity of the early stages of the reporting structure with those of transcript 3.16, could be linked to some external factor regarding the parents, which is known and oriented to by T (see Chapter 8, below for further discussion). Either way, following the recipiency of the parents at lines 29 and 30, T can be heard to carry out similar work to that seen in the previous two meetings, using a clarification and re-presentation of the result (lines 31 and 32) to set up a goal proposal (line 34) which implies that the child can do even better than their current level of attainment.

In the final transcript of this overview chapter, T delivers a level four result (line 10), once again omitting to present the result with a concomitant contextualising statement. Whilst all the other level four result meetings (transcripts 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, and 3.14, above) have been presented with a contextualising statement, the lack of one in this meeting can easily be linked to the similar situation during the level five results (transcripts 3.15 and 3.16, above), since in those situations outlining the national average level as an element in a goal characterisation was not applicable. Unlike previous meetings, however, the upshot stage of transcript 3.17 sees a goal proposal regarding the child's level of attainment based around a verbatim account of the set teacher's written report ("but she's saying is he capable of more?" – line 14). This is subsequently upgraded at line 17 with a reference to the actual grammatical tokens used ("exclamation mark question mark?").

Transcript 3.17 (Pt1/ t 02.1)

M=Mother; F=Father

1.	T:	-poor students out [° haven't you °
2.	M:	[uh hu(hh)gh hh=
3.	T:	= uh ha-ha (.) .hhhhhh o:kay::.
4.		(2.1)
5.	a→	ri:ght let's start with his maths,
6.	M:	yes:::
7.	b→ T:	okay >so he's in Mrs G's se[t,<
8.	M:	[°mm:hm°
9.		(0.8)
10.	c^1→T:	a:nd, (0.5) he's working at::: (.) uh – MIDLEVEL SAT FOUR
11.		(0.8)
12.		in the sats practice=
13.	M:	=°yes°
14.	c^3→T:	. hh but °she's saying° is he capable of more?,
15.		(0.8)
16.	M:	yhes:: [:: .h hh
17.	T:	[EXCLAmation mark question mar*k*?
18.	M:	yes .hhh hh (.) is always the answer to that one [.hhh
19. *	T:	[well I'm going to tell you
20.		all these things and you'll say ↑I ↓know and groan [probably.
21.	M:	[yeah (hh) eh

In overall terms transcript 3.17 follows the pattern established in other meetings with truncated reporting structures, in that T can be heard to engage in 'doing encouraging' by presenting goal proposals that urge further achievement from the child. The direct quotation from the set teacher's report, however, can be heard to work with a level of prior knowledge on the part of the parent's unseen in previous meetings.

Not only does the recounting of the actual grammatical tokens used by the set teacher make an appeal to a known-in-general level of exasperation with the child, T also includes a level of technical information regarding the mock SAT examination as the site of the result ("MIDLEVEL SAT FOUR in the sats practice" – lines 10 and 12) quite unlike that implicated by any contextualising statement. Although the impetus for this change in reporting structure format remains ambiguous (see Chapter 8 for further discussion on this topic), the manner in which this is done during this meeting indicates a different orientation by T to this particular set of parents. Equally, like transcript 3.13

(above), the non-teacher's turns-at-talk underline just how much of a collaborative accomplishment the parents' evening is.

3.3 Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to explore the overall structural organisation of the beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings. In effecting a shift from preamble talk to delivering an initial report on the child, the teacher attends to a basic reporting structure, which in its most comprehensive format moves through seven possible phases. These phases consist of the *preamble, agenda statement, focusing statement, reporting statement, contextualising statement, upshot stage*, and a *topic transition*.

In section 3.2.1, meetings in which every stage of the reporting structure was worked through were considered. T was routinely seen to initiate the report on the child, irrespective of what had previously gone on during the preamble talk, the movement into the reporting structure being facilitated by the stepwise transition of initiatory utterances prior to the agenda statement. This stepwise movement meant that T was not seen to move peremptorily into the main section of the reporting. Once the first curriculum topic to be discussed was introduced, stepwise transition allowed for a robust movement through each stage of the reporting structure, whilst keeping open potential turn transition points in the eventuality of expanded parental recipiency. As part of this stepwise movement, 'and'- and 'so'-prefaces frame subsequent stages of the talk as being sequentially implicative (cf. Heritage and Sorjonen, 1994). The implicative relationship this sets up between each stage of the reporting structure was particularly important in the case of the reporting and contextualising statements.

The sequential positioning of these statements sets up a *syllogism*, allowing a conclusion to be drawn from two given propositions that presents the child's result as the consequence of objective conditions. Having provided the parent(s) with enough information to imply the consequences of a level three result, T produces the upshot stage of the report delivery, which involves the presentation of a remedial goal proposal (often linked to an evaluative statement) that frames the result in terms of what the child can potentially do in order to achieve a better result. The use of goal proposals following the delivery of the results can also be heard as being something akin to a

'good news' exit from the report, since T subsequently effects a topic transition to the next part of the written report.

Section 3.2.2 outlined meetings in which the actual delivery order of the reporting structure was changed. For some meetings this involved the transposition of the reporting and contextualising statements. In the case of transcripts 3.8 and 3.9, this change in the delivery sequence was related to the "two stroke three" result being delivered to the parents. The less straightforward nature of this result meant that T attended to any potential parental difficulty with what it meant by altering the elements of the reporting structure. For transcript 3.10, the implication of the child as a participant leads to the reversal of the reporting and contextualising statements. Despite these changes the sequential implicativeness of the reporting structure was maintained, including the syllogistic contrast of the result and the national average. Equally, other elements of the reporting structure continued to be seen, managing both the participation status of T and the set teacher (via the implication of the written record and the set teacher as the source of the report), and characterising the work of the child as being within an ongoing trajectory (via the 'working at' formulation).

Further changes to the delivery sequence were seen in transcripts 3.11 and 3.12, although in both of these cases it was the contextualising statement and upshot stage that were transposed. As results that have achieved the requisite level four of the national average, these meetings highlighted the way in which the syllogistic import of the contextualising statement rested mainly on the contrast it provided with results below the national average. Removed from this context, the delivery of a contextualising statement could be heard as T providing the parents with all the information about the relevant aspects of the child's result, before moving on to the next stage of the report.

Finally, this change in emphasis deriving from the nature of the result being delivered lead to a consideration of other meetings in which the children concerned achieved results on or above the national average level. These meetings shared several aspects of the talk previously seen in meetings dealing with level three results, including the lexical and audible implication of the written record. A major difference could, however, be seen in the way the reporting structure was delivered with a truncated format that omitted either the focusing or contextualising statements. Whilst in the case

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of one meeting (transcript 3.13) the lack of focusing statement could be linked to T's role as the set teacher for the discussion topic (i.e. science), in other meetings the omission of this stage of the talk could be heard as an assumption of shared knowledge with the parents. The omission of the contextualising statement, on the other hand, can be seen in the same way as the level four results with the reversed reporting and contextualising statements, inasmuch as the specific utility of marking the contrast between the result and the national average in order to introduce a remedial goal proposal becomes less pertinent. Instead, T can be heard to 'do encouraging' during the upshot stage of the talk. Rather than being remedial, the goal proposals for these meetings urge further achievement by the children.

In the chapters that follow, various aspects of this overall reporting trajectory will be examined in more detail. Both chapters 4 and 5 look at the opening stages of the talk. Chapter 4 examines how the participants get into "a state of talk", whilst Chapter 5 investigates those meetings in which the written record is used as an interactional resource during the initial stages of the meeting. Chapter 6 focuses on the delivery of the reporting and contextualising statements, looking in particular at the role of syllogism in presenting the child's result. Finally, in chapters 7 and 8 I consider the provision of the upshot stage of the talk, with special reference to Maynard's (forthcoming) work on news deliveries. Chapter 7 will cover those results below the national average, whilst and Chapter 8 will examine those meetings dealing with results above the national average.

Chapter 4

Getting Into A State Of Talk

4.0 Introduction

Examining the first action of an example of talk-in-interaction provides an insight into just how any given sequence of talk can be co-operatively initiated. It also raises questions as to what impact the methods used to carry out this first action have upon both prior and subsequent conversational actions. Sacks highlights the way in which beginning sequences are carried out, not least because "it seems plain that some signaturing or typing of either a relationship or an interaction or both can be done there" (1992b: 205). This in turn leads to a consideration of how such relationships might be constituted at the start of an interaction, especially since this interactional work might "involve people in bringing an orientation to [the interactional relationship], such that they're starting off with that as a specific way of getting into the conversation" (Sacks, 1992b: 205). By looking at the 'machinery' involved in carrying out a beginning sequence, the way in which both the introduction of first topics, and overall presentation design of an interaction is carried out becomes clear. This is a particularly important issue, since as Sacks points out, "the one who introduces [first topic] can control how it gets developed, whereas for topics routinely, they are not 'introduced' but, e.g., affiliated to last topics" (1992b: 208). As the analysis below outlines, this has consequences for how the parties within the parent-teacher data adopt institutional task orientations and identities.

In focusing upon the beginning sequences of the interactions that make up this data, however, a problem arises with regard to exactly *what* has been transcribed. In this data, the teacher often went to the door of the classroom in which the interviews were taking place in order to invite parents into the room. This meant that on several occasions early in the talk, the participants to the meetings were away from where the tape recorder was positioned (cf. Chapter 1, above). Because the teacher operated the tape recording machinery during these interviews, certain sections of the talk have either been missed, or are inaudible, thereby denying us the opportunity to examine sequences relating to such pertinent sections of the talk as greetings and introductions.

Although this factor causes some difficulty, a positive point can be made with regard to the positioning of the extracts within the recorded data has been captured, since the question of sequential implicativeness on a specifically local level can be examined. Despite the possible ramifications of any unrecorded 'pre' business, an examination of

the specific temporal stage of the interviews (namely the point at which T switches on the tape recorder) allows us to engage with those aspects of the talk that constitute the prior sequential environment of both later, and more immediate, aspects of the interaction.

4.0.1 Overview of Chapter

The analysis of this chapter falls into two sections, which examine various aspects of the beginning sequences of the parents' evening meetings. It should be noted that this chapter does not include extracts from every parents' evening interview in the data corpus, despite the features outlined in this chapter being evident across all the data. The separation of extracts occurs because these other meetings are examined in the next chapter in terms of the audible manipulation of documents[1].

The first section in this chapter, section 4.1, looks at the *interactional features* that facilitate the development of a state of talk within the parents' evening meetings. Not only are the components that comprise the action of getting into a state of talk highlighted, the way in which these actions reflect upon the task orientation of the teacher is also described.

Section 4.2 examines those meetings in which *talk on topics unrelated to the report on the child* are introduced subsequent to the teacher producing her initiatory utterances. As well as the repeated utility of the initiatory sequence, institutional factors attended to by both sets of participants are also examined.

4.1 Getting Into A State Of Talk

In extract 4.1 (below) an initiatory utterance from T acts as the default action by which a *state of talk* can develop (marked with an arrow[2]). By marking a boundary between such pre-business which might have already taken place and the talk which is to come, T provides the legitimate source for the main section of the interaction, which will subsequently be based around the topic of the child[3]. The part played by the intonation

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[1] So that readers can judge for themselves the impact of the interactional features described in this chapter across the entire data corpus, they are also referenced in Chapter 5 (below).

[2] Note that following the outline provided in table 3.a (Chapter 3, above), the agenda statement in each extract will be marked a→. Single arrows will indicate other points of interest raised in the text.

[3] Whilst the child does subsequently become the topic of the talk, it should be remembered that this topic is constructed through the deployment of an institutional agenda and institutional identities of the participants, as opposed to an essentialist view of parents' evening as a social activity that will *necessarily* concern this topic.

of T's initiatory utterances in bringing about a specifically focused state of talk can also be heard.

Extract 4.1 (Pt1/ mi 13.1)

M=Mother; F=Father; S = Sibling

1.	T:	uh [ha ha ha,
2.	M:	[uh ha(hh)
3.		(0.3)
4.	T:	well it's alright I sound like a thick northerner on em [so =
5.	M:	[uh ha(hh)
6.	T:	= I wouldn't worry [.hhh
7.	M:	[and I'm a right cockney:
8.	T:	uh ha ha ha .hhh
9.	M:	(.hhhh) .hha
10. →	T:	.hhh ↑ri(h)::ght (.) erm::
11.		(0.5)
12. a→		↑Maths:

The prior sequential background of this extract involves alignment between T and M[4], gained through both joint laughter and self-deprecatory comments based on how the participants think they sound on tape[5]. The initiatory utterance that marks the end of this preamble talk and the start of the parents' evening meeting proper can be heard at line 10, with the marked upward shift in intonation seen in the production of "↑ri(h)::ght" acting to 'bracket off' the previous talk from that which is to come. Equally, the shift into higher pitch of "↑ri(h)::ght" works to mark the utterance as sounding 'brighter' than the surrounding talk, thereby indicating an utterance that is 'of interest' to the parents and therefore warrants their attention.

Such boundary-marking work is similar to that outlined by Mehan (1979) in terms of the organisational features of classroom lessons. As Mehan points out,

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[4] It is interesting to note that T and M are the sole participants in this stage of the talk, despite the fact that F is also present. One aspect of this orientation towards the mother could be found in Silverman's (1987) assertion that in professional/lay situations based around the well being of a child (i.e. medical consultations, school meetings etc), a higher level of competence tend to be ascribed by the professionals to mothers. Equally, mothers also tend to single themselves out as the addresses in such situations, something that is seemingly reflected in the parents' evening data (cf. extracts 3.5, 3.6, 3.9, 3.15, and 3.17 in Chapter 3, above). See also Strong (1979) on paediatric clinics.

[5] During the exchange of assessments heard here, note how M responds to T's self-deprecatory comment with one of her own. This is in line with Pomerantz's (1984a) work on agreeing and disagreeing with assessments.

"[I]nteraction is segmented, and to some extent controlled, by participants' systematically changing arrays of postural configurations. Proxemic shifts, tempo changes, and unique lexical entries are all structurally important".

(1979: 79)

Added to this, other aspects relating to the beginning of sequences of talk can be seen to be relevant, especially with regard to the movement from 'everyday' to institutional talk. Turner (1972), in his examination of the procedural relevance of 'beginning' therapy talk sessions, highlights the issue of there being "an authorized starter" (393). It is the role of this individual to provide the focus for the activity orientation of starting the talk 'proper'. Given that the participants to the talk, by virtue of their presence at the parents' evening meeting, are "oriented to some activity as providing the relevance of the occasion" (Turner, 1972: 393), the role of the teacher has an impact in this regard. That it is T who initiates the reporting structure indicates that an already developed sense of the "categorical partitioning" (ibid: 394) of roles amongst the interactants provides for who shall adopt the role of authorised starter. Furthermore, it is by the same distribution of rights that "participants can come to see what constitutes a "beginning", or that a "beginning" has been achieved" (ibid: 294). Speaking as the institutional representative within a professional-lay interaction, T can be heard to mark the start of the meeting proper via both her conversational strategies, and by dint of parental recognition of her rights to do so.

Having introduced the boundary between the preamble talk and the meeting proper, T's caution in introducing a change in topic in this way is also evident. A laughter particle can be heard within the production of "↑ri(h)::ght" (line 10), acknowledging M's laughter token at line 9, in line with the laughter implicative utterances both parties have provided across lines 1 to 9. Both the elongation within "right", as well as the inbreath prior to it at the beginning of line 10, allow T to monitor for any further talk from M/F, whilst the micropause (middle of line 10) acts to indicate a stepwise movement into the next stage of the talk, rather than anything more direct. Added to this, the production of the token, "erm::" at the end of line 10 works to retain the floor by allowing T to provide an utterance without formulating any lexically specific speech action. This also facilitates the cautious shift from one topic to another, since it delays this topical movement without making it accountable, as perhaps a pause of any appreciable

duration might have done. T can therefore be seen to attend to the problems that might arise if she is heard to peremptorily move into a reporting, highlighting Drew and Heritage's (1992) point that "the professional participants in institutional interactions design their talk so as to maintain a cautiousness...with respect to their co-participants" (1992: 47). Combined with the elongation of the utterance and the micropause immediately subsequent to its formulation, T can be heard to make a cautious movement out of one section of the talk and into another. Equally, the combination of these features work to make the transition less abrupt.

The final aspect of T's initiatory utterances once again relates to their intonational contour, although unlike the 'brighter' production of "↑ri(h)::ght", it is the impact of an intonational shift *between* utterances which is at issue. By examining the extract in terms of a more schematic display, a pattern emerges with regard to the positioning of differently intoned utterances:

<div align="center">

Preamble talk
↓
Pause
(inbreath – beginning of line 10)
↓
Upward intoned utterance
("↑ri(h)::ght")
↓
Pause
(micropause)
↓
Evenly intoned utterance
("erm::")

</div>
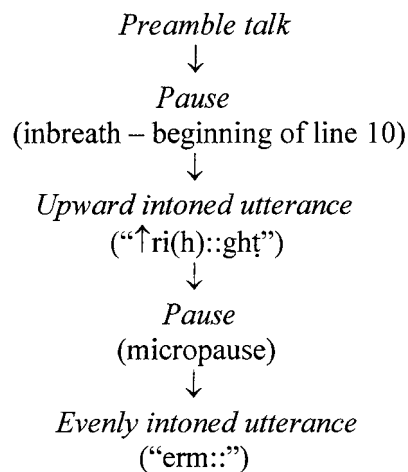
What can begin to be seen here is the way in which the prosodic shape of an utterance is linked to its sequential position within a specific interactional environment. Coming as it does at a point in the talk which marks the shift from a less formal conversational environment to a more official, institutionally focused one, the upward intonational contour of "↑ri(h)::ght" (indicated as *Upward intoned utterance* above) acts as an indication of both a transitional moment within the talk, and a forecast of further talk to come. The *evenly intoned utterance*, as the next positioned action, can be heard to indicate the next stage in the sequence, which, whilst not being the agenda statement itself, is one step closer to starting the talk 'proper'. As two sides of the same

<div align="center">101</div>

transitional moment, the movement from a higher to a lower intonation mirrors the topical movement T is attempting to bring about.

The opening stages of extract 4.2 (below) is similar to the previous extract, in that it involves T and M discussing the fact that tape recording of the interviews is taking place[6]. Unlike extract 4.1, however, T's initiatory work involves the production of *two* fully formed utterances ("o:kay::."-line 3, and "ri:ght"-line 5):

Extract 4.2 (Pt1/ t 02.1)

M=Mother; F=Father

1.	T:	-poor students out [° haven't you °
2.	M:	[uh hu(hh)gh hh=
3. →	T:	= uh ha-ha (.) .hhhhhh o:kay::.
4.		(2.1)
5. a→		ri:ght let's start with his maths,
6.	M:	yes:::

The utilisation of a two stage initiatory sequence in this extract not only mirrors the bracketing work seen in extract 4.1 (including the caution indicative inbreath prior to the initiatory utterance at line 3), it also provides a stronger case for the forecasting work that T is attempting to carrying out at this point in the talk. Indeed, despite a long 2.1-second pause subsequent to her initiatory "o:kay::." at line 3, T retains the floor, allowing her to introduce an agenda statement at line 5.

This stepwise approach to getting into a state of talk is similar to those highlighted by Mehan, who points out that "the reflexive structures that tie interactional sequences together are wide-ranging and not limited to adjacently occurring utterances" (1979: 76). This non-adjacency means that initiation acts often find completion at a point several turns distant. Although Mehan's work deals with "initiation-reply-evaluation acts" (ibid) between teachers and students, the point he raises can equally be applied to

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[6] The repeated occurrence of laughter implicative talk, both in this extract and the previous one, is as an indication of the work that humour does in marking and managing potentially delicate matters. Indeed, the question of tape recording the interviews opens up the possibility of interactional difficulties even before the potentially difficult issue of the child's results has been raised. It is important to remember, however, Silverman's (1997a) point that the question of what is deemed a 'difficult' topic should not depend "on the analyst's assumption that certain situations are intrinsically 'embarrassing' (or 'delicate')" (Silverman, 1997a: 77), since this would leave us in a position of having to "take it on trust that this is how the participants are orienting to the context" (ibid).

Having said this, the laughter implicative talk also subtly indicates that other parties will be listening to T just as much as they will listen to the parents, thereby indicating that she is just as much a 'target' of the tape recorder as they are (see footnotes 8 and 12, below).

'action initiation/forecast → action completion' sequences carried out by same speaker. In the case of extract 4.2, T retains the floor during the initiatory sequence by forecasting her own further talk:

Forecast of further action from same speaker
("o:kay::.")
↓
Pause
(2.1 seconds)
↓
Completion of projected action (agenda statement)
("ri:ght let's start with his maths,")
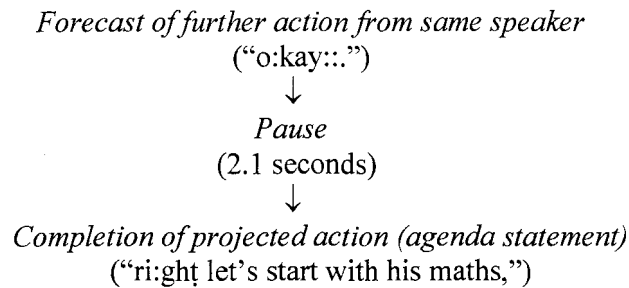
This method of both forecasting and delaying a conversational action is described in a paper by Schegloff (1980) as *action projection*, a turn format that involves two main features:

"A speaker projects the occurrence of some type of turn or action by mentioning either what he or she will do...or what will be involved for the recipient."

"Second, the projected turn or action does not occur in the same talk unit but is replaced there..."

(1980: 107)

What is the utility of this type of 'forward projecting' turn format? Schegloff expands upon the term 'action projections' to posit that there exists a class of actions that can be deemed "preliminaries to preliminaries" (1980: 116), which serve to exempt what directly follows them as being treated as "produced in its own right" (ibid). Within the context of the parents' evening meetings, T can be heard to be getting "the projected action's relevance into the conversation before the action itself and before the action is adequately prepared" (ibid), thereby setting up any subsequent movement into a topic specific utterance. More specifically, T can be heard to both focus the attention of the conversation on the shift towards talk on the child, and forecast that she is preparing to initiate further discussion on this topic, without necessarily being fully prepared in

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terms of sorting her documents or finding the requisite entry relating to the curriculum topic she wishes to talk about[7].

For the final extract in this section (extract 4.3, below), a prior sequential environment that draws explicit attention to the tape recording of the interviews is once again evident[8]. Examination of this short sequence highlights the way in which T's work to get into a state of talk goes hand in hand with the very specific work the participants do in order to constitute their relationships to each other within the parents' evening interview. This is set against a further elongation of the initiatory sequence, with T producing three initiatory utterances across lines 6 to 10 that emphasise the precise intonational work that is being carried out.

Extract 4.3 (Pt1/1 01.1)

M = Mother

1.	T:	° yeah °
2.		(1.2)
3.		°.hh ° we can be the guinea pigs (.) see if it works,
4.		(.)
5.	M:	ye° s °
6. →	T:	.hh r:(hh)ight h .h
7.		(2.1)
8. →		° ho:kay °
9.		(7.9)
10. →		ri:ght,
11.		(0.6)
12. a→		>if: we: ,< (0.7) talk about her maths: first

The utterance "°yeah°" at line 1, produced at a quieter volume than the surrounding talk and hearably 'self-addressed', attends to an unheard previous action by T, namely that of switching on the recording device itself. Similarities can be heard between this action and the role of the telephone ring in the caller/called sequence outlined by Sacks (1992b; see also Schegloff, 1972; 1979; 1986). In both situations these actions act as

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[7] The impact of the written record upon the interaction, especially in terms of the audible indication of document manipulation, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

[8] In terms of the order the meetings were carried out on the evening in question (rather than the order they are presented here), Extract 4.3 was the first interview in the corpus. This fact gives particular relevance to the discussion on the tape recording of the interviews.
Once again, the focus of this talk subtly indicates that other parties will be listening to T just as much as they will listen to the parent, thereby indicating that she (T) is just as much a 'target' of the tape recorder (see footnote 6, above, and 12, below).

turns in themselves, but *not* as examples of talk-in-interaction. The ringing of the telephone acts as the summons to which the answerer must make reference through the act of picking up the receiver, whilst the turning on of the tape recorder can be attended to through T's initiatory actions.

There are differences between the two actions, however, in that T can be said to be responding to a self-initiated turn, rather than responding to 'external' stimuli[9]. But certain similarities also apply, since in both instances attending to a prior non-talk action begins to set up specific interactional roles for the various participants. In Sacks' example, by picking up the receiver, the individual responding to the summons of the telephone ring takes on the default role of '*answerer*'[10], in contrast to the person making the call, who by dint of making the call becomes '*caller*'. Despite having been asked her permission for the recording to go ahead, in the parents' evening example M has no direct input regarding the operation of the recording machinery itself, and so must wait for T to carry this action out. In this way, the operation of the tape recording equipment facilitates the forward progression of the talk. For T, starting the tape recorder positions her as the individual responsible for initiating the interaction 'proper', since this action is hearable as a further step within the overall trajectory of the interview[11]. The active nature of how T sets up her role can therefore be set against the essentially *re*active position that M adopts[12].

As in the previous extracts, T's initiatory utterances act to 'bracket off' this prior sequential environment. Once again, this bracketing work can be said to be locally important to the talk, bearing in mind the potential difficulties that recording the

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[9] The self-initiation aspect of both this turn-at-talk, and the switching on of the tape recorder, is purely in terms of T carrying out a conversational action of her own volition. That the presence of the tape recorder is due to the 'external' influence of the researcher is explored below.

[10] But not necessarily that of '*called*' (cf. Sacks, 1992b: 543-544, and Schegloff, 1986).

[11] The operation of the tape recorder cannot be heard as the *first* action within the overall trajectory of the talk, since we can assume (as is the case in all the extracts) the existence of unrecorded preamble talk between T and M pertaining to greetings sequences and permission to tape record the interviews.

[12] The fact of having started the tape recorder continues to be emphasised by T at line 3, where she states, "we can be the guinea pigs (.) see if it works". Not only does this statement explicitly draw attention to the presence of the now operational tape recorder, thereby accounting for any delay as T operated the device, but it also places T and M in a specific relation to the fact of their being recorded. On T's part, the statement acts to distance her from the tape-recording itself, and therefore any of its possible ramifications, by highlighting that she herself is unsure as to the machinery's operation ("see if it works"). This implies the 'external' nature of the tape-recording as something with which T has no direct link (i.e. it is the researcher, and not T, who is carrying out the recording). As a corollary to this, by stating "we can be the guinea pigs", T portrays the situation as one in which both interactional parties can be cast as those being examined, rather than claiming any alignment with those doing the examining. Thus, T has cautiously introduced the fact of the recording whilst also attempting to minimise any adverse affects it might have upon the overall running of the interview.

interviews might engender. In terms of overall intonational contour, T's initiatory statement "r:(hh)ight" (line 6) follows the pattern established during extract 4.1, in that it marks a boundary within the talk. The internal downward contour of this utterance can be regarded in the same light as the 'high → low' intonational movement *between* utterances that indicated the shift from candidate laughable preamble talk to 'serious' reporting in extract 4.1[13]. Unlike the more direct movement from preamble talk to reporting structure seen in the previous two extracts, however, T's next turn-at-talk does not involve the production of an agenda statement, but the second initiation utterance "°ho:kay°" (line 8).

Despite this change in sequential background, at line 10 the statement "ri:ght," has an 'up → down' intonational contour similar to the utterances at lines 6 and 8. It is also produced at a louder volume than T's previous turn. Whilst this means that "ri:ght," does the same work in both forecasting further talk from T and bracketing off what has gone before, when set against the length of the delay at line 9[14] it can also be heard as the beginning of an even stronger reassertion of the 'forecast of further action from same speaker → completion of projected action' sequence than was heard at line 8. Making such a reassertion, rather than relying upon the now non-adjacent build-up sequence at lines 6 to 8, is indicative of T's caution in starting this reporting format, since to move peremptorily into any next stage of the talk could open up the possibility of interactional difficulty between the interactants.

4.1.1 Summary

Two areas have been highlighted in this analysis of the opening sequences of the parents' evening meetings: the actual mechanics of how T gets into a state of talk, and the way in which this conversational action reflects upon T's task orientation. The

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[13] Due to the examination of the prosodic nature of utterance production, efforts have been taken to distinguish various intonational shapes within the transcripts. The transcription notation used is based upon the adaptation of Jefferson outlined in Heritage (1984) and Gardner (1997), and is applied as follows:

"Combinations of stress and prolongation markers indicate intonation contours. If the underscore occurs on a letter before a colon, it 'punches up' the letter; i.e. indicates an 'up → down' contour. If the underscore occurs on a colon after a letter, it 'punches up' the colon; i.e. indicates a 'down → up' contour."   (Heritage, 1984: 313)
"If the contour of a syllable [only] rises, the last symbol of the syllable is underlined..."
(Gardner, 1997:153)

[14] The 7.9-second pause at line 9 can be heard as T taking time to find the requisite documents relating to the child's report, thereby necessitating a second initiation utterance "ri:ght," at line 10. With no audible indications that this is the case, however, this must remain supposition (see Chapter 5 for more details of talking written documents into reality).

general action of getting into a state of talk has been seen to consist of several components, the first of which involves the production of a brighter, 'attention grabbing' initial utterance marking the boundary between the preamble talk and the start of the parents' evening meeting 'proper'. Having marked this boundary, T's level of caution is displayed in her attempts *not* to appear to peremptorily move into the reporting structure. Effecting a stepwise transition into the reporting structure facilitates this.

Linked to these factors is the impact of both intra-turn and inter-turn intonational contours during the talk. A shift from 'high → low' intonation mirrors the topical movement T is attempting to carry out, and as such can be heard to work in relationship with both the prior sequential environment and the forthcoming talk. In marking the transition from a less 'formal' interactional environment to a more institutionally focused one, this intonational movement allows T to reference elements of the preamble talk (for all three extracts so far this has involved the reflection of laughter implicative talk), whilst forecasting further talk from herself. This forecasting works in terms of both a non-adjacent reflexive structure, and action projection.

In the final extract of this section, all of these elements were heard to act in conjunction with the specific work done by T to downgrade the 'seriousness' of a potentially problematic prior sequential matter, namely that the tape recording of interviews is taking place. Changes in the production of the initiatory sequence indicate the flexibility of T's approach to getting into a state of talk, with an extended 'right → ok → right' being utilised. Equally, this change in initiatory format highlights the latitude T has, since it allows her to account for different interactional environments initiated by a discussion of the tape recording of the meetings.

4.2 Side Sequences And Restarted Initiations

The initiatory sequences looked at so far during this chapter have involved a relatively straightforward format in terms of the prior sequential environment against which they set. Despite slight differences in the details of each extract, each meeting has been marked by a movement from generalised preamble talk, involving discussion of various aspects of the tape recording of the interviews, to an initiation of the reporting structure 'proper', culminating (for the purposes of this chapter's analysis at least) in the production of an agenda statement.

In this next section, meetings in which the prior sequential environment involves the discussion of different potentially accountable topics, such as the late running of the interviews, or the non-attendance of a parent to a previous parents' evening meeting, will be examined. Equally importantly, discussion of these topics involves lengthy sequences that take place *after* T has produced a set of initiatory utterances similar to those seen above. T can be heard to reintroduce subsequent initiatory elements, and thus effect the movement into the reporting structure, despite the impact of these events.

In extract 4.4 (below) T initially introduces an initiatory statement at line 2. A short tangential sequence can then be heard, based around T's question, "am I running behind a lot?" at line 4. When no recipiency is forthcoming from the parents, T appears to provide her own answer at line 6, which in turn is followed by a second initiatory sequence with an 'okay → right' format.

Extract 4.4 (Pt1/ r 04.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child

1.	T:	-for his research .hhhh
2.	→	O:kay
3.		(0.8)
4.		am I running behind a lot?
5.		(1.5)
6.	→	° probably ° .hhh ° oka:y °
7.		(0.8)
8.	→	Right
9.		(0.5)
10.	a→	we'll start with his maths, .h [hh-
11.	M:	[mm:hmm

The initial fragment of the talk at line 1, captured as the tape recording begins, is similar to the previous extracts, in that it concerns the fact of the recording taking place. The subsequent transition from this talk to a more focused task orientation is marked by an inbreath and initiatory utterance ("O:kay" at line 2). This follows the same structural pattern as that outlined in the previous extracts (*Preamble talk → inbreath → initiatory utterance*). The similarities continue with the intonational contour of "O:kay", since its initial emphasis and rising intonation mark the production of the utterance as hearably 'bright' in much the same way as previous extracts.

Despite the similarity of "O:kay" to previous initiations, neither an 'okay → right' sequence, nor a subsequent initiatory statement, are realised. There follows instead the statement "am I running behind a lot?" at line 4, which attends to T's concern over any accountable late running of the parent-teacher interviews. Having opened up the opportunity to allow the parents to answer her question and subsequently failed to gain any recipiency, T recasts the question as self-addressed. This provides a second pair part which both completes the question-answer sequence, as well as making the lack of response non-accountable on the part of the parents[15].

In overall terms, extract 4.4 highlights the way in which the stepwise movement of the 'okay → right' transitional sequence is utilised in the face of parental non-recipiency, since it allows for the movement away from the site of any possible interactional difficulties. Once T's own answer to the question at line 4 has recast the entire question-answer sequence as self-addressed, and the parental lack of response as being non-accountable, the 'okay → right' format provides a measured method of onward progression which serves to further normalise and downgrade the importance of the previous conversational actions. Part of this normalising action can be linked to the fact that use of this format also allows for the institutional task orientation of reporting on the child to be reasserted, thereby providing a warrant for T to continue the talk *and* influence the topic management of the interaction.

A comparable pattern of aborted initiatory sequences and non-reporting focused talk is also evident in extract 4.5 (below). But whilst the movement away from such talk is carried out by the repeated utilisation of the initiatory sequence, it can also seen how this work is linked to both T *and* M's efforts to provide a non-accountable version of potentially accountable past events.

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[15] Although T downgrades any lack of response by providing her own answer ("°probably°" at line 6), changing topic, and recasting the question as self-addressed, the utterance itself can also be seen in terms of Pomerantz's assertion that "one way of coparticipating with a co-conversant who has just proffered an assessment is by proffering a second assessment" (1984a: 59). The nature of this co-participation has a direct impact upon the creation of social solidarity between T and M/F, in that the initial question, as made available to an overhearing audience, invites an agreement dispreferred second assessment. A possible response by M/F, subsequent to what amounts to a self-deprecation by T, could take the form of 'No, not by much/No, that's alright', since as Pomerantz points out "when conversants disagree with prior self-deprecations, they show support of their co-conversants" (1984a: 81).

Extract 4.5 (Pt1/ s 11.1)

M = Mother

1.	T:	- ↑ you=
2.	M:	= as(h)alright
3.		(.)
4. →	T:	ri̲:(h)gh::t
5.		(0.7)
6. →		° okay °
7.		(1.3)
8.		I didn't (°d°)et to see you last time did I?
9.	M:	no I didn't u-=
10.	T:	=uh Ha ha ha
11.	M:	° I don't ° know what happened, I forgot all about it ° well it- ° (.)
12.		it ma [de (me too late)
13.	T:	[she y'know what she's li::ke, (.) she didn't bring the thing home
14.		I don't think, .hhh
15.		(.)
16. →		ERM::,
17.		(2.0)
18. →		° uri̲:ght̲ °
19.		(2.5)
20. →		° okay ° ((even quieter than previous utterance))
21.		(3.4)
22. a→		>Right̲ <(.) we'll start having a look at ma°ths::: °
23.	M:	° mm °

Although the short exchange prior to the first initiatory sequence involves a statement from T that is receipted by M (lines 1-2), not enough of their talk was captured to allow for any detailed analysis. Irrespective of the details of this prior talk, after a micropause at line 3 T starts an initiatory sequence, which has both a 'right → okay' format and a 'high → low' inter-utterance intonational contour. This format can be compared to earlier trajectories, although in this case the 'right' and 'okay' elements of the progression are transposed. As is the case in the previous extracts, this early two-stage sequence can be heard to both 'bracket off' the preamble talk, as well as forecast the institutional task orientation of reporting to come.

T, however, raises an accountable point at line 8 regarding M's non-appearance at a previous meeting, although she immediately negates the seriousness of what could be

construed as an accusation by producing laughter tokens in overlap with M's account (line 10). These laughter tokens are hearable as being adjacent to T's prior utterance, rather than in response to the details of M's talk, since the point of overlap occurs early in M's utterance. Despite this, M continues with her account, which is constructed in such a way as to indicate that any 'blame' for the prior non-attendance resides with her. At lines 13 to 14 T once again interjects in overlap with M's talk, producing a non-accountable version of the events that lead to M's prior non-attendance. As with the previous laughter tokens, T's utterance in overlap downgrades the seriousness of the topic being discussed, although the content of T's talk also acts to upgrade this stance by shifting the aspects of blame onto the non-present child[16].

Linked to this work is the way in which T, by both immediately recasting her candidate accusatory question, and shifting whatever 'blame' might be involved away from the parent, can be heard to already be mindful of proceeding cautiously within the interaction. The main aspect of this relates to how T uses the non-present child to construct not only a non-accountable parent, but also a parent-teacher axis that is hearably talking *about* the child. The child has been created as a social actor responsible for certain aspects of relevant behaviour, with the parent not being seen as a proxy for the child, but as someone qualified to talk about the child.

Along with this cautious work regarding non-accountability, T also constructs an extended initiatory sequence comprising several 'extra' elements as a way of reasserting the transition into the reporting proper. As in previous extracts, the volume change evident in the production of the utterance "ERM" at line 16 marks it as brighter than the preceding talk, and therefore of interest to the parent. T's next two turns-at-talk, however, the initiatory utterances "°uri:ght°" (line 18) and "°°okay°°" (line 20), are produced at progressively lower volume. This gradual reduction in production volume marks these utterances as being of secondary importance to the overall trajectory of the talk.

The need to highlight the lesser status of these utterances can be found in the way use of the initiatory statements implies a temporally relevant (i.e. coming sooner rather than later) further action by the current speaker. An attempt to retain the floor is therefore

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[16] In doing so, T can also be heard to set up a specific version of the child based upon a level of shared knowledge with M (i.e. 'You know what she's like'). In taking this stance, T can also be heard to indicate that she understands both the child *and* her mother's perceptions.

balanced against the need to avoid being heard as accountable when a projected action fails to come about. Equally important is the fact that this potential accountability can be set against both the initiation sequence from line 16 onwards, and the overall delay caused by the initial 'right → okay' sequence and the subsequent non-report focused talk.

Similar work is done in extract 4.6 (below) in terms of moving away from a potentially problematic sequence of talk. In this instance, the talk relates to a potentially accountable action by T, in that it addresses concerns that she (T) might be over-running the timetable for the interviews. Once again, both T *and* M provide a non-accountable version of potentially accountable past events. Discussion of these events can be linked to the way the stepwise initiatory sequence allows for a cautious movement away from such talk.

Extract 4.6 (Pt1/ 1 10.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

1.	T:	.hhh ohh:
2.		(1.3)
3.	M:	° thanks ° =
4. →	T:	= sorry about this
5.		(0.5)
6. →		.hh behind ↑as usual.
7.		(0.7)
8. →	M:	you're not ° too bad (you' re [finish) °
9.	T:	[I'M Not too bad > I've got- <
10. →		° it's terrible ° I was about seventeen minutes behind and > ° I was ° <
11.		(1.3)
12. →		but somebody didn't turn up hhh [hu hh hu =
13.	M:	[> huhuhuu <
14.	T:	= (hca-) so:: .hhh (.) ri:ght
15.		(4.3)
16.	T:	er::m: .hh
17.		(5.4)
18.		(tsk) .hh ° okay.°
19.		(1.2)
20. a+b→		ri::ght ↑m::aths:: ((said gently)) (.) °> i- she in Mrs G's set?, <°

As in the case of extract 4.5 (above) with the topic of the parents' non-attendance at a previous parents' evening, the fact that T can initiate a topic of conversation that is not

directly relevant to the stated matter in hand (i.e. the reporting of parents' evening) is dependant upon the way in which M treats the topic as important and relevant. With T being able to divert from the trajectory of the parents' evening in such a manner, M's treatment of this state of affairs as unproblematic goes some way towards highlighting the "relationship between institutional roles and tasks, on the one hand, and discursive rights and obligations, on the other" (Heritage, 1997: 176).

Subsequent to the early exchange across lines 1 to 3, T's topic initiatory utterance at line 4 (formulated as an apology for over-running) latches to M's prior recipiency. This signals that T has heard the minimal level of recipiency on the part of M, in response to an action that does not necessarily call for any response[17], as indicating a favourable interactional environment. After providing at line 6 a statement which acts as a form of upgrade to the apology (".hh behind ↑as usual." line 6), M makes a reply.

The importance of the utterance at line 6 does not rest solely on its function as an upgrade of the prior apology, however, as can be seen when examining the way in which it provides a self-deprecatory assessment of T. As Pomerantz (1984a) points out in her work on the making of assessments, a downgrade is recurrently relevant in second position to a self-deprecation, unlike the making of other assessments, where agreement and upgrade is often expectedly due. By providing a statement that is hearable as a self-deprecation, T sets up a favourable environment by which to describe the late running of the interviews as a laughable matter, consequently downgrading its importance. Equally important is the way this environment allows M to join in with the laughter, providing for a two-fold level of alignment between the interactional parties based first on the imperative to disagree with the self-deprecation, and secondly on the implications of joint laughter.

Despite the tangential nature of the talk across lines 6 to 13, at least in terms of initiating the report on the child, the preamble in no way marks a point of difficulty for T in conducting the ongoing course of the interaction. The major utility of the "okay →

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[17] Extract 4.6 starts at the point at which T turns on the tape recorder. This being the case, it is interesting to note that her first utterance subsequent to doing this, ".hhh ohh:" at line 1, can be heard as a change of state token. In other situations such a token could be used as a 'newsmark', indicating that the speaker was unaware as to the details/import of a statement that had just been presented. In this situation, however, the token is hearably directed towards an action, or as proves to be the case, a non-action by T herself, regarding a document she has forgotten to hand over to the parent. This becomes clear with the subsequent receipt token from M at line 3.

right/ right → okay" sequence at this point can be found in the way in which it allows T to refocus the talk upon the reporting and assessment agenda. Even in the case of extended prior recipiency by a parent, as is evident in this extract, the initiation format leading to the agenda statement, followed by non-response in the next possible TTP, can still be returned to by T, thereby allowing her to move on to the next stage of the talk.

The final extract in this section, extract 4.7 (below), starts with T's initiatory statement "°okay:°" (line 1), which is similar in formulation to utterances heard at the very beginning of the previous extracts. Unlike previous extracts, however, an attempt is made by M to take up what could be heard as a potential TTP (line 3).

Extract 4.7 (Pt1/ n 08.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

1.	T:	.hh ° okay: °
2.		(1.8)
3. →	M:	(so u-) ow's he been progressing
4.		(0.5)
5.	T:	↑ alri:ght, [↑ yeah:
6.	M:	°a[s he?°
7.		(0.6)
8. a→	T:	↑yeah, (.) > let's have a look- ° that's ° his maths. <

Whilst the warrant for M's turn-at-talk at line 3 can be located in the length of the pause at line 2, such pauses in other extracts have not been oriented to as potential turn transition points (PTTP). This is not to say that for extract 4.7 M's turn-at-talk is wholly unexpected. Indeed, there are certain aspects of T's prior utterance ("°okay:°" - line 1), in particular the lower production volume and even intonation, which *could* be hearable as, if not a warrant for further talk from T, then not a strong indication that M *should not* start her own talk.

Compared to previous extracts in this way, extract 4.7 throws into sharp relief the means by which topic initiation and the rights to being either a producer or receiver of 'first topic' are locally constructed. Whilst the work of Heath (1992) indicates how the silence of the parent(s) acts to preserve the asymmetries of the professional and lay

participants in terms of the management of the trajectory of the talk[18], in extract 4.7 evidence of this asymmetry can in no way be taken as either monolithic or assumed on the part of either the interactants (who have not treated it as such) or the 'overhearing' researcher. Indeed, in marking a digression from the previously noted pattern of interactional rights and responsibilities attended to by the respective professional and lay roles of teacher and parent, extract 4.7 draws attention to institutionality as a locally constructed set of relevancies. Parental non-recipiency during the previous extracts should not be heard as 'silence' based upon notional rights and obligations attached to the roles of 'teachers' and 'parents', but as a locally relevant conversational strategy by which M/F defer to T's attempts to mark the shift from preamble talk to reporting.

That it is M, rather than T, who initiates the talk about the child's progress at line 3 also allows us to distinguish between the various types of tangential talk that can be introduced by the different sets of participants. For T, speaking as the institutional representative, any supplemental talk not directly related to the recounting of the child's result focuses upon what can broadly be categorised as 'procedural' matters. In the case of extract 4.4 (above) for example, these procedural concerns echoed those already raised during extracts without any 'tangential' sequences, namely the fact tape recording of the interviews was taking place. Other procedural matters included concerns that the meetings were running behind schedule (see extracts 4.4 and 4.6, above), whilst extract 4.5 (above) involved a discussion relating to parental non-attendance at a previous meeting.

In extract 4.7, on the other hand, M focuses immediately upon the more directly pertinent matters of the child's progress. Her intervention, however, whilst not accountable in terms of 'everyday' conversational forms, highlights the impact of the institutional task orientation of parents' evening on both sets of participants. This is typified by the way M's attempt to find out her child's level of academic attainment, "(so u-) ow's he been progressing" (line 3), reflects the context-sensitivity of descriptive terms. As Drew and Heritage point out, "speakers select descriptive terms which are fitted to their roles within an institutional setting" (1992: 30), which in the case of M's utterance pertains to the lexical choice she employs in asking her question of T. This means that rather than producing a more 'everyday' question, such as "how is he

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[18] Note that Heath (1992) is particularly concerned with the silence of patients during consultations at certain points in the interview, for example after diagnosis.

doing?", M's enquiry as to how the child is "progressing" hearably makes use of institutional categories and language.

Although by asking an early question M hearably orients to the category of 'interested/concerned parent' (which has tacitly positive ramifications in terms of alignment), her intervention poses certain interactional difficulties. Specifically, her query necessarily makes a response from T relevant, but at point of the talk in which T has not yet been able to utilise the cautious production format heard during the previous extracts. In short, T has been left in a position in which she must hearably make a personal assessment of the child ("alright yeah" – line 5) that, without the benefit of highlighting her institutional role of 'deliverer' of the report, she might subsequently be held responsible. The specific utility of the stepwise 'right → okay/okay → right' initiatory sequence can therefore be seen, since in allowing T to 'bracket off' any prior activity and signal that further talk is due from her, it sets up the movement into both an institutional agenda, and the interactional identities associated with it.

4.2.1 Summary

Despite the differences in both topic and source of the preamble talk evident in the extracts of this section, T's utilisation of the stepwise transitional sequence allows her to 're-focus' the trajectory of the meeting by linking the talk back into the institutional agenda of delivering the report on the child. This non-report focused talk can to some extent be viewed as tangential, due mainly to the work that subsequent turns-at-talk carry out in reorienting the participants to the institutional agenda, despite T having already produced initiatory utterances.

Both the teacher and, to a lesser extent, the parents can be heard to mitigate the potential disruption of the tangential sequence. Added to this, both parties work to downgrade any potentially accountable elements within the preamble talk. Indeed, the early intervention by M in Extract 4.7 focuses attention on the locally attended to task both the participants are engaged in, rather than treating them, in Garfinkel's (1967) terms, as 'cultural dopes'.

In terms of topic initiation, the locally constructed rights to being either a producer or receiver of 'first topic' are evident, and as such reinforce how these categories should not be unproblematically applied based purely on any loosely defined institutional role

(i.e. 'teacher' or 'parent') potentially attended to by the interactants. Bearing this mind, both sets of participants attend to the influence of institutional factors, not only with regard to their interactional concerns and use of language, but also with regard to their joint orientation to the overall agenda of delivering the child's report.

4.3 Conclusion

Simply put, an initial 'puzzle' to be solved during any introductory sequence of talk is that of how to 'get started'. Not only do the roles of the speakers have to be agreed upon and understood, but certain corollary details also have to be worked with, such as the nature of the first topic and which speaker has the stronger claim to introduce it. Within the telephone-call openings analysed by Sacks these issues are dealt with during the earliest stages of the interaction, since one of the basic rules of these conversational sequences can be heard to be "*Answerer speaks first*" (1992b: 542). The basis for this rule can be found in the way the ringing of the telephone acts as the callers initial action, which means that subsequent to the answerer speaking first (generally with a greeting), it is then open for the caller to indicate the first topic (i.e. the reason for the call). Within a very short period of time, therefore, not only are the opening roles of the speakers constructed (caller-called), but the nature and the delivery of the first topic are also initiated.

The caller-called sequence is an elegant example of the way in which the issues surrounding the initiatory sequences of conversations can be resolved. It could be said that what is going on at this point is the working through of various methods employed by both interactional parties to facilitate what can be called "a state of talk" (Sacks, 1992b: 68). Although during his analysis Sacks looks at how introductions are made between two individuals who can be classed as 'strangers', he raises the point that what such sequences do is place two parties into a state of talk "which has a *legitimate source* for its occurrence" (ibid: 68 – my emphasis). The main aspect of this legitimacy revolves around the basic act of getting the talk started, since as a default action it will also provide the beginnings of a structure. It is important to remember, however, that *where* the interaction goes is not a concern during the early stages of the talk, since as Sacks points out, "states of talk once having gotten started have, at least with regards to the sequencing structures, indefinite possibilities of continuation" (ibid: 68).

In applying this to the parents' evening data, the initiatory utterance acts as this default action, thereby allowing for a state of talk to develop. By marking a form of boundary between such pre-business as might have already taken place and the talk which is to come, T provides a legitimate source for the main section of the interaction that will subsequently be based around the topic of the child. Whilst the potential initiatory valence of utterances such as "right" and "okay" mark this boundary, the role of intonation is also shown to be important. Indeed, Sacks points out that "intonation can be a way of aiming something like doubt or agreement or whatever at some other utterance, with the specification that it may only be able to operate in fairly local ways" (1992b: 559). For this analysis, the 'whatever' lies in the way that intonation is used to aim the fact of T's intentionality at her co-participants, operating purely in terms of the local imperative to move from the preamble talk to the report on the child. Of equal importance, however, is the way that this underscores the efficacy of the close-grained study of interactional features afforded by Conversation Analysis in highlighting what might otherwise be deemed 'slight' conversational data.

Although extract 4.7 (above) provides an indication that the right to produce the first topic for discussion is still 'up for grabs' at this stage of the meeting, the way the parents on the whole attend to T's lexical and intonational intention markers regarding the move from generalised preamble talk to a report on the child opens up the question of what impact different institutionally focused roles might have on the talk. However, whilst T generally takes the initiative in providing the 'first step' of the meeting, it should (for the moment) be stressed that there is nothing explicitly linking this action by T to such interactional roles as 'teacher' or 'parent'. Whilst these roles are made visible by the later application of the institutional agenda, at this stage it is enough to note that T's initial utterance acts as a focus around which both parties can begin to construct a state of talk. Where the talk *goes* remains to be seen.

It is also important to point out that whilst T takes the initiative in starting the talk, the way in which she does so is markedly cautious. Starting upon the main body of the report from the initiation of the tape recording *was* an option open to T, for example by providing a straightforward recount of the child's result along the lines of "right, he's level three for maths". But in not doing so, T has not only allowed extra preparatory

time for herself by not 'rushing' the start of the talk[19], she also avoids being heard to move peremptorily into the interview, thereby avoiding the risk of alienating the parent(s). It is therefore interesting to note that whilst getting into a state of talk is a standard default conversational action, during the parents' evening meetings it is done in such a way as to minimise potential sources of disagreement between the parties.

Another important aspect of these sequences is the part played by the parent(s) in facilitating the transition from preamble talk to the report on the child. Although this analysis has necessarily focused on the teacher as the most 'vocal' participant, her interactional work must at every stage be heard in terms of the two-party (or more) conversation that it is. As Schegloff points out, the bland assertion that conversation is a 'minimally two-party' activity "is not satisfied by the mere copresence of two persons, one of who is talking...[i]t requires that there be both a "speaker" and a "hearer"" (1972: 379). The incumbency of these roles cannot be forced on a given set of participants in an *ad hoc* manner by an overhearing audience, since it is in and through the displayed and understood orientation of the interactants to the opening sequence of conversation that "coordinated entry by two parties into an orderly sequence of conversational turns is managed" (Schegloff, 1972: 350).

In this instance, Schegloff is also talking about the summons-answer sequences that make up the distribution rule of telephone conversations that 'answerer speaks first' (see above). As such, he is describing a two-party activity that is somewhat different from the transition into the report on the child during this parents' evening data, not least because this stage of the parents' evening meeting does not constitute the very opening segment of a conversation[20]. But what Schegloff calls "the initial problem of coordination in a two-party activity" (1972: 372) still applies, irrespective of the point at which the activity takes place within the overall trajectory of an interaction. This is the problem of availability, in that "a person who seeks to engage in an activity that requires the collaborative work of two parties must first establish, via some interactional procedure, that another party is available to collaborate" (Schegloff, 1972: 372). Just as

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[19] Another element of this preparatory work is the time that it allows T to search through and prepare the written documents she has in front of her containing the reports on the children. The ramifications of this document sorting, and the audible indications that it is taking place, are discussed in the next chapter.

[20] As was noted in Chapter 1 (above), the first point of contact between T and the parent(s) comes when T goes to the door of the room where the meetings are being held and invites the parent(s) in. Although this sequence of events has escaped our analytic gaze, it is not too deep a delve into the realm of supposition to assume that at the very least some form of summons-answer sequence (e.g. "Mr and Mrs X? Would you like to come in now?") has already taken place, if not some other form of greeting activity.

the work done by T constitutes several interactional procedures designed to establish this availability, so too does the relative silence of the parents, since at very least the parents have not made themselves unavailable in the face of T's attempts to initiate the report on the child[21].

In the next chapter, I will examine further transitions from preamble talk to the report on the child. The analytic focus shifts marginally, however, in that alongside the points raised in this chapter, the implication of the written documents from which the report on the child stems will be examined.

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[21] The question of availability also puts M's early intervention in extract 4.7 into a different light, inasmuch as her introduction of first topic equally establishes her availability to secure a coordinated entry into the two-party activity of the parents' evening meeting. The problem for T, however, becomes one of effecting the movement into the reporting in such a way as to not cause any interactional problems, should the parent not like the result as presented.

Chapter 5

Talking Written Records Into Reality

5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was seen how the work of 'getting into a state of talk' was carried out during the early part of the parents' evening meetings. Various elements within this stage of the meeting hearably facilitated two overall aspects of the sequential structure of the talk. The first involved marking a boundary between any previously occurring talk and talk that is to come, whilst the second related to T's provision of the 'first step' of the meeting 'proper'. The question of what impact any other factors could have on the talk was deferred, however, in favour of examining how T's initial utterances acted as a focus around which both parties could begin to construct a state of talk. In this chapter, I examine how the inclusion of extra contextual elements, in the form of both spoken referencing of the individual child's report documents, and audible indications of their manipulation by T, impact upon the initiatory sequences of some of the meetings.

In general terms, this chapter outlines the way in which the written report document is attended to by the participants within the preamble section of some of the parents' evening meetings. This includes both specific referencing of the report documents, thereby 'talking into reality' (cf. Heritage, 1984) the written records within the ongoing interaction, and the impact of audible document manipulation on the task orientation of the meeting. Rather than being seen as a subsidiary aspect of the elements that allow the participants to get into a state of talk, these features of the interaction are seen to be of equal importance to such factors as topic initiation. Indeed, as Heath and Luff point out in their study of doctors' use of written patient records, examining the utilisation of written records reveals

"the intricate and complex social arrangements which surround and inform the use of even the most mundane of human artefacts, and shows how seemingly 'individual' and 'cognitive' abilities, like reading a line of clinical data, are embedded in socially organised procedures and conventions."

(2000: 33)

Given that the ostensible focus of the parents' evening meetings is the delivery of a progress report on the child, the role played by written documents containing the details of these reports can intuitively be presupposed. The reliance upon examinations to

represent a child's academic achievement, and the report card that results from such testing, can both be located as massively recurring features of the wider social institution of 'school'. For Conversation Analysis (CA), however, the question of context, institutional or otherwise, opens up a whole series of difficulties regarding the *a priori* application of assumed external influences upon the actual conduct of talk-in-interaction. This methodological standpoint is neatly summed up by Heritage as relating to "instances versus idealizations" (1984: 234 – also see Chapter 2, above). Rather than relying upon intuitive sociological generalisations that may or may not have an impact upon a given interaction, CA treats context "as something *endogenously* generated within the talk of the participants and, indeed, as something created in and through that talk" (ibid: 283 – original emphasis). The examination of the role of written records within the parents' evening meetings provides an example of how supposedly extraneous elements related to a given social setting, such as written records, can be endogenously generated and attended to within talk.

5.0.1 Factors to Consider in the Role of Written Records

Although the aim of this chapter is to highlight the way referencing written documents invokes certain 'contextual' details, several factors relating to the specific report records used during the parents' evening meetings must be considered first. The first of these concerns the fact that the details of each child's results are contained on separate record sheets for each curriculum topic area (mathematics, languages, etc: see Appendix B for examples of these sheets). Whilst the exact configuration and layout of these documents on the teacher's desk remains unknown, T's being engaged in an ongoing interview programme throughout the course of the parents' evening provides, at the very least, for a default need to assemble a different set of documents at the start of each meeting[1].

The second factor to be borne in mind relates to T's role as class teacher for the children involved, as opposed to the set teachers who actually conduct the different areas of the curriculum. As the examination of the overall trajectory of the interviews (Chapter 2, above) has indicated, the *focusing stage* of the interview reflects this division of teaching roles (as influenced by the impact of setting), with T stating which teacher has

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[1] Another factor that might have relevance for the audible manipulation of documents is the relatively fluid nature of the timetable T attempts to adhere to throughout the evening. However, whilst the fact that some of the meetings have either overrun (cf. those extracts in which T apologises for late-running), or potentially occurred out of sequence (cf. the preamble talk in Extract 5.6, below), any suppositions as to the impact of these factors would divert from the analysis of the data as it appears on the tape and transcript.

taught the specific set each child is in, and has thus written the report. Although the link between this institutional role division and the audible manipulation of documents will be discussed below, T's delivery of the set teacher's reports can for the moment be seen to introduce a specific organisational element that could potentially become relevant to the talk, since T has to sort through documents with which she might only have a passing acquaintance.

5.0.2 Overview of Chapter

This chapter will examine the four formats by which the implication of the written record is carried out.

The first of these formats is examined in section 5.1. It involves a straightforward spoken reference to the report documents, with T providing an explicit description of the action of *looking at* the written record.

Equally, the second format for implicating the written record (see section 5.2 for details) involves spoken referencing of the documents, but also includes the combination of the *action description* with the *audible manipulation* of the documents themselves.

Section 5.3 looks at the way spoken reference and audible document manipulation are combined during the third format, but in this instance they are utilised in order to provide an *account for interactional delays*.

Finally, section 5.4 examines audible document manipulation, but without explicit spoken referencing of the report. Instead, audible indications of report sorting are *integrated into the sequential initiatory utterances* produced by T.

5.1 Spoken Reference to Written Records

Extract 5.1 (below) highlights that the most obvious and straightforward way to render a text 'visible' within talk-in-interaction is to make specific reference to it. As the previous chapter detailed, an attempt is made by M during this meeting to take up what could be heard as a potential turn transition point (PTTP) with the question "(so u) ow's he been progressing" at line 3. In response to this question, T overtly draws the attention

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of the parents to the written documents in front of her with the statement "let's have a look- ° that's ° his maths" (line 8)[2].

Extract 5.1 (previously Extract 4.7: Pt1/ n 08.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

1.	T:	.hh ° okay: °
2.		(1.8)
3. →	M:	(so u-) ow's he been progressing
4.		(0.5)
5.	T:	↑ alri:ght, [↑ yeah:
6.	M:	°a[s he?°
7.		(0.6)
8. a→	T:	↑yeah, (.) > let's have a look- ° that's ° his maths. <
9.	(M:)	(.hh)
10.		(1.1)
11. b→	T:	(tch) <u>Right</u> he's got Mrs G...

Having responded to M's second question at line 6 ("°as he?°") with an affirmatory response token (RT), T forecasts a further conversational action based around an item which all parties must 'look at' (line 8). Not only does this tentatively lay claim to subsequent turns-at-talk, it also implicates the specific source of the report (i.e. the written document containing the report on the child) as something physically separate and therefore 'noticeable'. Whilst the audio-only nature of the data does not allow us to analyse such factors as gaze orientation amongst the participants, T can be heard to provide the description of what is being looked at with the statement "°that's° his maths" (line 8). Although attending to some ascription difficulty regarding which specific subject is going to be discussed, the exhortation to 'look' at a specific item is hearable as a very effective way by which to work in those elements of participation status (i.e. the rights to being either a producer or receiver of 'first topic') which M's early intervention had problematised.

This can be seen if T's exhortation to 'look' is compared with the work of Heath and Luff (200). They have examined how journalists for Reuters pass on stories of relevance to their colleagues, despite much of this material being "received in real-time, on-

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[2] As in the previous chapter (Chapter 4, above), note that following the outline provided in table 3.a (Chapter 3, above), the agenda statement in each extract will be marked a→. Single arrows will indicate other points of interest raised in the text.

screen, localised to particular desks and individual screens, and...largely unavailable and invisible to others" (Heath and Luff, 2000: 66). In Heath and Luff's data, when a journalist verbalises some aspect of the news story on the screen in front of them, they not only render that information "'publicly' accessible, or at least audible to others within the immediate location" (2000: 67), they also highlight the asymmetric access to the information. As Heath and Luff point out,

> "It is not simply that co-participants may not necessarily be able to see the same story, but rather what they know of the text, even during the course of a collaborative reading, is permeated through, and embedded in, the ways in which the teller is concurrently characterising the text"
>
> (2000: 84)

For the parents' evening meetings, the 'invisibility' of the document and the methods by which T makes it 'publicly accessible' is reflected in the way that she both redirects the trajectory of the talk, and reasserts the pattern of interactional rights and responsibilities implied by the respective professional and lay roles of teacher and parent, without causing any overt disruption to the overall interaction. As the sole participant with access to the report document, T begins to shape the way in which the text is seen, as well as utilising it to effectively downgrade M's attempts at topic initiation by reasserting the teacher's institutionally 'correct' role as the sanctioned 'topic initiator'.

Added to this, whilst T has tacitly highlighted her direct access to the written document (and by implication the parental lack of access), the alignment implicative nature of "let's have a look-" at line 8 is indicative of the caution inherent in this shift into an institutional set of conversational relevancies. Specifically, it allows T to avoid appearing to take unilateral action in bringing about the shift from preamble to report-focused talk. Equally, T's attempt to carry out this shift into an institutional set of conversational relevancies is matched by M and F's orientation to this action as such. Despite the possible inbreath by M heard at line 9, neither parent treats the overtly long 1.1-second pause at line 10 as a PTTP. This indicates just how the 'meaning' of the written record being implicated is co-produced by all the participants.

5.1.1 Summary

By making explicit reference to the action of 'looking' at the written documents in front of her, T draws attention to the source of the report on the child. This provides the justification for the movement into the reporting structure proper, asserting the respective professional and lay roles of teacher and parent by dint of the fact that only T has direct access to the report documents. This assertion of the relative participation status of the participants is jointly produced, with the parents also treating the implication of the written record as a cue for T to start the reporting on the child. Whilst this reframes both the previous and current conversational actions (M's question at line 3 and T's agenda statement at line 8) in the light of these institutional roles, a level of inclusiveness is also implied by making reference to 'looking' at the document. This minimises any potential disruption that might be caused by T's sidestepping of M's earlier question.

5.2 Spoken Reference and Document Manipulation

Although extract 5.1 (above) has highlighted its most obvious and straightforward manifestation, this section outlines further aspects of talking written records 'into reality'. In particular, the audible manipulation of the document plays a part in T's preparatory work during the preamble section of the talk, alongside the actual spoken referencing to the report document itself.

Thus in extract 5.2 (below), alongside all of the previously outlined elements relating to the shift from preamble talk to reporting structure (i.e. intonational shifts marking boundaries, specific lexical choice carrying out preparatory work, and now, the referencing of the written document), the sound of papers being sorted/arranged during an accountably long 5.6-second pause (line 3) can also be heard.

Extract 5.2 (Pt1/ co 17.1)

F=Father

1.	T:	-et your best speaking voice (° on °)
2.		(n).h̤hh ER̤M: (.) ° right > let's have a look < °
3.	→	(5.6) ((paper shuffling))
4.	a→	.hh ↑Ma̱:ths: (.) he's got Mrs G hasn't he.

As the analysis in Chapter 4 (above) outlined, the initiatory sequences utilised by T have a bridging role in terms of marking the shift from the preamble talk to the

reporting structure. In extract 5.2 the token "ER:M:" (line 2) acts to forecast further talk from T, as well as 'bracketing off' any prior talk from the current conversational action. The increase in the production volume of "ER:M:" facilitates this transitional moment within the talk, with the amplitude shift foregrounding this utterance as being 'of interest' to the parent and therefore deserving of attention. The intonation contour of the utterance "ER:M:" follows a 'down → up' pattern[3], which acts in tandem with the shift in amplitude to mark a boundary between the previous talk and that which is to come. The intonational shift from the 'brighter' "ER:M:" to the more evenly intoned "right" at line 2 also provides a bridge between the preamble talk and the more focused task orientation of T, as well as marking a transition from specifically laughter implicative talk to what proves to be oriented to as more 'serious' talk[4].

The next element in T's sequential initiatory build-up is the statement ">let's have a look<" (line 2), a referencing of the written document which uses the same lexical formulation as that seen in extract 5.1. In this instance, however, the exhortation to look is followed by an audible indication that T is sorting through the documents she has in front of her (line 3), with an agenda statement being subsequently produced at line 5. It can first of all be seen that the movement from the forecast statement, "°right >let's have a look<°" (line 2), to the concluding statement, "↑Ma:ths:" at line 4, is part of a non-adjacent reflexively tied sequence (cf. Mehan, 1979, and Chapter 4, above). Added to this, the paper shuffling is linked by sequential implication to the prior forecasting activity contained within the initiatory sequence. By acting as an interactional turn in its own right, the paper shuffling can therefore be seen to delay the making of the agenda statement.

As the previous chapter highlighted, this forecast of further action from the same speaker (T), and the completion of the projected action at a point several turns distant, is part of what Schegloff (1980) describes as *action projection*. As an example of a 'forward projecting' turn format, the trajectory described by the sequence leading up to the making of the agenda statement is similar to what Schegloff has called "preliminaries to preliminaries", in that they work to get the significance of the intended action into the conversation before that action has been satisfactorily prepared (cf.

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[3] See Chapter 4, footnote 13, above, for the amendments to the transcription notation designed to describe internal intonational contours.

[4] The upward intonation of this bridging utterance works as part of a progression from 'joking' to 'business', thereby making the transition from one to other less abrupt.

Schegloff, 1980, and Chapter 4, above). If the impact of the audible document manipulation at line 3 and the attention it draws to the written record is also considered, a strong indication of T's attention to a specific task orientation relating to the written document can be heard. In practical terms, this means that employing both a preliminary to a preliminary, and highlighting that a subsequent action might not be adequately prepared, provides an implicit account for any delay there might be in starting the next conversational action. Furthermore, highlighting the way the next set of adjacent actions pertains to the written record allows T to draw the attention of her co-participants to the source of the report.

This is not say that T overtly points out how she is drawing upon a second hand source, but rather that the application of "pre-pre's" is, as Schegloff points out, flexible. Whilst on the one hand the use of preliminaries at this stage of the talk forecasts further conversational actions from T, the introduction of this forecast also involves elements that are not as yet fully within the realm of accountable actions, and are thus not yet open for discussion. As Schegloff states, "'pre-pre' operation can be 'subversively' used; that is, materials can be introduced as mere preliminaries that a speaker does not want addressed as matters in their own right" (1980: 120). Therefore, T's implication regarding her position as the *speaker* but not the *author* of the report (cf. Goffman, 1981) *can* be heard and noted at this point, but not unproblematically addressed outright. In short, T positions herself as a third party in relation to the content of the written record.

As part of this work, the alignment implicative nature of "let's have a look" (line 2), underlined by the sound of the documents being sorted, frames the action of looking at the written record as something that both interactional parties have to do as third parties. This has an impact on two levels. First of all, these elements introduce a level of implied mutuality between T and the parents, positioning both sets of participants as an aligned group examining the written report, rather than setting up a more rigid 'professional delivers to lay' relationship. Secondly, the consequences of positioning both sets of participants as third parties to the report impacts upon both T's role in bringing about this topic change (i.e. that the report document itself is something which *all* parties, including herself, must defer to), and the way in which the interaction subsequently progresses, in that the task orientation of report delivery becomes the necessary focus of the talk. Whilst this should in no way be seen as a conscious

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interactional strategy by T (indeed it is not CA's place to speculate on such matters), the written record is used as a specifically local interactional resource which, intentionally or not, sets up a series of different relevancies through which T can affect a change in the course of the talk.

The practical applicability of this two-tier method of implicating the written record can also be seen in extract 5.3 (below), since it allows T to return to the reporting structure following both an earlier initiation sequence, and talk on a topic unrelated to the specific reporting on the child. Whilst the introduction of a side sequence and the need to counter any potential disruption it might cause mark this extract as similar to extract 5.1 (see above, and Chapter 4, extract 4.7), the lexical and audible implication of the written documents in extract 5.3 is not utilised in the face of a digression initiated by a parent, but in terms of one initiated by T.

Extract 5.3 (Pt1/ af 15.1)

F = Father; C = Child

1.	T:	(n).hhhh(a) o::kay
2.		(0.8)
3.	→	H? ooh. she's aw:::ful
4.		(0.9)
5.		ourgh,
6.	→	(1.7) ((papers rustling))
7.		let's find her. (.) .hhh okay.
8.		(0.7)
9.		.hhh
10.	→	(2.7) ((papers rustling))
11.	a→	° o:kay ° ((said softly)) (.) ↑ma:ths:

Initially, extract 5.3 appears to be similar to the previous extracts of both this and the preceding chapter. Intonationally, the 'down → up' contour of "o::kay" works in the same way as has been seen in previous extracts, lending weight to the forecasting function of this utterance by marking it as hearably 'bright', and therefore worthy of F's attention. Then at line 3 the only example of a preamble in which the child (when present) is implicated both as an overhearing audience *and* as the subject of the talk itself is heard. Indeed, rather than being heard simply as an element in T's talk on a topic unrelated to the reporting, this implication of the child forms the basis of the entire initiatory sequence, with T's next two utterances at lines 5 and 7 also attending to C as

both topic and audience. Subsequent to the invocation of the child's name at line 3, T makes an assessment with a negative format; the production of these utterances, however, marks the appraisal as being of an ironic and humorous nature[5]. Having framed these utterances in such a way as to avoid them being heard as 'true' indications of T's assessment of the child, the physical presence of the child is used as an interactional resource, in much the same way as the audible manipulation of documents have been. T is not only able to initiate the talk, albeit in a non-standard way within the framework established during the previous extracts, but she is also able to provide an implicit forecast that the upcoming evaluation of C will be relatively positive, at least in terms of her own point of view[6].

Having engaged in this side sequence, the statement "let's find her." can subsequently be heard at line 7. This statement is similar to the implied mutuality of statements exhorting the parent(s) 'to look' in terms of the written record seen in previous extracts. There is, however, a certain level of ambiguity about this statement, which stems from the subsequent production of the utterance "okay" at the end of line 7. This utterance acts to terminate the last topic by indicating that T has found the documents she was markedly looking for, and as such is retroactively focused. It is because of this that T's turn-at-talk at line 7 can be heard more as a bridging utterance between stages of the talk than as an explicit indication of an immediate next action by T. This formulation also marks a shift away from the positioning of C as the overhearing audience directly implicated in the talk, towards the more standard 'child as topic' framework seen in previous extracts. Indeed, the task orientation implied by the need to 'find' the details among the audibly attended-to written records (line 6) hearably re-focuses attention back onto the institutionally focused 'task at hand'. In this instance, therefore, the explicit reference to the written document, combined with the earlier sounds of those documents being sorted, allows T to construct both a delineating point between the preamble talk and the reporting, and affect the movement away from the implication of the child as an overhearing audience, an occurrence specific to this meeting.

Whilst the sequencing of the statement "let's find her" at line 7 and the sounds of the documents being sorted at line 6 mean that the spoken implication of the written record

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[5] Not only does T employ tokens of exasperation which are hearably over emphasised ("ooh," and "ourgh," lines 3 and 5), the marked early emphasis and elongation within the statement "she's aw:::ful" (line 3) follows a 'see-saw' pattern often associated with the production of sarcastic or intentionally humorous utterances.

[6] But not necessarily with regard to any third party written assessment from a set teacher.

works in a retrospective manner, it can also be seen that this implication acts in a forecasting role, as the paper shuffling subsequently heard at line 10 indicates. As extract 5.2 (above) has already highlighted, the sorting of documents acts as a turn in its own right[7], part of the non-adjacent reflexively tied sequence 'action projection → action completion', which is marked in extract 5.3 (above) by the movement from the utterance "let's find her" to the agenda statement at line 11. Although the use of these reflexively tied structures does not necessarily have to involve any audible or indeed visual indications that T is carrying out a document sorting action[8], the logic for its occurrence within such a sequence is clear. This means that along with the other aspects of the 'action projection → action completion' sequence described above, the inclusion of a 'paper shuffling' turn within the sequence allows T to retain the floor across a potentially accountable period of non-conversational silence.

5.2.1 Summary

Added to the explicit referencing of the written reports with such statements as "let's have a look", T integrates the audible manipulation of documents as an element within the previously outlined initiatory work that marked the shift from preamble talk to reporting structure. The exhortation to look is linked sequentially to the sounds of paper shuffling, and as such can be heard as an intervening stage in the non-adjacent reflexively tied sequences utilised by T.

Positioning these sequences as "preliminaries to preliminaries" means that the paper shuffling presents T's next action as to some extent not being adequately prepared, thereby providing an implicit account for any delays as the documents are sorted out. Added to this, T is able to 'subversively' introduce both her own and the parents' third party relationship to the written record. The effect of this is two-fold: implied mutuality sets up an alignment implicative relationship between the participants; in deferring to the written report, the task orientation of report delivery is necessarily returned to and

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[7] A further element in the role of paper shuffling as a turn in its own right can also be located in the presumption that by manipulating the documents, it is highly likely that the individual involved would necessarily be looking at the documents at the same time. Since this would involve a corresponding loss of eye contact with co-participants, the action could serve to close topic. The lack of any visual information pertaining to gaze orientation means, however, that this must remain supposition.

[8] As we saw in both extract 5.1 of this chapter, and during the previous chapter, the initiatory sequences utilised by T work just as well in terms of forecasting further action from the teacher without any audible signs that records are being sorted. Whilst the differential occurrence of 'paper shuffling' could be linked to factors as simple as T being better prepared for some interviews than others because the previous meeting has run to time, once again the lack of any video or wider scale ethnographic data means that this speculation must remain unfounded.

focused upon. In extract 5.3, despite a changed initiatory sequence in which the child is implicated as an overhearing audience, all of these elements are utilised in order to re-focus the trajectory of the interaction upon the delivery of the report, with the child as its focus rather than its specific audience.

5.3 Providing An Account

As was seen at the end of the previous section, one element of talking the written record into reality is the role it plays in providing an account for the periods of non-conversational silence which mark T's physical reorganisation of the report documents. Spoken reference to the act of looking at the documents is combined with the sequentially relevant occurrence of the documents being audibly sorted. This allows T to retain the floor across a period of non-talk, which in other conversational situations would be open to question as an accountably long gap, either within a single turn-at-talk, or between two turns by the same speaker. In the previous section this factor was seen only as corollary to the work of drawing attention to the relationship of the participants to the document. In this section I examine meetings in which the main concern of the lexical and audible implication of the written record rests in its provision of an account for any conversational silence.

T uses the lexical and audible implication of the written record in extract 5.5 (below) to reassert her institutional task orientation. As well as the reassertion of the report-focused trajectory of the talk, the combination of audible document manipulation, and reference to those documents, allows T to carry out the more prosaic work of covering for a lack of organisation during the movement from preamble talk to reporting. More importantly, it is evident that the parent also attends to this delay.

Extract 5.4 (Pt1/j 16.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

1.   M: °(dunno)° eh > ↑ hu- hu h[hh
2.   T: [>you talk to him< =
3.   M: = ° thank you °
4.   F: ° (you sit over there) °
5.   (1.2) ((sounds of movement))
6.   T: ri:ght
7.   (1.7)
8.   Mr Jackson
9.   (0.2)

10.	F:	>yup<
11. →		(0.8) ((papers shuffled))
12.	T:	.hhhh
13.		(1.2)
14. →		° where's me no [tes °
15.	F:	[((coughs))
16.	T:	° oːkay: °
17.		(1.1)
18. a→		>right< ↑maːthsːː,

Following a short sequence of preamble talk[9], at line 6 T marks the movement into the reporting format with the statement "riːght". Rather than providing in second position any of the various elements seen in previous extracts regarding initiatory sequences, a side sequence ensues with the statement "Mr Jackson" at line 8. This utterance appears to be the first part of a "summons-answer sequence" (Schegloff, 1972: 357), which is receipted by F at line 10. Equally, it is also hearable as a variation of an agenda statement, since while a topic for discussion has not been proposed (i.e. which curriculum subject will be discussed), the fact that it regards a child in particular *has* been put forward. The use of an 'official' version of the name of the male child is not inconsistent with the parents' evening setting, and as such could be heard as a candidate topic implicative utterance which F receipts as an agreement to the projected course of action. In either case, whilst the turn transition returns to T, the sound of paper shuffling can be heard at line 11.

If the topic implicativeness of the name invocation at line 8 is extended to include other elements of the talk, the audible paper shuffling at line 11 can be heard as part of the action forecast by the statement "Mr Jackson". The invocation of the family's surname can be linked to T's search for the requisite document, to some extent providing an account for this action and any extra time it might take up. However, attending to the written documents in front of her also forms the basis of T's statement at line 14, "where's me notes". This utterance can therefore be heard to provide a stronger account

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[9] It is difficult to ascertain the exact topic of the preamble talk heard across lines 1 to 4 of this extract, not least because once again the tape recording has been initiated at a point at which the conversation between T and the parents is already underway. What the short sequence between T and M across lines 1 to 3 pertains to therefore remains unknown, as does the source of M's statement "°thank you°". M's receipt token could be linked to the discussion between herself and T which appears to have been brought to some sort of closure by the statement ">you talk to him<", since this apparent description of a course of action could be the requisite answer to an earlier question by M. This level of supposition, however, does little to further the overall analysis of the extract.

for the delay regarding T's sorting of documents, accompanied as it is by audible paper shuffling. That T attends to the provision of an account as a potentially accountable action can be heard in the quieter volume of "where's me notes", which marks it as being 'self-addressed', and thus of secondary importance to the overall trajectory of the talk.

It can also be seen that at least one of the parents align to the delay and T's attempts to minimise her account for it, with the cough produced by F at line 15 relating back to the alignment his response at line 10 set up. As noted above, the quasi summons-answer sequence can be heard as a candidate topic implicative utterance from T, which F receipts as an agreement to the projected course of action. Having provided such a response, the possibility is raised that F might do so again with regard to a subsequent utterance from T. However, since the next fully formulated turn-at-talk by T involves a statement providing a warrant for what is hearable as an accountably long delay, for F to continue this candidate recipiency format would in itself be problematic. His cough at line 15, produced as it is in overlap with T's talk, can therefore be heard as a way of 'passing up' on any tacit claim to a subsequent turn in response to T's prior turn. With both parties attending to the primacy of the written record as the source of the report on the child, any potential difficulties related to the delay as T finishes her preparation are averted.

Similar work by T can also be seen in extract 5.5 (below), although in this instance the spoken reference to searching the documents, and the sound of the documents being manipulated (marked with arrows), does not come in an immediately prior sequential position to the delivery of the agenda statement. Instead, the beginning of the meeting is punctuated by the Deputy Head teacher entering the classroom and carrying out a lengthy discussion[10] with T pertaining to which forms are to be given to the parents during the parent's evening meetings. Despite these delays, T is still able to retain the floor and restart the reporting sequence.

Extract 5.5 (Pt 1/ e 05.1)

M = Mother; C = Child; DH = Deputy Head teacher (subsequently leaves)

1.   T: O:khay:
2.   (1.9)

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[10] It should be noted that a large section of the preamble involving the 25-second section of talk solely between T and DH has been omitted from the transcript in the interest of conciseness.

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3.    →        ° (tk)  righ:t lemme find me notes: °
4.    →        (5.4) ((paper shuffling))
5.             ° .hh °
6.    →        (7.2) ((paper shuffling))
7.             ↑ hello::
8.             (0.7)
9.    DH:      ° hiya °
      :                                                              .
      :    ((DH and T discuss forms that are to be given to the parents))
      :
10.   T:       thanks          ((DH leaves))
11.            (1.1)
12.            .hh ri:ght, (.) maths:
13.            (0.5)
14. a→         .hh she's in: er Mr D's set (.) > for maths <...
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The initiatory sequence across lines 1 to 3 follows an 'okay → right' pattern similar in format to extracts in this and the previous chapter, with the increased amplitude and emphasis at the beginning of "O:khay:" (line 1) marking an 'up → down' intonational contour. The amplitude shift, like previous extracts, is hearable as marking a transitional boundary within the talk (both 'bracketing off' any prior talk, and marking the utterance as 'of interest'), whilst at the same time forecasting further talk. Elongation evident within "O:khay:", as well as its slightly 'breathy' delivery, can be heard to provide further emphasis to these actions. With the quieter production volume of "righ:t" at line 3, the inter-utterance intonational contour of this progression hearably follows a 'high → low' pattern.

Following this initiatory sequence, T produces the statement "lemme me find me notes" (end of line 3). This statement is similar in function to "where's me notes" heard in extract 5.4 (line 14, above), in that it provides an account for a delay regarding T's sorting of documents, and is accompanied by subsequent audible paper shuffling. The elongation of the utterance "O:khay:" at line 1 can also be linked to the 'searching' nature of this statement, since T hearably extends her previous turn in order to decrease the amount of any delay subsequent to its production.

Unlike extract 5.4, however, the subsequent audible document manipulation takes place across a distinctly lengthy period, consisting of two episodes of paper shuffling

equalling nearly twelve seconds of conversational silence, punctuated only by a very quiet inbreath at line 5. If the disruption caused by the side sequence between T and DH is included, the gap between T's first initiatory sequence and the one that ultimately culminates in the making of the agenda statement at line 12 is considerable. The length of the pause highlights the validity of document sorting as a non-accountable activity for T, since she does not need to provide any further account for her lack of talk other than the forecast utterance at line 3. Equally, that T is able to retain the rights to topic initiation, despite the lack of any directly relevant prior interactional sequences[11], indicates the part played by the specific silence of the parent in facilitating the shift from preamble talk to reporting.

For M, the preceding turns-at-talk provide no overt indication that an intervention at this point would be unwarranted. As the analysis of extract 4.7 in the previous chapter (see also extract 5.1, above) has indicated, parents' evening meetings are different from more formal and rigidly structured examples of lay-professional talk, such as courtroom proceedings (cf. Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Atkinson, 1982; Pomerantz and Atkinson, 1984; Atkinson, 1992), in that the role of topic initiator is in no way monolithic and assured. This means that rather than being seen simply as an inherent passivity based upon an assumed institutional relationship between 'professional' teachers and 'lay' parents, the silence of M also helps to define the nature of any relationship between the participants.

Indeed, the parental silence can instead be seen to bear some relation to Heath's (1992) work on general practice consultations. In these instances, a patient withholding a reply to a doctor's diagnosis "not only provide[s] the doctor with the opportunity of developing the consultation as they so wish, but preserve[s] the objective, scientific, and professional status of the diagnosis" (Heath, 1992: 262). Whilst Heath's work deals with assessment objects such as diagnoses, rather than turn distribution rights, this parallel is important in highlighting the relationship between the roles 'parent' and 'teacher' during these meetings. It also indicates the way that any asymmetry in this

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[11] The temporal distance between the two initiatory sequences means that the 'same speaker turn' implicative elements of the 'action projection → action completion' sequence cannot be utilised by T. Indeed, whilst the rising intonational contour of "thanks" (line 10) can be heard to mark the terminal point of the closing sequence between T and DH, implicating a transitional moment within the talk by virtue of its hearably 'bright' production, this does not provide as strong a claim as T's previously utilised techniques to retaining the floor. The 1.1-second pause (line 11) is ambiguous in terms of who can speak next.

relationship is accomplished in and through their interaction, rather than being the result of some intuitively presupposed 'external' factor.

For the final extract in this section (extract 5.6, below) the lexical and audible implication of the written record is applied in various contexts across several different parts of the preamble talk. Variations in the specific activities the paper shuffling is linked to can also be seen, which in turn highlight the way the implication of documents is not solely linked to the straightforward forecasting of the reporting structure.

Extract 5.6 (Pt1/c 03.1)

M = Mother; B = Baby; C = Child (subsequently leaves)

1.	M:	mm > huh-huh- [huh<
2.	T:	[uhuh – huh
3.	M:	he's a bit smelly: (.) though
4.	T:	is he? =
5.	M:	=he's decided to [° um ° ( ) =
6.	T:	[owh:: nice
7.	M:	= fill [imself u<u>p</u>
8.	T:	[° .hhh u-> ha-ha- [Ha<
9.	M:	[mm heh (° alright smelly? °) ((to child))
10.		(0.3)
11.	T:	aowh<u>:</u> de<u>a</u>:r
12.		(0.4)
13.		° .h ° ri:gh<u>t</u>
14. →		(3.0) ((paper shuffling))
15.		ws:: (.) Richard bef [ore you then ° Colin? °
16.	M:	[((coughs))
17.		(1.2)
18.	C:	( ) ((away from microphone))
19.		(0.8)
20.	M:	° I don't know (.) uh hu-hu °
21.		(0.7)
22.	T:	n<u>o</u>: =
23.	M:	= no (.) we wer- we were before (0.2) ° ( ) °
24.	T:	° oh °
25. →		(2.5) ((paper shuffling))
26. → T:		these were all supposed to be in order and now I can't find his notes (tsk)
27. →		(1.5) ((paper shuffling))
28.	T:	° hhhh °
29. →		(3.4) ((paper shuffling))

30. a→ T: right. let's have a look at his science ° while I'm looking for this °

Starting at line 1 and concluding at line 29, the preamble section of extract 5.6 encompasses several different topics and turns-at-talk. These lengthy preliminaries can be roughly divided into three sections, the first of which involves the non-meeting focused preamble talk across lines 1 to 10, prior to T making her first set of initiatory statements at lines 11 to 13. Although the initial part of this sequence is cut off by the tape recorder, it can subsequently be heard to centre on M's baby, who she has brought with her into the classroom. Whilst subsequently starting an initiatory sequence, from line 15 the second section of the talk, an insertion sequence, can be heard. During this insertion sequence T can be heard to address C, who has yet to leave the classroom, on the matter of which child's parental interview was prior to his own ("ws:: (.) Richard before you then °Colin?°" – line 15). The third section begins after the child's response at line 18 and the short discussion around the same topic by M and T (lines 20 to 24), when T turns her attention to checking her notes, a task orientation that ultimately leads to a second initiatory utterance and agenda statement at line 30. Since talking written records into reality occurs during each section, they will be examined in turn.

Following the laughter implicative talk regarding the baby across lines 1 to 11, T produces an initiatory statement ".h ° ri:ght" (line 13). Although this utterance is not accompanied by any direct reference to the report documents[12], three seconds of paper shuffling can be heard as T's next action (line 14). Whilst the ambiguity of "right" as an initiatory statement allows it to be heard as a forecast for a non-specified action, T's next turn-at-talk at line 15 frames this preparatory work as relating to the question of meeting sequencing, as she addresses a question on this subject to the still present child. This is interesting not only because it marks a change from the link between paper shuffling and the topic of the child's report seen in previous extracts, but also because it further highlights the validity of document sorting as a non-accountable activity for T. Despite both the proximity of aligned talk with M, and the minimal nature of her initiatory sequence, T is able to carry out a non-conversational action (paper shuffling) and introduce a side sequence (talk with the child) without either action being treated as accountable by T's co-participant. That M has attended to both of these actions as legitimate ones for T to carry out is underlined by her cough at line 16. Like a similar

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[12] Such as the statement "° (tk) righ:t lemme find me notes: °" seen at line 3 of extract 5.5 (above).

action by the father in extract 5.4 (above), this cough allows M to 'pass' on any claims to the succeeding turns-at-talk.

After having a discussion as to which interview was supposed to be next, at line 24 T provides a newsmark in receipt of a prior statement from M. Once again, paper shuffling constitutes T's next action, which in terms of both sequential implicativeness and the impact of the earlier document manipulation can be linked to the topic of the previous discussion. But just as the previous example of paper shuffling at line 14 was reframed by T's subsequent turn-at-talk, so too is the paper shuffling at line 25. The vague connection between document manipulation and meeting sequencing is replaced by a more specific task orientation, attended to by T with the statement "°these were all supposed to be in order and now I can't find his notes°" (line 26). This utterance fulfils several functions, not least because it allows T to focus attention back on to the overall task orientation of the interview, i.e. reporting on the child. The statement also accounts for the paper shuffling that brackets it (lines 25, 27 and 29)[13]. More importantly, it provides for a blame account regarding the delay in examining the documents that does not implicate any of the current interactants. Whilst non-specific, the attribution of blame heard here is directed towards a prior event regarding the sorting of the written documents. Neither T nor (perhaps more importantly) M can be linked to this implied earlier error.

At line 30 T produces an agenda statement, which like those seen in extracts 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3, draws overt attention to the specific act of reporting on the child. Unlike these previous extracts, however, T subsequently produces the statement "°while I'm looking for this°" (line 30), which adds an extra element to the link between audible document manipulation and the spoken reference to the action it signifies by positioning the report on science as being 'secondary' in nature. But in terms of this analysis, talking written records into reality serves different purposes across the various stages of the preamble talk, beyond underlining the link between the report and the documents it stems from.

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[13] Once again, a loss of eye contact could be expected as T sorts through the documents, especially bearing in mind the nature of T's 'searching' statement at line 26. Although impossible to verify, loss of eye contact serving to close the current topic would also act in the provision of an account for T's non-conversational action.

5.3.1 Summary

For the extracts of this section, accounting for any delay as T prepares to initiate the reporting on the child becomes an important element of the preamble to the meeting. Several aspects of the document manipulation and spoken reference to the written records, which in previous extracts had been only secondary features in implicating the report documents, can now be seen to facilitate this account provision.

All the participants hearably attend to the primacy of the written record as it draws attention to the specific details of sorting the documents prior to the initiation of the report delivery. Not only is the validity of document sorting as a non-accountable action by T seen to apply across very long periods of non-conversational silence, the role of complicit parental silence is also highlighted.

Changes in the sequential placement of audible document manipulation and the spoken reference to it can also be seen. In extract 5.6, whilst paper shuffling provides T with an account for the period of non-conversational silence, it is not necessarily linked to the movement into the reporting structure proper. As well as allowing for movement into other aspects of preamble talk, changes in the sequential placement of the document manipulation and its concomitant spoken referencing highlight how both forecasting *and* retrospective reframing of paper shuffling also take place.

5.4 Document Manipulation With No Spoken Reference

So far in this chapter three aspects of talking written records into reality have been highlighted: spoken reference to an action relating to the written document without any accompanying sound of paper management/shuffling; spoken referencing of the report document linked to audible document manipulation; and referencing of the audible manipulation of documents as account provision. In this final section, sounds of paper shuffling can be heard, but without any accompanying spoken reference to it. That the written record continues to be implicated into the preamble talk, however, is evident in both the linking of the document manipulation with the forecasting activity of T's initiatory sequences, and the impact of specific parental action or non-action.

The movement from preamble talk to reporting structure in extracts 5.7 and 5.8 (below) can be heard to have a similar format to the initiatory sequences seen in the previous

chapter. However, whilst the two-stage initiatory sequence in both cases[14] also involve audible paper shuffling (lines 4 and 17 respectively) that is hearable as an action in its own right, there is no direct spoken reference to this action.

Extract 5.7 (Pt1/ y 18.1)

M=Mother; C=Child

1.	T:	.hhh o:k(h)ay,
2.		(1.7)
3.		(tch) ri:ght.
4.	→	(5.3) ((papers shuffled; chairs moved))
5.	a→	m:ath<u>s</u>

Extract 5.8 (Pt1/ g 07.1)

M = Mother

1.	T:	° I'm taping my interviews is that al:right? °
2.	M:	yes that's fi[ne
3.	T:	[thanks ((All the above away from microphone))
4.		.hh u:hm: ((T and M sit down))
5.		(1.0)
6.		<u>ri</u>:·ght
7.		(1.3)
8.		did you decide on a school in the end?
		:
		((Extended sequence: T and M discuss secondary school choices))
		:
9.	T:	...she's: er:: (0.5) pretty self motivated [int she? =
10.	M:	[m:mm
11.	T:	= so,
12.	M:	M:mm
13.		(2.8)
14.	T:	° ri:ght. °
15.		(1.4)
16.		.hhh ok:ay,
17.	→	(5.2) ((shuffling papers))
18.	a→	maths:.

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[14] For extract 5.7, T has allowed the tape recorder to continue after the end of her previous interview. The preamble talk between T and the incoming parent (M) subsequently takes place away from the microphone, and is thus of insufficient quality to be transcribed. However, whilst the details of this untranscribed section of talk escape us, we can gain enough from the tape to know that during their brief talk, T both apologises for the possible late running of the previous interviews (in terms of the temporal sequence of recording, this extract was the last of the evening), as well as seeking, and gaining, M's permission to record the talk. There is then a pause as T, M and C move to T's desk and sit down, at which point the transcript starts.

19.   (1.2)

20. b→   ↑ i:n Mrs H's set?

As initiatory sequences, the two-stage process seen in both extracts (lines 1 to 3, extract 5.7, and lines 14 to 16, extract 5.8) are similar to those seen earlier in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 4 (above). In both extracts, the initiatory sequences can be heard to not only mark a transitional boundary within the talk (both 'bracketing off' prior talk, and marking the utterance as 'of interest'), but also forecast that further talk is to come. Indeed, in the case of extract 5.8, the utility of such initiatory sequences at various stages of the talk can once again be seen, since an earlier initiatory sequence ("um" → "right" at lines 4 to 6) leads not to an agenda statement, but to a discussion of the choices made by the parent regarding the choice of secondary school. As was the case in Chapter 4, T can reintroduce these initiatory elements and effect the movement into the reporting structure, despite various events taking place during the overall trajectory from preamble talk to the report on the child.

Similarities with Chapter 4 continue with the formulation, positioning, and general intonation of these 'okay → right/ right → okay' sequences, in that they mirror the topical movement that T is attempting to carry out, thereby marking the transition from a less formal interactional environment to a more formal one. Added to this, the 'preparatory' nature of the progression from preamble talk to reporting is also hearable, not only because the sequence delays the making of the agenda statement, but also because a two-stage sequence sets up a reflexively tied structure (cf. Mehan, 1979 and above) that has yet to reach its projected concluding part. The only difference from previous extracts in this chapter is the way production of the agenda statement during the conclusion of the reflexively tied structure does not involve any specific reference to 'looking' at the written documents. Indeed, in both extracts the agenda statement has been formulated in the simplest possible manner, comprising only an invocation of the subject chosen to be the first topic of the reporting.

As part of a reflexively tied structure, therefore, the audible indication of T sorting her documents can be linked to the overall task of the meeting, namely the delivery of the child's result in the mock SAT examination. In sequential terms, this task orientation is reflected both in the way the audible manipulation of documents has been forecast by the initiatory 'okay → right/ right → okay' sequence, and T's being able to retain the

floor and effect the movement into the reporting proper with the agenda statement, despite the accountably long pauses at lines 4 and 17 respectively. The sequentially specific occurrence of paper shuffling, combined with the initiatory sequence, still retains the power to implicate the written record without any spoken reference to it.

Whilst in extract 5.9 (below) the audible manipulation of documents is similar to that heard in preceding extracts, it can also be explicitly linked to a jointly constructed action by T and M. This action is indicated by M's acknowledgement statement "°thank you °" at line 5.

Extract 5.9 (Pt1/ m 12.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

1.	T:	.hhh R(hh)ight
2.		(1.1)
3.		okay.
4. →		(9.2) ((rustling/sorting of papers))
5. →	M:	° thank you ° (hha)
6.		(1.1)
7.	T:	um::,
8.		(0.6)
9.		ri:ght
10.		(0.7)
11. a+b→		s:tart w [ith her language. Mr D::
12.	M:	[° y(h)es: (mm) °

The audible manipulation of documents within extract 5.9 can be linked to twin interactional trajectories evident within this example of preamble talk. Starting with the overarching trajectory related to the movement from preamble talk to reporting structure, the sequential placement of paper shuffling within the two-stage initiatory structure at lines 1 and 3 is markedly similar to the other extracts within this section. The preparatory work of this 'right → okay' sequence works to 'bracket off' whatever talk had previously passed between the participants, whilst at the same time forecasting further talk or actions from T. The ambiguity of this forecast, combined with the complicit silence of the parent, means that the subsequent period of non-conversational silence, although potentially accountable, is not treated as such by either set of participants. Leaving aside M's utterance at line 4 for the moment, the production of the agenda statement at line 11, "s:tart with her language.", whilst not explicitly referencing the action implied by the earlier sorting of papers, frames the previous delays as relating

to the strictly procedural matter of arranging which part of the report to begin with. Even without direct spoken reference to the action implied by the paper sorting, the written record is hearably talked into reality.

Returning to M's statement at line 4, it acknowledges the receipt of a document that has been passed to the parent[15], indicating that a different action relating to the documents in front of T has ·been carried out. As part of a 'trajectory within a trajectory', M's receipt of the document from T underscores the way in which both participants attend to T's lead role in initiating various actions (including topic preference regarding the report on the child). Indeed, M's displayed attendance to one of the documents involved in T's initiatory work echoes the work of lay participants in Heath and Luff's examination of the use of written records during general practice encounters, in which they find "patients developing practical discriminations concerning the developing course of the activity with the document, and in various ways attempting to co-ordinate their own conduct with its use" (2000: 52). Despite the length of the preceding non-conversational silence, spoken acceptance of the document casts both the prior delay as non-problematical, and M's role within the overall management of this part of the meeting, as one that is essentially reactive[16]. In this way, rather than being seen as a purely ancillary element of the interaction, the sound of action related to the document manipulation, and the subsequent reactions of the participants to them, allows for a deeper level of analysis of the locally constructed identities within the parents' evening meetings.

Unlike the previous extracts in this section, the audible sounds of document manipulation within extract 5.10 (below) occur at the same time as T's initiatory utterances, rather than as a discrete element of the initiatory sequence.

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[15] Although not explained during the early part of the meeting, the documents passed from T to M in extract 5.9 are the same documents as those discussed by T and DH during extract 5.5 (above).

[16] It is interesting to note that the production volume of M's receipt token at line 5 marks it as minimal, which along with the fact that T does not provide any explanatory account for having passed the document (or indeed makes any reference to it at all), opens up the possibility that the whole action could be heard as back channel work (cf. Yngve, 1970; Duncan and Fiske, 1977). That this is perhaps not the case can be heard in the fact that as her next action T starts a second initiatory sequence at line 7, rather than perhaps finding in the first such sequence licence enough to move directly on to making an agenda statement.

Extract 5.10 (Pt1 / f 06.1)

F=Father

1. →	T:	↑u:m °ri(h)ght° ((paper shuffling))
2.		(1.8)
3.		↑maths: (.) o:kay.
4.		(1.2)
5. a→		u:m:, >she's in< Mrs G's set.

Despite both the change in sequential format (i.e. the audible document manipulation is contiguous with the 'um → right' sequence', rather than coming between such utterances) and the lack of any direct spoken reference to the action associated with the paper shuffling, the sorting of documents can still be heard to provide an implicit account for any delay within the transition from preamble talk to reporting. Two elements are of particular interest: the more subtle referencing of the document with the token "↑u:m" (line 1), and the simultaneous production of initiatory utterances and audible document manipulation.

Although similar tokens are evident in previous extracts[17], the inclusion of "↑u:m" (line 1) as part of an initiatory sequence that both culminates in an agenda statement, and is produced alongside the sounds of documents being sorted, allows us to examine the specific work this utterance carries out. As the first part of an initiatory sequence, "↑u:m" can be compared to similar sequences in previous extracts. The upward shift in pitch indicates that a new conversational action is about to take place, 'bracketing off' of any prior talk whilst forecasting further action from T. But equally important is the way "↑u:m" acts as an indication that T is either unsure or unready to proceed with a fully formulated turn-at-talk, despite having started speaking. Produced alongside the sound of paper shuffling, the source of this uncertainty can be located in this parallel action, thereby talking the written record into reality, albeit in a far more subtly implicative manner than has previously been seen.

The simultaneous production of the two initiatory utterances ("um → right") with the paper shuffling at line 1 can arguably be heard as a reflection of more straightforward practical concerns relating to the amount of organisation the specific documents for this

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[17] Cf. extract 5.8, line 4 and extract 5.9, line 7.

meeting require. In other words, unlike previous extracts where the audible manipulation of documents is attended to as an interactional turn in its own right, extract 5.10 (above) could simply reflect such mundane pragmatic concerns as the documents 'coming to hand' for T far more easily in this instance. More specifically, however, in being produced simultaneously with T's turn-at-talk at line 1, the paper shuffling can be heard to provide an on-line context for T's initiatory work, reflecting the transitional work that is carried out[18].

For the final extract in this section (extract 5.11, below), the production of audible document manipulation, as linked to an activity forecast by T, can once again be heard. In this instance, however, the other participants to the meeting do not overtly orient to the implied forecast. This leads to a reassertion of the initiatory sequence at line 7.

Extract 5.11 (Pt1/ z 09.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child; S = Sibling

1.	T:	.hhhh r:(hh)ight
2.		(7.5) ((background talk between child and father/child and sibling))
3. →	T:	(° o:kay:: .hh°) ((paper shuffling))
4.		(7.2)
5. →	C:	( ) ((addressed to parents/sibling))
6.		(1.2)
7.	T:	.hhh ↑ RI:ght:::: um::::
8.		(0.9)
9. a→		(tk) maths > I'll start with the maths <...

At line 2 the main feature of the preamble to extract 5.11 is the background talk between the family members. The quiet volume of this background talk means that its details have escaped transcription, but its tone and amplitude indicate that it is not directed towards T. Equally, T's lack of response to this talk, and the way it 'cuts across' what she is saying, marks it as "back channel" conversation (cf. Yngve, 1970; Duncan and Fiske, 1977). Although the initiatory statement "right" (line 1) fits the pattern established in earlier extracts, the forecasting, bracketing, and transitional relevance of the first stage of the initiatory sequence are not oriented to by the other participants in the same way.

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[18] Whilst the upward intoned "↑u:m" marks both the transitional nature of this section of talk, and forecasts further conversational actions from T, the downward intoned "°ri(h)ght°" indicates the next step towards the 'serious' task in hand.

That the second element of this initiatory sequence, "°o:kay:: .hh°" at line 3, is another reason for the diminished effectiveness of T's initiatory work can be heard in its production volume, which is so low that the transcription is marked as a possible hearing. Like extract 5.10 (above), the sound of paper shuffling is produced simultaneously with the initiatory statement, although in this case the combination of background talk and the arguably 'self-addressed' nature of "°o:kay:: .hh°" frames T's talk as being "back channel" as well. As part of an activity that only T is able to carry out, the potential remains for the document sorting to be oriented to by T's co-participants as a 'secondary' or ancillary activity, resulting in the continuance of whatever talk the co-participants are conducting amongst themselves.

It is the combination of all these factors that marks the subsequent 7.2-second gap at line 4 as a potentially 'open' space within the talk, rather than one that has been linked to an activity and therefore *not* of turn transitional relevance. The open nature of this pause can therefore be seen at line 5, where C carries on her conversation with her family despite the preparatory work by T. Not only does this indicate the extent to which the successful completion of an initiatory sequence relies upon the co-participation of all participants to the talk, it also shows how the implication of the written records, along with the other elements of T's initiatory work, do not provide any straightforwardly applied interpretation. Whilst in most extracts the turn-by-turn interpretation of the various elements of T's initiatory talk (including the spoken referencing of audible document manipulation) are attended to in a consistent manner, extract 5.11 indicates how these same elements can just as easily be heard as 'background' work.

5.4.1 Summary

Even without any spoken reference to it, audible document manipulation is still implicated in the preamble talk of the parents' evening meetings, as part of the non-adjacent reflexively tied structures of T's initiatory sequences. Whilst the non-adjacency of these structures is due to the sequentially relevant occurrence of paper shuffling, the forecasting action of the 'okay → right/right → okay' sequences also implicates an activity by T of which paper shuffling can be heard to be a part. Added to this, in extract 5.9 the implementation of this activity involves the participation of the parent, thereby

highlighting the attendance of both participants to an activity that is not explicitly spoken of during the meeting.

On top of the lack of any explicit reference to the activity implicated by the sounds of paper shuffling, differences in format are evident in both the occurrence of audible document manipulation, and the way in which attention is drawn to it. The changes in occurrence format are evident in the simultaneous production of the audible document manipulation with T's initiatory statements, which provides an online contextualisation for these utterances. In terms of drawing attention to the written documents, explicit spoken referencing is replaced by T's utilisation of a token that implicates unreadiness to proceed, which in turn is linked to the parallel sounds of paper shuffling.

In this section, the part played by the co-participants in facilitating the talking of the written records into reality was also seen. This is especially true in the case of audible document manipulation without any accompanying spoken reference to it, since no implicit way of hearing such sounds has been provided (visual only clues notwithstanding). Extract 5.11 underlines this aspect of audible document manipulation, highlighting both the joint work by T and the parents in constructing all of the elements of the initiatory sequences, and the way in which paper shuffling, without explicit reference to the activity it *potentially* signifies, can be treated as purely 'background' work without any wider interactional implicativeness.

5.5 Conclusion

At first glance, the implication of the written record within the parents' evening talk would appear to be only an ancillary element of the sequential techniques by which a state of talk is developed during the preliminary stages of the meetings. Indeed, without any visual evidence pertaining to gaze orientation or the specifics of such non-verbal actions as passing documents from one person to another, the utility of examining these features of the parents' evening meetings would appear to be minimal[19].

Despite this supposed deficit in terms of data, the importance of considering the role of written records is clear, since as Heath and Luff point out, "social interaction – talk,

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[19] Throughout this chapter, the link between paper shuffling and the concomitant act of looking at the papers whilst doing so has been highlighted. Without the backing of any evidence pertaining to gaze orientation (for example, through the use of video recorded data), however, this remains on the borderline between endogenously produced features of talk, and *a priori* observations.

visual and material conduct - ...address the ways in which participants collaborate in and through the tools and artefacts which are readily available to hand" (2000: p. x). The availability of these materials is reflected in their utility, with paper documents constituting an integral feature of many different types of interaction: "various activities rely upon the use of these tools and artefacts, and their use is embedded in the ongoing co-ordination of actions and activities between participants" (Heath and Luff, 2000: 48). Added to this, Heritage points out that "...the details of little, local sequences which at first seemed narrow, insignificant and contextually uninteresting, turn out to be the crucial resources by which larger institutionalized activity frameworks are evoked" (1984: 290). What then do these aspects of the preamble talk tell us about the management of institutionality within the early parts of the parents' evening meetings?

In order to provide a focus for research into institutional talk, Drew and Heritage outline what they call "five major dimensions of interactional conduct" (1992: 28): lexical choice; turn design; sequence organization; overall structural organization; and social epistemology. Using some of these foci as a template, the institutional aspects of the spoken reference to, and audible manipulation of, written documents within the parents' evening talk can begin to be characterised. If, for example, the overall structural organisation of the meetings is examined first, the repeated implication of the report document during the transition from preamble talk to reporting structure can be seen to constitute one element in the "task-related standard shape" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 43) of delivering the report on the child. The referencing of the report document by the teacher both reasserts the interactional focus of the talk, and draws attention to the 'official' source of the knowledge that allows this task can be carried out.

Whilst the integration of audible document manipulation into T's initiatory sequences acts as part of this overall structural organization, it also allows for a consideration of the question of sequence organisation. For Drew and Heritage, this focus pertains not only to the substantiation of institutional phenomena in the sequential aspects of a given example of talk (cf. Drew and Heritage, 1992: pp. 37-42), but also the comparative perspective that such an examination engenders. In terms of sequential phenomenon, the site-specific nature of the paper shuffling not only provides for an implicit account of any interactional delays, it also acts as an important element in the action projection

function of the non-adjacent reflexively tied sequences that characterise T's initiatory sequences[20].

Both of these aspects are also important in terms of any comparison with more 'ordinary' conversational forms, since whilst providing a source or warrant for any second hand knowledge is common across a whole raft of interactional situations, the length of the gaps during which document manipulation takes place in the parents' evening meetings are often by ordinary standards exceptionally long. That T sometimes provides an explicit account for this delay marks a similarity with ordinary conversation, whilst at the same time indicating how "nonspecialized or conversational organizations are...fitted or adapted to specialized interactional tasks in institutional contexts" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 38). The evidence for this can be found in the way that these accounts are based around organisational matters relating to the documents themselves[21], thereby drawing attention to the task orientation of delivering a report on the child. Equally importantly, the comparative aspect of examining sequence organization further highlights the attendance of the parents to the task orientation of the meetings, since unlike ordinary conversational situations, no attempt is made to take up a period of silence as a turn transition point (the example of extract 5.1 notwithstanding).

With both sets of participants attending to the institutionally derived task orientation in this way, the question of social epistemology and social relations is also raised. This is because the attendance by both the parents and the teacher to a specific task orientation acts as an indication of their asymmetric relationship within the interaction. Along with the deferral by the parents to the teacher's role as topic initiator in terms of making the report on the child, there is the related question of asymmetric access to the official source of the report. As a consistently referenced element of the talk, the inter-relationship between the implication of the report documents, T's role in delivering their details, and the parental lack of access to them, could all be seen to provide indications of the way institutional asymmetry is embedded in the talk. But whilst this is a factor in the constitution of the initial stages of the talk, it does not provide a complete account of the displayed relationships between the participants.

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[20] It is important to remember that, as the previous chapter has shown, the implication of the written record is not a *necessary* element in the initiatory work of T.

[21] See section 5.3 (above).

Firstly, two extracts[22] have shown how the parents do not always display an initial orientation to the initiatory work by T, including those elements relating to the implication of the written records. In this way, the collaborative nature of what could otherwise be unproblematically deemed 'institutional' talk is highlighted. Secondly, T's attempts to mitigate the asymmetric aspects of the meetings in the specific lexical choices she makes when drawing the attention of the parents to the existence of the written documents become evident. As Drew and Heritage point out, lexical choice "is a significant way through which speakers evoke and orient to the institutional context of their talk" (1992: 29), which in the parents' evening data is evident in the implied mutuality of such statements as "let's have a look" when referencing the written records.

Whilst the link between this choice of words and the action projection elements of T's initiatory statements has already been discussed, it can also be seen that this institutional task orientation is produced as an action *both* sets of adult participants need to carry out. It could also be said that the use of such mutuality implicative statements as "let's have a look" work to exclude the child as a participant, if present. Extract 5.3, for example, provides a case in point, in that the specific lexical choice of T in referring to the present child as "her" when forecasting the making of a report based upon the written record positions the child as a third party to be examined and talked about. As part of the institutionally focused task orientation of delivering the report on the child, T seeks the active participation of the parents, thereby constructing the parents' evening meetings as a joint endeavour, rather than one in which the 'professional' interactant straightforwardly delivers information to a 'lay' participant.

In summary, these findings have implications on two levels. In terms of the actual accomplishment of the parents' evening meetings, the implication of the written record during T's initiatory sequences carries out various functions across the different sections of the preamble talk. As well as explicitly referencing the written reports with such statements as "let's have a look", the audible manipulation of documents is sequentially integrated into the non-adjacent reflexively tied sequences utilised by T. This serves to imply the third party relationship of the participants to the written record. Not only does the referencing of the report begin to facilitate the institutional task orientation of delivering the report on the child, it also highlights the way in which the parents are co-

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[22] Cf. extracts 5.1 and 5.11, above.

opted into this delivery. In this way, the skills utilised by both the teacher and the parents in the co-operative achievement of a co-ordinated entry into the report-based meeting can once again be seen.

With regard to the analysis of interactional data generally, this chapter has shown that not only do supposedly extraneous factors such as written records have an impact upon a given example of talk-in-interaction, but that an examination of these extraneous factors does not have to move beyond an analysis of the actual actions carried out and attended to by the participants to the talk. Indeed, an investigation of what at first sight would appear to be an ancillary feature of actions carried out during an interaction, such as the audible indications of documents being manipulated, can prove to be extraordinarily fruitful, thereby reflecting the assertion by Heritage (1984a: 242) that "no order of detail in interaction can be dismissed *a priori* as insignificant".

Moving on from the initiatory sequences of the parents' evening meetings, the next chapter examines the main body of the reporting structure outlined in Chapter 3 (above). Further to the early stages of this structure seen during the preceding analysis, such as the production of agenda statements by T, Chapter 6 looks in detail at the delivery of the report on the child.

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Chapter 6

Report Delivery and Syllogism

6.0 Introduction

As Chapter 3 (above) indicated, once the preamble, agenda and focusing stages of the talk have been worked through, T moves on to the actual delivery of the child's mock SAT examination result. Whilst the importance of this stage of the parents' evening meeting can be presupposed on a normative level (i.e. informing the parents as to their child's academic attainment constitutes the 'main reason' for the meeting), the centrality of the reporting on the child is reflected in the fact that the reporting statement is presented during every meeting within the data corpus[1]. Added to this central role in the structural formation of the parents' evening meetings is the fact the delivery of the report on the child involves the management of several important aspects of the talk. As Drew points out, "[a] turn's official business is reporting; what the reporting may accomplish is done implicitly, at least as regards the speaker's involvement in the action that a reporting can be seen to have eventually managed" (1984: 147). So, beyond the delivery of the child's result as information *in and of itself*, the reporting statement can also be seen to involve the management of several interactional identities relating to the various participants to the talk. These include the role of the teacher as both deliverer of the report, and as representative of the school, as well as the role of both parent(s) and teacher in their sphere of joint interest and expertise, the child. Equally, on some occasions the role of the child themselves as an active participant is also managed.

As part of the examination of the reporting statement's implicitly accomplished work, this chapter also focuses upon the role of the report on the child as 'news' in its own right. Two important features of the parents' evening meetings converge in this specific focus. As one of the few officially sanctioned sites for meetings between parents and teachers, parents' evening constitutes for many parents the first time information regarding their child's schoolwork has been delivered to them first-hand[2]. Moreover, the method by which a result is produced within the SAT testing regime, setting a child's level of attainment against a 'national average' result (see Chapter 1, above, and section 6.0.1, below, for more details), opens up the possibility that the results could potentially be seen as constituting 'good' or 'bad' news. Equally, the production of each result,

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[1] Cf. Chapter 3, table 3.a, above, and the subsequent discussion in this chapter.

[2] Although there are many potential sites where parents and teachers might interact, experience and utilisation of these opportunities will necessarily differ between parents. The tacit (if not always fully enacted) compulsory nature of parents' evening attendance means that parents who do not generally interact with their children's teachers at any other site within the school environment do so at these interviews, often for the first time.

both in terms of an individual child's ability during any given examination environment, and the educational policy decisions which define a notional statistical average to be achieved, could be said to be reliant upon factors 'external' to the parent-teacher interaction itself. However, the actual significance of these results is defined and negotiated via the actions of the parents' evening participants themselves. This chapter focuses, therefore, on how the negotiation of these actions is carried out.

6.0.1 Test Result Format

Before looking at the actual delivery of the report on the child, it is necessary to briefly reiterate the technical details of the results that form the basis of this report, not least as an aid to the reader regarding the terms utilised by T during the meetings (see also Chapter 1, table 1.b, above).

The 'mock' exams undertaken by the children earlier in the term followed the pattern of the SAT examinations proper, and were designed to give both the teaching staff and parents an indication of every child's level of ability in each curriculum subject area. This result is expressed as a single grade in each subject between 1 and 5, with 'level 1' being the lowest level of attainment, and 'level 5' the highest. A further gradation of the child's attainment can also be found in the specific exam result, with the achievement of each level being dependant upon a given number of 'marks'.

Further to the individual quantification of each child's level of attainment, every result is set against an externally moderated 'national average' for the curriculum subject in question, as established by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). For every curriculum area subject to an SAT examination (this includes each curriculum topic discussed within the data for this research), this national average is set at 'level four'. Once again, it is important to stress the difference between the notional imposition of these 'national average' levels on a given child's result, and the actual utilisation of the concept of 'national average' within the parents' evening meetings.

6.0.2 Overview of Chapter

In section 6.1, the presentation of the child's result via a syllogistic contrast with the national average level is outlined. Not only is this seen as an indication of T's professional cautiousness in presenting results below the national average level, it also

highlights how the implicative force of the syllogistic structure maintains a robust interactional movement. This is done by the application of specific preface utterances.

That the presentation of the result and national average level also involves the management of various levels of participation status is examined in section 6.2. The creation of interactionally relevant identities is seen to be important in terms of constructing an image of the child, as well as with regard to the participation status of both the teacher and the parents.

Finally, in section 6.3 changes made to the reporting structure are examined, highlighting its sensitivity to various local contingencies within the parents' evening meetings. Differences in the presentation of level four and above results are made apparent in this section, contrasting with the interactional work of the delivery of below level four results. Whilst providing a contrasting 'national average' element is central to the delivery of level three or lower results, this section also examines how, for those results on or above the national average, when the contextualising statement is present it does different interactional work.

6.1 The Report- National Average Contrast

The first observable feature of T's talk during this section of the parents' evening meetings is the sequential pattern by which the various elements of the report are delivered. As the overview of the meeting trajectory has already illustrated (see Chapter 3, above), the production of an agenda statement by T marks the end of the preamble talk and the start of the reporting 'proper'. The specific task orientation of reporting on the child is evident in the series of details T provides regarding various contextual academic factors. The repeated application of this reporting structure is evident in extracts 6.1 to 6.4 (below)[3].

Extract 6.1 (continued from Extract 5.11: Pt1/ z 09.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child; S = Sibling

9.   a→ T: (tk) <u>maths</u> > I'll start with the maths <

10. b→   .hh she's <u>in</u> Mrs G's set

11.   M: (yes she is) =

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[3] As in the previous chapters (above), each stage of the reporting structure will be marked a→, b→ etc following the outline provided in table 3.a (Chapter 3, above). Single arrows will indicate other points of interest raised in the text.

12. c^1→T: = YEP (0.4) and she's working at (.) a level three

13.   (0.5)

14.   M: Ok [ay

15. c^2→T: [.hhh now the national, (0.6) av'rage is level fou_r:,

16.   (0.5)

Extract 6.2 (continued from Extract 5.5: Pt 1/ e 05.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

20. a→ T: .hh ri:ght, (.) maths:

21.   (0.5)

22. b→   .hh she's i_n: er Mr D's se_t (.) > for maths<

23. c^1→   .h a::nd she's working at level th_ree

24.   (0.5)

25.   M: °kay°

26. c^2→T: .hhh (tck) (nand) the national average is level fou_r.

27.   (0.5)

Extract 6.3 (continued from Extract 4.5: Pt1/ s 11.1)

M = Mother

39. a→ T: >Righ_t <(.) we'll start having a look at ma°ths::: °

40.   M: °mm°

41. b→ T: Erm_: she's in Mr D's set for maths

42.   M: yeah =

43. c^1→T: = (t) .hhu she's working at level th↑ree::,

44.   (1.1)

45. c^2→   now the national average is level four.

46.   (0.6)

47.   M: (°yeah°)

Extract 6.4 (continued from Extract 6.4: Pt1/ r 04.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child

20. a→ T: we'll start with his maths, .h [hh-

21.   M: [mm_:hmm

22. b→ T: he's in Mr D's set-

23.   (1.1)

24.   T: a::nd

25.   (1.3)

26. c^1→   he's working at er level three,

27.   (0.5)

28. c^2→   .hh now the national average is level four.

29.   (1.2)

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Along with the delivery of the result itself, in each of the preceding extracts T provides a subsequent contextualising statement (indicated as c^2 in the transcript). These two stages have been specifically designed to work in adjacency with each other, with the nature of this adjacency being linked to what Sacks has called a "generically present" (1992b: 556) feature of talk, namely that of the relationship between current utterances and any immediately prior utterances. As Sacks points out, positioning is relevant to the activity of a given utterance, which in this instance means that the initial power of the 'national average' contrast rests in the position of the *contextualising statement* as a 'next' to the *reporting statement*. By first of all stating the level a child is working at with the reporting statement, and then contrasting this level against a 'national average' during her next available turn-at-talk, T provides a tacit measure by which to judge the result.

6.1.1 Syllogism

The mere fact of adjacency is not enough, however, to explain the implicative force of T's delivery of the result and national average. By introducing a sequentially implicative contextualising statement, the reporting is "managed as a 'seen-by-anyone' consequence of objective circumstances" (Drew, 1984:137). This objectivity can in turn be linked to the fact that the mechanism by which T introduces the implications of the result makes use of *syllogism* as a logical progression for the parents to work with, with a conclusion being drawn from two given propositions[4]. Gill and Maynard, in their study of news delivery by diagnostic clinicians to their patients, describe the use of syllogism in such circumstances as the presentation of a series in which "a general (major) premise [is] followed by a particular (minor) premise and a conclusion" (1995: 17). By implying but not (as yet) overtly stating the conclusion, this news delivery device is hearable as an "incomplete syllogism" (Gill and Maynard, 1995), since the conclusion is left for the parents to draw.

This means that as a unit-type, syllogism works in terms of a clausal construction, and follows a basic pattern outlined by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, in that it allows "a projection of the unit-type under way, and what, roughly, it will take for an instance of

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[4] The implied objectivity of the syllogism is further enhanced by the presentation of the results as straightforward numerical values. In Leppanen's (1998) work on the delivery of test results regarding blood pressure by District Nurses, the objective character of the results is due to the fact that result levels are "not achieved from elaborations of subjective impressions" (Leppanen, 1998: 135), but are constructed as "numerical values, not qualitative verbal statements" (ibid).

that unit-type to be completed" (1974: 702)[5]. This aspect of the syllogistic structure reflects some of the properties of reportings outlined by Drew (1984), which in turn highlights the specific utility of presenting the report in the following way:

a). The reporting simply "provides the materials from which the recipient can see for him/herself the consequence" (Drew, 1984:137); i.e. the upshot of the report is left to the recipient.

b). By simply detailing the circumstances of the national average without explicitly stating its implications, the speaker (T) can be heard to "withhold officially taking positions about the possible implications of their reportings" (Drew, 1984:137).

The specific utility of this method of report delivery can be linked to the nature of the result being delivered, since each of the extracts outlined above concern results below the national average level, and as such can be deemed as 'failing' and constituting 'bad news', at least on a normative level. Given this factor, the provision of clues regarding the upshot of the result 'prepares the ground' for the parental acceptance of a 'failing' SAT result. Indeed, Schegloff states that there appears to be "a practice by which bearers of bad news can bring its recipients to be the first to articulate it" (1988: 444) by providing clues that "engage their recipients' common sense knowledge of the world, their recipient-designed mutual knowledge, and their orientation to the occasion of the conversation" (ibid).

6.1.2 Syllogism and Professional Cautiousness

The question of whether or not the syllogistic report-national average contrast presents a specific 'good' or 'bad' news valence must, however, be set against one important factor: in terms of the parents' evening data, the reporting structure outlined in Chapter 3 (above) indicates that in each interview it is T who provides an upshot/assessment of the result subsequent to the making of the national average contrast (for more details on this stage of the talk, see Chapters 7 and 8, below). This means that whilst the syllogistic format of the report-national average contrast reflects a cautious handling of a potentially delicate subject, a 'failing' result on the part of the child, the ultimate 'good' or 'bad' news valence of the information remains to be seen. Putting aside such

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[5] In this instance, the projectability of the syllogistic contrast is less specific than the examples provided by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, since the 'objective' nature of the report-national average contrast means that the potential 'next' is open for either M or T to provide an upshot.

questions for the moment, it is clear that T, by avoiding taking up any position regarding the relative 'value' of the result at this stage of the meeting, displays a level of professional caution during the delivery of the reports. As Drew and Heritage point out, "professional participants in institutional interactions design their talk so as to maintain a cautiousness, or even a position of neutrality with respect to their co-participants" (1992: 47), This can often be seen in situations where interviewers provide 'difficult' questions whilst maintaining an impartial position (cf. Clayman, 1992, and Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991).

This aspect of the syllogistic reporting structure can also be seen by comparing it to the three aspects of cautiousness outlined in Gill and Maynard's description of Incomplete Syllogism (1995). The first level of caution is linked to the way "the general premise offers an abstract definition that only by implication applies to the child under consideration" (Gill and Maynard, 1995: 18). For the parents' evening data, the abstract nature of the national average contrast means that whilst the child is being judged by a specific set of criteria, it is difficult to move beyond any implied criticism of the child towards a more direct and personalised level of criticism[6]. The second aspect of cautiousness outlined by Gill and Maynard relates to Maynard's earlier work on the Perspective Display sequence (Maynard, 1991; 1992), in that "the syllogistic device allows the clinician to glimpse the recipient's reaction before fully committing to the diagnostic news" (Gill and Maynard, 1995: 19). In extracts 6.1 to 6.4 above, the stepwise production of the syllogistic contrast has allowed for parental recipiency (even if such recipiency has not always been forthcoming), which not only allows T to gauge reaction to the details of the report, but also avoids giving a 'lecturing' format to the report delivery.

These two aspects also imply the final feature of syllogistic cautiousness, in that this method of news delivery "is built to handle the contingencies of recipient response" (Gill and Maynard, 1995: 19). For Gill and Maynard, this means that if the parents "do not publicly propose the conclusion" (1995: 19) of the syllogism, the clinician can perform remedial work before going ahead with the news delivery. Whilst this opportunity also exists within the syllogistic structure of the report-national average contrast, when the parents do not complete the syllogism at this stage of the parents'

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[6] See the next section (below) for a further discussion of the work the reporting structure does in constructing an image of the child.

evening meetings, T does not carry out any overt remedial work *per se*. Instead, the trajectory of the syllogistic structure, as well as elements in its construction, provides the interaction with a robust forward movement, irrespective of the level of response displayed by the parents.

6.1.3 Preface Work and Interactional Movement

The initial source of this robust interactional movement is found in the implicative force of the syllogistic structure outlined above, with the objective circumstances of the report implying a link between the adjacent clauses of the actual detail of the report. In terms of the wider reporting structure outlined in Chapter 3 (above), the linking work of *and*- and *now*- prefaces mark a forward movement within the trajectory of a larger activity. The work of Heritage and Sorjonen (1994) provides an explication of this preface work. Indeed, despite looking specifically at *and*-prefaces in terms of a series of question-answer sequences, the use of such prefaces described by Heritage and Sorjonen applies equally to both *and*- and *now*- prefaces:

> "As part of the work treating prior answers as unproblematic and sufficient, these and-prefaced questions move the talk forward across a sequence boundary. In doing so, they mark the units out of which the activity is fashioned; and by marking the movement to a "next unit", they register progress within the activity."
>
> (1994: 6)

For the parents' evening data, the sequential implications of this can be found in the way the institutional framework of the report, as worked with on a local turn-by-turn basis, allows for the continuance of the talk. Indeed, if faced with a minimal level of recipiency from the parent(s), T can continue with the 'task at hand' without making this silence on the part of the parents accountable. In extracts 6.1 and 6.2 (above), *and*-prefaces link the reporting statement to the prior focusing statement (cf. extract 6.1, line 12: extract 6.2, line 15), whilst the report and contextualising statements are linked by *now*- and *and*- prefaces respectively (cf. extract 6.1, line 15: extract 6.2, line 18). Similar work is done in extract 6.3 (above), with the now-preface that links the report and contextualising statements (line 28) gaining M's subsequent appreciation ("(°yeah°)", line 30). Finally, in extract 6.4 (above) the specific utility of registering progress within the activity of reporting becomes obvious, since despite M's continuer

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at line 11 being the only example of recipiency throughout the entire meeting so far, T is able to continue on with the reporting trajectory[7].

6.1.4 Summary

The basics of a robust comparative structure within the overall reporting trajectory is evident in the four extracts examined so far. The main format of this structure involves a basic comparative pattern, which starts with the provision of a *reporting statement*, during which the child's result in one of the mock SAT examinations is recounted. Subsequent to this report, a *contextualising statement* is made, which seeks to compare the child's result to a 'national average', which in all subjects has been set at level four in a scale from 1 to 5. The contrast between the report and the national average is produced through the application of a syllogistic logical progression. This both provides the recipient of the report with the interactional materials necessary to supply the upshot of the report for themselves, and allows the teacher to avoid taking any official position regarding the result.

This general syllogistic format has three specific consequences:

1. Whilst providing a measure by which to judge the child's result, it avoids making any direct criticism of the child.
2. In allowing for parental recipiency, the stepwise format of the syllogistic contrast allows T to avoid being heard to 'lecture' the parents.
3. The syllogism utilised by T is designed to handle contingencies of recipient response. In the case of the parents' evening meetings this means that interactional movement, irrespective of the level of parental recipiency, can be maintained via the application of *and-* and *now*-prefaces.

6.2 Participation Status and Constructing The Child

Although the previous section looked mainly at sequential aspects of T's delivery of the reporting structure, several features relating to the relationships set up during the interaction were also highlighted. In referencing the national average as the initial criterion by which the child's result will be judged, T positions both herself and the parents as third parties relative to the report, with her own status being that of the

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[7] Added to this, as we saw in the Chapter 4 the lack of recipiency by the parents means that T has to recast a prior question as self-addressed. See extract 4.4.

deliverer of the results, rather than as their particular institutional source. Secondly, the abstract nature of the national average contrast as a judgement criterion avoids introducing a direct and personalised level of criticism of the child.

Alongside these features of the syllogistic contrast, other elements within the reporting structure as a whole work to construct the relative identities of the participants. Further to T's participation status as the deliverer of the results, explicit referencing of the set teacher's role can be heard, whilst specific lexical work is carried out in order to cautiously construct an image of the child. This section will examine each of these features in turn.

6.2.1 Implicating the Set Teacher

As the previous extracts have already outlined, the trajectory of the reporting structure implies a series of relationships between T and the report she is delivering. Whilst the national average contrast introduces an 'external' judgement criterion for the child's result, the focusing statement informs the parents that an individual other than T is responsible for both the teaching and production of the report currently up for discussion. This way of outlining relative interactional positioning has been described by Goffman, who states,

> "when a word is spoken, all those who happen to be in perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it. The codification of these various positions and the normative specification of appropriate conduct within each provide an essential background for interaction analysis."
>
> (1981: 3)

Goffman outlines three levels of participation status relative to any given interactional object: *speaker, author* and *principal*. For the parents' evening data, T positions herself as the *speaker* of the report, whilst the set teacher is introduced as the *author*. As the subject of the report, and thus of the meeting, the child is implicated as the *principal*. In highlighting this relationship, T can be heard to provide the requisite information regarding the child's report, whilst minimising her own responsibility in the production of the result. Not only does this positioning work allow T to maintain a neutral position regarding the production of the report, it also allows her to circumvent any potential difficulties that might arise in terms of parental queries regarding the result. Having

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positioned herself as the *deliverer* of the results rather than as their particular institutional source, T has introduced a factor that mitigates any responsibility she might bear for a 'bad' result.

In extract 6.5 (below), all of these factors are at work. Unlike previous extracts, however, they are also underlined by the explicit referencing of the set teacher's role. This level of emphasis can be heard at two points: T's response pursuit at the end of line 14, and in her preface to the reporting statement at the beginning of line 16.

Extract 6.5 (continued from Extract 4.3: Pt1/ 1 01.1)

M = Mother

20. a→ T:	>if: we:,< (0.7) talk about her maths: first
21. M:	°yea(h)°
22. b→ T:	.hh okay so she's in: Mr D's set (0.8) y[eah?
23. M:	[°yeah°
24. c¹→T:	.hh urm and he says that- (0.4) >she's working at-< (0.9) .h level three
25.	(0.6)
26. M:	yea::h.
27. c²→T:	the::: n:ational average, (0.7) is level four
28. M:	yea::h.

In terms of response pursuit, T seeks a reply from M after monitoring the potential turn transition point (the 0.8-second pause) at the end of her utterance on line 14. The information regarding the set teacher is packaged in a straightforward way, and is heard as a complete and unproblematic informing in its own right, since T's response pursuit doesn't involve reviewing her statement and offering a replacement (cf. Pomerantz, 1984b). Instead, T simply seeks an indication from M that she understands. In terms of the positioning of this focusing statement, it is worth citing Sacks:

> "There can be a choice between making an announcement and using a question, where the question controls what the other will do in the next turn, where your interest is to tell them something you convey in the question, which they are then placed in a position to not respond to."

> (1992b: 177)

T can therefore be heard to convey to M that she (T) is not the originator of the report, whilst at the same time presenting this as something routine and acceptable. By seeking

an explicitly affirmative response and forecasting its form (T: "yeah?:" - M: "yeah"), whilst at the same time not taking the opportunity in third position to upgrade the information in the face of what could be read as a minimal expression of understanding by M, T's utterance has placed M in such a position that she *cannot* specifically respond to the import of the setting. Instead, she is simply responding to its existence, and by continuing with the reporting, T has both 'coached' M as to how the interaction will progress, and gained parental recipiency as to the respective participation status of the class teacher (T) and the set teacher.

This participation status is also underlined at the beginning of line 16, with T constructing her preface to the report by explicitly forecasting what is to follow as *not* being her own words ("he says that")[8]. By specifically outlining the 'source' of the report in this way, T provides an actualisation of those earlier aspects of the talk that had merely implied the various levels of participation status (including the implication of the written record seen in Chapter 5, above, and the straightforward production of the focusing statement seen in extracts 6.1 to 6.4, above). As the overall production of the report-national average contrast has already outlined, this level of expressive caution allows T to position herself as 'neutral' regarding the forthcoming result. This is a defensive strategy that can be set against both a subsequent 'below national average' result, and an unknown parental reaction in the face of such a result. Whilst it cannot be assumed that T has any prior knowledge of the result at this point[9], the introduction of participation status as an interactional resource allows for several eventualities in terms of parental response subsequent to the delivery of the report. Equally important, it also ensures that the ongoing progression of the meeting is maintained.

6.2.2 Construction of the Child

In comparison to the several aspects of cautiousness outlined in Gill and Maynard's (1995) description of incomplete syllogism (see above), it is clear that the abstract nature of the report-national average contrast allows T to judge the child by a specific set of criteria without this being heard as direct or personalised criticism. Added to this, it also indicates how specific lexical choices during the focusing and reporting statements facilitate a cautious presentation of the children and their work by T.

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[8] Other examples of this explicit referencing of the set teacher can be seen in extract 6.7 (line 17), extract 6.10 (line16), and extract 6.11 (line 14). See below for more details.

[9] The fact that two pauses can be heard later in T's utterance at line 16 would appear to give some indication that her exact knowledge of the result is based primarily upon the written report document. As such, the report can be heard as something that she is coming to 'cold'.

Further to T's work highlighting her own participation status, during all of the extracts looked at so far the child in question is also implicated in the making of the report. Indeed, from the earliest stages of the reporting structure T repeatedly mentions the child. During both the focusing and reporting statements the application of pronominal terms can be heard as specific points of reference around which to concentrate the ongoing trajectory of the talk[10]. So, in examining extract 6.1 again, T and M can both be heard to implicate the child with the pronominal reference "she".

Extract 6.1.a (Pt1/ z 09.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child; S = Sister

15.	→ T:	.hh she's <u>in</u> Mrs G's set
16.	→ M:	(yes she is) =
17.	→ T:	= YEP (0.4) and she's working at (.) a level three

Other examples can also be seen in each of the previous extracts, although changes in the level of parental recipiency means that only T can be heard to deploy specific pronominal terms when referencing the child.

Extract 6.2.a (Pt 1/ e 05.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

12.	T:	.hh <u>ri:ght,</u> (.) <u>maths:</u>
13.		(0.5)
14.	→	.hh she's <u>in:</u> er Mr D's <u>set</u> (.) > for maths<
15.	→	.h a::nd she's working at level th<u>ree</u>

Extract 6.3.a (Pt1/ s 11.1)

M = Mother

24.	→ T:	Erm: she's in Mr D's set for maths
25.	M:	yeah =
26.	→ T:	= (t) .hhu she's working at level th↑<u>ree</u>::,

Extract 6.4.a (Pt1/ r 04.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child

10.	→ T:	we'll start with his maths, .h [hh-
11.	M:	[mm:hmm
12.	→ T:	he's in Mr D's set-

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[10] Note that during extract 6.4, the agenda statement also includes pronominal referencing of the child ("we'll start with his maths" – line 10).

13.		(1.1)
14.	T:	a::nd
15.		(1.3)
16. →		he's working at er level three,

Extract 6.5.a (Pt1/ 1 01.1)

M = Mother

12. →	T:	>if we:,< (0.7) talk about her maths: first
13.	M:	°yea(h)°
14. →	T:	.hh okay so she's in: Mr D's set (0.8) y[eah?
15.	M:	[°yeah°
16. →	T:	.hh urm and he says that- (0.4) >she's working at-< (0.9) .h level three

On one level this occurrence conforms to normative conversational expectations, and as such can be located in the general aspects of topic management displayed by T during the meetings. The recitation of the SAT result will therefore necessarily involve a description of the child, or at least the child's actions during the specific event of the earlier mock examination. But it is also interesting to note that during both this stage of the talk, and during the preamble (see Chapters 4 and 5, above), the child is not explicitly referred to by name, notwithstanding any mention of their name at a stage prior to the beginning of the tape recording which has escaped our analytic gaze[11]. This can be set against the more technical definition of a pronoun and its use, in that it is "a word used instead of and to indicate a noun already mentioned *or known*" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1992 – my emphasis). The continued use of such pronominal terms can therefore be heard to not only provide the child as the focus for the talk, but also implicate T and M as participants talking about an already *known-in-general* topic.

6.2.3 Formulation of Reporting Statement

In terms of the formulation of reporting statement itself, T can be heard to repeatedly utilise the phrase "s/he's working at" as a preface to the numerical detail of the child's level of academic attainment. This formulation hearably 'projects forward' from the

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[11] Whilst there are two exceptions to this feature of the parents' evening talk, the specific referencing of the child in these instances does not represent the straightforward identification by name of a third party. In the case of extract 5.4 (Chapter 5, above) the referencing of the absent child by the appellation "Mr Jackson" (line 8) is ambiguous, given that the father actually receipts the tacit summons of the utterance. For extract 5.3, the child's name is used in direct reference to the present child as an overhearing audience. But as we shall subsequently see in extract 6.7 (below), this highlights a two-tier level of reporting that throws into sharp relief the actual construction of the child within the parents' evening meetings.

activity of the mock SAT examination, thereby reflecting the actuality of the school's academic timetable (i.e. that the SAT examinations proper have yet to take place). It also places the child within an ongoing trajectory of schoolwork that can, by implication, get 'better'.

That this formulation is designed to present a specific temporal categorisation of the child can be seen in extract 6.6 (below), with T initiating a self-repair of the 'working at' preface to the reporting statement (line 14).

Extract 6.6 (continued from Extract 5.9: Pt1/ m 12.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

11.	a+b→T:	s:tart w [ith her language. Mr D::
12.	M:	[° y(h)es: (mm) °
13.		(0.4)
14.	c^1→ T:	(t) .hhh Okay >she works:-< (.) she's working at level three:,
15.	M:	°yeah°
16.	T:	.hh
17.	M:	°°m:hm°°
18.		(.)
19.	c^2→T:	the national average (.) is level four.
20.		(1.7)
21.	M:	o(u)h…

The initial offering of "she works" (line 14) presents a more essentialist picture of the child than the subsequent formulation "she's working at", which only implies a *present* state. By explicitly repairing the reference to the child in this way, the essential character of the child is *not* implied in the notion of 'working at'. As such, this statement cannot be heard as direct criticism of the child, since it implies the potential for the current level of attainment to get 'better'. T's lexical choice can therefore be heard to forecast and reflect the stated aim of assessment that the national average contrast works with, whilst at the same time aligning the parents to the work of ensuring that the child is achieving his/her academic best.

As part of this work of focusing upon the child and his/her results, the caution inherent in the formulation 'working at' reflects upon both T *and* the parents. In terms of the overall focus of the meeting, it is the child who has been ascribed responsibility for the work, thereby removing responsibility for the result from either set of adult participants

(i.e. both the teacher *and* parents). That this level of ascription for a particular result by a child avoids equating responsibility with blame is manifest in the way 'working at' implies that the child is 'working *not* shirking' in terms of their schoolwork.

Another aspect of this method of ascribing the result to the child is the way in which it reflects the institutionality of T's task orientation. In the previous chapter regarding the implication of the written record, one site at which the institutional nature of talk can be heard was found in the specific lexical choices of the participants (cf. Drew and Heritage, 1992, and above). Bearing this in mind, whilst T's self-repair in extract 6.6 begins to highlight the importance of precisely wording the report on the child within the parents' evening meetings, extract 6.7 (below) outlines the institutional nature of this formulation.

This institutionality is evident in the two ascription formats utilised by T during extract 6.7 (below), which in turn stem from T having spoken directly to the child during the early stages of the meeting. The first reporting is directly addressed to the child (lines 17 and 19), and is arguably more informal in delivery. The second reporting is addressed to the parent (line 22), and follows a pattern similar to the 'working at' formulation of earlier extracts.

Extract 6.7 (continued from Extract 5.3: Pt1/ af 15.1)

F = Father; C = Child

11. a→ T:	° o:kay ° ((said softly)) (.) ↑ma:ths:
12.	(0.6)
13. b→	>i- she in Mrs G's set- <
14.	(1.5)
15. c²→	(tch) .hhh A:::Nd (0.9) (u)national average (.) is a level fou:r
16.	(0.8)
17. c¹→	(tk) for these sats. = ↑now this says level ↑three::
18.	(1.6)
19.	↑is that ri:ght?
20. C:	I'm bad int I, (hhh)
21.	(.)
22. c¹→T:	.hhh Level three: working towards a level four
23.	(.)
24. F:	(oh is it)

As the analysis in Chapter 5 (above) indicated, T treats C as an overhearing audience from a very early stage in the interaction. As the meeting progresses, T shifts to directly addressing the child, as seen in the reporting statement "now this says level three is that ri:ght?" (lines 17 to 19). Indications of T's institutional task orientation are still evident within this statement, as shown by the implication of the written record ("now this says" – line 17)[12] and the use of technical language deriving from the SAT testing judgement criteria ("level ↑three::" – line 17). But in general terms, the presentation of the result has a more informal, conversational character. Not only is the utterance hearably presented as both question implicative and as an expression of surprise regarding the result, it is also demonstrably directed at C, as her response at line 20 indicates. This informal character provides a marked contrast to both the reporting statements of previous extracts, and the subsequent reporting statement at line 22.

During this reporting statement T reiterates the level achieved, which in turn latches onto a more formalised presentation of the result. Having gained the recipiency of C, this later reporting statement is hearably addressed to F, and indeed gains a response from him at line 24. Despite the child having already been directly addressed during the meeting, the subsequent reporting statement directed at F contains all of the elements that presented a non-essentialist picture of the child heard in previous extracts. The two reporting statements in extract 6.7 are therefore hearably directed at two different audiences within the parents' evening meetings. In providing a two-tier level of reporting, not only can the institutional nature of T's task orientation be seen, it also becomes evident how this task orientation works in and through T's conversational actions.

6.2.4 Summary

By introducing the role of the set teacher, T highlights the relative participation status of each person involved in the creation of the mock SAT result and its corresponding report. In terms of her own role in the creation and delivery of the result, the implication of the set teacher allows T to position herself as the deliverer, but not the institutional source, of the report. This strategy means that T can adopt a neutral position regarding

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[12] As we saw for extract 6.5 (above), the implication of the written record sometimes involves explicit referencing of the set teacher as the source of the report. By stating, "now this says" at line 17, T hearably positions herself as a third party to the report, specifically outlining the set teacher as its 'source'. In this way, T actualises what had merely been implied earlier in the meeting regarding the various levels of participation status relative to the child's result.

the result, a defensive strategy designed to mitigate the effects of an unknown parental reaction in the face of a potentially problematic 'below national average' result.

The reporting statement itself can also be heard to set up a particular image of the child being discussed. The use of specific pronominal terms provides the child as the focus for the talk, as well as implicating both teacher and parent(s) as participants talking about a known-in-general topic. Even in the case of extract 6.7, where the child is explicitly targeted as an active participant within the talk, T's delivery of pronominal terms sets up a particular set of parent/teacher relationships. Taken as a whole, the specific formulation of the reporting statement can be heard to work in two ways:

1. It places the child within an overall trajectory regarding the SAT testing procedure, projecting forward from the activity of the mock SAT examination.
2. It ascribes responsibility for the level of the result with the child, concomitantly removing responsibility for the result from teacher and parent(s).

6.3 Changes in Reporting Structure Delivery

In terms of both the syllogistic structure of the report-national average contrast, and the overall reporting structure utilised by T, the majority of extracts examined in this chapter so far follow a similar sequential pattern and share similar sets of interactional features. But as extract 6.7 (above) has shown, some differences do exist in the format of T's delivery of the report on the child.

In this section I examine extracts in which changes to the sequential and production features of this stage of the parents' evening meetings take place. These include various modifications to the delivery of the contextualising statement, as well as changes in the production order of the previously seen sequential pattern of the reporting and contextualising statements. Whilst continuing to highlight T's cautious presentation of those results below the national average, including how changes to the reporting structure reflect its sensitivity to the various local contingencies within the parents' evening meetings, this section also highlights the changes to the reporting structure during the delivery of results *above* the national average. For these meetings, a whole different set of considerations relating to the role of the report-national average syllogism and the construction of the relative identities of the participants become evident.

6.3.1 Non-National Average Contextualising Statements

The first set of changes to the delivery of the report-national average contrast is apparent in extract 6.8 (below). Unlike previous non-achieving result extracts, T does not make reference to the sought-for national average level. Instead, she implies a measure by which to judge the child's result without explicitly mentioning the 'national average'. Following the reporting statement at line 15, this contextualising statement can be heard at line 17.

Extract 6.8 (continued from Extract 5.2: Pt1/ co 17.1)
F=Father

4.	a+b→T:	.hh ↑Ma:ths: (.) he's got Mrs G hasn't he.
5.		(0.7)
6.	F:	right yeah
7.		(0.6)
8.	T:	(tch) °went down a group didn't he° and he was [n't best pleased =
9.	F:	[sright
10.	T:	= I don't [think
11.	F:	[no
12.	T:	.hhhh BU: [t (.) his sats results,
13.	F:	[°no°
14.		(1.1)
15.	c^1→ T:	level three,
16.		(0.8)
17.	c^2→	working up to a level four
18.		(0.8)

T's statement at line 17 is different from the contextualising statements of previous extracts (for example, extract 6.1, line 15: "now the national av'rage is level four"), in that it has elements that are more similar to the reporting statements seen in previous extracts. Not only is there no mention of the national average level, a formulation similar to the 'working at' of previous reporting statements can be heard. These changes to the reporting and contextualising statements are indicative of two important aspects of the reporting structure utilised by T. First, they reveal the sensitivity of the reporting structure to local contingencies within the parents' evening meetings. Second, the presentation of some form of contextualising statement reflects the ongoing importance of providing a measure by which to judge the child's below level four result, both in terms of presenting a non-essentialist picture of the child and their work, and supplying the requisite information to the parent in an easily understandable format.

In extract 6.8, the question of sensitivity to local conditions can be linked to both the section of talk that diverges from the reporting structure across lines 8 to 12, and the truncated version of the reporting statement (line 15). This first section of talk involves a discussion about the child's change in mathematics set, and takes place after T has initiated the reporting structure at line 4 with the agenda and focusing statements. Whilst this discussion is related to the theme T has introduced during the agenda statement (i.e. that his current set teacher is different from the one he initially had earlier in the academic year), it can also be heard to add an extra level of detail to the delivery of the child's result. This is potentially problematic in terms of the parent's understanding of the result, especially when comparing it to the relatively straightforward provision of information that marked the progression through each stage of the reporting structure in previous extracts. Equally, having introduced both the agenda for the talk and the information regarding the set teacher, the discussion regarding the child's "group" can be heard as not getting on with the 'task in hand', thereby opening up a site of potential interactional difficulty should F choose to query the path the discussion has taken. T can therefore be heard to attend to both of these local contingencies by dispensing with the reporting and contextualising statements in as brief a manner as possible. This not only accounts for the delay caused by the tangential topic, but also makes the judgement criteria for the result less complicated by providing a truncated report and more straightforward contextualisation.

Whilst the flexibility of the reporting structure is highlighted by the way in which it allows T to account for prior sequential actions, it also indicates the ongoing importance of providing a measure by which to judge the child's result, at least for those results below the national average level. As earlier analysis has shown, T provides a non-essentialist picture of the children during the parents' evening talk, placing them within an ongoing trajectory of work that can by implication reach a 'better' state. Regardless of the changes to the reporting and contextualising statements, this construction of the child can still be heard, aided in a large part by the utilisation of a "working up to" formulation at line 17.

Alongside the cautious ascription of the result to the child, more pragmatic concerns are also seen to be relevant, which in turn reflect upon T's institutional task orientation in delivering the below national average report on the child. Despite the truncated nature

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of the reporting statement and the lack of any explicit reference to the national average level, T still hearably provides enough information regarding the result for the parents to see for themselves the consequence of the report. The provision of both elements of the child's result (the level they achieved in the mock examination *and* the national average level) continues to be important, even if they involve substantial reformulation. T's institutional task orientation continues to involve both delivering the report on the child, as well as making the requisite information available to the parent in a clear and comprehensible format.

In the three extracts described below (extracts 6.9 to 6.11), a contextualisation of the child's result without reference to the 'national average' also takes place. For these extracts, however, changes to the presentation of the reporting structure can be linked to a differential approach regarding the delivery of those results on or above the national average of four. Not only do these changes impact upon the actual stages of the reporting structure that are produced by T^{13}, they also provide further evidence of the different set of relationships being presented and worked with during the delivery of those achieving results above the national average level[14].

Extract 6.9 (continued from Extract 5.7: Pt1/ y 18.1)

M = Mother; C = Child; S = Sibling

5.	a→ T:	maths:
6.		(1.4)
7.	c^1→	(tk) level ↑four,
8.		(0.6)
9.	c^2→	> so we < want him to be a level four. .hh [h Erm: (.) high=
10.	M:	[mmm
11.	c^2→ T:	= level four (.) .hh so, (.) .hhha > if he < works a bit harder ...

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[13] That both below national average and above national average reports have some features in common was mentioned in Chapter 3 (above), not least because the delivery of achieving and non-achieving results both involve the utilisation of the basic reporting structure outlined in table 3.a. There was, however, an important proviso attached to this structure as a particular set of conversational actions, inasmuch as its construction was seen to be the product of the locally managed routines of the parents' evening interactants. In theory this meant that not every stage of the reporting structure necessarily needed to be produced. We can see the more specific actualisation of this theoretical position in the variable application of the turn-by-turn production of the reporting structure by the teacher during the delivery of achieving results.

[14] Note that the terms 'achieving' and 'non-achieving' results are purely intended as a shorthand description of those results above and below the national average criteria outlined in Chapter 1 and section 6.0.1 (above). As I hope has been consistently illustrated throughout this thesis, description of the actual treatment of such results as good/bad, achieving/non-achieving, etc., by the participants to the talk has remained the central empirical thrust of the research.

Extract 6.10 (continued from Extract 4.1: Pt1/ mi 13.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; S = Sibling

12. a→	T:	↑Maths:
13.		(1.2)
14. c^1→		level fi:ve
15.		(1.2)
16. c^1→		downwards. (.) we've got he:re
17.		(0.9)
18. c^1→		so (.) (n) .hhhh u:m:: (.) > so he's < a level five by three marks:,
19.		(0.5)
20.	M:	yea(p)=
21.	T:	=right? So we...

Extract 6.11 (continued from Extract 4.2: Pt1/t)

M = Mother; F= Father

5. a→	T:	ri:ght let's start with his maths,
6.	M:	yes:::
7. b→	T:	okay >so he's in Mrs G's se[t,<
8.	M:	[°mm:hm°
9.		(0.8)
10. c^1→T:		a:nd, (0.5) he's working at::: (.) uh – MIDLEVEL SAT FOUR
11.		(0.8)
12.		in the sats practice=
13.	M:	=°yes°
14. c^3 →T:		. hh but °she's saying° is he capable of more?,

For extracts 6.9 and 6.10, a streamlined reporting structure (i.e. no focusing statement; truncated agenda and reporting statements) presents a straightforward version of the child's level of attainment. Although these straightforward accounts move relatively seamlessly into subsequent upshot statements (see Chapter 8, above, for more details), T's attempts to seek a response from the parents regarding the results not only highlight the way in which the results are not unproblematically attended to as a 'good' ones, but also appear to presuppose some level of knowledge on the part of the parents regarding the judgement criteria of the National Curriculum. For extract 6.11, this presumption of prior knowledge on the part of the parents goes hand in hand with what appears to be an assumption on the part of T regarding the level of affiliation between the parents and the school.

Looking first at extracts 6.9 and 6.10, each of the stages up to and including the delivery of the result exhibit a more straightforward configuration than those seen in previous extracts. Indeed, in both extracts a focusing statement is omitted altogether. Despite these changes, T produces at lines 11 and 18 respectively a statement akin to the contextualising statement of extract 6.8 above), which whilst not explicitly mentioning the "national average" level, provides an implicit contrast with the preceding result.

In comparison to the delivery of the below national average results examined above, the trajectory from agenda statement to reporting statement in these two extracts displays a markedly minimal format, with the respective stages being delivered as simple announcements. There is no inclusive "let's have a look" statement linked to the agenda statement, no focusing statement, despite T *not* being the set teacher for the curriculum subject in question, and no "working at" formulation during the reporting statement presenting a non-essentialist picture of the child and his/her work. Indeed, the simple assertion of the children's results bear comparison to the work of Leppanen, who outlines how 'good' blood test results by nurses are often simple statements of numerical value, delivered straightforwardly, and often with high intonation (1998: 151).

In extract 6.9 (above), the combination of noticeable upward intonation, emphasis, and continuing terminal intonation marking the delivery of the reporting statement (line 7) makes it hearable as being worthy of a response in its own right. Despite not being produced in quite such a response implicative manner, the reporting statement in extract 6.10 also sees T treating the delivery of the child's result (line 14) as having had potential relevance in its own right, since the subsequent production of a downgraded description of the result (line 16) invites the parents to comment. The sequentially implicative link between the initial statement "level five" and the subsequent downgrade "downwards" is further enhanced by the retroactive positioning of both statements as two halves of a single statement from the written report, via the statement "we've got here" (line 16). This implication of the written record provides an indication that T is working on the assumption of prior knowledge of the child's schoolwork on the part of the parents. Despite not introducing the name of set teacher via a focusing statement, T can be heard to position herself as the deliverer of the report, not its

author[15]. The lack of a focusing statement in extract 6.10 can therefore be viewed as T attending to the fact that the parents already know who their child's set teacher is, rather than as an oversight on her part[16].

The streamlined presentational format in both of these extracts leads us to consider some of the differences between the results being delivered here, and those seen earlier in this chapter. A major aspect of T's report delivery during the previous extracts was the level of explanatory detail included as part of the general presentation of the child's result, including information regarding the fact of the national average and the existence of the set teacher. This explanatory detail introduced several factors that mitigated T's role in the production of the result, which, added to the cautious ascription of the result to the child, acted as indications of a "dispreferred" format (Heritage, 1984: 267), despite the lack, as yet, of any explicit assessment regarding the result. For those results on or above the national average, however, two factors influence the need to provide so much explanatory detail. First of all, the need to mitigate the role of the teacher and provide a cautious image of the child for what could potentially be seen as a 'failing' result is not necessary if the child has attained a higher result. This in turn leads to the second factor, since in terms of preference organisation and news delivery, a preferred format conversational action, "performed straightforwardly and without delay" (Heritage, 1984: 267), might be expectedly due when delivering an achieving result.

These factors regarding the supposed inbuilt positive valence of results achieving the national average must, however, be set against the presentation of statements providing a contrast to the result (lines 9 and 16 respectively) within these extracts. In the case of extract 6.9, this statement is at first similar to the contextualising statements relating to below national average results, in that it provides a contrast to the prior reporting statement and the level of attainment it was seeking on the part of the child. Along with the presentation of the result as being response worthy in its own right (see above), the use of both a 'so'-preface and an affiliative "we want" at the beginning of line 9 initially present this statement as providing further indications that this is a 'good' result. As pointed out above, this can be seen as a simple analogue of the child having gained the national average level. Given this presentation of the level four result, it is perhaps

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[15] See also extracts 6.5 and 6.7 (above) in terms of this explicit referencing of the set teacher.

[16] Although this might equally be true of extract 6.9, especially given the other elements of the report delivery (discussed below) that imply T is working on assumption of prior parental knowledge, the mere fact of a focusing statement being missing from this extract does not provide enough evidence to make such an assertion.

unsurprising that M takes T's extended inbreath subsequent to the recitation of "level four" to be a potential turn transition point, and provides what can be heard as a response token marking an appreciation of the information imparted by T. Set against these factors, however, is the way T introduces a further piece of information regarding the result at the same time as M's recipiency at line 10, which also provides a measure by which to judge the result.

That this continuation by T is in response to M's recipiency is difficult to say, occurring as it does in overlap. However, the production of an utterance ("Erm") between the two elements of this turn-at-talk hearably positions the latter part as being related to the former. As such, this extra information regarding the result provides a downgrade from any original implication of a 'good result'. Indeed, it indicates a tacit institutional task orientation that involves the delivery of a 'could do better' message, which in turn is related to the reports for these parents' evening meetings being derived from the results of the mock SAT examinations[17]. Similar work is done in Extract 6.10, although in this meeting T does not produce an initial formulation that can in any way be heard as implying a 'good' result. Instead, the contrast statement at line 18 can be heard as a clarification of the "level five downwards" formulation of the result heard earlier in the extract. By implying that the child's level five result is borderline ("so he's a level five by three marks" – line 18), T can once again be heard to imply that the child 'could do better' in terms of the upcoming examinations. But whilst this task can equally be seen to be relevant for the below national average results, in that the need to reach the national average level for those below it is inferred by the contextualising statements seen previously, the difference in both extracts 6.9 and 6.10 is T's introduction of a less straightforward set of concepts by which to provide a contrast with the child's result than the previously heard invocation of the 'national average' level.

In downgrading from her original position in extract 6.9, T introduces the more sophisticated concept of a gradation within the level four results ("high level four" – lines 9 to 11) as something for the child to aim at. In extract 6.10, a further layer of complexity is added via a reference to the actual number of marks by which the child achieved the level five result ("so he's a level five by three marks" – line 18). Once

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[17] Coming as they do between the mock examinations and the real thing, this downgrade begins to highlight the way in which the meetings are focused on the task of 'doing encouraging' in terms of the upcoming examinations, so that even those children with results achieving the national average can do better (see Chapters 7 and 8, below, for more details on this aspect of the parents' evening meetings).

again, this can be taken as a relatively pragmatic move on the part of T, since the utility of the 'national average' as a judgement criterion has been made redundant by the children having already achieved that result. More importantly in terms of the delivery of achieving results, however, is the way in which T treats *these* concepts, rather than the 'national average' itself, as sufficient in themselves as a way to infer that the children need to continue striving to do better. For extracts 6.9 and 6.10, T presents the statements "high level four" and "level three by three marks" as explanatory judgement criteria in their own right, without invoking the 'national average'. What can begin to be seen is a different orientation by T to these parents, based upon an assumed level of knowledge regarding the child and the method by which their result has been produced[18].

The stepwise build-up of the early stages of the reporting structure (i.e. the agenda and focusing statements, lines 5 and 7 respectively) in extract 6.11 (repeated below) is similar to that of the delivery of the below level four results seen previously in this chapter. However, both the increase in production volume during the reporting statement (line 10), and the extension of this statement at line 11, make this extract similar to extracts 6.9 and 6.10, in that they reflect an attempt by T (successful in this case) to gain parental recipiency. Once again, there is no recourse to the contextualising adjacency pair of 'child's result/national average' that would allow the parent to make their own assessment of the result. Instead, T goes on to deliver the reported comments of the set teacher (line 14), from which the inference can be drawn that the child could achieve an even better result.

Extract 6.11 (Pt1/t 02.1)

M = Mother; F= Father

5.	a→ T:	ri:ght let's start with his maths,
6.	M:	yes:::
7.	b→ T:	okay >so he's in Mrs G's se[t,<
8.	M:	[°mm:hm°
9.		(0.8)

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[18] One important ethnographic contextual detail that could be brought to bear on this analysis is the fact that in extract 6.10, not only was the mother in this meeting a student teacher, but her relative peer status was known to T. However, whilst this goes a long way towards providing a more precise explanation for the change in report delivery during this meeting (especially with regard to T's use of more technical language in terms of the marks by which the child achieved a level five result), this specific factor is never directly alluded to within the portion of the meeting that this thesis examines. Since it falls outside of CA's focus on the actual actions and utterances attended to within a given section of talk, the impact of this factor must necessarily be discounted in terms of this analysis.

10. c^1→T: a:nd, (0.5) he's working at::: (.) uh – MIDLEVEL SAT FOUR

11.   (0.8)

12.   in the sats practice=

13.   M: =°yes°

14. c^3→T: . hh but °she's saying° is he capable of more?,

Further to the parental recipiency to the previous two stages of the reporting structure (lines 6 and 8), the increase in volume for the production of the numerical value of the child's result at line 10 is hearable as an explicit attempt to gain further recipiency, with the increase in production volume marking the result as being response worthy in its own right. This level of response worthiness is further implied by T's subsequent utterance at line 12, which rather than engaging in some form of remedy-pursuit based around clarifying an unclear reference (cf. Pomerantz, 1984b) linked to the National Curriculum Key Stage level description (see table 1.b, Chapter 1, above), actually only serves to locate the mock SAT examination as the source of the result.

This extended reporting statement also uses technical terms to describe both the result and the mock SAT examination ("MIDLEVEL SAT FOUR in the sats practice" – lines 15 and 17). Along with the omission of any contextualising statement, a different orientation by T to this particular set of parents is once again evident, based around an assumed level of knowledge regarding the child and the method by which their result is produced[19]. This assumed level of knowledge is worked with further at line 14, where the statement "but she's saying is he capable of more?" sees T orienting to these specific parents as individuals who not only already know the pertinent details of their child's schoolwork, but are expected to also display a wish for the child to 'try harder'[20] (see Chapter 8, below, for more details of this stage of the talk).

6.3.2 Shifts and Omissions in Production Format

For the majority of below national average result extracts examined so far in this chapter, the reporting structure utilised by T follows the pattern outlined in table 3.a (Chapter 3, above). The sequential implicativeness of this pattern plays a major part in

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[19] Like the mother in extract 6.10 (above), the mother in this meeting was a teacher, and T knew the fact of her peer status. Once again, however, the fact that this is never directly alluded to within the meeting means that it must be discounted in terms of this analysis

[20] This formulation also works to underline T's participation status relative to the child's result. As we have already noted with regard to extracts 6.5, 6.7, and 6.10, further to the implicit foregrounding of the written record as the source of the report, in some instances T explicitly references the set teacher (i.e. "but she's saying" – line 14). In this way, the set teacher is positioned as being directly responsible for writing the report.

the work of both the syllogistic national average contrast, and the participation status of the various interactants. Extracts 6.9, 6.10, and 6.11 (above) have also shown that in terms of the delivery of above national average results, the full reporting structure outlined in table 3.a is the product of the locally managed routines of the parents' evening interactants, and as such is subject to some variation in presentation. Further to the omission of some stages of the reporting structure described above, this section will outline the way in which for both achieving and non-achieving results, the reporting and contextualising statements, as well as the contextualising and upshot statements, are not always positioned in a rigid format relative to each other.

As extract 6.7 (above, and repeated below) has illustrated in terms of non-achieving results, the contextualising statement *can* be positioned before the reporting statement. Of the remaining below national average results in this corpus, extracts 6.12 and 6.13 (below) also display a reversal of the pattern of reporting and contextualising statements established in the majority of the meetings. In all three cases, the change in production pattern does not problematise the making of the contrast between the child's result and the national average. In terms of the utility of making these changes in the trajectory of the talk, the flexible application of the reporting and contextualising statements can, like extract 6.8 (above), be seen to reflect the sensitivity of the reporting structure to local contingencies within the parents' evening meetings.

Extract 6.7.a (Pt1/ af 15.1)

F = Father; C = Child

11. a→ T:	° o̲:kay ° ((said softly)) (.) ↑ma̲:ths̲:
12.	(0.6)
13. b→	>i- she in Mrs G's set- <
14.	(1.5)
15. c^2→	(tch) .hhh A:::Nd (0.9) (u)national average (.) is a level fou:r
16.	(0.8)
17. c^1→	(tk) for these sats. = ↑now this says level ↑three::
18.	(1.6)
19.	↑is that ri:ght?
20. C:	I'm bad int I, (hhh)
21.	(.)
22. c^1→T:	.hhh Level three: working towards a level four
23.	(.)
24. F:	(oh is it)

Extract 6.12 (continued from Extract 5.1: Pt1/ n 08.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

8.	a→ T:	↑yeah, (.) > let's have a look- °that's° his maths. <
9.	(M:)	(.hh)
10.		(1.1)
11.	b→ T:	(tch) <u>Right</u> he's got Mrs G:: .hhh h for his maths <u>an</u> his language hasn't he
12.	M:	yea [::h
13.	a→ T:	• [so his ↑ma̲ths::,
14.		(1.0)
15.	c²→T:	<u>The na̲ti</u>onal average level is: (.) level four:.
16.		(0.7)
17.	M:	°yeah:° =
18.	c¹→T:	= er and he's working at a two stroke three:
19.		(0.8)

Extract 6.13 (continued from Extract 4.6: Pt1/ 1 10.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

20.	a+b→T:	ri̲:ght ↑m::aths:: ((said gently)) (.) °> i- she in Mrs G's set?, <°
21.		(0.7)
22.	c²→	.(t)hh an:::d, (0.9) we're aiming for level fours,
23.		(0.6)
24.	c¹→	.hh and for her maths she's a level two stroke three.
25.		(1.0)
26.	M:	°ri:ght°...

In each of these extracts, a contrast between the results the children have achieved and the national average score is still produced by T, despite the change in which item of information is provided first. Extract 6.13 indicates that the parents can also orientate to the presentation of the contrast in this way, since M acknowledges the implications of the contrast with a receipt token at line 26. Irrespective of the positioning of these stages of the talk, the sequential nature of the relationship between the two elements of the contrast is plain. It provides the basis for the creation of an external factor (the imposition of the national average), which, whilst accounting for the method of assessment, mitigates the role of the Teacher/School in carrying it out. In this way, the reporting and contextualising statements do the same work with regard to both caution and footing as was seen during the previous below national average result extracts. The syllogistic thrust of the report-national average contrast is maintained despite the reversal of the order in which its elements are presented, and as such does not rely solely upon a single configuration of the sequential elements.

Turning to the specific utility of this flexibly applied format, it can once again be seen how this allows T to vary her method of report delivery in the light of previous conversational actions. In the case of extract 6.7, the change in format can be linked to the earlier direct referencing of the child (see Chapter 5, above, for details). Although T's implication of the child is arguably indicative of a differential treatment of parental competences[21], having already oriented to C as an overhearing audience, T can be heard to further enhance C's status to that of an active participant by directly addressing her at line 17. Set against this ongoing undertaking to include the child as a participant, the reversal of the previously attended to report-contextualisation format allows T to introduce the fact of the national average result before directly addressing the child. Since the child is drawn into the talk by a question relating to the actual level of the result, T can be heard to avoid entering into a potentially lengthy question-answer sequence before she has delivered all of the requisite details of the report and the national average contrast. Once these details have been introduced, T is then able to deal with the so far unknown responses of both C and her father.

For extracts 6.12 and 6.13 (above), the utility of changing the order of the reporting and contextualising statements rests not so much on prior sequential matters[22], but on the nature of the result being delivered by T. The results for these two extracts are presented as being level "two stroke three" (lines 18 and 24 respectively), which whilst similar to previous non-achieving extracts in terms of being below the national average, are of a less straightforward nature than the criteria by which such results have previously been judged. Indeed, T's presentation of the results with a formulation which directly mirrors its written format exposes a site of potential interactional difficulty, given that the use of more technical language opens up the possibility of a misunderstanding on the part of the parent. The 'difficult' character of the "two stroke three" result also extends to the

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[21] The fact that the group of participants present at this meeting comprises the set [Teacher-Father-Child] (as opposed to any combination involving a single father, mother and father, or both parents with the child) can be linked to Silverman's (1987) work in cleft-palate clinics, in that a higher level of parenting competency is ascribed to mothers over other possible members of the family group. Added to this, the promotion of the child as someone who is competent enough to speak can be linked to the particular level of language competency an individual parent might be expected to have, especially in the case of their being a non-native English speaker. All of these points, however, are difficult to substantiate, given that this is the sole case of such a participation format being utilised by T within the data.

[22] In the case of extract 6.12, a local contingency relating to M's earlier question regarding the child's academic attainment (see Chapter 4, above) can be said to be a factor. In the light of T's subsequent assertion that the child's work was "alright" (line 5: see extract 4.7, above), the problem of inconsistency arises, since the result of "two stroke three" clearly describes one of the lower attainable grades. The impact of this prior sequential matter must, however, been seen more in the light of the overall influence of the nature of the 2/3 result itself.

fact that the practice of subject setting (and the government moderated national averages from which it stems) is new to the school, which means that the parents may be unsure as to the implications of such a result. By shifting the elements of the reporting structure in this way, T attends to the possibility of interactional difficulty regarding the parental understanding of the result formulation "two stroke three".

Another aspect of this 'difficult' character rests in the way the "two stroke three" results constitute the lowest levels of attainment in terms of the mock SAT examinations from which the reports on the children stem. Taking the provision of the child's result and the national average level as an interactional unit in its own right, the introduction of the contextualising statement prior to the reporting statement marks a cautious format to the report delivery. This is reflected in the way that element of the report directly related to the child is delayed by the introduction of the 'national average' details (cf. Levinson, 1983; Davidson, 1984). Added to this, the reversal of the previously seen 'report → national average' presentation format attends to the low marks as being a delicate subject by making the delivery of the results less potentially antagonistic. Unlike previous extracts where the actions of the child (i.e. their SAT result) are introduced as the central factor of the syllogism, with other elements being introduced in reference to the fact of these actions, in these extracts presentation of the national average first means that the child is not positioned as the pivotal aspect of the contrast sequence. That the specific reference to the 'national average' is in addition replaced by an affiliative 'we' formulation in extract 6.13 also means that the subsequent contrast of the child's result is produced as a goal that both adult parties share for the child.

By making the contrast between the report on the child and the corresponding national average appear less antagonistic in this way, the interchangeable nature of these stages evident in extracts 6.12 and 6.13 also provides an interesting reflection on the 'report → national average' format seen in previous extracts dealing with below national average results. Although a cautious presentation of the results is seen at all points of the reporting structure, positioning the actions of the child as the central factor in the syllogistic contrast means that this cautious approach does not ultimately deflect from T's message that the child needs to do 'better' in order to achieve higher SAT grades. Put another way, rather than seeing T present a report that 'says nothing' by presenting

the results in too insipid a manner[23], the contrasting role of the national average, however it is presented, acts to maintain the focus on the child's need to make every effort to reach better levels of attainment, at least for those results below the national average level.

6.3.3 Shifts and Omissions for Achieving Results

Shifts in the production order of the reporting structure are also evident in meetings involving the delivery of above national average results. In contrast to the cautious presentation of below national average results which allowed the parent(s) to see the upshot of the result for themselves, the delivery of an achieving result in extract 6.14 (below) sees the national average contrast being used to both upgrade the level of information provided to the parent, and provide a direct link into a subsequent assessment of the result. Once the reporting statement is delivered (line 33), an extended contextualisation statement is produced as part of an explicit delineation of the 'good' ramifications of the result (lines 37 and 38). Other changes in the delivery of this achieving result include the omission of a focusing statement, and the presentation of a more essentialist picture of the child's result during the delivery of the reporting statement.

Extract 6.14 (continued from Extract 5.6: Pt1/c 03.1)

M = Mother; B = Baby

30. a→ T:	right. (t)et's have a look at his science °while I'm looking for this°
31.	.hh ((sniffs))
32.	(1.1)
33. a+c^1→	↑ science (.) he came out with a level fo:ur
34.	(0.6)
35. M:	mmm =
36. c^2→T:	= so they're supposed to be aiming at level fo:ur [(.) =
37. M:	[°mmh°
38. c^2→T:	= that's what the national average is >so that's good <

The changes to the reporting structure in this extract begin to highlight how T attends to various locally relevant features of the talk, over and above the displayed need to

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[23] I suppose a gloss of this position could be found in the perceived 'political correctness' that some commentators have located as one of the failings of more progressive methods of teaching, wherein positive reinforcement is used to avoid damaging the self-esteem of those children who do not achieve 'good' academic results. I rush to point out, however, that this criticism of supposed political correctness *is not* a position I hold myself.

cautiously present those results seen in the below national average level extracts examined so far. The first of these relate to the operational features of the school environment, in that for extract 6.14, the omission of the focusing statement can be linked to T's role as the set teacher for science. This throws into relief the presentation of the focusing statement in previous extracts, since in each of these cases mentioning the set teacher by name could simply be an analogue of institutional 'realities'. However, given both the importance of implicating the role of the set teacher in the cautious presentation of the non-achieving results, and the fact that this is the only meeting where science is introduced as an initial topic within the entire data corpus, the link between choice of discussion topic and the utilisation of the various elements associated with that topic is not necessarily a straightforward one. Equally, it brings back into focus the question of why a specific operational element relating to the child's result is introduced (or not) at any given stage of the talk, especially given the lack of a focusing statement in extracts 6.9, 6.10, and 6.11, where T *was not* the set teacher for the topic being discussed.

As part of the way in which the delivery of a science result negates the need for a focusing statement, it can also be seen how T presents different curriculum topics in different ways. In this specific instance, different presentational strategies can be linked to the prior sequential environment of this meeting, with the reiteration of the agenda statement across lines 30 and 33 being in direct consequence of T's earlier work of positioning the report on science as 'secondary' in nature (line 30; see also Chapter 5, above). It is T's orientation to science in this way that provides the context for the delivery of the reporting statement. The formulation "he came out with a level four" (line 33) directly implicates the child in the creation of the result, with the child's level of attainment being presented as an end result, unlike the delivery of the results in earlier achieving result extracts, which placed the child within an ongoing trajectory of work that could, by implication, get better.

Given this less cautious approach to the presentation of the report on the child's result, it is interesting to note how the subsequent contextualising statement, "so they're supposed to be aiming at level fo:ur" (line 36), provides an explicit explanation of how the result should be viewed. There is no recourse to the syllogistic contrast of the contextualising statement seen in previous extracts for this result, since not only has the child achieved the national average level, but T explicitly states that level four is what

the children are "supposed to be aiming at". In the face of minimal parental recipiency at line 37, the subsequent mention of the "national average" (line 37) can be heard as an upgrade from the initial contrast, providing information for the parent rather than simply providing a measure by which to judge the child's result. Furthermore, referencing the national average is used in this extract to set up an immediately sequentially relevant assessment of the result ("so that's good" – line 38), underlining the previous presentation of the child's result as satisfactory.

In extract 6.15 (below), the truncated format of both the agenda statement (line 18) and reporting statement (line 20) are similar to the comparable stages of the presentation of achieving results seen above. Further similarities can be found in T not providing any focusing statement, despite not being the set teacher for mathematics. Unlike these previous extracts, however, T not only produces an extended contextualising statement (lines 24 to 28), she subsequently re-presents the child's result in more detail (lines 31 and 32).

Extract 6.15 (continued from Extract 5.4: Pt1/ j 16.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

18. a→	T:	>right< =↑ma:ths::,
19.		(0.8)
20. c^1→		↑ulevel five,
21.		(0.8)
22.		okay?
23.		(0.7)
24. c^2→		so- > you know < the:- (.) [level four (.) =
25.	M:	[hmm
26. c^2→T:		= is the average,
27.		(0.4)
28. c^{2+3}→		national average th[at's what we want them to get, [yeah?
29.	F:	[right ° yeah ° [yeah
30.	M:	[° yeah °
31. c^1→T:		[(n).hhhha level five and she's put downwards => he was < level five
32. c^1→		by three marks (.) (tch) o [kay:, =
33.	(F):	[(tsk)
34. c^3→T:		= > so we < want to make that a…

Whereas in extracts 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 (above) the lack of any overt parental recipiency to the straightforward presentation of the child's result was met with the delivery of

further detail regarding this result (Extract 6.9 – "*high* level four"; Extract 6.10 – "level five *downwards*"; Extract 6.11 – "midlevel sat four *in the sats practice*"), in extract 6.15 T initially appears to seek only the basic recipiency of the parents with her response pursuit at line 22, rather than any fuller reaction. In the face of the parental silence to both the fact of the child's result and this subsequent response pursuit, T goes on to provide an extended contextualising statement across lines 24 to 28. Since the syllogistic contrast between the result and the national average only serves to underscore the fact of the child having gained the requisite level, the role of the contextualising statement here is instead one of explanation, with T's assertion "so you know the level four is the average" (lines 24 and 26) presenting the level four national average as knowledge shared by T and the parents. That the subsequent mention of the "national average" (line 28) can be heard to provide a context for the result in terms of explaining where the judgement criteria came from, rather than as a presentation of the result as a 'good' one by dint of the child having achieved the requisite result, is evident during T's subsequent turns-at-talk. Having gained parental recipiency regarding the national average (lines 29 and 30), T re-presents the result in more detail (lines 31 and 32), although as yet the utility of providing so much detail regarding the child's result remains to be seen[24].

This combination of changes to the reporting structure production order, and mention of the national average during the presentation of results that have already achieved it, also takes place during the extracts described below, although in these cases the reporting structure follows a 'report → upshot → contextualising' format. So, in extracts 6.16 and 6.17 (below) subsequent to the delivery of the reporting statement (lines 9 and 22 respectively), T produces an upshot/assessment statement (see Chapter 8 for a further discussion of this stage of the talk). It is only after these two statements have been produced that T introduces the fact of the national average (lines 12 and 24 respectively).

Extract 6.16 (continued from Extract 5.10: Pt1/ f 06.1)

F = Father; C = Child

3. a→   T: ↑maths: (.) o̲:kay.
4.   (1.2)
5. b→   u:m:̲, >she's in< Mrs G's se̲t.
6.   (0.6)

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[24] See Chapter 8 (below) for more detail.

7.		and she's
8.		(1.4)
9. $c^1 \rightarrow$	T:	working at level fou:r,
10.	F:	[(°yes°)
11. $c^3 \rightarrow$ T:		[> which is good that's u- we
12. $c^{2+3} \rightarrow$		that's the national average- that's where we want them to be< ° .hhh °

Extract 6.17 (continued from Extract 5.8: Pt1/g 07.1)

M = Mother

18. a→ T:		maths:.
19.		(1.2)
20. b→		↑i:n Mrs H's set?
21.		(0.7)
22. $c^1 \rightarrow$ T:		(t) .hh(a) she::::: i:s midlevel four,
23.		(1.0)
24. $c^3 \rightarrow$ T:		so > is level four < we want
25.	M:	mm
26. $c^2 \rightarrow$ T:		° okay, ° (.) that's >the national aver°age°<
27.		.hh she TRies hard

Having already provided either an explicit assessment of the result (extract 6.16, "which is good" – line 11), or a goal proposal projecting forward from the mock SAT result (Extract 6.17, "so is level four we want" – line 24)[25], the subsequently produced contextualising statements in extracts 6.16 and 6.17 lose the implicative force that adjacently positioned reporting and contextualising statements have been seen to possess during the previous non-achieving result extracts. Equally, as extract 6.15 (above) has already indicated, a contextualisation of an above national average result only serves to underscore the achieving nature of the report. In short, changes to the production order shift the way in which the contextualising statement provides a tacit measure by which to judge the result.

Whilst a contextualising statement being produced at all indicates that the results in extracts 6.16 and 6.17 are subject to some level of mitigation by T, the direct implicative link between the report and the contextualising statements has been reformulated. These changes relate to the nature of the result being delivered, with the impetus for modifying the production order reflecting a strategy of information provision, rather than an attempt to downplay a possibly 'difficult' result. Having been

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[25] See Chapter 8 (below) for a discussion of the upshot statement stage of these extracts.

removed from the sequentially implicative structure of 'report → contextualisation → assessment', the contextualisation statement does not have the same syllogistic thrust: in other words, the making of an upshot prior to the contextualisation statement has made the contrast provided by the national average 'surplus to requirements'. Instead, the national average level can be heard in terms of T telling the parent(s) all that they 'need to know' about the relevant aspects of the child's result.

In both extracts this information provision constitutes a matter of secondary importance within the delivery of an achieving result, as the change in the delivery speed of this information makes clear. Indeed, in extract 6.17 this indication of getting the details of the national average out of the way as quickly as possible is combined with the quieter production volume of T's turn-at-talk at line 26, which lends the contextualising statement something of the character of an 'afterthought'. This is not to say that the provision of this information is presented as being of only marginal interest to the parents, since in extract 6.16 T can be heard to repair in mid-utterance ("that's u- we": line 11) in order to include an explicit reference to the national average during the same turn-at-talk as the prior assessment statement.

In general terms, the contrasting role of the contextualising statement during the delivery of the achieving results is not specifically focused on allowing the parents to see for themselves the upshot of the report, as was the case for the delivery of the below national average results. But the inclusion of contextualising statements in these extracts also marks them as different to the previously seen delivery of achieving results, where the national average level was omitted altogether in favour of a more direct account of the child's result based on prior parental knowledge. Instead, the national average level is presented as information offered in clarification of the result. Whilst there is no evidence internal to these extracts to indicate why T provides clarification for *these* parents and not for those in extracts 6.9, 6.10, and 6.11, that such differential treatment takes place is further highlighted by the delivery of the results in extracts 6.14 to 6.17.

6.3.4 Summary

The extracts examined in this section not only highlight the flexibility of the delivery format utilised by T in presenting below national average reports, but also the changes that occur in the reporting structure during the delivery of above national average results. In both instances, the flexibility of the reporting structure indicates just how

much of it is the product of locally managed routines, rather than a strict adherence to any prescribed or pre-determined set of influential factors.

For the non-achieving results, these changes in reporting format highlight the centrality of providing the contrasting 'national average' element when delivering results of level three or lower, even if, as is the case with extract 6.8, it is not explicitly referred to as such. Like all of the non-achieving result extracts examined in this chapter, T's repeated utilisation of this contextualising factor in the child's result reflects the institutional task orientation of the parents' evening meetings, whilst at the same time allowing her to cautiously present potentially delicate results. In the case of extracts 6.12 and 6.13, this cautious approach is maintained despite the reversal of the reporting and contextualising statements, and indeed is subtly altered by the way in which the reversal makes the report sound less potentially confrontational and antagonistic.

In terms of the delivery of results above the national average level, comparisons with the delivery of non-achieving results indicate that a different set of relationships are being presented and worked with. The truncated production format of several stages of the talk point to a more direct delivery of the achieving results, except for the case of extract 6.14, where the direct format cannot be explicitly seen as the provision of a specific 'good' valence to the result (see below for a fuller discussion of this aspect of achieving result delivery). The need for caution evident in the delivery of non-achieving results is replaced by either a neutral presentation of the report on the child, during which all of the requisite information regarding the production of the result is presented, or a presentation of the result that appears to presuppose a level of knowledge regarding the result on the part of the parent.

6.4 Conclusion

In the introduction of this chapter, Drew's (1984) statement regarding the difference between the 'official business' of an interactional sequence dedicated to the task of delivering a report, and what that report might implicitly accomplish, was highlighted. Reviewing the presentation of the reports on the child within the parents' evening data, it is clear that T's default 'official' activity during the delivery of both the above and below national average results has been to convey to the parents their child's mock SAT result and, in the majority of cases, its concomitant national average contrast, before moving on to the next topic. In terms of the implicit accomplishments of this stage of

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the talk, the careful management of the interactional relationships of those individuals pertinent to both the production of the result, and its dissemination, is evident. These include constructing the role of the teacher as both deliverer of the report, and as representative of the school; the implication of the non-present set teacher as the source of the report; the role of both the parents and the teacher in their field of joint interest, knowledge, and proficiency, the child; and of the child themselves, either as a pivotal aspect in the production of the result, or as an actual participant to the talk. It has also clear that the reporting structure outlined in Chapter 3 has provided the framework around which these interactional relationships have been constructed and worked with.

The marshalling of these various aspects of the talk is also attentive to the nature of the result being delivered. For those results below the national average level of four, the fullest format of the reporting structure has been utilised. The syllogistic contrast between the result and the national average can be heard to place the child within an overall trajectory regarding the SAT testing procedure, projecting forward from the activity of the mock SAT examination. This cautiously ascribes responsibility for the level of the result with the child, concomitantly removing responsibility for the result from teacher and parent(s). The presentation of the non-achieving results not only include the implicit foregrounding of the role of the set teacher, they also allow the parents to 'see for themselves' the ramifications of the result, even if the fullest extent of these ramifications have yet to be explicitly addressed.

In contrast, the presentation of those results on or above the national average level of four are subject to truncated formats of delivery, both in terms of the overall reporting structure, and with regard to the production of its individual elements. The level of caution displayed during the delivery of the non-achieving results is not replicated for these meetings, with the report on the child being subject instead to a neutral presentation. When a contextualising statement introduces the fact of the national average level, it can be heard as the presentation of all the requisite information regarding the production of the result, rather than as part of the more straightforward implicative structure seen during the delivery of the below national average results. For those meetings where a national average implicative contextualising statement is not delivered, it can be heard as part of a presentation of the result that presupposes a level of knowledge regarding the result on the part of the parent.

Given these changes in presentation related to the above or below national average nature of the result, what can be said about the implicit work of reportings that Drew has highlighted? Silverman's assertion that "CA uses the practices found in ordinary conversation as a baseline from which to analyse institutional talk" (1993: 134) provides a context for the different presentational strategies adopted for the achieving and non-achieving results during the overall presentation of the parents' evening meetings so far. By applying what is found in ordinary conversations with the great level of caution evident in the presentation of the below national average results, it could be said that this reflects T's orientation to the results as potentially 'bad news'. The use of a syllogistic structure to present the child's result has already been tacitly linked to the telling of bad news by Schegloff's assertion (1988, and above), in that it allows for the parent to be the first to articulate this news.

Meanwhile, T's displayed professional caution in avoiding taking up any position regarding the relative 'value' of the result, whilst deferring the specific question of good or bad news valence of the result, can also be seen as a circumspect approach to a potentially problematic topic. Indeed, the majority of interactional work during the delivery of the non-achieving results could potentially be viewed in terms of the first element of what Maynard has described as the twin features of news delivery, "shrouding bad news, exposing good news" (forthcoming). This includes the organisation of the participation status of each party to the talk[26], formulation of the various elements of the reporting statement, and the changes in the format of the reporting structure.

The value of 'good news', on the other hand, is generally seen to be apparent, with those delivering the news producing it forcefully and forthrightly within a developing conversation (see Maynard, forthcoming: ms 197). In examining doctors delivering test results to patients, Maynard states that,

> "good news needs relatively little build-up, preparation or forecasting, and that physicians often receive patient's unmediated affiliation to the news and to its valence, exhibits how patients can and do follow what the news 'means' in a

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[26] These include those parties who are present during the talk, including the teacher, parent(s), and sometimes the children themselves, and those not present, including the set teacher, and, generally, the child.

discursively rational way, with both participants producing displays of positive affect."

<div align="right">(Forthcoming: ms 211)</div>

This shift in orientation in terms of the presentation of 'good news' would at first sight appear to be manifest in several different ways during the delivery of the above national average results. In several extracts, utilisation of a contextualising statement is eschewed altogether, with T moving directly from the delivery of the result to the making of some form of upshot statement (see Chapter 8, below, for more details of this stage of the talk). For other extracts, the contextualising statement is produced in such a way that the implicative link between the result and the national average level is made more explicit, unlike the below national average result extracts, where the emphasis is on the parents seeing for themselves the upshot of the report. The overall effect is one of T cutting down on the level of explanatory detail that has, in earlier extracts, introduced several factors mitigating her own role in the production of the result and cautiously ascribed the result to the child.

As Maynard states in his forthcoming book, not only is the management of a given piece of information as 'bad' or 'good' news important in terms of avoiding potential interactional disruption, the impact of 'news' upon an interaction can also highlight some of the interactional characteristics of the parents' evening meetings in general:

> "...bad news and good news represent disruptions of everyday life to the extent of jeopardizing participants' sense of what is real. Events of bad news and good news create fissures in the structure of everyday life in the way that contrived and natural breaches do: these events reveal the achieved organizational features of social settings."

<div align="right">(Forthcoming: ms 13)</div>

Given the changes in the presentational strategies during the delivery of achieving and non-achieving results, the implicit accomplishment of the reporting and contextualising statements *could* be linked to the management of the potentially disruptive impact of good or bad news. It is important to remember, however, that the potentiality of these aspects of the talk remain contingent upon their actually being attended-to as 'good' or 'bad' news by the participants. The achievement of any given grade within the SAT

examinations cannot be said to carry any intrinsic measure of 'worth' relative to either any other result, or the national average itself, since this will depend upon the actual treatment of these results by the participants engaged in the parents' evening meetings.

It is interesting to note, therefore, that in terms of the non-achieving result extracts, the only point at which any of T's co-participants orient to the report as bad news is in extract 6.7, where the child herself states, "I'm bad int I" (line 19). Of course, one aspect of this lack of take-up regarding the relative bad or good news valence of the reports is related to T not yet providing any upshot of the result. The expectation that she will do so is borne out by the fact that for each meeting a subsequent upshot regarding the result is delivered (see table 3.a, Chapter 3, above, as well as Chapters 7 and 8, below). At this stage of the talk, however, the realisation of this potentiality is only one of a range of possible actions by T.

The information of the non-achieving results is presented as 'news' to the parents, in that they are treated as not having known the information beforehand. Equally, the displayed criteria by which the results are judged (the national average) marks them as being below a sought for level. Meanwhile, T attends to the potentially 'difficult' nature of the information being provided by attempting to neutralise her own role in the production of the result (i.e. through highlighting the role of the set teacher and the child). However, none of these features adds up to a straightforward picture of 'bad news' being delivered[27]. Similarly, the presentational differences associated with the delivery of the above national average results are related to rather more than the management of a 'good news' valence, despite the more straightforward presentation of the results.

Whilst the results *as news* do not get specifically formed up as having a 'bad' valence, the impact of the potentially problematic news event 'below national average result' is useful in terms of this analysis. Indeed, it reveals a set of achieved organisational features that act to allow T to progressively downgrade the negative aspects of the child's result. In other words, T defers to the category 'favourable things' (aims for the child) whilst remaining silent about unfavourable things (being "behind"). Not only is

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[27] This is not to say that *some* elements of T's delivery of the results cannot be seen in terms of bad news. For example, in the case of T's role as the deliverer of the result, Maynard states, "deliverers are interactively cautious in their presentations, and, in terms of responsibility for the bad news event, provide for third-party or impersonal attribution rather than self-attribution" (forthcoming: 239).

the child firmly implicated in the production of the result and placed within an ongoing trajectory of work that could see better levels of attainment, any specific responsibility on the part of both the parent and the class teacher for the child's academic performance is downplayed.

For those results on or above the national average level, the comparison with the delivery of 'good news' is also helpful, not least because it allows us to see that the achieving results are presented as neither 'good' or, in the majority of cases, news. In general terms, the results above the national average level are produced neutrally, to some extent reflecting the way in which the need for caution in ascribing the result to the child is demonstrably oriented to as being less important when the national average level has been achieved. But of equal importance is the way that this less cautious approach is not linked to the presentation of the results as being 'no problem'. Instead, T seeks to incorporate the parents into the process of ensuring the child continues to achieve satisfactory results. This in turn can be viewed as part of the work of implicating teacher and parents as legitimate participants in the discussion on the child as a known-in-general topic. Even when an assessment of a result is delivered prior to the information regarding the national average level, for example during those extracts where the child's result is presented as 'something the parents do not know' (cf. extracts 6.16 and 6.17, above), the fact of the national average is offered in clarification of how the result was produced, rather than as an implication of academic success.

For both the achieving and the non-achieving results, the work T carries out regarding the construction of the various identities involved in the production of the results can be heard as the precursor to the eventual provision of an upshot. Although not linked to the role of these results as good or bad news *per se*, the nature of the results as being above or below the national average means that T orients to them differently, managing and constructing various interactional identities according to the result achieved. For those results below the national average of four, T's work can be categorised as *preparatory*, cautiously introducing the requisite elements of the result in such a way that the parents are in full possession of the 'facts' before any upshot regarding what the result 'means' is introduced. For those results on or above the national average level of four, T's work can be categorised as *affiliative*, positioning the adult participants as being tacitly aligned on the subject of the child's level of attainment, even if for the majority of cases an explicit upshot of the result has yet to be delivered.

Before moving on to examine the next stage of the reporting structure, the impact of two important aspects of the reporting structure outlined in this chapter must be considered. As the analysis has indicated, differentiation between above and below national average results is evident in the negotiation of the various interactional identities made relevant during the delivery of the reporting and contextualising statements. Equally, deferment of any upshot regarding the result-national average contrast is also seen to occur in most of the meetings. As a result, the delivery of the final stage of the reporting structure is examined in the final *two* chapters of this thesis. So, whilst Chapter 7 examines the delivery of upshot statements for non-achieving results, Chapter 8 looks at the delivery of such statements for achieving results.

Chapter 7

Upshot Statements for Non-Achieving Results

7.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter the mechanism used by the class teacher for relating the results of the mock SAT examinations for the majority of meetings involved the application of a robust comparative structure, which set the child's result against a 'national average' for the subject in question. The specific application of the comparative structure was most clearly seen in the delivery of results below the national average level, where the syllogistic contrast between the result and the national average level not only located the child within an overall trajectory related to the SAT testing process, but also cautiously assigned responsibility for the result with the child. As a corollary to this work, any potential blame for the result was removed from both the teacher and the parents. In addition, this presentation of the non-achieving results involved an implicative function, in that it allowed the parents to 'see for themselves' the consequence of the result. The overall impact of this interactional work was categorised as *preparatory*, in that T was heard to cautiously deliver all the elements of the children's result in such a way that the parents were arguably in possession of 'all the facts' before any upshot regarding the result was produced.

This use of a syllogistic structure can be linked to other professional-lay interactions, since as Maynard points out, "the practices of clueing, guessing, and confirming are... displayed in institutional settings – particularly medical ones – where professionals must convey bad news" (1992: 332). Maynard, however, introduces an important extra element, that of *confirmation*, since the potentiality of any given piece of news hinges upon its subsequent realisation. Whether or not this realisation can be categorised as being one of 'good' or 'bad' news depends upon its specific treatment by the interactants involved. It has already been seen that the results below the national average level receive a different treatment from those results above it, at least in terms of the delivery of the reporting and contextualising statements. In this chapter, the way the class teacher delivers the *upshot statement* (see table 3.a, Chapter 3) relating to the result-national average contrast for below national average results, and the subsequent interactional work related to this action, will be examined.

7.0.1 Overview of Chapter

This chapter will look at the delivery of an outcome related statement to those reports of children with below national average level results. The analysis in this chapter falls in to

three sections, reflecting the three broad formats evident in the presentation of the upshot statement.

In section 7.1, the first group of extracts to be analysed all display a basic format in which the delivery of an upshot statement involves the presentation of a goal proposal regarding the child's level of attainment. This is presented as the consequence of the earlier syllogistic report-national average contrast, and is followed by a movement on to another topic derived from the written report on the child.

Section 7.2 examines changes to both the delivery of the upshot statement as goal proposal, and the level of parental recipiency. It also highlights the way the teacher specifically manages the level of agreement she seeks from the parents.

Finally, in section 7.3 two extracts are examined in which the parents involved stay silent throughout the delivery of the upshot statement. Despite the potential problems raised by this non-recipiency, T is able to continue with the presentation of the upshot statement, as well as carry out a topic transition.

7.1 Presentation of the Upshot Statement as Goal Proposal

In this section, each extract follows a basic format: subsequent to the syllogistic report-national average structure, T provides an upshot statement regarding the child's result. Despite variations in parental recipiency, both before and after the making of the upshot statement, once the statement is delivered, T moves on to the next stage of the written record. Whilst the earlier report-national average contrast implied an outcome of the child's result (i.e. that it was not achieving the requisite national average level), the actualisation of this outcome involves the making of a goal proposal.

Since this chapter deals purely with the delivery of those results below the national average level (see Chapter 8, below, for an analysis of upshot statements relating to results above the national average level), there are certain aspects common to the prior sequential environment of the upshot statements in the extracts that follow. By comparing the child's result (level three) with a higher national average (level four), one potential realisation of the result-national average contrast could be found in its status as 'bad news', not least because the results could be viewed as 'failing'. Indeed, many aspects of the delivery of the non-achieving results so far mark the dispreferred format

of reporting evident in other studies of news delivery where potentially 'difficult' information needs to be recounted (e.g. Maynard, 1991, 1992, 1996, and forthcoming, and Schegloff, 1988). As the previous chapters have already highlighted, delay and epistemological caution have been recurrent features throughout T's delivery of the reports on the children. The syllogistic logic of the contrast between the non-achieving reports and the national average has allowed T to withhold any personal position on such results (cf. Drew, 1984; Schegloff, 1988, and Chapter 6, above), whilst providing the recipients with the interactional materials necessary to see the upshot of the child's result.

That the potential realisation of the child's result as 'bad news' is one that T is working with appears, at first, to be borne out in Extract 7.1 (below). Indeed, the presentation of the upshot statement (lines 21-22) displays a cautious format, not only in terms of its length, but also because it is subject to several delays and repairs. That this realisation is not 'carried through', however, can be seen in the way that T rushes through sections of her turn-at-talk (lines 21 and 22), circumventing any parental recipiency until the negative implications of the contrast have been removed. Having finally sought and gained recipiency from the parent (line 23), T treats any discussion of the result as complete by moving on to another stage of the written report (line 24)[1].

Extract 7.1 (continued from Extract 6.5: Pt1/ 1 01.1)

M = Mother

16.	c^1→T:	.hh urm and he says that- (0.4) >she's working at-< (0.9) .h level three
17.		(0.6)
18.	M:	yea::h.
19.	c^2→T:	the::: n:ational average, (0.7) is level four
20.	M:	yea::h
21.	c^3→T:	so that's what they- (0.6) we want them to be achieving >so she's< working
22.		at level three, >so she's-< (0.5) ↑she's not too bad =
23.	M:	(°yeah°) ((unclear, but sounds like an agreement token))
24. *	T:	= she's okay, .hh umm he says that her work is very neat...

In terms of its general construction, the upshot statement at lines 21-22 can be broken down into three constituent parts. First of all, T provides a characterisation of a goal with the statement "so that's what they- we want them to be achieving" (line 21). This is

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[1] Note that further to the delineation of the relevant stages of the reporting structure within the transcript in previous chapters, the symbol c^3→ delineates the upshot statement, whilst the symbol * marks the point at which the teacher moves on to a new topic: see Chapter 3 and Appendix A for more details.

followed by a reiteration of the result ("so she's working at level three" – lines 21 to 22). Finally, the reiteration of the result is linked to an assessment of it ("she's not too bad" – line 22) via the connective "so". It is through the positioning of this final assessment subsequent to the previous two elements, as well as what it refers to, that marks it as a comparative statement.

The general presentation of the upshot statement can be heard to work with T's earlier cautious delivery of the below national average result, especially given that the application of a 'so'-preface at the beginning of line 21 can be heard to explicitly link the statement to the earlier syllogistic structure. For the goal characterisation at line 21, T's self-repair from invoking a nebulous "they" to a more institutionally focused "we" during a statement of attribution regarding the national average ("so that's what they- (0.6) we want them to be achieving" – line 21) is hearable as part of the same epistemological caution seen earlier in the talk. Equally, the use of "we" as a categorising term (line 21) works to avoid any possible conflict between the interactants, since it positions the adult participants as a joint group within the overall discussion on the child. Whilst 'they' can be heard as attending to a more generalised category of people who *do not* include the current interactants, 'we' can be heard to position the interactants as an affiliated group, implicating both the mother and the teacher in the category of those who want the child to achieve the requisite academic performance.

The sharpening of affiliative resonance from 'they' to 'we' continues the work carried out earlier in the meeting, i.e. constructing the child as the focus for the talk whilst implicating T and M as legitimate participants to be talking about an already known-in-general topic. It also opens up the question of the participation status of the child. In contrast to the direct reference to the child during the earlier reporting statement ("*she's working at*" – line 16), the characterisation of the goal is formulated generically as something for "*them* to be achieving" (line 21). That this generic formulation is hearably applicable to the child, however, is evident in both the sequential implicativeness of the upshot statement subsequent to the reporting and contextualising statements, and T's continuation of her turn-at-talk via the reiteration of the child's result. More importantly, it is through the combination of these features that, following the syllogistic implication of the child's result as non-achieving, T produces a goal proposal that is future-oriented.

Whilst the link between the earlier syllogistic structure and this upshot regarding it has been made explicit, the positioning of several speeded up connective terms during the reiteration of the result and its subsequent assessment (the two "so she's" used on lines 21 and 22) work to circumvent any parental recipiency until T provides a non-problematic version of the result ("she's not too bad she's okay" lines 22 and 24). By also setting up T's movement onto the next stage of the written report, the parent is not invited to discuss the ramifications of the result-national average contrast and its upshot. T has already highlighted the fact she is reading another teacher's report[2], which can be linked to the way at line 24 she marks a change in topic by continuing on with a verbatim recounting of the report[3]. Put simply, having provided all the requisite details of the result, T can be heard to be 'tying up' this part of the report before moving on to the next. In doing so, T provides something akin to a "good news exit" (Maynard, forthcoming: ms 216) from the potential bad news of the below national average result. Unlike Maynard's description of "regular sequelae to bad news deliveries" (ibid) [4], however, the work of the goal proposal does not involve placing any positive (or indeed negative) 'spin' on the news of the result. Instead, it detoxifies any bad news implications of the result by moving on to a possible future regarding the child and their work, albeit a future which is in no way guaranteed.

In extract 7.2 (below), some differences in the presentation of the upshot statement from the previous extract are evident. The statement itself (line 17) is more straightforward than that of extract 7.1 (above), whilst M's recipiency (lines 18 and 20, below) takes a slightly more extended form due to her repetition of the numerical value of the result recounted by T. Despite this, there is a similar level of topical management to extract 7.1, both in terms of T presenting a characterisation of a goal for the child (line 17), and in her subsequent introduction of the next part of the written report. Similar lexical management is also apparent, with the joint application of a 'so'-preface and 'we' as a categorising term.

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[2] The set teacher is implicated with the phrase "he says that" at line 17. See also line 14 (not shown in this extract – see chapters 3 and 6, above), where the name of this set teacher is invoked.

[3] The verbatim nature of the turn at line 24 is further highlighted by T's production of it, using what Goffman (1981) terms a "text-locked voice". Whilst incredibly difficult to transcribe with any accuracy, this refers to a certain pitch in a speaker's delivery which indicates that what is currently being said is either a quotation, or being read directly from another source, thereby providing a form of "verbal parenthesis".

[4] Amongst the good-news exits described by Maynard (forthcoming) are "bright side sequences", "optimistic projections", and "remedy announcements".

Extract 7.2 (continued from Extract 6.1: Pt1/ z 09.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child; S = Sister

12.	$c^1 \rightarrow$T:	= YEP (0.4) and she's working at (.) a level three
13.		(0.5)
14.	M:	Ok [ay
15.	$c^2 \rightarrow$T:	[.hhh now the <u>nati</u>onal, (0.6) av'rage is level fou<u>r</u>:,
16.		(0.5)
17.	$c^3 \rightarrow$T:	so we want her to be aiming for a level four:.
18.	M:	le [vel four
19.	T:	[Okay? =
20.	M:	= okay
21.	* T:	.hhhh um:: she says she <u>rushes</u> with her work.

As in the previous extract, the application of the 'so'-preface at the beginning of line 17 links the upshot statement to the earlier syllogistic structure. In the case of extract 7.2, it also recasts the PTTP opened up by the previous pause (line 16) as having been T's, which like the preface work seen in the previous chapter allows for forward movement within the meeting whilst positioning any lack of parental recipiency as non-problematic.

Other differences from the previous extract are apparent in the presentation of the upshot statement. In extract 7.1, the characterisation of a goal during the upshot statement was generically formulated (as something for "*them* to be achieving"), whilst in extract 7.2 the statement at line 17 is formulated as being for this particular child: "we want *her* to be aiming for a level four". For extract 7.2, the goal proposal is specifically designed as a remedy for the non-achievement of the child's result so far, and as such can be viewed as the provision of a future-oriented projection forward from the mock SAT examination result. Indeed, the sense of the goal proposal as a forward looking projection is further underlined by the similarity between the formulation 'aiming at' and the formulation 'working at' used during the prior reporting stage (see Chapter 6, above). In both instances, this formulation avoids making any direct criticism of the child by implying forward movement within an ongoing trajectory of work, which in turn is hearable as a 'favourable' category around which the teacher and parents can align.

The combination of a future-oriented goal proposal and a 'bad news' detoxifying exit from the discussion of this particular curriculum topic is also evident in extract 7.2,

although in this case the provision of the exit is problematised by M's repetition of the result at line 18, which can be heard as a potential understanding difficulty. To remedy this, T can be heard to 'coach' M in the requisite answer, providing the evaluative term "Okay?" (line 19) which M subsequently repeats and aligns to. That T does so in overlap with M's repetition of the result is a clear indication that T will not treat M's utterance as a difficulty. Instead, further talk relating to M's potential difficulties is closed down by T's subsequent movement into a verbatim recounting of the next part of the written report. This is not to say that T has abandoned her earlier level of caution in presenting the child's result, since despite having closed down any further discussion of the result *and* M's possible problems with it, an inbreath (line 21) allows T to monitor for any other talk from the parents, before moving on to the next stage of the talk[5]. The overall impact, however, remains the same: M's displayed recipiency regarding the upshot of the syllogistic structure is treated as sufficient, and the agenda is moved on.

In Chapter 6 (above), the prior sequential environment of extracts 7.3 and 7.4 (below) involved a reversal of the syllogistic structure. The fact that the contextualisation statement was produced before the reporting statement was linked to the nature of the result delivered by T during these two meetings (cf. extracts 6.12 and 6.13, Chapter 6, above). Despite this change in the earlier report delivery format, T can still be heard to present an upshot statement regarding the children's results (lines 27 and 20 respectively). Interactional elements related to lexical management (the use of 'we' as a categorising term) and topical management (the verbatim recounting of the next stage of the written report marking movement to next topic – lines 29 and 24 respectively) during the presentation of the proposal statement are also once again evident.

Extract 7.3 (continued from Extract 6.13: Pt1/1 10.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

22.	$c^2 \rightarrow$T:	.(t)hh an:::d, (0.9) we're aiming for level fours,
23.		(0.6)
24.	$c^1 \rightarrow$	.hh and for her maths she's a level two stroke three.
25.		(1.0)
26.	M:	°ri:ght°=
27.	$c^3 \rightarrow$T:	= so we really want to get that up to a three.
28.	M:	° okay °
29.	* T:	.hhh um: she says that- shes:: (.) very weak...

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[5] Also delivered with a text-locked voice: cf. footnote 3, above.

Extract 7.4 (continued from Extract 6.12: Pt1/ n 08.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

15.	$c^2 \rightarrow$T:	The national average level is: (.) level four:.
16.		(0.7)
17.	M:	°yeah:° =
18.	$c^1 \rightarrow$T:	= er and he's working at a two stroke three
19.		(0.8)
20.	$c^3 \rightarrow$T:	so we really want to get that up to a three, =
21.	M:	= (° ok °) (.) ye [ah:
22.	T:	[most definitely,
23.		(1.0)
24. *		(tck) .hh um she says: that...

In similar ways to the previous two extracts, extracts 7.3 and 7.4 provide clear examples of the work that 'so'-prefaces do, both in terms of linking the syllogistic national average contrast to the next stage of the reporting structure, and in managing prior parental recipiency. For extract 7.3, the upshot statement at line 27 is presented as a consequence of the prior contrast between the national average and the report via 'so' as an upshot marker, which provides a direct link between these two stages of the talk. It can also be heard to deal with signs of the parent being unsure as to the ramifications of the contrast[6] by latching to M's weak prior recipiency at line 26. In the case of extract 7.4, having gained no response from the parents to the prior stage of the reporting structure, T uses a 'so'-preface to both retake the floor, and to recast any previous lack of uptake as non-accountable (line 20).

It can also be seen that the presentation of the upshot statement is sensitive to the specific features of each interaction, rather than being rigidly applied irrespective of either the actual mock SAT result or prior sequential considerations. Several aspects of extracts 7.3 and 7.4 reflect both the impact of the 'two stroke three' result delivered previously (see also Chapter 6, above), and in the case of extract 7.4, the way the upshot statement can resolve earlier potential interactional difficulties.

In terms of T's continuing orientation to the specific local contingencies related to the 2/3 result, a change in reporting voice is heard, with T stating in both extracts "we really

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[6] That M's RT at line 27 tacitly indicates she is unsure as to what the upshot of the result is can be seen in the fact that it not only comes after a one second delay, but also that it is subject to a lower production volume and elongated delivery.

want to get that up to a three" (line 27, extract 7.3, and line 20, extract 7.4). This shift involves both an intensification of the future-oriented projection unseen in the previous extracts ("so we *really* want"), and a less personalised invocation of the level of attainment ("get *that* up to a three"), since if it is 'that' which needs to be improved directly, the child only becomes involved by implication[7]. As part of this goal proposal, T lowers the level of attainment being sought to "level three", despite the national average of level four having been invoked earlier in the talk. In having to 'lower the bar' with regard to the expected level of attainment for the children in these extracts, the changes in reporting voice work to cautiously extend the goal proposal to the parents, whilst at the same time heightening the opportunities for alignment between the two adult interactional parties.

The specific circumstances of extract 7.4 also highlight the impact of the goal proposal on both the current level of affiliation between teacher and parents, and earlier potential interactional difficulties. In Chapters 4 and 5 (above), an early question from M ("(so u) ow's he been progressing" – line 3, not shown in this extract) lead T to provide a tacit assessment ("alright, yeah:" – line 5, not shown in this extract) of the child before the cautious framework of the syllogistic reporting structure could be introduced. The goal proposal at line 20 is hearably more cautious than this earlier assessment, in that T's statement "alright yeah" could be directly attributed to her, as opposed to her role as the representative of several different institutional 'we'. Indeed, if T had constructed the goal proposal in an alternative manner, perhaps by saying 'so *I* think that needs to get up to level three', her earlier assessment of "alright yeah" might easily be called into question, since "doing alright" is not necessarily commensurate with 'child needs to do *X* amount of work'. Instead, the utility of constructing the announcement of both the results, and any subsequent upshots/goal proposals, via stepwise progression becomes clear. The result can be placed in a more cautious context, which has the corollary effect of mitigating any previous potential difficulties.

Like previous extracts, once T has delivered the upshot statement, she introduces the next part of the report on the child via a direct quotation from the written document ("she says that" at lines 29 and 24 respectively). Despite lowering the level of achievement being sought from the child (i.e. level three down from level four – see

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[7] Whilst these formulations of the goal proposal involve less personalised invocations of the level of attainment, they can still be heard in the same terms as the goal proposal in extract 7.2, in that they are formulated as being for these particular children.

above), the movement on to the next stage of the report continues to show how the upshot statement as goal proposal provides an exit from the potentially bad news of the children's level of achievement.

In extract 7.3, this transition is straightforward: T provides a future-oriented goal proposal at line 27, M aligns to it at line 28, and after monitoring for any other talk from her co-participant[8], T moves on to the next stage of the talk. For extract 7.4, alignment around the forward looking projection of the goal proposal is T's specific objective at this stage of the talk, since in response to M's production of the strongest level of recipiency seen in these extracts so far ("ok yeah" – line 21), T provides the appending comment "most definitely" (line 22). On the one hand, "most definitely" acts as an upgrade to M's "ok yeah", and as such is hearable as an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) acting as a display "of affiliation *being done*" (Edwards, 2000: 359 – original emphasis). This allows T to demonstrably indicate that she and the parents are in alignment. On the other hand, it also acts to close down the current discussion topic in much the same way as T's coaching of the parent in extract 7.2 was heard to do.

7.1.1 Summary

As the previous chapter outlined, the reporting and contextualising statements for those results below the national average were presented in such a way that the parents could see for themselves the potential ramifications of their child's results. There was the distinct possibility that following the contrast between a level three result and a level four national average, such a result could be viewed as 'failing' and thus 'bad news'. However, despite being linked to the prior contrast between the report and the national average by both sequential implication and the use of 'so'-prefaces, the next stage in the reporting structure does not provide a depiction of the child's result as one that is failing.

Instead, the presentation of an upshot statement characterises a goal for the child, either generically ("that's what we want them to be achieving" – extract 7.1, line 21), or as for the specific child ("so we want her to be aiming for a level four" – extract 7.2, line 17). For either formulation, the goal proposal is always future-oriented, offering a projection forward from the child's result that works to detoxify the potentially 'bad news' of the

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[8] The inbreath at the start of line 29 does similar work to the inbreath prior to topic transition heard in extract 7.2.

non-achieving/below national average result. As such, this goal proposal acts as a continuation of T's earlier cautious interactional approach, as the use of 'we' as an affiliative descriptive statement indicates. Although T invites some level of recipiency from the parents regarding the goal proposal, further to initiating an exit from the discussion of the current curriculum topic, she instigates movement within the meeting by providing a verbatim account of the next stage of the written record.

7.2 Changes in Structure and Parental Recipiency

For the extracts examined in the previous section, the overall structural format of the upshot statement was relatively straightforward: once a future-oriented projection forward from the child's result was delivered, T initiated movement on to another topic. In each extract, some form of parental recipiency was evident, although the general level of response could be characterised as minimal. That this was oriented to by T as non-problematic could be seen in the way that she both managed the level of parental recipiency[9], and continued the trajectory of the meeting without engaging in any further discussion of the children's results.

Whilst extracts 7.5 to 7.8 (below) in this section also deal with reports of below national average results, variations in both the nature of the parental recipiency, and the method of delivering the upshot statement, can be seen. Despite these changes, in each case T can still be heard to provide a characterisation of a goal for the child, and works to detoxify any bad news implications of the results in order to exit the discussion of the particular curriculum topic. Whereas in the previous extracts T could be seen to seek straightforward parental alignment and agreement with the upshot statement, in the extracts that follow this agreement is both elicited and managed more precisely by T. In particular, it becomes clear that the provision of goal proposals by T occasion the relevance of acceptance/rejection by the parents, rather than delivering assessments of the children.

The level of parental recipiency in response to T's goal proposal (line 20) during extract 7.5 (below) is markedly different to that of previous extracts, in that M provides a gloss of the inferred evaluation of the child's result (line 21). Despite introducing a blame account regarding the child's work, the provision of this gloss does not cause any overt

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[9] For example, by using speeded up connective terms to circumvent any parental recipiency (extract 7.1), coaching the parent's response (extract 7.2), or closing down the current discussion topic by producing an appending comment to prior parental recipiency (extract 7.4).

disruption to the ongoing trajectory of the talk. T can instead be heard to provide a reformulation of her initial goal proposal at line 22, before introducing the next topic from the written record at line 24.

Extract 7.5 (continued from Extract 6.2: Pt1/ e 05.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

15. $c^1 \rightarrow$T:		.h a::nd she's working at level th<u>ree</u>
16.		(0.5)
17.	M:	°kay°
18. $c^2 \rightarrow$T:		.hhh (tck) (nand) the national average is level <u>four</u>.
19.		(0.5)
20. $c^3 \rightarrow$T:		so that's what we're aim↓ing a<u>t</u> =
21.	M:	= she's a °be-° bit behind
22.	T:	so that's what we want them to get (.) yeah
23.	M:	° mmh [m °
24. *	T:	[.hhh er:and he says she works well in class...

T's initial goal proposal at line 20 is similar to those seen in previous extracts, being linked to the prior contrast between the report and the national average by both sequential implication and the use of 'so' as an upshot marker. Like extracts 7.3 and 7.4 (above), a less personalised invocation of the child's level of attainment is heard, with the proposal being couched in terms of the national average level as 'that' which is being sought. In general terms, the 'aiming at' formulation of the goal characterisation during this upshot statement is similar to that of extract 7.2 (above), whilst the use of 'we' as a descriptive term positions the teacher and parent as an affiliated group with regard to this objective.

However, M provides a gloss of the child's level of attainment at line 21. This can be heard as an artefact of both the earlier syllogistic progression, which forecast the potentially 'bad' news of the result, and the use of 'that' as a non-personalised target during the upshot statement (i.e. the national average, rather than the child, becomes the focus of the goal proposal). In terms of syllogism, Maynard points out that forecasting "aids in realization through giving advance indications of bad news in a way that allows recipients an opportunity to estimate or calculate that news in advance" (Maynard, forthcoming: ms 49). As such, M's response fits in with the logical progression introduced earlier by T. In this instance, having been provided with interactional resources that point to a specific upshot, M has used her own set of descriptive terms,

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converting the generalised formulation of T's goal proposal into an evaluation that is more directly implicative of the child. Furthermore, this characterisation of the child introduces a blame account, effectively presenting the child as being responsible in terms of the level of attainment.

T's response to the gloss is interesting, especially since she has demonstrably gained M's alignment regarding the implicit 'message' of the contrast between result and national average, i.e. that the child has to work a little harder in order to achieve the requisite grade in the SAT's[10]. That T is not seeking to elicit alignment based around a negative assessment during the parents' evening meetings is noticeable at line 22. Indeed, having previously forecast the news of the result and consequently received some guess as to its reception, Maynard states that "deliverers are then in a position to confirm or disconfirm recipients' presentiments" (forthcoming: ms 49). Rather than simply confirming or disconfirming M's assertion that the child is 'behind', in effect dealing with the utterance as an assessment of the child, at line 22 T reformulates her earlier goal proposal and appends a confirming "yeah" at the end of the utterance.

The reformulation of the upshot statement contains similar lexical elements to both the upshot statements of previous extracts, and the one heard earlier in this extract at line 20. Not only can a 'so'-preface casting this upshot as the logical outcome of objective circumstances be heard, but the use of 'we' as a categorising term positions teacher and parent in the category of those who want the child to achieve the requisite academic performance. Nevertheless, T does not provide a more specific goal characterisation for the child. She states instead "that's what we want *them* to get" (line 22) as a generic formulation, despite M already having directly implicated the child by asserting that "*she's* a bit behind" (line 21). Furthermore, whilst the upshot statement (both at line 22, and line 20) continues to defer to the category 'favourable things' (aims for the child), thereby remaining silent about unfavourable things (being "behind") even when M has introduced them, the confirming "yeah" that T appends to the end of her turn-at-talk formulates the second upshot statement as being in accord with M's exhibited understanding.

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[10] M's alignment with the implication of the report-national average contrast is further enhanced by the fact that her gloss of the contrast fits with the overall sequence shape Pomerantz (1984a) outlines for agreement turns: agreements have agreement components occupying the entire agreement turns; agreements are accomplished with stated agreement components; in general, agreements are performed with a minimization of gap between the prior turn's completion and the agreement turn's initiation (Pomerantz, 1984a: 65).

The impact of this re-presentation of the goal proposal is twofold. First of all, T can be heard to negate M's bad news reading of the child's attainment by moving on to a more cautious aim. Instead of countering M's formulation with a more favourable one, T simply changes the issue from the present ("she's a bit behind") to the hoped for future ("that's what we want them to get"). Second, rather than dealing with the assessment/evaluative thrust of M's upshot, T re-presents the goal proposal as something that requires only straightforward acceptance.

Extract 7.5 highlights the method by which maintenance of a consensual environment with the parents is carried out. An indication that the maintenance of such an environment is oriented to by T can be found in the extracts of section 7.1 (above), in that alignment around the upshot statement is demonstrated to be T's specific objective by the way in which she either closes off or neglects to elicit any further discussion of the result as presented. In extract 7.5, how such agreement and consensus is exhibited is more precisely managed. Whilst the application of 'so'-prefaces, 'we' as an affiliative categorising term, and generically formulated goal proposals, can all be heard as indications that T is careful to avoid engaging in any overt criticism of the child (and as such continues her displayed level of caution from earlier in the talk), she is also careful to negate any potential criticisms of the child that might arise from the parents. In doing so, provision of a future-oriented goal proposal regarding the child allows T to position remedying the non-achievement of the child, rather than attributing blame for any 'failure', as the shared objective of these meetings.

Extract 7.6 (below) further highlights the work T does to maintain a consensual environment, although in this instance she also attends to a potential understanding difficulty by the parent. M's production of a gloss (line 36) of a prior assessment by T (line 35), whilst working to remedy this understanding difficulty, shows how even a tacit implication of a projection forward from the child's result can act as the focus for affiliation and consensus between teacher and parent. In particular, this is evident in the way that, unlike extract 7.5, T provides a simple affirmatory utterance (line 37) in response to a gloss of the result by M.

Extract 7.6 (continued from Extract 6.3: Pt1/ s 11.1)

M = Mother

26. $c^1 \rightarrow$T: = (t) .hhu she's working at level th↑ree::,

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27.                  (1.1)

28. c²→              now the national average is level four.

29.                  (0.6)

30.       M:         [ (° yeah °) ]

31. c³→T:            [   .hh      ] so that's what we want°u° to aim at

32.       M:         yeah:

33.       T:         but she's at a three, so

34.                  (1.0)

35.                  that's u- [              th ] at's okay,

36.       M:                   [ (that's it)     ] she got one (more a few) =

37.       T:         = y↑eah

38.                  (1.0)

39. *                (tsk) she works quite hard...
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The initial stages of this extract follow the pattern outlined during previous extracts, since having gained recipiency from M regarding the earlier result/national average contrast (line 30), T goes on to make an upshot statement at line 31. Once again this takes the form of a goal proposal, and is linked to the prior contextualising statement through the use of a 'so'-preface, thereby tacitly providing an upshot for the contrast with the reporting statement. However, having gained an RT from M (line 32), T can then be heard to reiterate the details of the child's result (line 33), before producing an assessment of the result at line 35.

This general structural pattern is similar to extract 7.1 (above), where at lines 22 and 23 T reiterated the child's result and provided a brief 'good news' assessment of it. In that instance, the positioning of several speeded up connective utterances during the reiteration of the result and its subsequent assessment worked to circumvent any parental recipiency until T provided a non-problematic version of the result, which the parent subsequently aligned to. In extract 7.6, having implicated the child with the statement "but she's at a three, so" at line 33, an accountably long pause can subsequently be heard. This pause, along with the upshot implicative 'so' at the end of line 33, is hearable as a further indication of T's caution, since it allows for the parent to provide a response regarding the report. Subsequent to this, T initiates a further turn-at-talk (line 35). Whilst the reasons for the disjointed presentation of these utterances are

difficult to locate[11], it prompts talk in overlap from M, who provides an upshot herself (line 36).

An important aspect of this extended sequence can be found in the fact that once M has provided her own upshot, T not only immediately confirms it, but after leaving a further monitoring pause at line 38, carries on with the next stage of the written report. In comparison to the upshot produced by the parent in extract 7.5, which introduced a negative categorisation of the child's level of attainment, M's upshot in this extract provides something akin to a forward looking projection, even if "she got one more a few" (line 36) does not provide as full a formulation as previously seen goal proposals. With M having produced an upshot of the child's result that is both positive and tacitly forward looking, thereby working to remove the bad news implications of the result, this presentation of an initial report on the child within a parents' evening meeting has reached a suitable point on which to end. Despite the lack of detail regarding what needs to be done about the child's non-achievement, teacher and parents can be heard to be in consensus around a tacit forward projection, with T orienting to this outcome as satisfactory by carrying out the movement into the next stage of the meeting via the verbatim recounting of the report (line 39).

Extract 7.7 (below) also sees a parents' evening meeting in which the parent produces her own upshot (line 26) subsequent to T making a goal proposal (line 22). Like extracts 7.1 and 7.6 (above), T can once again be heard to reiterate the actual result, although it is interesting to note that during the utterance at line 26, M delivers a gloss of the upshot that expresses both positive ("oh she's okay?") and negative ("or low level?") versions

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[11] One explanation for T's continued turn-at-talk could be found in non-verbal indications by M that she is experiencing some understanding difficulties with the assessment. Whilst this possibility is understandable in terms of the two-part nature of the reiteration and assessment as presented by T, it can only remain conjecture, given the lack of visual evidence afforded by audio recording. There are, however, some points that can be made about T's change in report delivery format in this extract. In previous extracts, T implicates the child during the making of the report via the application of a direct pronominal link, i.e. "so we want *her* to be aiming for a level four" (extract 7.2). On the face of it, T's utterance "so that's what we want°u° to aim at" (line 31) would appear to be sound in terms of this format. Not only is the joint application of a 'so'-preface and 'we' as a categorising term evident, but in formulating the assessment statement as the 'natural' result of the prior result-national average contrast, T is providing an upshot in lieu of M giving one, without making this omission accountable. Equally, previous extracts have also used the term "that" to describe the sought for national average result, without the need to repair its implementation. But whilst this change in reporting voice is linked to differences in the syllogistic structure and the need to 'lower the bar' with regard to the expected level of attainment for the children in extracts 7.3 and 7.4, in this extract the movement away from any direct attribution to the child regarding what needs to be done to improve the result separates them from the ongoing trajectory of work. In terms of the image of the child T is trying to construct, the national average contrast remains an abstract concept, removed from the child rather than being linked to the topic T is attempting to align the parent(s) around.

of the level of attainment achieved by the child. There then follows an extended sequence in which a more specific characterisation of the child's achievement is negotiated ("you know? it's >it's not< as good as we'd like her to be bu- you- >you know< she's not awful" – lines 32, 34, 37, and 39), before M actually introduces a new discussion topic (line 42).

Extract 7.7 (continued from Extract 6.6: Pt1/ m 12.1)

M = Mother; C = Child

14. $c^1 \rightarrow$ T:		(t) .hhh Okay >she works:-< (.) she's working at level three:,
15.	M:	°yeah°
16.	T:	.hh
17.	M:	°°m:hm°°
18.		(.)
19. $c^2 \rightarrow$ T:		the national average (.) is level four.
20.		(1.7)
21.	M:	o(u)h =
22. $c^3 \rightarrow$ T:		= so that's where we want her to be,
23.		(0.7)
24.		> but sh- < it's a level three. so :,
25.		(0.6)
26.	M:	oh she's okay:? or [(low-) (.)](level?)
27.	T:	[↑ mmmm, that's] oka- > no b-< that's okay::, =
28.	M:	yeah?
29.	T:	= that's oka [y:
30.	M:	[(mmh?)
31.		(0.4)
32.	T:	you know? it's (.) > it's not < .hhh =
33.	M:	° okay °
34.	T:	= as good as we'd like her [to be:,
35.	(M):	[°( )°=
36.	M:	= (° oh [nou °)](° yeah? °)
37.	T:	[bu-] hhh
38.		(0.5)
39.		you- (.) > you know < she's not aw:ful,
40.		(0.8)
41.		.hhh =
42. *	M:	= last time: [(.) you said =
43.	T:	[hhh
44.	M:	= she's not,
45.		(0.8)
46.		very good in the clas(h)s

47.   (0.6)

48.   M: what about ° now? ° (.)° is:, °

49.   (0.4)

50. → T: TO[o much of this =

51.   (M):   [(   )

52. → T: = <u>talk</u>ing I'm afrai::d...

Although it is once again difficult to locate any evidence internal to the extract regarding T's decision to reiterate the result at line 24[12], like all of the extracts examined so far T produces a characterisation of a goal (in this case specifically formulated for this particular child) that is hearable as a future-oriented projection (line 22). Whilst latching the upshot statement to M's prior recipiency ("o(u)h" at line 21), T ensures that the utterance is directly linked to the contrast between the report and the contextualising statement by the deployment of a 'so'-preface. An affiliative "we" is also utilised during the making of the goal proposal. Like extracts, this is an indication of T's caution, since it can be heard as referring to both the institutional 'we' of the school, and a level of alignment between the teacher/school and parent as 'those who want the child to succeed'.

Despite this work, one of the potential difficulties of letting the parents see for themselves the ramifications of the child's result becomes clear, since although the syllogism is reliant upon the realisation of a particular upshot, many different interpretations could be made regarding what the contrast between the report and the national average 'means'. For extract 7.7 this means that M introduces two different sets of evaluative terms during her own assessment of the child's level of attainment (line 26), which in itself questions what exactly the 'working at level three/national average is level four' contrast means in terms of the child's result. Not only does T's earlier inference of a level of shared knowledge between teacher and parent appear to have been improperly applied in this case, M provides an upshot ("oh she's okay:?" – line 26) which introduces evaluative terms that deflect from the 'must try harder' implication of the report/national average contrast. Although M does go on to provide a further gloss that is closer in spirit to T's earlier proposal statement ("or low level?)" – line 26), T's delivery of both the report-national average contrast, and the attendant

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[12] One potential indication that M is unsure as to the actual constitution of the child's result could be found in her response to the report-national average contrast. Coming where it does, i.e. subsequent to the national average contrast *and* an accountably long pause (line 20), M's newsmark "o(u)h" at line 21 might be heard as relating to the fact of the contrast itself, rather than being in relation to the specific news of the child's result.

upshot statement, depends upon a level of recipiency from the parents which does not divert from the specific terms and criteria by which the child's result is judged. As such, the delivery of the upshot statement, like the rest of the reporting structure outlined in previous chapters, is a product of the joint work of both the teacher and the parents.

Whilst T goes on to recast the result as being "okay", the introduction of the new evaluative terms by M opens up the prospect that T's goal proposal regarding the child's level of attainment will be heard as being overtly critical. This raises the possibility of conflict between the interactional parties, especially if M continues to display the opinion that a level three result is acceptable or 'okay'. The questioning of the upshot by M highlights the difference between the purely rhetorical and logical nature of syllogism, which follows an overtly deterministic pattern, and its actual application within the reporting structure in general.

In rectifying this displayed lack of understanding on the part of M, T's subsequent characterisation of the child, "it's not as good as we'd like her to be" (lines 32 and 34) also includes explicit evaluative statements like "good" and "she's not awful" (line 39). Although this can be heard as a movement away from the more neutral formulation of the goal proposal seen in previous extracts, with its suggestion as to what the child can potentially do, this characterisation of the child can still be heard to defer to the category of "favourable things" (aims – 'what we would like her to be') whilst downplaying the unfavourable aspects of the child's performance (non-achievement of national average – 'she's not awful'). Indeed, despite this characterisation involving different elements than the future oriented goal proposals seen in previous extracts, it can still be heard to detoxify any bad news implications and provide an exit from the curriculum topic being discussed. In this instance, however, it is M who introduces the topic change (line 42), although T provides an indication that the current discussion topic has reached a satisfactory point by subsequently being heard to orient to M's topic change as such (line 50)[13].

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[13] Two other interesting aspects of the topic change introduced by M can also be seen. Firstly, the actual discussion initiated by M, as well as T's response to it, almost immediately begins to negate the 'good news' elements of T's detoxification of the bad news implications of the result (lines 27 to 39). Second, following M's intervention T appears to show more concern with alignment than when minimal recipiency is displayed by the parent(s). The situation could be seen as similar to that of Maynard's Perspective Display Series (1991; 1992), although rather than T as the professional seeking to elicit a response from the lay participant, it is M who has displayed a perspective that T is required to respond to.

In extract 7.8 (below), the presentation of the upshot statement is sensitive to the specific features of each interaction. In particular, changes to the statement at line 25 can be linked to events earlier in the meeting when T had directly implicated the child as an active participant (see Chapter 5, above). During the delivery of the reporting statement (see Chapter 6, extract 6.7, above), this meant that two ascription formats were utilised by T in presenting the result. A similar two-tier format is also evident during the upshot statement, with T providing one goal proposal to the parent, and another to the child (line 29). Despite these changes, T's orientation to maintaining a consensual environment within the talk is still clear.

Extract 7.8 (continued from Extract 6.7: Pt1/ af 15.1)

F = Father; C = Child

15. $c^2{\rightarrow}$T:		(tch) .hhh A:::Nd (0.9) (u)national average (.) is a level fou:r
16.		(0.8)
17. $c^1{\rightarrow}$		(tk) for these sats. = ↑now this says level ↑three::
18.		(1.6)
19.		↑is that ri:ght?
20.	C:	I'm bad int I, (hhh)
21.		(.)
22. $c^1{\rightarrow}$T:		.hhh Level three: working towards a level four
23.		(.)
24.	F:	(oh is it)
25. $c^3{\rightarrow}$T:		SO we want to °u° to a level four::. I'm surprised at that,
26.		(1.2)
27.	F:	(t).hh she only works at a ( ) I don't know why.
28.		(0.7)
29. $c^3{\rightarrow}$T:		(tch).hh you should be level four:.
30.		(.)
31.		.hh well
32.		(0.9)
33.	*	she lacks confidence...

Further to the child being included as a participant earlier in the talk (see Chapters 5 and 6, above), there is a certain level of ambiguity regarding who the specific recipient of the initial upshot statement is. The goal proposal at line 25 is hearably aimed at the parent, in that it incorporates the lexical elements seen in previous extracts. These include the 'so'-preface linking the utterance as an upshot to the earlier syllogistic contrast, as well as the use of 'we' as a categorising statement positioning the adult participants as a joint group within the overall discussion on the child. It can also be

heard to orient to the child as a participant, as the way T avoids making any reference to the child in third person during the characterisation of a goal ("SO we want to °u° to a level four") suggests. Equally, T's subsequent expression of surprise, whilst oriented to by F as being directed at him (see below), also appears to reference T's earlier, more conversational, reporting statement (lines 17 and 19). As the analysis of Chapter 6 pointed out, this involved a more 'informal' reporting statement that sought (and gained) recipiency from the child partly by dint of an expression of surprise regarding the result.

Despite this ambiguity, at line 27 F aligns to the goal proposal, providing his own characterisation of the child's level of attainment. Unlike the previous extracts in this section, where T undertook careful interactional work to downplay any negative valence during parental alignment, F's utterance is left to stand on its own. Whilst this is due in part to the ongoing construction of the child as an active participant to the talk, as evidenced by T's subsequent goal proposal directed towards the child (line 29), it is interesting to note that F's utterance *does* include some potentially negative elements. Like the parent in extract 7.5 (above), he produces an upshot of the report-national average contrast that involves a blame account, which in effect presents the child as being accountable for the level of attainment.

Set against this potentially negative blame account, however, the format of F's utterance at line 27 provides an indication that T is using goal proposals to occasion the relevance of acceptance/rejection by the parents, rather than seeking any specific assessment of the child's result. Importantly, F does not deliver any assessment of the child's result during his aligning utterance, and indeed by stating "I don't know why" (line 27), is hearably keying to T's prior expression of surprise and distancing himself from the fact of the result by articulating uncertainty as to the cause for its actual level. By leaving his utterance to stand on its own, T can be heard to treat F's recipiency as an acceptance of the goal proposal, as a result of which the talk progresses. During her next turn-at-talk (line 29), T produces a goal proposal formulated in more direct terms ("*you* should be level four"), and is thus hearably and specifically aimed at C. This highlights the way in which this type of consensual environment (i.e. one which seeks parental agreement with a goal proposal) is tailored specifically to the parental participants of the meetings.

The topical management of earlier extracts is also seen in extract 7.8, with T moving on to the next stage of the written report at line 33. As has already been seen, the format of this further talk involves the verbatim recounting of the next stage of the written record[14]. Whilst this is also the case in this extract, the fact that it provides an exit from both the parent focused *and* child focused upshot statements highlights the robust nature of this method of topic management. This shift in focus on to another section of the report marks a change of topic, and attends to the agenda driven nature of the talk by marking the separation of the report and its author (i.e. the set teacher) from T as the speaker of the report. By signposting that her continued talk is related to an 'external' agenda in this way, the written record also acts as a way out of this section of the meeting, 'detoxifying' any candidate interpretations of T's continued talk as 'talking over' any potential continuance by either F or C.

7.2.1 Summary

Whilst T's presentation of the upshot statement in *this* section has followed the basic pattern across *all* of the extracts looked at so far, changes in the level of recipiency produced by the parents allow a more precise consideration of how agreement is both elicited and managed by T. On a general level, the focus of the talk is directed away from any extended discussion of the child's result. For her own part, T is careful to avoid engaging in any explicit censure of the child and their result. Equally importantly, she also negates any potential criticisms of the child that the parents express. By doing this, the future-oriented goal proposal for the child locates remedying the non-achievement of the child, rather than attributing blame for any 'failure', as the shared objective of the meetings.

Even in those cases where extended interactional work has to be carried out subsequent to the making of the upshot statement in order to repair indications that the parent(s) are unclear as to the upshot of the report-national average contrast (cf. extract 7.7), T's main work is focused upon creating and maintaining a consensual environment in which both teacher and parents are constructed as legitimate participants to be talking about the child. Having done this, T undertakes a verbatim recounting of the next stage of the written report, which provides for both a non-problematic way out of this section of the talk, and a way to move the interview in general forward.

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[14] See footnote 3, above, for an outline of how this verbatim account can be heard in terms of Goffman's 'text locked voice (1981).

7.3 Proposal Statements and 'Silent' Parents

In marked contrast to the parents' evening meetings examined above, the final two extracts in this chapter concern meetings where no parental talk can be heard. In both cases, the parents are silent throughout the delivery of the child's result, i.e. from the delivery of the reporting statement, up until the point at which T initiates a topic transition. Despite this potentially problematic lack of recipiency, the upshot statement and subsequent topic transition are still delivered, thereby reflecting the robust nature of goal proposals and the detoxifying exits they facilitate. Equally, it highlights T's focus on maintaining a consensual environment within which to discuss the results of the child.

In extract 7.9 (below), the trajectory of the meeting is maintained, even without parental recipiency regarding the upshot statement. Indeed, despite there being no talk from the parent either prior or subsequent to the making of a goal proposal at line 19, the overall format of the report delivery follows that outlined in Chapter 3 (see table 3.a, above).

Extract 7.9 (continued from Extract 6.8: Pt1/ co 17.1)

F = Father

15. $c^1 \rightarrow$ T: level three,

16.   (0.8)

17. $c^2 \rightarrow$ working up to a level four

18.   (0.8)

19. $c^3 \rightarrow$ T: °o°kay, (.) .h > so we < want him to get to a level four.

20.   (0.7)

21.   e::rm:

22.   (0.9)

23. *   °and° > she says < that he's very eager to please...

As the transcript makes clear, there is no recipiency from the parent at any stage of the delivery of the child's result, despite his earlier response to a question by T and participation in a brief discussion of his son's displeasure at moving maths groups (see Chapter 6, Extract 6.8, above). This extract would therefore appear to reflect the differential status of teachers and parents as 'experts' on the child, for as Heath states, "relative absence of recipient participation with informings is also found in...interaction environments in which an expert provides an opinion or assessment on matters of which the other person is ignorant" (1992: 245). This is not to say that the silence of the parent in any way marks an innate passivity in the face of T's 'expert' opinion, since Heath

also points out that recipient silence during general-practice consultations "reveal the patient's orientation to medical authority and "affective neutrality"" (ibid: 262). Instead, parental silence here *could* be taken as an example of T and F co-producing an asymmetrical relationship based around the differential status of their opinions.

Given this reading of the parental silence, it is interesting to note that whilst similar elements of lexical and topical management evident in previous extracts also appear here[15], prior to the upshot statement itself T provides the extra component, "okay" (beginning of line 19). With the introduction of this extra element, T can be heard to 'fill in' recipiency for F in terms of the prior turn (line 18), so that "okay" functions to move the agenda on in much the same way as it does in classroom lessons (cf. Mehan, 1979). In treating F's lack of recipiency as non-problematic in this way, T's interactional work highlights the fact that whilst recipiency regarding the goal proposal is sought for during this stage of the talk, eliciting such recipiency is not carried out at the expense of preserving an overall lack of conflict between the adult participants.

Added to this displayed focus on avoiding conflict and maintaining consensus, T once again attends to local contingencies within the talk (cf. extracts 7.3 and 7.4, above). As Chapter 6 (above) demonstrated, T's truncated presentation of the earlier stages of the meeting[16] can be heard as a consequence of the tangential passage of talk that took place subsequent to the agenda and focusing statements. This earlier change in delivery format is reflected in the way T proceeds with the interaction despite F's lack of recipiency at this stage of the talk, with a displayed imperative to make up the time lost by the delay being evident across the reporting structure as a whole.

More importantly, perhaps, T's task orientation of providing a future-oriented goal proposal can reflect which child is actually being discussed. Unlike the majority of previous extracts, this goal proposal (line 19) provides a more optimistically inclined projection forward from the child's result. Rather than outlining a goal in which the child is 'aiming at' something, with the implication that they have not yet reached the target, in this extract T links the goal proposal to a specific outcome by stating that "we want him to *get* to a level four". Given the earlier discussion of the child having moved down a maths set (see Chapter 6), the possibility remains that the child may be able to

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[15] I.e. the use of a 'so'-preface, and 'we' as a categorising statement.

[16] In terms of this extract, see the reporting statement at line 15, and the contextualising statement at line 17.

achieve the desired aim. This more optimistic goal proposal therefore provides a contrast with the earlier upshot statements, which in comparison are neutrally produced in terms of the possible future T is invoking for the children and their work.

Given these prior sequential considerations, the robust nature of the reporting structure in general is evident during the upshot statement and subsequent topic transition. This is not to say that T does not continue the cautious approach evident throughout the delivery of the below national average children's results, since she monitors for any talk from F across lines 20 to 22. But the forward movement implied by the stepwise transition from reporting statement, through upshot statement, to topic transition allows T to maintain the forward trajectory of the talk against the background of different levels of parental recipiency (or indeed lack of it). Added to this, the implication of the written record at line 23 detoxifies any candidate interpretations of T's continued talk as 'talking over' any potential recipiency from F (see extract 7.8, above).

Many of the elements that make up the repeated format of future-oriented goal proposal and detoxified exit from the current discussion are also evident in the final non-achieving result extract. There is, however, a major difference in the presentation of the upshot statement in extract 7.10 (below). Although the application of both a 'so'-preface (line 20) and a topical shift marked by the verbatim reading of the written report (line 24) mark this extract as similar to previous extracts in this chapter, T's upshot statement at line 20, "he needs to do a bit of work to get up to that", provides a different version of a goal proposal.

Extract 7.10 (continued from Extract 6.4: Pt1/ r 04.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; C = Child

16.	$c^1 \rightarrow$ T:	he's working at er level three,
17.		(0.5)
18.	$c^2 \rightarrow$	.hh now the national average is level four.
19.		(1.2)
20.	$c^3 \rightarrow$	.hh °urm <u>so</u>° (1.2) he needs to do a bit of work to get up to that,
21.		(0.8)
22.		erm
23.		(1.5)
24.	*	he says althou::gh .hh A's concentration can be...

In earlier extracts, the goal proposals were formulated inclusively. The combination of 'we' as a categorising term, and a deferral to the category of 'favourable things' in terms of the child's work within the trajectory of their ongoing SAT preparation, were indicative of the consensual work T was attempting to carry out. In extract 7.9 (above), there was a slight variation in this approach, with T linking the goal proposal to a specific outcome. This provided a more optimistically inclined projection forward from the child's result. Whilst a definite outcome is once again implied in extract 7.10, the goal proposal delivered during the upshot statement is more specific and blaming in terms of what the child "needs to do" (line 20).

This change in format can be linked to the ongoing non-recipiency of the parents', which unlike the silence of F in extract 7.9 (above), has been constant throughout the entire stepwise presentation of the reporting structure, including the preamble talk[17]. Whilst the goal proposal delivered by T continues to occasion the relevance of an acceptance or rejection, rather than making any direct assessment of the child, here the parents appear to be doing 'withholding', declining to produce either an acceptance or a rejection of the upshot statement. Having received no indication from the parents of their opinion regarding the child's result prior to this point, T changes the goal proposal in order to seek a response, based around the description of a specific course of action. Given that T cannot be certain what reception the below national average result might get from the parents, it is interesting to note that proposing a more specific course of action involves focusing on the child.

As Maynard points out with regard to potentially bad news being delivered within institutional settings, "deliverers work to cleanse their announcements of reference to their own agency" (forthcoming: ms 255), often linking such announcements with courses of remedial action. Of the three other actors in the parents' evening meetings who could be targeted with blame (i.e. the child, the parents, or the set teacher), T chooses to focus on the child, which makes sense in terms of his/her role as the main actor regarding the production of the result. But it is important to remember that the goal proposal *does not* present the child's result as bad news, nor indeed does it engage in any "blame negotiations" (Watson, 1978: 110). Instead, the course of action suggested at line 20 is not developed in any way, the neutrality of the goal proposal

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[17] As we saw in Chapter 6 (above), the only recipiency from M has been the minimal RT at line 11 made in response to the agenda statement.

allowing T to state an aim and how it could be achieved, without saying that it *will* be achieved. Indeed, the formulation of the utterance at line 20 continues T's earlier cautious approach to the parents' evening, in that the child is constructed as having to do only a minimal amount of work ("a bit of work") in order to achieve the requisite result. In order to maintain a consensual environment within which to discuss the child, with both teacher and parents positioned as legitimate participants discussing the child as a known-in-common topic, questions of blame or fault are thus avoided, despite the actual responsibility for the result being linked to the child and diverted from the adult speakers[18].

7.3.1 Summary

Even in situations where the level of parental recipiency constitutes a potential interactional difficulty, the overall trajectory of the proposal statement is preserved. The goal proposal regarding the child's result, in providing an exit from the current discussion by detoxifying any bad news implications of the result, continues to work with the implication of the written record as topic transition to allow for continued movement within the meeting.

The robust nature of the reporting structure also facilitates T's continued focus on the preservation of a consensual environment within which to discuss the results of the child. This is particularly true in the situation when T's interactional work highlights that whilst recipiency regarding the upshot statement as goal proposal is always sought, eliciting such recipiency is not carried out to the detriment of maintaining a non-conflict relationship between the teacher and the parents. A major part of this non-conflict relationship is facilitated by the level of neutrality the future-oriented goal proposals allow T during her presentation of an upshot. This was especially the case in extract 7.10, where proposing a more specific course of action as a method of response pursuit involved attributing more responsibility on the child.

7.4 Conclusion

For those parent-teacher meetings concerned with children whose results are below the national average mark, this chapter has highlighted two important factors regarding the

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[18] It is interesting to note that the child is present during this extract, and as such constitutes an overhearing audience.

delivery of news[19]. First, the potentiality of any given piece of news hinges upon its subsequent realisation. The interactional work to provide a consequent 'upshot' or confirmation presents an explicit interpretation of the previously delivered piece of information, although the actual orientation to this valence by the recipient of the news cannot be presupposed. Second, it is in and through this interpretive work that the specific task orientations of the participants are revealed.

In general terms, once the below national average 'non-achieving' results have been delivered, T produces an upshot statement that involves the delivery of a goal proposal. These goal proposals work to detoxify the bad news implications of the level three results by moving into a statement of aims that is future-oriented. That such goal proposals are, to some extent, about remedying the non-achievement of the child is reflected in the way they incorporate a projection forward from the child's result. This projection implies that in order to deal with the child's difficulties (i.e. a below level four SAT result), they must aim for a certain level of accomplishment. Usually, this is done by producing a neutral statement of aims (cf. extracts 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.8, and 7.10), in that T implies a *possible* future regarding the child's work, but one that is not guaranteed. Sometimes, however, T produces a goal proposal grounded in a more 'hopeful' version of the child's prospects (cf. extracts 7.1, 7.6, 7.7, and 7.9). In either situation, by proposing a remedy to the child's non-achievement, these goal proposals provide a comparison with what Maynard (forthcoming) has called a 'good-news exit' from potential bad news. Rather than seeking to provide straightforward good news 'spin' to the children's below national average results, T can be heard to provide a broadly neutral exit from the initial discussion topic of the parents' evening meetings that works to manage consensus between herself and the parents.

On one level, all of these features fit with normative expectations regarding the delivery of 'difficult' information. This is especially true if the upshot statement is viewed as the culmination of an extended 'clueing' sequence provided by T's earlier syllogistic contrast (cf. Schegloff, 1988, and Chapter 6, above). Further reference to normative expectations can be found in the way elements such as the 'so'-preface and the use of 'we' as a categorising statement work to present the result as the outcome of objective circumstances. These two aspects of the talk also work to position the teacher and

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[19] That the reporting of the below national average results is presented to the parents as *news*, rather than any other form of information, has already been seen in Chapter 6, above.

parents as an affiliated group with the best interests of the child 'at heart'. Overall, the presentation of the result steers clear of the question of blame in terms of all those involved, since as Maynard (forthcoming) points out, taking or attributing responsibility is something to be avoided with bad news.

The management of responsibility has a different impact on the various actors involved in the production of the result, irrespective of whether they are present at the meeting. For the child, this means that whilst they are firmly implicated in the production of the result, they are also placed within an ongoing trajectory of work that could see better levels of attainment. For the parent too, any potential responsibility for the child's academic performance is ignored in favour of their being implicated as a legitimate participant in the discussion on the child as a known-in-general topic. Finally, in the case of T's role as the deliverer of the 'bad news', Maynard states, "deliverers are interactively cautious in their presentations, and, in terms of responsibility for the bad news event, provide for third-party or impersonal attribution rather than self-attribution" (Maynard, forthcoming: 239). For all three parties, therefore, normative expectations regarding the delivery of such results resonate with Maynard's assertion that the "benign order of everyday life" (cf. Maynard, forthcoming: 223 onwards) is maintained by "practices of talk and social interaction [which] shroud bad news" (ibid: 224).

However, whilst the cautious presentation of the proposal statement within these extracts is indicative of 'bad news' deliveries, the overall structural organisation of this particular section of the talk provides an interesting contrast with other cases where potentially socially disruptive news has to be reported. In particular, the actual details of the children's results are almost 'subsidiary' to the consensual interactional environment that T is attempting to maintain. To illustrate this point, the delivery of upshot statements for non-achieving results can be examined in the light of another technique for introducing delicate or potentially 'bad news' topics, namely Maynard's work on the Perspective Display Series (PDS) (1991; 1992).

Against a background of clinicians delivering diagnoses to the parents of children with a variety of physiological problems, Maynard shows how doctors use a repeated interactional device to seek the parents' perspective before delivering the 'bad news'. This structure consists of three turns:

1) Clinician's opinion-query, or perspective-display invitation.

2) Recipient's reply or assessment.

3) Clinician's report and assessment.

(adapted from Maynard, 1992: 333)

Extract 7.11 (below) provides a good example of the PDS, the three stages of which are marked with arrows:

Extract 7.11 [Maynard 1992: 337-338]

Dr = Doctor; Mo = Mother

1.	1)→ Dr:	What do you see? as- as his (0.5) difficulty.
2.		(1.2)
3.	2)→Mo:	Mainly his uhm: (1.2) the fact that he
4.		doesn't understand everything. (0.6) and
5.		also the fact that his speech (0.7) is very
6.		hard to understand what he's saying (0.3)
7.		lot[s of]time
8.	Dr:	[right]
9.		(0.2)
10.	Dr:	Do you have any ideas wh:y it is? are you:
11.		do [yo] u? h
12.	Mo:	[No]
13.		(2.1)
14.	3)→ Dr:	.h okay I (0.2) you know I think we basically
15.		(.) in some ways agree with you:

In this extract, the doctor can be heard to prepare the ground for the receipt of bad news diagnoses by linking the view of the patients with their own. More precisely, the professional interactant is actively seeking the alignment of the lay participant, so as to facilitate the delivery of a specific interactional object, i.e. a diagnosis. When conveying the bad news diagnoses via the Perspective Display Series, co-implication of the recipients facilitates the details of the news itself. The task of gaining co-participant recipiency is a 'means to an end', the end being the delivery of the diagnosis.

Within the parents' evening meetings, however, gaining parental recipiency does not appear to be an over-riding consideration. Indeed, despite introducing a future oriented goal proposal, T at no point expands or develops this proposal in order to gain alignment from the parents regarding any specific course of action for the child. In the

case of PDS, Maynard shows the clinicians' work in maintaining an environment in which a specific action is to be achieved, namely the alignment of the parents with the diagnosis being presented. In the case of the parents' evening meetings, T attempts to construct an interactional environment which focuses on *avoiding* both sources of conflict between the participants, and any time consuming elements within the talk (thereby allowing T to move the agenda on).

More importantly, T's work in framing an ostensibly 'bad' piece of news (i.e. the child not achieving a result on or above the national average in their mock SAT examination), highlights how locally produced institutional talk is sensitive to the different task organisations that occur across specific institutional environments. In particular, the SAT agenda, *as attended-to by the teacher*, does not allow for an essentialist view of the child and their work (i.e. a result which is below the national average is *ipso facto* bad news), but instead constructs the child in terms of the ongoing trajectory of SAT focused schoolwork. As part of an overall orientation towards 'doing encouraging' during the presentation of non-achieving results, T attempts to position the parents as aligned in terms of the child. Coming as it does during the initiatory sequence of talk for each parents' evening meeting, the upshot statement focuses not so much on delivering information to the parents *per se*, but in asserting the framework within which the ongoing meeting could be heard. For the delivery of non-achieving results during parents' evening meetings, setting up the child as somebody engaged in an *ongoing* process of schoolwork acts as a vehicle by which the affiliation of the teacher and parents is affirmed. Put another way, the institutional task orientation of simply delivering the report on the child constantly references an orientation by T to positioning the parents as broadly aligned with her (and by implication, the school) in terms of the child's education, rather than as merely recipients of the report.

This data underlines how rather than being difficulties that must be mitigated and avoided, the problems often associated with 'bad news' can be used to the benefit of the interactants. Whilst the problematic elements of bad news are attended-to during the parents' evening meetings, the achieved organizational features displayed by T *do not* relate to any tacit level of social disruption. Although undeniably hearable as news that by most criteria can be designated 'bad', T's delivery of the non-achieving results focuses on maintaining both a consensual environment, and the forward trajectory of the talk, even when extended interactional work is carried out in order to rectify any

potential difficulties raised by the parents. The 'bad news' of the non-achieving results is not, therefore, primarily produced as a problematic and socially disruptive interactional object that must be imparted to the parents. Rather, it is as a means both by which the parents can be implicated as part of the overall educational process, even if this implication does not as yet extend to seeking their opinion on matters relating to this process, and the overall forward trajectory of the meeting can be maintained.

In Chapter 8 (below), the delivery of upshot statements during meetings that deal with children who have achieved the requisite national average result will be examined.

Chapter 8

Upshot Statements for Achieving Results

8.0 Introduction

As the discussion in the previous chapter has shown, T's main activity during the delivery of the non-achieving results has been to progressively downgrade the negative aspects of the children's results, deferring to the category 'favourable things' (aims for the child), whilst remaining silent about unfavourable things (being "behind"). Once the below national average results have been delivered, T produces as an upshot statement a goal proposal that is future-oriented. This is hearable as an attempt to remedy the non-achievement of the child by introducing projections forward from the result, implying that to deal with the below level four SAT result, the child must aim for a certain level of accomplishment. Rather than being solely focused on mitigating potentially 'bad' news, however, the provision of an upshot for the below national average results involves the management of a wider set of relationships within the parents' evening meetings. This was illustrated by the way that, unlike Maynard's work on PDS, the details of the children's results were less important than the way in which the teacher and the parents could be positioned as legitimate and non-conflicting participants in the discussion of the child.

Moving on to the analysis of what has previously been glossed as 'achieving' results, the question of interpretive valence can once again be seen to be of relevance. Indeed, several factors would appear to indicate that the potential exists for these results to be oriented to as 'good news'. The main reason for making this assumption rests on the way that the teacher (T) includes the interpretive element of the national average within her delivery of the above national average results, thereby implying the 'successful' nature of any result on or above level four. Further to this interpretive signposting, the presentation of results above the national average level follow the normative treatment of 'good news', in that the format utilised when delivering the results ostensibly reflects what Maynard describes as "exposing good news" (Maynard, forthcoming, and Chapter 6, above). This exposure is evident in the way that the value of 'good news' is generally seen to be apparent, with those delivering such news producing it forcefully and forthrightly within a developing conversation (see Maynard, forthcoming: ms 197). For those extracts dealing with results above the national average level, this forthright presentation could arguably be seen during the initial stages of the talk, with truncated agenda, focusing, reporting, and contextualising stages all being evident prior to the production of the upshot statement (see Chapter 6, above). Indeed, in several extracts

T's orientation towards framing the results via the national average level appears to change completely, with the contextualising statement being absent altogether. When compared with the attendance to participation frameworks and specific sequence boundaries seen during the presentation of non-achieving results, T can arguably be heard to deliver a 'no problem' version of both the above national average result and, by implication, the child attaining it.

Chapter 6 also highlighted that there is no straightforward presentation of these results as 'good news'. T instead carries out affiliative work during the presentation of the reporting statement for the achieving results, thereby incorporating the parents into the process of ensuring that the child continues to achieve the requisite result. This affiliative work also positions both sets of adult participants (i.e. the teacher and the parent/parents) as aligned on the subject of the child's attainment. Further to this affiliative work, any early indications that the results could tacitly be seen as 'good' are not generally reflected in the production of the upshot statement. In terms of the normative format of good news delivery, Maynard highlights the importance of subsequent assessments in relation to the foregoing details of news delivery, since this stage of the talk is "almost wholly devoted to displaying valence" (forthcoming: 128). However, whilst elements of forthright delivery can be heard in the prosodic features of the deliverer's talk prior to the making of the upshot statements, T does not generally deliver direct evaluative assessments regarding the above national average results. Instead, she routinely makes use of goal proposals just subsequent to the delivery of the results. When assessments *are* produced, they work to facilitate T's orientation towards a specific institutional agenda in terms of the results, rather than delivering news with a specific 'good' valence.

It is only during one meeting (extract 8.1, below) that the presentation of an upshot relating to the child's result is hearable more in terms of the delivery of good news. However, that this meeting constitutes a deviant case when compared to the rest of the meetings in this data leads to an examination of the way the work of some children within specific curriculum subjects is perceived to need 'praise' rather than 'encouragement'. In this way, T's overall institutional orientation towards the delivery of results and 'doing encouraging' are thrown into sharp relief.

8.0.1 Overview of Chapter

This chapter will look at the delivery of outcome related upshot statements linked to those reports for children with above national average level results. The three sections in this chapter will examine different aspects of the delivery of the achieving results as they relate to normative expectations regarding the presentation of 'good news'.

In section 8.1, the one meeting in the data corpus that is closest to Maynard's description of good news delivery is examined. It is then compared to two other meetings involving results above the national average, thereby highlighting the way that T attends to a different set of interactional competencies and institutional relevancies for those parents and children with higher results.

Section 8.2 examines the changes in interpretive valence that are evident during the delivery of some of the extracts. These changes, although loosely similar to the presentation of what can ostensibly be seen as 'good news', show how the results cannot be characterised as 'good', but instead are presented with certain clarifications.

Finally, section 8.3 looks at two extracts in which a feature common to the delivery of most of the achieving result meetings, the assumption of parental knowledge, is worked with on an even greater level by T.

8.1 'Good News' Results?

In this section, three extracts in which results on or above the national average level of four are delivered are examined. The first of these extracts (extract 8.1, below) involves a meeting in which the child's result *is* constructed as being 'good' during the upshot statement, and as such is closest to Maynard's description of 'exposing' good news (forthcoming, and above). This marks a shift from the presentation of upshot statements for results below the national average, since instead of simply 'doing encouragement' (cf. Chapter 7, above) both T and M can be heard to engage in praising the child's academic achievements. However, this meeting can also be seen to be different from the presentation of other above national average results, as the subsequent comparison with extracts 8.2 and 8.3 (below) indicates. For these two extracts, T's institutional task orientation of ensuring that the children remain focused on the upcoming SAT examinations 'proper' appears to override what is potentially construable as 'good news'.

8.1.1 'Praising' the Child

As previous chapters have already shown (see chapters 3 and 5, above), in extract 8.1 (below) T chooses science as the topic to be discussed[1]. The child's result is constructed as good news, with T and M both presenting positive characterisations of the child. First of all, M receives the report (line 33) with silence and a minimal response token (line 35). At line 36, when T goes on to clarify what the level four result means, an upshot is embedded in the utterance. After another response token from M (line 37), T continues with the clarification at line 38, not only invoking the national average but also providing an assessment ("so that's good" – line 38). T and M subsequently embellish the 'goodness' of the news by praising the child (lines 44 to 48), before T initiates topic transition at line 50[2].

Extract 8.1 (continued from Extract 6.14: Pt1/c 03.1)

M = Mother; B = Baby

33. a+c^1→T: ↑<u>science</u> (.) he came out with a level <u>fo:ur</u>

34.   (0.6)

35.   M: mmm =

36. c^3→ T: = so they're supposed to be aiming at level fo:ur [(.) =

37.   M: [°mmh°

38. c^2→ T: = that's what the national average is >so that's good, <

39.   (0.9)

40.   e: rm and he's very interested in that

41.   (.)

42.   M: yea [h

43.   T: [you know .hh [erm

44.   M: [he said that's one of his favourite su [bjects so

45.   T: [yeah he's

46.   <u>very</u> interested

47.   M: [hmm

48.   T: [puts me on the spot plenty of times

49.   M: mha ha .hh hh .hh

50. * T: E:::RM (0.8) .hhh so what we're doing (0.3) tonight we've got, (.) two: (.) quizzes...

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[1] Not only is this unlike any of the non-achieving extracts looked at in Chapter 7, but as we shall see later on in this chapter, it is also the only instance of science being chosen as the first curriculum topic for discussion amongst any of the above average result extracts.

[2] As in the previous chapter, note that the symbol c^3→ delineates the proposal statement, whilst the symbol * marks the point at which the teacher moves on to a new topic: see Chapter 3 for more details.

In the first instance, the delivery of this achieving result is similar to the delivery of non-achieving result upshot statements, in that T provides the national average contrast as a way of setting up an upshot statement as an immediately sequentially relevant action. Whilst M has responded at lines 35 and 37 to the information provided by T, her recipiency is hearably minimal, which means that the deployment of an upshot at this point can be heard as a tacit repair, linked in part to the need to replace an unclear referent[3]. In order to avoid producing the national average contrast as a criticism of the child, T links it directly to a positive assessment (">so that's good<", end of line 38).

Having retaken the floor with the statement "so that's good", T does not provide any further detail regarding this 'good' assessment, instead referencing the child's experience to invoke the category 'knowledgeable in the area of the child'. This is done via an appeal to the child's own likes and dislikes ("and he's very interested in that", line 40), the experiential focus of which can be heard to act as a contrast to the perhaps more abstract 'national average' focus used during T's previous turn-at-talk. M agrees with T's assertion as to the child being interested in the curriculum topic of science by providing her own version of his 'interestedness' ("he said that's one of his favourite subjects" – line 44), which T in turn upgrades by emphasising that he is very interested (lines 45 and 46). The topic of science is then closed and moved away from via the application of both an idiomatic expression at line 48, "puts me on the spot plenty of times"[4], and the introduction of a new topic relating to some supplementary materials being handed out to the parents (line 50).

This focus upon unpacking the topic of the child's interest in science by M and T is in marked contrast to the work T has been heard to do in the previous chapter. For the below national average results, T provided goal proposals which incorporated a projection forward from the child's result, and as such were focused on remedying the non-achievement of the child. The overall format of the opening sequence in extract 8.1, with the result being constructed as 'good news' and followed by very positive characterisations of the child, marks a shift from 'encouragement' of the child to 'praise'. Although he is not actually present at the meeting, the characterisations of the child initiated by T lead to a situation in which the mother receives and participates in

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[3] T's utterances at lines 36 and 38 can be seen in terms of Pomerantz's (1984b) first point regarding response pursuit, in that T monitors her prior turns and clarifies what could be seen as an understanding problem on the part of M, as evidenced by M's minimal recipiency at lines 35 and 37.

[4] Cf. Drew and Holt, 1988 for the role of idiomatic expressions in closing off present conversational topics.

the praise on his behalf. In general terms, therefore, the child having achieved the national average level is reflected in the evaluative work that T and M engage in. However, whilst this follows Maynard's outline of good news being exposed (forthcoming, and above), and as such can be seen as a straightforward reflection of the contrast between the result and the national average, an examination of other achieving result extracts indicates that similar praise oriented presentations do not occur. In the case of extracts 8.2 and 8.3 (below), T can once again be heard to produce goal proposals as upshot statements.

8.1.2 Goal Proposals For Achieving Results

In Chapter 7 (above), the regular use of goal proposals subsequent to the delivery of the reporting statement typified the production of the upshot statements for below national average results. Since these results were of 'non-achievement', and as such could potentially be seen as 'bad' news, the goal proposals detoxified any negative implications of the results by producing a neutral statement of aims that implied a possible future. This detoxifying work also provided an exit from the curriculum topic being discussed. In this way, T was able to provide a future oriented projection forward from the child's SAT result, which in turn reflected her institutional goal orientation of providing encouragement for less able children.

It is interesting to note, therefore, that goal proposals are also delivered as upshots for some of the results above the national average. Unlike the proposal statements for the non-achieving extracts, in these instances the goal proposals urge further achievement on the part of the children towards a specific level of academic attainment, rather than implying a possible future result. That T is able to provide a more forthright upshot statement for the achieving results can be linked to the affiliative work that the delivery of the reporting stage involved, since as Chapter 6 (above) indicated the adult participants were positioned as being tacitly aligned on the subject of the child's level of attainment. This is not to say that the results on or above the national average level receive an upshot with an explicit 'good news' valence, since as will become evident, the production of goal proposals for these results work in broadly the same way as those for non-achieving results, in that they show T to be hearably 'doing encouraging'. For the above national average level results, however, this encouragement work highlights how T attends to a different set of interactional competencies and institutional relevancies for those children with higher results and their parents, over and above

implicating the parents as part of the overall educational process, and maintaining the overall forward trajectory of the meeting. Equally, it is clear that the delivery of the achieving results does not follow the format of other 'good news' tellings.

For extract 8.2 (below), a goal proposal as an upshot statement can be heard at line 11, providing an explicit characterisation of an objective for the child. This is subsequently receipted by M at line 12. Whilst T in turn aligns to this recipiency (line 14), no further discussion of the goal proposal relating to the child's result takes place. Instead, a topic transition based on a verbatim recounting of the next part of the written report is carried out (line 16).

Extract 8.2 (continued from Extract 6.9: Pt1/y 18.1)

M = Mother; C = Child; S = Sibling

7.	c^1→T:	(tk) level ↑four,
8.		(0.6)
9.	c^3→	> so we < want him to be a level four. .hh [h Erm: (.) high=
10.	M:	[mmm
11.	c^3→T:	= level four (.) .hh so, (.) .hhha > if he < works a bit harder he could get a five
12.	M:	yes he told me
13.		(0.4)
14.	T:	good,,
15.		(0.5)
16.	*	he does not always concentrate (.) neatness is deteriorated...

In Chapter 6 (above), the straightforward presentation of the child's result (line 7) was followed by a statement similar to the upshot statements seen during many of the non-achieving result extracts. This statement, "so we want him to be a level four" (line 9), provides a contrast to the prior reporting statement by further outlining a specific level that is being sought. A criterion by which to judge the result is implied, and as such this initial upshot statement can be heard as similar to that seen in extract 7.9 (line 19: see Chapter 7, above). Unlike the implicative thrust of the statement heard during extract 7.9, however, the utterance at line 9 implies that the level four result is an achieving one. As part of the inferential structure set up by T, M can be heard to provide a minimal level of recipiency (line 10) that could be taken as an appreciation of this statement. If, however, the sequential placement of M's receipt token (line 10) and T's subsequent work to set up an upshot statement as goal proposal (lines 9 and 11) is examined, just how the result gets framed as one that requires further work on the part

of the child becomes clear. This work also highlights T's management of parental recipiency both before and after the goal proposals are produced.

As well as the lexical format outlined above, the production of the upshot implicative statement at line 9 has the same elements as the upshot statements delivered for results below the national average (see Chapter 6 for more details). A 'so'-preface links the details of this utterance to the preceding reporting statement by working as an upshot marker[5], whilst the application of 'we' as a categorising statement implicates both parent and teacher as those who want the child to achieve the requisite academic performance. Whilst for the delivery of non-achieving results these features worked to set up a tacit level of affiliation between teacher and parents, here they can also be heard as a cautious way to elicit a response from M, especially when considering that there has been no talk from her since the very beginning of the transcript (see chapters 3, 5, and 6 for more details). During the delivery of the non-achieving results, the implication of affiliation, irrespective of any parental recipiency regarding T's turns-at-talk, was seen to be enough, with the robustness of the reporting structure enabling T to continue on with her talk. Here, by developing the initial statement "so we want him to be a level four", T seems to seek at least a minimal level of recipiency from M. Once again, this is in contrast to the delivery of upshot statements for below average results, since in those cases once an upshot statement was delivered, T moved on to another discussion topic.

The work to develop "so we want him to be a level four" starts with the delivery of extra information regarding the result. At lines 9 and 11 T qualifies the initial upshot statement by appending a re-presentation of the result ("high level four"). Not only is this more sophisticated concept, based around a gradation within the various levels of the results, delivered without any accompanying explanation[6], it also indicates that the preceding utterance at line 9 is not going to be left to stand on its own. This is further underlined by the application of a 'so'-preface at line 11, which in this instance works to present T's subsequent talk as a consequence of the earlier part of her turn-at-talk. Having elicited a response from M regarding the initial upshot statement, T can be heard to 'work in' a subsequent upshot statement as goal proposal that does not involve a projection forward from the child's result based on a *possible* future result. Indeed, the

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[5] 'So' also works to maintain the impetus of the reporting trajectory, in much the same way as 'and' and 'now'-prefaces have been seen to (cf. Heritage and Sorjonen, 1994, and Chapter 6, section 6.1.3, above).

[6] As we saw in Chapter 6, minimal explanatory information regarding the reporting statement marked a different orientation by T to these parents as individuals with a greater presumed level of knowledge regarding the child's result.

goal proposal as upshot statement in extract 8.2, "so if he works a bit harder he could get a five" (line 11), unlike the upshot statements seen in the previous chapter, is not formulated in terms of what "we want". Instead, it is produced as a specific outcome that is explicitly linked to the agency of the child. It is the child's result and his role in producing it that is positioned as the central factor in the goal proposal, unlike the non-achieving result upshot statements, where T's presentation of the result steers clear of the question of responsibility for all those involved.

To some extent the formulation of "if he works a bit harder he could get a five" (line 11) bears comparison to the upshot statement seen during extract 7.10 (line 20: see Chapter 7, above), since in both cases the upshot statement as goal proposal is more precise about what the child actually needs to do in terms of reaching a specific result. Both of these extracts also involve response pursuit, since aside from her minimal RT at line 10, M has provided no response to any of the previous stages of the reporting structure. But whilst the upshot statements for the non-achieving results described an aim and how it could be achieved *without* saying that it would be achieved, in extract 8.2 T unambiguously states that the child "could get a five" (line 11).

T's presentation of a 'could do better' message can be related to a similar level of 'doing encouraging' as that seen for the below national average results. However, during the delivery of an upshot statement for the achieving result, displaying a level of caution regarding the child's involvement in the production of the result is less of a consideration than when the result is one that falls beneath the national average level. Having said this, it is important to remember that this shift in T's cautious stance when delivering the above national average results is not the same as Maynard's previously outlined 'exposing good news' format of news delivery. This is reflected in T's subsequent conversational actions, which are based around the successful elicitation of parental recipiency.

So, unlike the similar statement in extract 7.10, T's upshot statement at line 11 actually elicits a level of recipiency from the parent in extract 8.2. Indeed, M's recipiency ("yes he told me" – line 12) can be heard to respond to the assumption of prior knowledge that T's earlier presentation of the child's result involved, since M displays that she was

aware of the child's level of attainment and the subsequent outcome associated with it[7]. Having gained M's recipiency and delivered a goal proposal regarding the child's ongoing schoolwork, the limits of this search for alignment become evident, since T's response of "good" at line 14 acts to close off the current topic of conversation. This action is important because it draws attention to how the search for parental recipiency during this achieving result upshot statement is not ultimately designed to act as a lead-in to an extended discussion of the child's result. Like the delivery of the below national average results seen in the last chapter, the maintenance of a non-conflict, consensual environment, within which parents and teacher are constructed as an affiliated group in terms of their joint object of interest, the child, appears to be T's main aim. But whilst the actual level of parental recipiency during the delivery of the below national average results ultimately seemed unimportant in terms of maintaining the ongoing trajectory of those meetings, in this instance T has been heard to purposely elicit a response from M to at least some part of report on the child.

Extract 8.3 (below) also highlights the way in which T both works with an assumption of prior knowledge on the part of the parents, and seeks a specific level of recipiency from them, albeit not one that involves any extended discussion of the child's result. Following an unreceipted response pursuit at line 22, T initiates an extended contextualising statement (lines 24, 26, and 28), which in turn is followed by a statement similar to the upshot statements seen during the non-achieving result extracts. Like extract 8.2 (above), once recipiency regarding these statements has been gained, a re-presentation of the result (lines 31 and 32) takes place. Whilst this indicates the effort that goes into remedying any potential understanding difficulties, in overall terms constructing an affiliative environment within which to discuss the child continues to be T's focus. This is evident in the way that, having produced an upshot statement as goal proposal at line 34, T initiates topic transition (line 36).

Extract 8.3 (continued from Extract 6.15: Pt1/ j 16.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

20. c[1]→T: ↑ulevel five,
21.   (0.8)
22.   okay?
23.   (0.7)

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[7] It is interesting to note that as an overhearing audience, the child is implicated in M's turn at line 12. Indeed, by citing the child as the source of her information, M can to some extent be heard to downplay her own claim to the knowledge.

24. $c^2 \rightarrow$ so- > you know < the:- (.) [level four (.) =

25.   M: [hmm

26. $c^2 \rightarrow$T: = is the average,

27.   (0.4)

28. $c^{2+3} \rightarrow$ national average th[at's what we want them to get, [yeah?

29.   F: [right ° yeah °   [yeah

30.   M: [° yeah °

31. $c^1 \rightarrow$T: [(n).hhhha <u>level</u> <u>five</u> and she's put <u>down</u>wards => he was < level five

32. $c^1 \rightarrow$ by <u>three</u> marks (.) (tch) o [kay:, =

33.   (F):   [(tsk)

34. $c^3 \rightarrow$T: = > so we < want to make that a (1.1) deadlevel five if we can.

35.   M: ° ye [ah °

36. *   T: [(n).hhh um: good allround (.) participates well...

As Chapter 6 (above) outlined, at several points in the delivery of the child's result, T has presented the report information as joint knowledge shared with the parents. Following the straightforward reporting statement at line 20, T seeks a response via a confirmatory "okay?" (line 22). As was noted in Chapter 3, this might be due to some understanding difficulty on the part of the parents, although this is not borne out by any evidence internal to the transcript[8]. Whatever the reason, given the lack of uptake regarding this unreceipted response pursuit, the reporting is oriented to by T as requiring further elucidation, with the subsequent contextualising statement being presented in terms of an intersubjective appeal ("so you know" – line 24). More importantly, T makes a concerted effort to elicit a response from the parents. Following the production of the response implicative "okay" and an initial intersubjective appeal regarding the national average level, an utterance similar to the upshot statements of the non-achieving results, with an embedded confirmatory utterance, is produced (lines 24 to 28).

After T has elicited parental recipiency to the national average level (lines 29 and 30), she re-presents the child's result in more detail (lines 31 and 32). The greater level of detail regarding the level five result involves terms of reference that directly attend to the fact that it is the set teacher who has written the report ("level five and *she's* put downwards" – line 31), as well as a specific delineation of the child's attainment ("he

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[8] One possible explanation could be found in the fact that the audio only nature of the data means that some visual indication of parental uncertainty escapes our analytic gaze, but is oriented to by T.

was level five by three marks" – lines 31 and 32)[9]. Like extract 8.2 (above), these more sophisticated concepts are introduced without any further explanation. Having provided the extra information regarding the child's result, T then produces an upshot statement as a goal proposal (line 34) which, in once again utilising a 'so'-preface and 'we' as a categorising term, is similar in format to that of extract 8.2[10].

Further similarity between extracts 8.3 and 8.2 can also be seen at line 34, where the goal proposal outlines a goal that is linked to a specific outcome, the stated aim of which is to "make that a deadlevel five if we can" (line 34). The assumption of parental knowledge by T, despite the understanding difficulties implied by M and F's earlier silence during the reporting and contextualising statements, continues with the delivery of this goal proposal, in that the concept of a "deadlevel five" is introduced without any further explanatory detail. Finally, having gained recipiency from M regarding the goal proposal, T can be heard to effect topic transition at line 36, which as in previous extracts (both achieving and non-achieving) involves a verbatim recounting of another part of the set teacher's written report.

In general terms, extract 8.3 shows how T manages the parental understanding and recipiency regarding the details of the report on the child. It also indicates how, should they display a lack of recipiency/understanding, T seeks to provide extra explanatory detail in order to elicit some form of response. Unlike the presentation of details relating to the delivery of the non-achieving results in the previous chapter, these explanatory accounts are not presented as 'news', but as information known-in-general by both T and the parents, even if the parents do not immediately display that they do understand. Eliciting a level of recipiency from the parents, despite the amount of effort T puts into it, is not subsequently used to initiate any extended discussion of the child's result. Like extract 8.2 (above), getting the parents to display their alignment to the future-oriented goal proposal seems to be T's aim, as her subsequent shift on to another topic indicates.

8.1.3 'Praising' vs. 'Doing Encouraging'

So far, a comparison has been drawn between the delivery of upshot statements for results on or above the national average level, and those in the previous chapter that

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[9] Note that the provision of extra information regarding the child's performance cannot be heard in terms of T 'exposing' the good news of the result. Indeed, the net effect of this extra level of detail sees the child's result being downgraded from an initially 'good' presentation.

[10] Note that unlike extract 8.2, the use of 'we' as categorising term in Extract 8.3 cannot be heard to make the child responsible for the result.

related to children with marks below the national average. As extract 8.1 (above) highlighted, the construction of the result as 'good news', as well as the formulation of positive characterisations of the child, marked a shift from the previously seen 'encouragement' of the child, to a delivery of 'praise'.

Indeed, as the only example of science being offered up as first topic within the entire data corpus, extract 8.1 highlights some of the factors at work beyond the cautious consensus-seeking work carried out by T (glossed as 'doing encouraging'), common to both the achieving and non-achieving extracts looked at so far. Not only is the specific construction of the child within the achieving result delivery format seemingly dependant upon an achieving result being discussed, it also involves such locally attended-to features of the talk as the curriculum subject currently being discussed.

On one level, this change can be partly linked to the institutional framework of parents' evening, and the way in which the topic of science is presented relative to other curriculum areas such as maths and languages. The evidence for this assertion in extract 8.1 rests in the way T has previously forecast the reporting of the science result. It was highlighted in Chapter 5 (above) that during her preamble, T indicated that her notes were not in order, and that she would have to deal with the report relating to the science results as a stopgap until she could find the actual report she wanted to start with (cf. Extract 5.6, above). Having set up a context within which the result can be heard (i.e. as being of 'secondary' importance to another, unspecified, curriculum topic), T locally attends to the institutional priorities within the talk, shifting the emphasis of the talk on to a more general discussion of the child's favourite subject. Whilst the need to provide an 'end result' with regard to the child's attainment in the mock SAT examination is important when relaying both achieving and non-achieving results, the work this action carries out relative to the specific subject in question highlights how the amount of discussion prompted by T regarding the child's result varies between topics.

This change in focus related to the specific curriculum topic being discussed also indicates that there might be something special about either this particular child, or the interaction with this particular parent. In general terms, the affiliative work T has carried out in the extracts 8.2 and 8.3 is also evident in extract 8.1, although the basis for this display of affiliation has become one related to delivering praise for this child in particular. However, since there is no evidence internal to the transcript to indicate why

this specific family should be singled out in this way, it is difficult to explore this differential treatment any further without straying into the realms of supposition. What *can* be seen is the that for the other two parents' evening meetings looked at so far which involve results on or above the national average level, T's institutional task orientation of ensuring that the children remain focused on the upcoming SAT examinations 'proper' tends to override what is potentially construable as 'good news'. For some curriculum topics, or indeed, for particular parents and/or children, T's attendance to this task orientation appears to be less important/relevant. Despite this change in focus, the maintenance of an affiliative and consensual environment within which to talk about the child can still be seen to be of generic importance.

8.1.4 Summary

In the three extracts described in this section, similarities between the production of the achieving and non-achieving report upshot statements have been seen, specifically in the areas of topic management and lexical formulation. These similarities can be summarised thus:

1. There is the recurrent use of goal proposals subsequent to the delivery of the child's result and the national average level.

2. Goal proposals are utilised as part of an overall interactional orientation towards 'doing encouraging'.

3. 'So'-prefaces, working as upshot markers, are used to link the details of the upshot statements to the preceding reporting; the categorising term 'we' implicates parent(s) and teacher as an affiliated group wanting the child to achieve the requisite academic performance.

4. Verbatim recounting of the set teacher's written report is utilised as a method of topic transition.

These similarities highlight the way in which there is no asymmetry in the delivery of 'achieving' and 'non-achieving' results regarding the maintenance of a consensual and non-conflict environment during the parent's evening meetings. Irrespective of the level of parental recipiency, T appears able to maintain the ongoing trajectory of the meeting, whilst at the same time implicating the parents in an affiliative environment within which to talk about the child.

Differences from the delivery of the non-achieving results have also been seen, and are summarised below:

1. The goal proposals are linked to a specific level of achievement on the part of the child, rather than a *possible* future result, and are explicitly linked to the agency of the child.

2. 'So'-prefaces and 'we' as a categorising term are used to elicit an explicit level of response from the parent(s), rather than simply implying a tacit level of affiliation between the two parties.

3. Although not designed to act as a lead-in to an extended discussion of the child's result, T has been heard to purposely elicit parental response to at least some part of report on the child subsequent to the delivery of the upshot statement. This is in contrast to the non-achieving result extracts, where the actual level of parental recipiency was unimportant in terms of maintaining the ongoing trajectory of the meeting.

T also attends to a different set of interactional competencies and institutional relevancies for those parents and children with higher results, over and above implicating the parents as part of the overall educational process, and maintaining the overall forward trajectory of the meeting. These interactional competencies and institutional relevancies are significant for three reasons.

The first relates to a presupposition by T of a level of parental knowledge beyond that accorded to the parents of children with below national average results. This is manifest in the way that T introduces concepts beyond the relatively straightforward report-national average contrast and its upshot to describe the children's results. The second reflects an expectation by T that the parents can and will display a greater level of recipiency and affiliation regarding the description of the children's results, and is reflected in attempts at response pursuit unseen in the previous chapter. Finally, T appears to orient to the children achieving results on or above the national average as being more capable than those working below it. This is apparent in the way T produces upshot statements as goal proposals that directly cast the child as being responsible for attaining a specific outcome, unlike the previous chapter, where future-oriented goal proposals avoided attributing any such agency to the child.

8.2 Changes in Interpretive Valence

In this section, two extracts are examined in which the upshot statement delivery presents the child's level of attainment as being in accord with the national average, and thus what T and the parents 'want'. This is in marked contrast to both the presentation of upshots for both non-achieving results, and for those of achieving results seen earlier in this chapter (cf. extracts 8.2 and 8.3, above). In these previous situations, T framed the reports on the child in terms of a forward projection from the mock SAT result. In contrast, the upshot delivery for the extracts in this section are presented in terms of a 'present tense', thereby implying that the results have reached their nominal Key Stage 2 targets[11].

This does not mean, however, that the default presentational strategy for these results becomes one of 'good news', despite the delivery of the upshot statement in these extracts arguably being hearable in terms of T producing 'good news' straightforwardly within a developing conversation (see Maynard, forthcoming: ms 197). In contrast to the tacit good news presentation of extract 8.1 (above), the changes in presentation format during extracts 8.4 and 8.5 (below) show just how the provision by T of a contextualising statement subsequent to her upshot statement (lines 26 and 11 respectively) offers a clarification of the result that does not characterise the result as 'good'. In this way T positions the results of the children involved in these meetings as neither good nor bad, but as satisfactory.

8.2.1 Contextualising Statement as Result Clarification

In extract 8.4 (below), T produces an upshot statement, "so is level four we want" at line 24, subsequent to the reporting statement (line 22). Following a minimal level of recipiency from M (line 25), T can then be heard to provide a clarifying statement regarding this upshot. As Chapter 6 (above) showed, this clarification takes the form of a contextualising statement, with the national average level being heard in terms of T telling the parent all that she 'needs to know' about the relevant aspects of the child's result. After the delivery of this clarification, T carries out topic transition (line 27), which once again is based upon a verbatim account of the written record.

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[11] See Chapter 1, above, for a further discussion of the SAT testing regime and the various Key Stages involved.

Extract 8.4 (continued from Extract 6.17: Pt1/ g 07.1)

M = Mother

22. $c^1 \rightarrow$ T:	(t) .hh(a) <u>she:::::</u> i:s <u>midlevel four,</u>	
23.	(1.0)	
24. $c^3 \rightarrow$ T:	so > is level four < we wan<u>t</u>	
25. M:	mm	
26. $c^2 \rightarrow$ T:	° okay, ° (.) <u>that</u>'s >the national aver°age°<	
27. *	.hh she <u>Tries</u> hard	
28.	(0.8)	
29.	erm ° bu- ° sometimes she likes to...	

Without a prior contextualising statement (see Chapter 6, above), the upshot statement at line 24 is explicitly linked to the reporting statement (line 22) by both sequential implicativeness, and the application of a linking statement. As previous extracts have shown, the application of a 'so'-preface works as an upshot marker, whilst the use of 'we' as a categorising statement implicates the teacher and parents into the category of those who want the child to achieve. Unlike the previous extracts, however, T's upshot during this extract does not involve the production of a goal proposal. Instead, she situates the result as being what "we want" (line 24).

The lack of any contextualising statement between the report and the upshot statement makes the extract potentially hearable in terms of Maynard's "exposing good news" format of news delivery. Having achieved level four in the mock SAT examination and received T's confirmation that this is the requisite level of attainment, the truncated upshot statement appears to follow Maynard's assertion that the value of such 'good news' is constructed as being apparent. That the result is *not* characterised as 'good news' can be seen by comparing it with Maynard's account of the work done *subsequent* to the delivery of ostensible good news. The news of the result is not left to stand on its own, nor indeed is it followed by transition to a new topic or conversational closure (cf. Maynard, forthcoming: 225). T instead introduces a contextualising statement as a third position response to M's RT at line 25.

Despite the work that "okay" (beginning of line 26) does in acknowledging M's prior recipiency, T provides a clarification of the preceding upshot with the statement "that's the national average" at line 26. It is interesting to note that T leaves only a minimal space within which the parent can respond (i.e. the inbreath at the beginning of line 27)

before she initiates the verbatim account of the next stage of the written report, thereby indicating that this was not an attempt to gain parental recipiency. Having been removed from the sequentially implicative structure of 'report → contextualisation → upshot', the contextualising statement does not have the same syllogistic thrust as that seen during the delivery of below average results (see Chapter 6 for more details). This means that the inclusion of what in previous extracts worked as a contextualising statement can in extract 8.4 be heard more as straightforward information delivery. Whilst this provision of information can be heard in terms of T telling the parent all that she 'needs to know', more importantly the achieving result has been subject to mitigation, through reference to the 'official' explanation for how the results are produced. The overall effect is one in which despite the apparent strength of the contextual details of the result (i.e. that they can be heard as good news), T does not characterise the result as 'good news'. Instead, it is presented as being what "we want", and thus in accord with the "national average".

Similar clarification work takes place in extract 8.5 (below), although in this instance the prior sequential background of this clarification involves T producing an explicit assessment of the result (line 11) subsequent to the reporting statement (line 9). Following its characterisation as 'good', the result is positioned as being the national average (line 12), before finally being described as "where we want them to be" (line 12). Whilst all three levels of description define what the result 'means', at no point can a straightforward 'good news' message, in Maynard's sense, be heard.

Extract 8.5 (continued from Extract 6.16: Pt1 / f 06.1)

F = Father; C = Child

9.	c^1→T:	working at level fou:r
10.	F:	[(°yes°)
11.	c^3→T:	[> which is good that's u- we
12.	c^{2+3}→	that's the national average- that's where we want them to be< ° .hhh °
13.		(0.5)
14.		urm:, (0.9)
15.	*	she says that she- (0.5) thinks B find it's a bit <u>hard</u>...

Like extract 8.4 (above), the upshot statement is linked to the prior reporting statement by both sequential implication, and the application of a linking statement. In the case of extract 8.5, the explicit link between the report on the child and the subsequent upshot statement is marked by the use of "which". T's initial upshot statement involves an

explicit assessment of the result ("which is good" – line 11), which would also appear to be hearable in terms of Maynard's "exposing good news" format of news delivery, perhaps more so given the use of evaluative terms in describing the result. However, on a general level the result is not characterised as good. This is due to a clarification of the result by a subsequent contextualising statement (line 12).

It is interesting to note how T repairs mid-utterance ("that's u- we" – line 11) in order to provide a hearably full contextualising statement during the same turn-at-talk as her assessment of the result. Not only does this work to introduce the fact of the national average, it also acts to negate any opportunity for F to respond to T's assessment. In some ways this is similar to the work carried out during extract 7.1 (see Chapter 7, above), where T circumvented any parental recipiency until she had provided a non-problematic version of the result. For extract 8.5, T appears to be circumventing recipiency from F until she has produced all the clarifying details regarding the result. Like extract 8.4, the provision of this information can be heard as telling the parent all that he 'needs to know' by referencing the 'official' criteria by which the results are judged. However, the achieving result *has* been subject to mitigation.

This is underlined by T's subsequent production of an upshot statement ("that's where we want them to be" – line 12), which can be heard as a downgrade of the initial assessment statement, in that it does not involve any evaluative statements. Instead, the statement firmly locates the child's result within the SAT testing format, thereby mitigating the child's achievement. The net effect of this mitigation can be located in the way the result cannot be considered as 'good news', because the initial assessment of it ("which is good") turns out to be linked to the information that it's the "national average". Having clarified that "that's where we want them to be", T hearably treats the provision of this information as in need of no further explanation by moving on to the next part of the written report via a verbatim recounting of what the set teacher has written (line 15).

The combination of the children's results as being achieving ones, and the lack of any further interactional work by T designed to implicate the parents as affiliated parties in the task of getting the children to a 'better' level of attainment, highlights a different orientation by T towards these children and these results in particular. Indeed, for both extracts the children's results are described as either "midlevel four" (extract 8.4) or

simply "level four" (extract 8.5). No goal proposals are delivered, and as such the children are tacitly positioned as being 'good enough', having reached an optimum level of attainment. This in turn means that T does not engage in implicating the parents into any specific work related to 'doing encouraging'.

8.2.2 Summary

Extracts 8.4 and 8.5 display several of the 'good news' implicative features outlined by Maynard's account of 'good news' delivery, including the provision of a straightforward upshot statement subsequent to the delivery of the reporting statement. However, T initiates a shift in the valence of the news, in the case extract 8.5 despite the initial production of a good news assessment.

In general terms, the results are not characterised as 'good', being presented instead with certain clarifications. This shift is manifest in the fact that whilst the achieving nature of the grades attained in extracts 8.4 and 8.5 have been foregrounded, the news is also subject to mitigation. In both extracts, this is via reference to the 'official' criterion by which the results are judged. This mitigation work highlights T's orientation towards these results as being both the optimum level of attainment for the child, and 'satisfactory' in terms of the level achieved. Within T's overall institutional agenda related to 'doing encouraging', there are certain modifications to the delivery of the upshot statement that take place, based upon the actual result achieved by the child.

8.3 The Assumption of Parental Knowledge

Further to T's orientation towards the parents in the preceding extracts as having a different set of competencies than those of parents with children working below the national average level, the next section examines two meetings in which this assumption of prior parental knowledge can explicitly be seen to influence the production of the upshot statement.

In extract 8.6 (below), T can be heard to orient to the parents as more competent during both her extended presentation of the result across lines 14 to 18 (see Chapter 6, above, for details), and in the delivery of an upshot statement as a goal proposal at line 21. Like extracts 8.2 and 8.3 above, T's assumption of greater parental knowledge/competency is manifest in the level of detail she includes in the presentation of the child's result. Unlike either of these previous cases, however, there is no further explanatory work carried out by T, either in terms of developing an initial upshot statement, or in

providing a contextualising statement (cf. extract 8.3, above). Instead, subsequent to M's receipt token regarding the detail of the child's result (line 20), T constructs an image of the child that is linked to a specific outcome (line 21)[12]. Having done this, she then initiates a movement on to another topic, once again based around a verbatim recounting of the written report (line 24).

Extract 8.6 (continued from Extract 6.10: Pt1/ mi 13.1)

M = Mother; F = Father; S = Sibling

14. $c^1 \rightarrow$ T: level fi:ve

15. (1.2)

16. $c^1 \rightarrow$ downwards. (.) we've got he:<u>re</u>

17. (0.9)

18. $c^1 \rightarrow$ so (.) (n) .hhhh u:m:: (.) > so he's < a level five by <u>three</u> marks:,

19. (0.5)

20. M: yea(p) =

21. $c^3 \rightarrow$ T: = right? So we want to > get him < (.) to be a def °initely level five°

22. .hhh um::

23. (1.1)

24. * (tsk) ↑C must allow ↑ those round him to concentrate (.) it says...

As was noted in Chapter 6, the mother in extract 8.6 was known by T to be a student teacher, a factor that could explain some of the interactional conduct during this meeting. It is important to remember, however, the difficulties associated with importing too much contextual detail into such an analysis, thereby moving away from the consideration of the actual displayed features of the talk as attended-to by the participants. Nevertheless, the combination of minimal explanatory information regarding the reporting statement (line 14), and subsequent clarifications of the result implying that the child's result is on the borderline ("level five downwards we've got here" – lines 14 and 16: "so he's a level five by three marks" – line 18), both indicate a different orientation by T to these particular parents based upon an assumed level of knowledge. Whereas for the delivery of the non-achieving results a relatively straightforward syllogistic contrast was utilised to explain the result to the parents, here T unproblematically uses more sophisticated concepts, specifically in terms of gradations of marks, in order to explain the child's level of attainment. Although this was also true of extracts 8.2 and 8.3 (above), in extract 8.6 T produces the report details

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[12] Once again, this format of goal proposal is similar to those seen during the delivery of non-achieving results, with T utilising both a 'so'-preface as an upshot indicator, and 'we' as a categorising statement, in order to position the adult participants as a joint group within the overall discussion on the child.

as a known-in-common piece of information, and thus not in need of any further explanation. Equally, she treats M's subsequent recipiency as being indicative of a level of affinity between the two sets of adult participants.

Having elicited a response token from M at line 20, T subsequently provides the affirmatory statement "right?" (line 21). This utterance works to mark a boundary within the talk, acknowledging that the prior talk and subsequent responses by M have been deemed satisfactory and that further talk from T is forthcoming. Bearing in mind that it is produced with a distinctly questioning intonation, the work of "right?" can also be heard to seek assurance that M and F have understood, whilst at the same time indicating to the parents that T knows that they have understood. As well as delivering the child's result via a less straightforward set of concepts than the invocation of the national average heard during the delivery of the non-achieving results, T sets up a level of mutuality between herself and the parents. It is against the background of this display of mutual understanding that T moves on to provide an upshot statement as goal proposal (line 21).

Following the delivery of the upshot statement at line 21, rather than seeking the parent's affiliation to any supposed 'good news' valence resulting from this shared knowledge, T frames the result as one that requires further work on the part of the child. Indeed, the goal proposal acts as the fulfilment of the earlier implied encouragement work outlined in Chapter 6. Interestingly, having delivered this upshot statement and *not* gained any parental recipiency, T instigates topic transition by once again providing a verbatim account of the next section of the written record. This format of upshot delivery and topic transition is common to all of the parents' evening meetings, irrespective of what result the child has achieved. Gaining specific parental recipiency to the upshot statement does not therefore appear to be an over-riding consideration during these meetings. As the previous chapter outlined, part of the overall orientation towards 'doing encouraging' appears to involve T positioning herself and the parents as aligned in terms of the child. Since the sequences examined in this data constitute the opening stages of the parents' evening meetings, the overall alignment work carried out by T seems to be focused upon setting up an affiliative framework within which the ongoing meeting will be heard.

In extract 8.7 (below) the upshot statement at line 14 is not only worded differently from those upshots delivered for below national average results (cf. Chapter 7, above), it is also different from those of the achieving result extracts seen previously in this chapter. This change in format reflects T's orientation towards these parents as having an even greater level of shared knowledge regarding the child than the other parents of children who are working on or above the national average. Indeed, whereas for most of the previous extracts (both achieving and non-achieving) direct quotation from the written report document facilitated topic transition, in extract 8.7 T introduces an extended verbatim account of the set teacher's written report as part of the upshot statement. Despite these changes, a forward projection in terms of the child's result is still implied. Although M provides a receipt token in terms of this upshot statement (line 16), T can be heard to engage in an upgraded level of response pursuit that incorporates a recounting of the actual grammatical tokens used in the report (line 17). This change in production format regarding the upshot statement reflects an assumption of consensus having been reached by the interactional parties. Indeed, M and T orient it to as such, as indicated by M's recipiency at line 18, and T's forecast implicative topic transition at lines 19 and 20.

Extract 8.7 (continued from Extract 6.11: Pt1/ t 02.1)

M = Mother; F = Father

10.	c¹→T:	a:nd, (0.5) he's working at::: (.) uh – MIDLEVEL SAT FOUR
11.		(0.8)
12.		in the sats practice=
13.	M:	=°yes°
14.	c³→T:	. hh but °she's saying° is he capable of more?,
15.		(0.8)
16.	M:	yhes:: [:: .h hh
17.	T:	[EXCLAmation mark question mark?
18.	M:	yes .hhh hh (.) is always the answer to that one [.hhh
19. *	T:	[well I'm going to tell you
20.		all these things and you'll say ↑I ↓know and groan [probably.
21. M:		[yeah (hh) eh

Unlike any of the previous achieving result extracts, M receipts the details of the result (line 13), although as Chapter 6 (above) highlighted this recipiency came after response pursuit by T (line 12) that involved locating the mock SAT examination as the source of the result. With regard to the sequential pattern built up across all of the achieving result extracts looked at so far, this response highlights the interesting 'double-edged' nature

of the alignment that T has consistently sought from the parents. Whilst the benefits of early and consistent recipiency are obvious in terms of both gaining parental alignment and facilitating interactional movement, it also sets up a situation in which T, if she *does* want a parent to expand upon a specific point regarding the result, must purposely request them to do so. Given M's straightforward recipiency at line 13, the lexical formulation of T's subsequent goal proposal at line 14 can therefore be heard as incorporating just such a request.

Whilst T's work to elicit an upgraded level of recipiency from the parents in this extract constitutes an assumption of knowledge on the part of the parents, the parents can equally be heard to present themselves as knowledgeable. M's RT at line 13 is hearable as an assertion of her shared level of knowledge regarding the child, in that as well as acknowledging the receipt of the information, she indicates that she was already aware of her son's level of attainment. The inclusion by T of a more technical level of language during the preceding stages of the meeting[13] also indicates a shift in emphasis towards a more direct level of parent-teacher affiliation. In this case it is based upon an assumption of parental knowledge regarding the child's result[14].

This assumed level of knowledge is worked with further at line 14, where the statement "but she's saying is he capable of more?" indicates that T is orienting to these parents as individuals who are expected to not only already know the pertinent details of their child's schoolwork, but also display a desire for the child to 'try harder'[15]. Although this statement is cautiously delivered[16], it once again marks a change from the delivery of upshot statements for the below national average results, in that the set teacher's reported statement is unambiguous as to where responsibility for the result lies (i.e. with the child). Furthermore, whilst any affiliative relationship between T and the parent(s) during the production of an upshot statement for non-achieving results has been

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[13] In particular, T's assertion during the reporting statement that "he's working at::: (.) uh – midlevel sat four (0.8) in the sats practice" (line 10). See Chapter 6, above, for more details.

[14] As the analysis in Chapter 6 noted, the mother in this extract was a teacher, the fact of which was known by T. However, as we have already stated with regard to extract 8.6 (above), the difficulties that arise if 'external' features not directly attended-to within the talk are introduced into the analysis are such that this contextual detail cannot be legitimately raised by way of explanation.

[15] This formulation also works to underline T's participation status relative to the child's result. Further to the implicit foregrounding of the written record as the source of the report, T explicitly references the set teacher (i.e. "but she's saying" – line 14). In this way, the set teacher is positioned as being directly responsible for writing the report.

[16] Not only is the statement delayed by an inbreath at the start of line 14, it is presented as both reported speech, and as a question. Whilst the softened intonation during the phrase "she's saying" makes this presentation less strong than a direct question, the cautiousness of this statement can also be seen in the fact that it involves an assertion that is difficult to disagree with ("is he capable of more?").

cautiously inferred through such features as the use of 'we' as a descriptive term, such features are missing in this extract. Instead, the delivery of the upshot statement at line 14, whilst future-oriented in terms of the child's result ("capable of more" providing an explicit expression of this forward looking focus), not only assumes a heightened level of consensus between teacher and parents, it also appears to be keying to a specific level of knowledge on the part of the parents. Not only has the result not been delivered as 'news' to the parents (cf. Chapter 6), T also appears to be confident enough in their affiliative stance with the school that she offers up the set teacher's unequivocal assessment of the child as an upshot statement.

M can also be heard to attend to both this affiliative relationship *and* the assumption of parental knowledge. This can be seen in her response at line 16, which includes the insertion of an equivocal *within-speech laughter* particle (cf. Jefferson, 1979) into her utterance ("yhes"). This laughter particle seeks alignment with T in terms of positioning the fact of the child being 'capable of more' as something which is also already known to M, and as such can be heard as a potential 'exasperated' laugh. The elongation of M's "yes" at line 16 and subsequent inbreath/outbreath, according to Jefferson's analysis of inviting laughter, act as a way of monitoring the response to the laughter particle, and reformulating it if there is no uptake. It can also be heard as monitoring the third position taken by T, inasmuch as M still retains, to some extent at least, the right to expand upon her RT and make more of the prior statement regarding her child.

There then follows at line 17 an upgrading of the earlier ascription of the written record. This is hearable as pursuing a further level of response, both by the way that T reclaims the floor in overlap with M's prior talk[17], and in the fact that by making an appeal to the actual grammatical tokens used in the written report ("exclamation mark question mark?"), T underlines the 'could the child try harder' question previously presented at line 14. Leaving aside any known-in-particular knowledge that the formulation "exclamation mark question mark" might be dealing with[18], the formulation of this

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[17] T's increase in volume at the beginning of this statement also marks this utterance as an attempt to gain an upgraded level of response from M.

[18] As a grammatical token used to signify exasperation, the known-in-general appeal to the statement "exclamation mark question mark?" could be said to work with T's knowledge of M's professional role and relative peer status. It could place the report on the child within the context of the category 'bright children who do not push themselves', a group T and M would both have experienced professionally. T's specific reference to the report in this way as an attempt to gain M's affiliation can be linked to one of the category-bound activities associated with dealing with such children from a teacher's point of view, that

utterance can be heard to pursue an expansion by M/F on the question of the child's current level of attainment. M's response at line 18 provides this expansion, although it is interesting to note that when the upgraded response is delivered, it comes with a certain amount of delay (inbreath/outbreath/micropause)[19].

M restates her prior "yes" response at the beginning of line 18, but in more definite terms by emphasising it, before specifically commenting upon the initial assertion of the upshot statement at line 14. That M uses an extreme case formulation (cf. Pomerantz, 1986, and Edwards, 2000) in her response ("yes is *always* the answer to that one") is hearable as a display of her agreement being full. Sequentially this is important because M has not only specifically receipted the upshot statement regarding her child's attainment, but she also accounted for her lack of expanded uptake in her prior turns by signalling her investment in her agreement with the position expressed by T[20].

Having gained this display of alignment/affiliation between the two interactional parties, T's subsequent turn-at-talk at lines 19 and 20 moves away from an *assumption* of prior parental knowledge to an explicit referencing of it. Indeed, the statement "well I'm going to tell you all these things and you'll say I know and groan probably" (lines 19 and 20), as well as marking topic transition in terms of moving away from the discussion of the specific curriculum topic (mathematics) to a discussion of more general aspects of the child's schoolwork, can be heard to explicitly align to M's experience[21]. Not only has consensus been reached between the interactional parties, the affiliative relationship displayed by T and the parents appears to provide an interactional environment within which T can forecast the progress of the next stage of the meeting ("well I'm going to tell you all these things…").

8.3.1 Summary

In section 8.1.2 (above) an assumption of parental knowledge regarding the child and their level of academic attainment was worked with during the delivery of upshot

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of writing a parent's evening report indicating just such a situation, and highlighting ones own frustration at this state of affairs.

[19] Whilst this delay could be could be heard as M monitoring for any response by T in third position to see if she needs to expand upon her emphasised RT at line 18, it can also be heard as attending to the implication of exasperation that "exclamation mark question mark" delivered.

[20] M's use of the term "that one" at line 18 can also be heard as referring to both the assertion made by T during the upshot statement, as well as perhaps working further with the implied shared knowledge/experience as a teacher herself discussed in footnotes 14 and 18, above.

[21] T's prediction that M will "groan" can also be heard to key to M's prior exasperated laugh at line 16.

statements as goal proposals. In extracts 8.6 and 8.7, this assumption of parental knowledge is actualised by a display of mutual knowledge by the participants. For extract 8.6, the provision of progressively more detail regarding the child's result not only elicits recipiency from M, but in having gained a response sees T move directly into a goal proposal that is both explicitly formulated for the child and linked to a specific outcome. T deems no further mitigation or explanation necessary. In the case of extract 8.7, T eschews delivering a goal proposal as a way of positioning the child's result in terms of a forward projection of work, providing instead direct quotations from the set teacher's report as a way of eliciting upgraded recipiency from her co-participants. Not only does M respond to T's display of mutual knowledge, T also orients to M's recipiency as a cue to initiate a topic transition based upon this mutuality.

In short, extracts 8.6 and 8.7 indicate that whilst T orients to the parents of children with results on or above the national average level as being implicitly knowledgeable regarding their child's schoolwork, for some parents this assumption of knowledge goes even further. Indeed, for extract 8.7, T appears to move beyond an assumption regarding parental knowledge, to a directly attended-to presumption of such knowledge and the affiliation it engenders. Furthermore, this presumption ultimately appears to be well founded, as the responses by M indicate. Although such questions as 'why' a particular parent or set of parents are subject to differential treatment in this way are difficult to answer, questions of 'how' the upshot statements for results above the national average are produced allow us to see a different orientation by T to certain parents.

8.4 Conclusion

Despite the inherent syllogistic message of the national average contrast and the 'good news' implicative features of the talk, the child having achieved the requisite result *does not* automatically frame the result delivery as one pertaining to good news. In several of the extracts, T uses the upshot statement to introduce a 'could s/he do better' message with regard to the child's ongoing schoolwork. In others, despite the implication of the result as being an 'achieving' one, a specific 'good news' valence is not delivered. When a more 'good news' implicative characterisation of a result is delivered, the presentation of the result can be heard more in terms of an overall institutional orientation towards creating and maintaining an affiliative environment within the meetings, rather than the straightforward production of a given piece of information as good news. This change in the presentation of the level four and above results moves

away from the consideration of the specific good or bad news valence of any given piece of information, towards a consideration of the interactional work the presentation of this information allows the teacher to do.

The change in the treatment of the 'good' news valence of the result information as presented by T to the parents highlights the achieved nature of such categories as good and bad news. Indeed, it can be said quite confidently that information delivery should not be seen in terms of an unequivocal good or bad news telling. As Maynard points out,

> "Conveying news in actual interaction is not a matter of some deliverer having a pre-constituted newsworthy item with an intrinsic negative or positive character to send, as if down a conduit, to a recipient who grabs the package of bad or good news at the other end."
>
> (Forthcoming: ms 33)

Maynard's analysis emphasises the relativity of the categories 'good' and 'bad' news, as well as the "nuance with which participants work out just how good or bad some news is" (Maynard, forthcoming: ms 134). He outlines the various conditions "that allow for certain events and information to become news-of-a-particular-kind" (ibid: ms 134), stating that "these conditions, displayed in and as an actual telling, accord each conversational news delivery a particularity that represents participants' moment-by-moment interactional work" (ibid: ms 135). It is rather the case that the shift marked by the upshot statement during the parents' evening meetings provides further evidence of the risk inherent in rushing to identify good or bad news. The specific valence of information, and indeed whether or not that information is presented as news, emerges in and through the details of how the information is locally constituted as what it is.

For those parents' evening meetings concerning children with results on or above the national average level of four, the constitution of the results during the upshot statement indicates that rather than construing the information of the results as good news, T attends to an institutional task orientation relating in general to 'doing encouraging'. Whilst this orientation was also seen during the delivery of the non-achieving results (see Chapter 7, above), the work of the upshot statements for these results was broadly remedial, with the production of goal proposals working to provide a non-problematic

way out of this section of the talk. In this chapter, 'doing encouraging' has involved urging further achievement on the part of the child. In both cases, this reflects the SAT testing and assessment agenda, in that the results of the mock SAT examinations form the basis of the parents' evening meetings.

In simple terms, the method of upshot delivery for the achieving results highlights how there is no unequivocal 'good' or 'bad' news. Within the parents' evening data, this means that despite the structural implication of 'good news' derived from the report-national average contrast, the goal proposals delivered during the upshot statements are presented in terms of a 'could s/he do better' question put forward by T. When T alternatively produces an assessment of the result, the results are still not formed up as 'good news'. As was seen in the previous chapter, the work of framing what a result 'means', in this case for the ostensibly 'good' piece of news of the child achieving the national average or better in their mock SAT examinations, highlights how locally produced institutional talk is sensitive to the different task organisations that occur across specific institutional environments.

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Chapter Nine

Conclusion

9.0 Conclusions and Discussion

This research began with the broad aim of studying the ramifications of the professional-lay nature of parents' evening meetings. In particular, I was interested in the way that within these meetings, both the teachers *and* the parents could potentially claim a level of 'expert' knowledge with regard to the child as the subject of the interaction. Furthermore, the research sought to provide a description of the actual processes of interaction within the parents' evening context. Given the impact of "unmotivated looking" (Psathas, 1990: 45) on the analysis of the data, the broadly defined initial aims of the study were refined in order to produce more focused research questions. In this final chapter, I will explore the relationship between these initial research questions and the analytic work carried out within this thesis. This does not mean that I will engage in summarising what I have set out in the preceding chapters, since hopefully the 'message' of the foregoing analysis should be clear. Instead, I will attempt to place the research findings within the wider context of both institutional talk/CA, and the practice of parent-teacher interactions within the educational milieu.

9.1 Parents' Evening Meetings: Comparison to Other CA Studies

As Chapter 1 (above) indicated, the study of interaction within educational settings can be summarised in terms of what Mehan (1979) has called a methodological irony. Despite the supposed importance of education on both a social and political level, detailed descriptions of the actual processes of education are lacking within most debates about the influence of schools. Although the discussion in Chapter 1 located Conversation Analysis (CA) as the best means by which to generate knowledge in the area of teacher-parent communication, this has not, until recently, been matched by any concomitant studies of talk within educational settings. Indeed, when presenting their study of secondary school parents' evening meetings, Baker and Keogh pointed out "there is no site-specific precedent within the educational or the ethnomethodological or conversation analysis literature" (1995: 265) for the analysis of teacher-parent interviews. This meant that they had to draw upon studies of medical consultations to provide some analogous work on professional institutional encounters. Luckily for me, the excellent work by Baker and Keogh (1994, 1995; see

also Silverman, Baker and Keogh, 1998) and MacLure and Walker (1998; 2000, see also Walker 1998) on parents' evening meetings in recent years has allowed me to determine what specific contribution my own research can make to CA.

In terms of the overall organisation of the parents' evening meetings as examples of professional-lay interactions, the research presented in this thesis supports many of the observations made regarding other situations in which 'institutional talk' takes place. Like the medical encounters referred to above, the general characteristics of parents' evening point to the way that "the location, scheduling, duration and general agenda...are controlled by 'the professionals', who have access to specialist knowledge or resources not available to 'the clients'" (MacLure and Walker, 1998: 6). For parents' evening meetings in particular, the data presented in this thesis reflect the findings of MacLure and Walker (1998) in terms of the impact of this institutional asymmetry on the actual conduct of the meetings. Like MacLure and Walker's data, the opening stages of the meetings in this study involve "an unbroken stretch of talk by the teacher...devoted to a quasi-'diagnosis' of the student's current state of academic achievement or progress" (1998: 8). Equally, MacLure and Walker highlight how teachers "exercised control over what would count as 'legitimate' topics for the consultation" (ibid), whilst at the same time consulting "charts, coursework folders, marksheets or other 'technical' resources, to which parents did not have direct access" (ibid). Finally, it was seen that parents "if they responded at all during the opening phase, generally did so only with minimal responses such as *mm, yeah,* or *all right*" (MacLure and Walker, 1998: 8-original emphasis), whilst the students, if present, "said nothing at this point unless directly addressed" (ibid). This aspect of the parent-teacher interviews can also be related to work on the delivery of institutional talk within medical/clinical encounters, since as Heath points out, "despite receiving the opportunity to respond to the diagnosis or medical assessment, patients either withhold response altogether or produce only the most minimal acknowledgement of the diagnostic information" (1992: 241).

In general terms, therefore, the findings presented in this thesis reflect both the broadly defined asymmetry highlighted in various studies of professional-lay interactions, and the more specific models of such asymmetry as they apply to parents' evening meetings. However, it is important to remember that just because a

particular interactional situation 'fits the bill' in terms of a supposed set of influential features, such as the bulwark of a teacher's professional status/knowledge being set against a parent's supposedly lesser status home-based knowledge, it does not necessarily follow that such patterns of asymmetry will impact upon the talk in ways that the analyst, or indeed the participants themselves, might presuppose. As Drew and Heritage point out, "given the ease with which asymmetries in conduct can be interpreted in terms of exogenous variables...analysis should properly begin by addressing those features of the interaction to which the participants' conduct is demonstrably oriented" (1992: 53). By looking in more detail at the actual conduct of the parents' evening meetings and comparing this to the findings of other CA studies of parent-teacher interactions, the specific way in which institutional talk is presented and managed during these meetings becomes clear.

9.2 Specificities

Starting with the question of how the opening sequences of the parents' evening meetings are constructed, it can be seen that like the meetings examined by Baker and Keogh, "the initial problem-resolution in these interviews is the determination of who, situationally speaking, the participants are and what, situationally speaking they are doing there" (1998: 268). Whilst in Chapter 4 (above) this problem resolution was linked to an action common to most interactional situations, namely 'getting into a state of talk', it was also seen that the specific institutional features of the parent-teacher talk meant that, like Baker and Keogh, "the academic achievement of the student is "found" as the opening topic" (1995: 269). In other words, *the participants frame the parent-teacher meetings as an environment within which to discuss the academic work of the child.* As part of this orientation towards the academic work of the children, the repeated utilisation of a coherent and robust *reporting structure* has been highlighted.

As the overview of the reporting trajectory in Chapter 3 indicated, the basic aim of this structure is to make available the requisite information regarding the children's results. The reporting structure marshals the various aspects of a single curriculum topic into a coherent whole, thereby providing a framework within which to discuss an individual child's actual level of attainment in that topic. As such, the initial thrust of the meetings does not involve any negotiation regarding the curriculum subjects to

be discussed. This rigid focus is maintained across every meeting, with no alternative topics being introduced from outside the ambit of the mock SAT examinations. Having linked the results to the externally moderated SAT level, the parents' evening meetings place the individual child within an overall *trajectory of ongoing academic work*. A child's level of attainment is therefore not only topicalised in terms of a given academic curriculum subject, it is also located within the ongoing trajectory of their academic career *vis-à-vis* the National Curriculum testing regime at Key Stage 2.

This topicalisation of the children's results marks this parents' evening data as being similar to that of Baker and Keogh, in that by proposing a discussion of the results, the opening stages of the talk "assigns a diagnostic purpose to the talk that will follow" (1995: 270). However, the institutional context of the talk is achieved in subtly different ways from that of Baker and Keogh's meetings. For Baker and Keogh, "the membership categorisation device [(this) teacher – (her) students – (their) parents] provides the categorical incumbencies for the talk that follows" (1995: 270). The institutional context of the talk is immediately achieved by assigning the parent(s) "an identity as parents of one of the students in the teacher's classes, only one or one set of the parents she will see that night" (Baker and Keogh, 1995: 270). Whilst elements of this are also true in this study[1], the actual written record from which the child's report is taken acts as the focus around which all the categorical aspects of the talk are assembled.

This is not to say that the findings of this study should be placed in opposition to earlier studies of parents' evening talk, since the analytic point of departure for this research was very similar to that of Baker and Keogh's (1995) work. In a sequence that reflects back to the point raised above by Drew and Heritage (1992) regarding examining the demonstrable interactional orientations of the participants, Baker and Keogh note how their analysis was based upon observations that related to the resolution of problems and solutions by the parties to the talk:

"Some of these are conversation-organisation issues related to making the interview work as an interview/consultation; others are issues related to

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[1] For example, in those cases where the preamble talk has concerned the sequencing of the meetings (cf. (Pt1/c 03.1) or the delay in the overall running time (cf. Pt1/ r 04.1 and Pt1/ l 10.1).

working out some articulation of home-school relations and responsibilities. However, the conversational and topical aspects of these interviews cannot be separated absolutely."

(1995: 265-266)

Given my initial interest in the parents' evening meetings as a site on which both the parents and the teacher could claim a level of 'expert' knowledge with regard to the child as the subject of the interaction (cf. Chapter 2, above), Baker and Keogh's analytic focus was also true of my research. Equally, in both cases "parties to the talk can...be shown to be oriented to their institutional identities as teacher and parent(s) and to the moral implicativeness of their talk" (Baker and Keogh, 1995: 267). However, my data offers some alternatives to the interactional features outlined by Baker and Keogh in terms of the issue of home-school relationships and the specificities of their construction.

9.2.1 The Search for 'Reasons'

Returning to the question of the written record as the focus for the talk, in the case of Baker and Keogh's data the contents of the teacher's closed resources (such as the markbook or work folder) are delivered in such a way that the parents are "positioned as non-professional adjunct teachers, and other parenting skills or interests are unacknowledged as part of the work of the home" (1995: 280). In general terms, the parents only need to know the contents of the reports in order to help with the work of the school. As part of this positioning work, Baker and Keogh note how a search for "reasons" accompanies the delivery of results, especially for those results that are deemed "poor", and seems to be "part of an implicit agreement...to talk as if some improvement is always possible because the lack of success can be traced to some particular situation, practice, accident, or context in home or school" (1995: 275).

In comparing this to my findings, it is clear that by focusing on the report document itself, no other 'external' factors relating to either the child's home or school life are cited. For the educational participant, whilst the 'national average' is introduced as a judgement criterion, it is positioned as being separate to the actual work of the teachers (see below). On the part of the parents, no element of the child's home life is cited during the teacher's delivery of the report, and indeed, if a parent does imply a

criticism of the child (as in the case of transcript Pt1/ af 15.1), the teacher rapidly closes down further discussion of any negative aspects of the child's work. Whilst an asymmetry *does* exist in terms of the teacher's direct first-hand access to the report document (as noted above), the parents are made party to the report, rather than positioned simply as recipients to the information contained therein. Instead of framing the parents as non-professional adjuncts to the school's work of educating the children, the teacher can be heard to avoid 'lecturing' the parents in any way. The teacher goes even further in the case of those parents whose children have achieved above the national average level, playing up the level of their knowledge.

9.2.2 'Moral-Organisational' Work

The search for reasons behind the child's level of academic achievement is linked in Baker and Keogh's work to a wider level of "moral-organisational work (assembling the responsibilities and performances of parents and teachers)" (1995: 287) that underpins the conduct of parent-teacher interviews. As they state in an article looking specifically at such moral work,

> "the interviews appear to have the purpose of producing a tour of possible points of responsibility on the part of teacher, parent, and student. The identification of these points on a moral map serves as an index to the moral order which is produced through the talk."
>
> (Baker and Keogh, 1994: 27)

Silverman, Baker and Keogh go even further, stating that during parents' evening, "almost anything said could be made out to be morally implicative, since parenting practices are by implication part of the connection teachers make between home and school" (1998: 235). However, whilst my own parent-teacher data also involves talk that could be heard as morally implicative, there is no specific tour of responsibility seeking to settle on some agent or practice as providing an account for the achievement of any of the relevant interactional parties.

This is manifest in several ways. The teacher negates her own role in the production of the result by setting up the non-present set teacher as the author of the report. In turn, the set teacher is positioned as only part of the overall SAT testing regime, rather

than as the specific arbiter of the child's level of attainment. As was noted above, aspects of the child's home life which could be cited as influential are not raised, despite these elements coming within the potential sphere of parental influence. Finally, although the children are located as the focus of the talk in general terms, there is no morally implicative tour of responsibility designed to account for the child's level of attainment.

Even though the child is presented as being ultimately responsible for its own SAT result, accountability on the part of the parent, teacher, or child, is not seen to be the overriding consideration in the construction of the talk. For Baker and Keogh, the negotiation of responsibility involves the management of different perspectives regarding practices outside of the interview: "the moral always refers elsewhere" (1992: 27). Whilst this 'outside' focus is typified by the introduction of the SAT-derived "national average" via the contents of the written reports, it is important to realise that at this stage of the parent-teacher interview, no other factors relating to the accountable behaviour of any of the relevant parties to the talk are worked with.

Although this focus could be subject to change later on in the meeting, in general terms the question of accountability is handled in such a way that it is for the moment avoided. Like Baker and Keogh, it has been seen just how the teacher and the parents organise their conversational work around the topic of the student's academic achievement. Unlike their data, however, this focus on achievement does not involve "the working out of a relation, and where possible, a fit between home and school as courses of action" (Baker and Keogh, 1995: 291). Instead, the question of accountability is relegated in favour of ensuring that the adult parties to the talk are in agreement on those aspects of the child that relate to his/her academic performance.

9.3 Contributions and Implications

Having contrasted the findings of my study with previous conversation analysis work on the conduct of parents' evening meetings, the question arises as to what contribution this research can make to both the study of institutional talk within CA, and to wider sociological work. Such considerations also raise the related question of what further work can be undertaken in this area to expand upon the exploratory nature of this thesis, as well as what implications there are in this research for the

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practice of parents' evening meetings. In this section, I hope to address some of these aspects of my research.

9.3.1 Contributions to CA

As section 9.1 (above) has pointed out, the research presented in this thesis supports many of the observations made regarding other situations in which 'institutional talk' takes place. These similarities include a level of expressive caution exhibited by the 'professional' interactants, as well as particular participation frameworks invoked during the delivery of information from closed sources by institutional representatives to 'lay' participants. However, in describing the way the teacher and parents orient to each other during the early stages of the parents' evening meetings in this data, this research also makes several distinct contributions in terms of adding to what Hutchby and Wooffitt have called "CA's insistence on building analytic accounts which are both *particularized* and *generalized*" (1998: 95-original emphasis).

The most obvious empirical contribution of this research can be found in the delineation of the robust reporting structure repeated across each of the meetings in the data corpus, as outlined in Chapter 3. At its fullest exposition, the reporting structure consists of five stages (not including the preamble and topic transition talk): an *agenda statement* outlining the first curriculum topic up for discussion, a *focusing statement* describing who the set teacher for the curriculum topic being discussed is, a *reporting statement* during which the numerical level of the child's result is delivered, a *contextualising statement* which provides the national average level for the specific curriculum topic, and finally an *upshot statement*, in which some level of assessment or goal proposal regarding the result is delivered. As the overview of the reporting trajectory in Chapter 3 indicated, the basic aim of this structure is to make available the requisite information regarding the children's results, and has as its central focus the syllogistic contrast between the reporting statement and the national average (cf. Chapter 6). It can thus be compared to both Gill and Maynard's (1995) work on syllogism, highlighting an instance outside of the clinician-patient interview milieu where such conversation formats are used, and Baker and Keogh's (1994, 1995) parents' evening work, indicating that other alternatives to the minimal initiatory sequences they outline can also be seen during parent-teacher meetings.

It is through the delineation of this reporting structure that three other distinct empirical contributions become clear. The first of these stems from the analysis in Chapter 4 which examined in detail the role of intonation during the preliminary stages of the reporting structure. In particular, the functions of up-down registers in the delivery of initiatory utterances were highlighted, especially in terms of the patterns of pitch shifts between and within utterances. These shifts were used by the teacher to direct a level of intentionality at the forthcoming reporting structure, and could be viewed as an excellent starting point in the examination of a variety of non-lexical phenomena that have an impact on the vast majority of interactional situations. Since participants can be heard to orient to such non-lexical, intonational work, a whole extra level of contextual detail could be included when studying the structural and sequential features of talk.

The second empirical contribution of this research relates to the examination in Chapter 5 of the non-verbal activities of the teacher, in particular the use of documents during the meetings. As an example of professional-lay talk, the invocation of local physical resources within the parents' evening setting can be linked to wider concerns regarding the utilisation of 'extra-conversational' objects during other institutional interactions. Indeed, Heath and Luff, in their examination of the use of technology in the practical organisational conduct of workplace settings, state that whilst new technology has an acknowledged impact on work and human interaction, "the ways in which computers and other tools and artefacts feature in the accomplishment of organisational activities have disappeared from view" (2000: 7). Rather than viewing interactional features such as audible paper manipulation as separate from other conversation-based structures of social action, the utilisation of physical resources within this data can be placed firmly in the camp of "other tools and artefacts", and as such can be examined in the way they are "constituted in and through the activities of the participants themselves" (ibid).

The final empirical contribution this study makes to previous conversation analytic research is the work carried out in Chapters 7 and 8 developing Maynard's work on news announcements (forthcoming). To some extent, the findings in this thesis reinforce Maynard's point that the "interactional work regarding how news is to be assessed occurs at every point from the beginning to the end of its presentation"

(forthcoming: ms 131). Equally, both this research and Maynard's analyses emphasise the relativity of the categories 'good' and 'bad' news, as well as the "nuance with which participants work out just how good or bad some news is" (Maynard, forthcoming: ms 134). But in comparing the various conditions Maynard outlines as allowing "for certain events and information to become news-of-a-particular-kind" (ibid: ms 134) with the work of the news-tellings in the parents evening data, other influences associated with the delivery of news become clear. As Maynard points out, "these conditions, displayed in and as an actual telling, accord each conversational news delivery a particularity that represents participants' moment-by-moment interactional work" (ibid: ms 135). For the parents' evening data, the particularity of the news telling rests in the way that any disruptive aspects are worked with by the participants, inasmuch as elements of news delivery "constitute at the same time as they are taken to reflect alteration in participants' lifeworlds" (Maynard, forthcoming: ms 254). Thus, any negative or potentially problematic aspects of the news being delivered by the teacher are used as a tool by which to facilitate and manage patterns of agreement between the participants, rather than simply being part of an interactional 'problem' that needs remedying.

9.3.2 Wider Sociological Relevance

Although it is obvious that this study presents its findings relative to both Conversation Analysis in general, and research into institutional talk in particular, the question arises as to the applicability of what is discussed here to wider sociological concerns. Furthermore, it becomes clear that given the exploratory nature of this research outlined in Chapter 2 (above), any results described here can equally be applied to other sociological positions that have studied education and schooling. Indeed, CA's focus upon such micro-sociological features of everyday life as face-to-face interaction and the presentation of individual accounts of actions, feelings and ideational positions, can be used as a resource in testing macro-sociological theories. Heritage points out that social scientists depend in large part upon actors' accounts for their information, "whether they take the form of questionnaire responses or of statistical rates produced by bureaucratic agencies" (1984: 178). Equally, sociological theories relating to education and schooling must necessarily deal with the practices of social actors, not least in terms of the way their conduct is potentially shaped by the constraints of larger scale institutional structures. As Heritage states,

"no matter how firmly such accounts are proposed as reporting independently existing fact and no matter how fully they are supported by firm evidence and reasoned argument, these accounts – with their evidences and arguments – still await an analysis that situates them, with all their exigencies and considerations, within the socially organized worlds in which they participate as constituting and constituted elements"

(1984: 178)

Although this section of the conclusion to the thesis should not in any way be seen as a comprehensive *tour de-horizon* of the various sociological theories that have taken the educational sphere as their focus of study, it does attempt to provide some sense of the potential wider relevance of this particular piece of research.

If we look to such studies as those carried out by Sharp and Green (1975), who sought to ground Althusser's (1972) rather abstract Marxist analysis of the 'hidden curriculum' of schooling in the lived realities of the education system, certain other applications for this research can be found. Building on Althusser's idea that the ruling class in any society exercise control through schools and other Ideological State Apparatuses, by way of socialisation, in order to both produce a skilled and compliant workforce, and perpetuate capitalism, Sharp and Green suggest that "hierarchisation, and the differentiation of the material life chances of the children is being produced within the social structure of the classroom" (1975: 124). In differentiating between various 'types' of pupils, as we have seen the teacher in this data do in terms of her reiteration of the SAT testing procedure, Sharp and Green would argue that educational practice on the micro level can be linked to the reproduction of class relations within society generally. Given that the impetus for the SAT testing is continually located as being 'separate' from both T herself and the non-present set teacher, the structure of the meetings examined in this thesis could also be related to Sharp and Green's constant emphasis upon how the procedure of differentiation appears out of the field of constraints within which the teacher's work is set.

Further critical analysis of the educational system can be linked to this research. Indeed, the fact that during the opening sequences of the meetings analysed in this

study a tacit acceptance of the SAT examinations as the officially sanctioned arbiter of the child's level of achievement is evident could be related to the work of Apple (1979) and Anyon (1979), both of whom address the ideological elements of the school curriculum. Apple's analysis of the content of the curriculum highlights the 'forms of meaning' schools distribute through a formal body of knowledge that is normally taken to be neutral. Equally, schools are deemed to be neutral in the process of selection and allocation, a process that embodies the reproduction of the existing relations of production. For Anyon, "the school curriculum has contributed to the formation of attitudes that make it easier for powerful groups, those whose knowledge is legitimised by school studies, to manage and control society" (1979: 382), with ideology making a contribution to overall social control. Although Anyon's analysis deals mainly with the ideological 'invisible policing' carried out on behalf of the views and interests of the capitalist class via the textbooks and materials utilised by schools, her work can also be viewed in terms of such academic systems as subject setting as reflections of the move away from more overt methods of social control. The reactions of the participants in this data to the 'sorting' process of the SAT's could be seen to mirror the way that "governments and other powerful groups increasingly justify their activities by appeals to 'reason', to the logic of evidence, and to the consent of populations" (Anyon, 1977: 382). Thus, the acceptance and reiteration of the SAT testing format, and the way in which it is presented and dealt with by the parents' evening participants, could be viewed as an actualisation of these controlling ideological positions.

The actual influence of these ideological constraints upon the participants of the parents' evening meetings could also provide further links between this research and more mainstream sociological concerns, especially if we consider Foucault's analysis (e.g. 1977) of the circulation of knowledge and power within institutions. Unlike the more conventional Marxian positions outlined above, which view power as a force that is held by some groups or individuals and exerted upon others, Foucault defines 'disciplinary power' as being both oppressive and enabling, and seeks to highlight how it influences all levels of institutional discourse, in turn producing the subjectivities of those who participate. On the one hand, the question of discipline could be linked to the bureaucratic discipline exercised through the SAT testing regime, with definitions of 'good' or 'bad', 'achieving' or 'non-achieving', reflecting

the co-ordinated regulation of the individual's behaviour. On the other hand, the overt orientation of the teacher to the written records can be seen in terms of Foucault's equally important element in the movement of knowledge and power within institutions, namely surveillance.

In simple terms, the question of surveillance within an educational setting can be linked to the 'case-history' nature of school records, with both the SAT examination results themselves, and their role in the overall trajectory of a child's academic career, being seen in terms of their use in monitoring an individual's performance as they move through an organisation. However, whilst parents' evenings may be said to operate as a surveillance device for monitoring compliance with school values in relation to this overall surveillance regime, the surveillance works, in principle at least, both ways. In short, teachers also make their practices visible and potentially open to challenge from parents. Thus the relationship between teachers, parents, and students can be summarised in terms of Foucault's description of power as a mutual form of blackmail which binds both superiors and subordinates in "a relationship of mutual support and conditioning" (1977: 159).

A final element of this research that relates to a Foucauldian analysis of home-school relations can be found in the question of partnership between parents and teachers that is constantly alluded to within the educational and policy literature. This partnership is arguably evident within this data in the way that the creation of alignment between the two adult parties to the talk takes centre stage during the meetings. Not only is conflict avoided, the two institutional participants, namely the school and the family, are not implicated in the 'failing' results of some of the children. Bearing this alignment work in mind, some analysts (cf. Todd and Higgins, 1998; Crozier, 1998; Keogh 1996) have claimed the notion of 'partnership' conceals a practice of surveillance through which *all* participants regulate themselves and one another in the interests of 'governmentality'.

It was stated at the beginning of this section that the application of this research to wider sociological concerns was in no way intended as being comprehensive. Instead, these reflections should be viewed as ways in which this data, small-scale and necessarily micro-sociological as it is, can be made relevant to other research on

social structure as it is evidenced in such areas as educational practice and attitudes towards schooling in general. This is not to say that there is a straightforward and unquestioned link between the details of talk and interaction and wider social structural forms. Instead, whilst this researcher has not chosen to do so, this data can be used as a test-bed for other theories and methodological positions, in just such a way as Schegloff outlines in his discussion of how talk and social structure can be usefully incorporated into a coherent analytic formulation;

> "we should exercise our capacity to address the details of conduct, and exploit our data as challenges to our theoretical and analytic acumen, to enhance and expand our understanding of what 'social structure' could consist of, as a robust and expanding tool of analysis"
>
> (Schegloff, 1991: 57)

9.3.3 Further Research Options

Related to the question of what empirical contributions this research has made is the issue of what further research options might stem from it. This question can also be linked to a consideration of the limitations of the research as presented. Given the richness of the parents' evening data, a major element of this limitation is located in the way some form of rationalisation regarding what analytic topics were examined had to be undertaken. As Chapter 2 (The Natural History of the Research, above) pointed out, whittling down the number of interesting topics in order to get a grip on the data proved difficult, not least because whatever choices were made regarding the analytic focus of the research, arbitrary decisions about what to examine and what to omit would necessarily have to be made. Although the final thesis examined areas of the parents' evening meetings that I found interesting and worthwhile, many other equally interesting and worthwhile topics had to be excluded in order to maintain a clear analytic focus. If the research was undertaken afresh, an entirely different set of topics could be examined in more detail, and it is in the consideration of these topics that implications for further research can be found.

Looking in more detail at specific topics within the parents' evening data constitutes one alternative course that could have been taken with this research. This in turn opens up two other potential analytic options. The first of these involves the simple

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task of taking some of the other topics touched upon in the thesis, and carrying out an expanded analysis of them. Although there are many topics that would qualify for such a treatment (see the list in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1, above), two areas examined within the present thesis lend themselves readily to further examination. The first has already been touched on above, in that the role of various intonational features of talk have been seen to be important. Further to the functions of the up-down registers evident during the early stages of the reporting structure, the way in which the teacher provides a level of 'verbal parenthesis' to her topic transition utterances (cf. chapters 6, 7 and 8) also deserves greater attention than I was able to give it. In these instances something more than the lexical detail of the talk provides for the construction of the utterances being hearable as 'quotations'. Equally, the impact on the meetings of parents whose first language is not English was also touched upon, but due to the analytic choices made when presenting this data, did not receive the attention it deserved. As Gumperz points out, such interactional situations provide fertile ground for examining the way in which "linguistic and sociocultural knowledge interact" (1992: 302), especially when a bilingual participant's talk is "interpreted in terms of the other participant's culturally specific inferential practices" (ibid)[2].

The second way of looking in more detail at the parents' evening data involves the incorporation of some aspects of quantitative data into the qualitatively focused conversation analytic research that has been carried out for this research. As Silverman points out, even simple counting techniques "can offer a means to survey the whole corpus of data ordinarily lost in intensive, qualitative research" (1993: 163). Not only does quantitative data have more currency in terms of normative discourses relating to research findings, but as Silverman states, it also allows for the reader to gain "a sense of the flavour of the data as a whole" (1993: 163). Although such quantitative interpretation was considered and rejected for this research on the grounds that it diverted from the findings as I wanted to present them, an extra level of detail could be gained if simple counting techniques were applied to specific aspects of the parents' evening meetings. Amongst the many situations within the meetings that could benefit from the use of such techniques, tallying the gender and

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[2] Please note that this is not to say that the conduct of the parents' evening talk involved differences in interpretive criteria which had a pejorative effect on the interaction, as Gumperz's findings suggest, merely that the analytic topic is a potentially rich one.

relative number of parents present at each meeting, or those meetings at which the children in question are physically present, and cross referencing this data with the overall conduct/trajectory of the meetings in terms of topics discussed etc could potentially provide a further level of interpretive detail.

The area of counting within the parents' evening meetings leads us to consider the next point at which other research options could be applied to the data. Bearing in mind the focus on the opening sequences of the parents' evening meetings in this research, an examination of the overall trajectory of the meetings could be carried out. In this way, the analysis would be similar to other studies of parents' evenings, such as Baker and Keogh (1995) and MacLure and Walker (1999; 2000), which have looked at the organisation of the meetings as a whole, rather than just one section of the talk. Not only could the points raised in this thesis be examined and expanded on in terms of their use and relevance at different stages of the talk, the overall trajectory of the talk could also be examined with regard to its structural features. In this way, the reporting structure utilised for the first topic of the meetings could be tied into the overall progress of the meetings, and compared to other features that might be highlighted by an examination of the meetings' trajectory overall.

Opening up the analytic scope for the parents' evening meetings could also include a broadening of the database with regard to other examples of parent-teacher interactions within an educational setting. Indeed, as the discussion in Chapter 2 (see section 2.2.3, above) regarding the size of the data sample outlined, other research options would necessarily stem from comparing the data in this thesis with parents' evening meetings across various educational sites. Other Junior school meetings could be examined in parallel with this data, thereby allowing for comparisons between different sets of teachers and parents in order to see if wider interactional patterns could be detected. Equally, carrying out and cross-referencing CA studies of meetings within other Junior school year groups, especially those in which the SAT examinations are not immediately due, could allow for a broader range of comparative data, thereby providing a wider context for the displayed conducted of Year 6 parents' evening meetings. As part of this comparative work, studies of parents' evening meetings within Middle schools could also be included.

Finally, the findings from this study of parents' evening meetings could be integrated into the wider ethnographic literature focusing on the classroom (cf. Galton et al, 1980, 1999; Delamont, 1983; Delamont and Atkinson, 1983). Indeed, this research shares a common focus with the ORACLE study (Observation and Classroom Learning and Evaluation), which took place from 1975 to 1980, followed by "Son of ORACLE", a study of group-work in the primary classroom from 1980 to 1983 (cf. Galton et al, 2001). Whilst these studies described in detail what took place in primary classrooms, including the teaching styles used by teachers and the responses made by pupils, they also followed the pupils as they transferred out of the primary school into the secondary phase of education. Given the fact that the parents' evening meetings in this thesis take place during the period of 'secondary transfer' (see Section 1.1.2, above), the findings here could be incorporated into a wider ethnographic study of school and educational settings, especially bearing in mind that Galton et al linked the processes outlined above to pupil performance. As the analysis of the use of written records within the meetings has shown, wider contextual detail can be usefully incorporated into CA studies without erring from the consideration of how participants actually orient to various interactional phenomena. Taking the use of written documents as a starting point, an examination of the role such documents within a child's educational career overall could be undertaken, especially when we consider that the documents produced as a result of the Key Stage 2 SAT examinations form a major part of the decision making process regarding the entire issue of 'secondary transfer' (cf. Hak, 1999, for a further discussion of the role of information from multiple 'contexts' within CA studies).

9.3.4 Implications for Practice

The final aspect of this research that needs to be addressed in this concluding chapter relates to the implications that the findings presented here could have for those individuals actually involved in the parents' evening meetings. Indeed, one of the aims of the research was to highlight specific aspects of the communication process taking place between educational practitioners and their clients, so as to enable discussion and understanding between the two parties[3]. In doing so, however, research

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[3] The work of Silverman (1993), and Silverman, Bor, Miller and Goldman (1992) points to the role of the researcher in facilitating this.

should not aim to examine normative standards of 'good' or 'bad' communication, but rather "understand the *skills* that participants deploy and the *functions* of the communication patterns that are discovered" (Silverman, 1993: 192-original emphasis). As Silverman points out, by attending to the 'fine detail' of interactions research can "provide new opportunities which allow people to make their own choices" (1993: 188) regarding the conduct of such professional-lay situations as parents' evening meetings.

For the parents' evening meetings described in this research, increasing people's options can be linked to the variable expectations regarding such meetings displayed by both parents and teachers. As we saw in Chapter 2, for some of those involved parents' evening meetings are seen as little more than public relations exercises in which nothing much is accomplished. For others, however, they might be viewed as excellent opportunities for the participants to get to know a child's teacher or parents. Macbeth outlines other factors that could be influential in shaping parental attitudes to the meetings, in that "practical difficulties, deference to teachers, cynicism, and a sense of alienation from the school deter parents" (1994: 308). Equally, studies by Cyster *et al* (1979) and Johnson and Ransom (1983) highlight how some parents are hesitant and lose confidence when dealing with the systems of schooling. But overlaying all of these differences in perception and attitude is the fact that due to the expectations surrounding the significance of parents' evening, these occasions are times of great stress for all those concerned. This was brought home to me during the gathering of the initial data for this thesis. During the recording of the meetings, the Deputy Head teacher of the school where the research was being carried out distributed amongst the teachers and waiting parents a copy of a poem entitled *Parents' Evening,* which presented the meetings as a time of stress and nervousness for all its participants[4].

It is against this background that the value of outlining the actual processes of parents' evening meetings can be seen, since by putting the analytic resources of Conversation Analysis at the disposal of the participants to the talk, a better understanding of what goes on can be facilitated. The need for aids to understanding in this area is made

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[4] See Appendix C for the full text.

clear by Farrell, who in his outline of some of the key issues for primary schools, states "the importance of clear and concise communication with parents can hardly be over-emphasised" (1999: 140). He points out that whilst it is "easy to spot the muddy communication of others...poor communication, whether through euphemism, jargon, loquaciousness or confusion, is harder to spot when it is our [i.e. teacher's] own" (ibid). Indeed, Farrell goes on to provide the specific link between the various factors outlined above regarding parental attitudes to such school-based events as parents' evenings, and the teacher's need to mitigate such difficulties:

> "Perhaps inevitably, there are parents who are reluctant to become involved and they are often the parents which the school might feel most need to be involved for the sake of their child's education. Such parents may be disaffected and may have had unproductive experiences of school when they were children. Other parents seem to make contact with the school only to complain vigorously. In some instances, parents may be abusive and physically threatening. *If there is an easy way to build relationships with such parents, the secret is being kept very well hidden.*
>
> (Farrell, 1999: 141-my emphasis)

Whilst not claiming in any way to be able to provide any 'answers' in terms of how specific interactions should be conducted, at the very least it is hoped that research such as this can help teachers and parents to uncover the 'secret' of effective communication.

In general terms, the actual conduct of parents' evening can be viewed as one of "a variety of institutional discourses within which power moves and people may be constructed as objects of power" (Silverman, 1997: 209). As part of this institutional discourse, the educational practitioners could be said to have a dominant position by dint of their professional status. But as Silverman points out, "the movement of power within institutional settings may be empirically studied by attending to the mundane details of the talk through which service providers fulfil many of their professional responsibilities" (1997: 209). Whilst various interactional constraints related to the institutional nature of the meetings have an effect on the conduct of the participants, thereby potentially framing the meetings as a site upon which professional power is

wielded at the expense of the lay participants, the meetings also constitute an institutional discourse that is "textured by the various situational contingencies and practices of specific settings" (Silverman, 1997: 208).

In considering the management of agreement between the two adult parties to the talk, one of the features raised by Silverman, Baker and Keogh (1998) as being peculiar to the conduct of the parents' evening meetings as examples of institutional talk can be applied to this data. In their comparison of parent-teacher meetings with parent-clinician meetings, Silverman, Baker and Keogh point out that as the professional interactant, the teacher "puts considerable work into displaying her moral adequacy/knowledgeability" (1998: 238), an activity not often displayed by medical professionals. Thus, whilst the parents will not in all likelihood have great knowledge of clinical practice, they *can* know "a great deal second-hand about what teachers do in class" (ibid). The level of expressive caution displayed by the teacher when delivering any information that could be construed as critical of the child can therefore be linked to the way that "parents and teachers model their utterances to defer to the special competencies that each presumably possesses (as knowledgeable about, respectively, the home and the educational requirements of the school)" (ibid).

As the preceding chapters have shown, expressive caution on the part of the teacher is a feature of every stage of the reporting structure, and in general terms can be linked to the activity of managing potentially delicate subjects during the parents' evening meetings, especially for those children with results below the national average. But rather than making overt displays of her own moral adequacy during these early stages of the meetings, the teacher in this data manages a very precise *epistemic structure* (cf. Peräkylä, 1995) during her presentation of the children's results. The importance of epistemic structures within some interactional settings is highlighted by Peräkylä, who points out how "the participants' knowledge and their epistemic positions (i.e. what they expect one another to know) create great relevance for their interaction" (1995: 334). This is especially true given that "possessing knowledge and being able to know are practical and socially organized matters" (Peräkylä, 1995: 334).

Although the reports for those parents with children whose results are below the national average mark can technically be seen as 'news', in the sense that the parents did not know the information presented to them prior to their arrival at the meeting, the management of a specific epistemic structure by the teacher means that she avoids any potential disruption to the meetings due to an inadvertent positioning of the parents as simply recipients of the report on the child. By orienting to the parents as interested parties to the talk, irrespective of the level of recipiency they actually display, the teacher creates a consensual environment within which to talk about the child. For those parents with children achieving above the national average level, an assumption of knowledge on their part is worked with by the teacher, thereby facilitating an enhanced level of consensus based around an expression of shared goal.

In both situations (i.e. for parents of achieving and non-achieving children), the information contained within the reports is never delivered as a conversational item that the teacher's co-participants may or may not know. Instead, it is used as a focus around which to organise the collaborative activity of *talking about the child*, rather than a way of assembling the various participant's relative levels of knowledge. Minimising sources of potential interactional difficulty can also be seen as the impetus behind the stepwise format of the teacher's initiatory utterances. Stepwise entry into the reporting structure allows the teacher both extra preparation time, bearing in mind that she might not be completely acquainted with the child's progress in lessons taken by other teachers, and the opportunity to monitor for any talk from the parents. This level of caution continues with the use of such mutuality implicative language as "let's have a look" when referencing the written documents.

In this way, the teacher presents the parents' evening meeting in reciprocal terms, co-opting the parents into the shared activity of discussing the child, rather than simply delivering a professional address to a lay audience without consideration of their opinions or personal knowledge. Even if on the whole the parents do not display extended levels of recipiency during the initial stages of the meetings, the teacher demonstrably seeks their active participation in the meeting. Indeed, the work of presenting the meetings as a collaborative endeavour by the teacher *and* the parents also raises questions as to Baker and Keogh's assertion that "talk and silence are both consequential forms of participation" (1994: 33) for parent-teacher meetings. The

question of the 'lack' of parental talk during the transition from the preamble talk to the reporting on the child can be seen as something more than 'silence' on their part. For Baker and Keogh, the production of silence on the part of the parents withholds complicity "with the moral universe that is being described in the talk" (1994: 33). For my data, rather than viewing parental non-action as passivity in the face of the institutional strength of the teacher's position, it can be viewed as complicity, since a major part of co-ordinating multi-party entry into any conversational event is the mutual display of willingness to cooperate with a proposed action. That the ongoing minimal recipiency by the parents does not cause any overt problems with the delivery of the children's reports can be seen as both evidence for the robust nature of the reporting structure utilised by the teacher, and an indication that the straightforward application of supposedly 'negative' conversational features (such as co-participant silence) cannot be unproblematically exported from one interactional situation to another.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Notes On Transcription and Index Numbers

In terms of the presentation of the data within this research, it has already been noted that as a study utilising Conversation Analysis (CA), extensive use is made of detailed transcripts. These transcripts are produced using the conventions developed by Jefferson[1], although some adaptations of this system are introduced in the consideration of intonational contours in Chapter 4. With regard to the presentation of transcripts within this data, three elements must be noted.

The initial transcript designation includes both the chapter number and the relative position of the transcript or extract derived from it within the chapter as a whole (e.g. Extract 5.7 is the seventh extract in chapter five). The specific transcript index number follows this designation (in brackets), the sequential numbering of which reflects the temporal sequence of the meetings as conducted on the evening in question (i.e. meeting 01.1 was the first of the evening, whilst meeting 18.1 was the last)[2].

The final piece of information included with each extract consists of the individuals present for each meeting. Since the teacher (designated T in both the transcript and analysis) attends every meeting, her presence is not specifically outlined at this point of the transcript. Other individuals, even when they do not feature in the transcript itself, are included to indicate those who were both physically present, and constituted the entire set of possible participants[3].

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[1] C.f. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), as well the full glossary of transcription conventions in Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

[2] Note that whilst the transcripts run from 01.1 to 18.1, 17 meetings are presented within this data. This is because transcript Pt1/ a 14.1 concerns the meeting with the mother who had little English, which as a consequence was mediated by the translation of her son (see also Chapter 1, above).

[3] Identifying those present in this way does, however, raise its own problems, not least in terms of the way any naming practice "insists into relevance these categories and the bodies of common-sense knowledge organized by reference to them" (Schegloff, 1999: 565). This concern is of particular importance in the use of 'Mother' and 'Father' to designate the gender of those adults present in a 'guardian/primary carer' role (on a purely factual basis, the vagaries of modern household composition meant that many of the adults present in the 'parental' role were not the biological parents of the children concerned), although it can equally apply to the textual identification of such individuals as 'Child', 'Sibling', or 'Deputy head teacher'.

A desire for clarity is cited in mitigation, rather than an attempt to lead the reader in any particular direction by what Schegloff has called "analytically tendentious labelling of speakers" (1999: 566). Indeed, when made relevant within the talk, I have attempted to demonstrate how such categories are 'talked into being' by the participants.

As a guide to the reader, a brief outline of the transcription symbols used during the analysis of this data is provided below. For a fuller glossary of CA's transcript notation, see Atkinson and Heritage (1984: ix-xvi).

Overlapping utterances – the point at which an ongoing utterance is joined by another is marked by a left hand bracket:

> M: it ma [de (me too late)
>
> T: [she y'know what she's li::ke, (.) she didn't bring the thing home

The point where overlapping utterances stop overlapping is marked by a right hand bracket:

> T: that's u- [th] at's okay,
>
> M: [(that's it)   ] she got one (more a few)

Contiguous utterances – when adjacent utterances are latched together with no interval, but without overlapping each other, the utterances are liked together by equal signs:

> T: so that's what we're aim ↓ ing at =
>
> M: = she's a °be-° bit behind

Intervals – pauses either within or between sequences of talk are inserted within parentheses, and are timed in terms of tenths of a second:

> T: .hhh now the national, (0.6) av'rage is level four:

> T: ↑Maths:
>
>   (1.2)
>
>   level fi:ve

A dot in parenthesis indicates a pause of no more than one tenth of a second:

> T: >Right <(.) we'll start having a look at ma°ths::: °

Characteristics of speech delivery – intonation

Underscoring indicates emphasis placed upon an utterance or syllable:

> T: .h a::nd she's working at level three

Marked shifts in intonation are indicated by upward (rising intonation) or downward (falling intonation) arrows immediately prior to the intonational shift:

> T: ↑ hello::

Other punctuation marks are used to mark intonational changes to speech. A full stop indicates falling intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence, whilst a comma marks a continuing intonation. A question mark indicates a rising inflection, including

those not necessarily related to a question. Gardner's (1997) adaptation of the transcription notation covering more detailed descriptions of intonational contours are also utilised during this research. For further details, see footnote 13 in Chapter 4, above.

Characteristics of speech delivery – prolongation, volume, and speed

Colons indicate the prolongation of the immediately prior sound, with the length of the prolongation being indicated by the number of colons:

> T: he says althou::gh .hh A's concentration can be

Audible aspirations (hhh) and inhalations (.hhh) are inserted in the speech as they occur, with the length of the breath being indicated by the length of the row of h's:

> T: .hhhh um:: she says she rushes with her work.

Capital letters, except when used for proper nouns such as names, indicate the delivery of speech at a louder volume than the surrounding talk:

> T: a:nd, (0.5) he's working at::: (.) uh – MIDLEVEL SAT FOUR

Degree signs enclose passages of talk that are quieter than the surrounding talk:

> T: . hh but °she's saying° is he capable of more?,

Passages of talk enclosed by greater than and less than symbols are delivered at a quicker pace than surrounding talk:

> T: u:m:, >she's in< Mrs G's set.

Transcriptionist doubt and action descriptions

Where only a possible description of an utterance has been possible, an approximation of what was said is enclosed in brackets (note that the use of brackets in this way can also be used to indicate doubtful ascriptions of talk to a specific individual):

> M: = ° thank you °
>
> F: ° (you sit over there) °

Empty parentheses indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said:

> T: TO[o much of this =
>
> (M):   [(   )
>
> T: = talking I'm afrai::d

Double brackets contain either descriptions of non-speech phenomenon with the talk:

> T: (1.7) ((papers rustling))
>
>   let's find her. (.) .hhh okay.

or characterisations of actions carried out by participants:

> DH: ° hiya °
>
> ((DH and T discuss forms that are to be given to the parents))
>
> T: thanks   ((DH leaves))

Appendix B: The Report Documents

A major element of this parents' evening data is the utilisation of written records in the delivery of the report on the individual child. Whilst the strictures of data protection and anonymity mean that actual completed examples of these documents cannot be included as part of the data in this research, copies of the basic framework document upon which the child's information is recorded are provided below as a guide for the reader.

The first document was used to record the report on the child's attainment in mathematics, whilst the second document recorded details of the child's language/English skills.

<u>Maths</u>

Name...   **Set**   1-CHD 2-AT 3-DY 4-CH

Working at level   N   1   2   3   4   5

General comments...
....
....
....
....

Number skills...
....

Topics covered: Shape & Space...
Data Handling...
Angles...
Probability...

Oral work/mental maths...
....

Practical skills...
....

Language

Name..   **Set** 1-CH 2-DY 3-AT 4-CHD

Working at level   N   1   2   3   4   5

General comments..

....

....

....

....

Handwriting..

....

Spelling/Phonics...

....

Speaking & Listening...

....

Comprehension & Grammar...

....

Creative Writing...

....

Reading..

....