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# Complaining as Reflective Practice in TESOL Teacher–Mentor Post-Observation Meetings

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates interactions between a novice language teacher and TESOL practicum mentor during a series of post-observation meetings, focusing on how and why the teacher engages in complaining. We draw upon conversation analysis and narrative analysis to look at how the teacher's complaints are developed and managed, as well as what they accomplish, within the institutional context. The data show the novice teacher uses a variety of interactional resources to construct complaints about her co-teacher, a peer observer, and the practicum course workload. We argue that complaints are relevant to reflective practice and show how the teacher's complaints work to express beliefs about teaching and learning and to defend her competence and moral values as a novice teacher. Based on our analysis, we discuss implications for mentor practice.

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Complaining is ubiquitous in everyday interaction. We work to avoid being labeled as complainers and delicately manage directly complaining to those with whom we are intimate (Edwards, 2005). At the same time, we can use complaints *about* someone or something to build solidarity and reinforce shared values (Günthner, 1997; Hanna, 1981).

While complaints may be tricky to manage in conversations between friends, they can be even more challenging in institutional interactions, such as service encounters, doctor–patient consultations, and workplace meetings. Within institutional talk, complaints are often embedded in other interactional activities, and the ways that they are developed and managed relates closely to institutional goals. For example, Ruusuvuori and Lindfors' (2009) examination of complaints about previous healthcare encounters highlights how medical doctors generally avoid affiliating with patient complaints against their own practice, while homeopathic practitioners may build on patient complaints about medical encounters to encourage the use of alternative treatments. Within professional spaces, such as the second language teacher education (SLTE) context analyzed here, issues of power asymmetries between teacher educators and novice teachers also factor into how complaints are managed (Vásquez, 2009).

In this paper, we examine the role of a novice language teacher's complaints within a series of post-observation meetings with her practicum mentor. The institutional goal of such meetings is for the teacher to engage in reflective

practice, which includes the “critical analysis” of one’s “*own beliefs*” and the need to “take *full responsibility*” for one’s actions in the classroom (Farrell, 2018, p. 1, emphasis added). Our focus on complaints was driven by what appeared to be a tension between the negative valence of complaining and the positive valence of professional development and self-improvement typically associated with reflective practice. Our analysis was guided by the following questions:

- How are complaint sequences structured, developed, and managed in the post-observation meeting?
- What do complaint sequences accomplish in the post-observation meeting?

## Background

### Complaints

Arriving at a formal definition of a complaint is a difficult endeavor: Complaining as a social activity encompasses a broad range of interactional behaviors and bears similarity to troubles-telling, criticizing, accusing, and story-telling (Heinemann & Traverso, 2009). Nevertheless, Edwards (2005) posits that complaints have common features: (a) they are concerned with some element of grievance or transgressive behavior, (b) they are inherently negative, and (c) they are often constituted as morally implicative stories or descriptions.

Given the delicate and inherently negative nature of complaining, it is no surprise that complainers may work to avoid being seen to be doing complaining (Edwards, 2005; Sacks, 1992). Complaining as a social activity often emerges over extended sequences (Traverso, 2009), rather than a clearly defined first pair and second pair part of an adjacency pair. The difficulty in delineating complaint sequences is also compounded by the embedding of complaints into more recognizable institutional activities (Ruusuvuori & Lindfors, 2009). Furthermore, Sacks (1992) notes how conversations often include complainables, which hold the potential for development into complaints and may be consequential for interaction without an actual complaint ever being articulated (Schegloff, 2005).

Complaints can be followed by a variety of response types (Jefferson, 1988) unlike more tightly organized sequences (e.g., greeting–greeting, offer–acceptance/refusal). One main vein of research in examining recipient responses to complaints has been in terms of affiliation and disaffiliation. Typically, affiliation is a preferred outcome, particularly in everyday conversation, displayed in the form of co-constructing the complaint or in essence joining in the negative stance taken by the complainer. However, social and institutional roles, that is, the relationship between parties—complainer, complaine, recipient—as well as topic of the complaint are significant factors in how the complaint is constructed and treated (Heinemann & Traverso, 2009). Recipients may also disattend to a complaint by taking up some other aspect of talk (Mandelbaum, 1991–1992), or in institutional contexts, directing the interaction to more institutionally-relevant grounds (Ruusuvuori & Lindfors, 2009).

Issues of morality are often infused within complaints. Drew (1998) argues that “any consideration of the accountability of social conduct brings moral dimensions into focus” (p. 295); he distinguishes implicit moral work “in which speakers exhibit but do not overtly claim the propriety of their own conduct” (p.

296) from explicit moral work in complaints “built to manifest transgressions by others of normative standards of conduct and hence warrant the speaker’s sense of moral offense and indignation” (p. 297) through the provision of circumstantial accounts, evocation of the deliberateness of the complainable conduct, and the prosody of direct reported speech (DRS).

### **Reflective Practice in SLTE**

A common emphasis within SLTE is on encouraging language teachers to engage in reflective practice (Wright, 2010). Teachers who engage in reflective practice, according to Farrell (2018), “subject their own beliefs about teaching and learning to critical analysis, take full responsibility for their actions in the classroom, and continue to improve their teaching practice” (p. 1).

Novice teachers enrolled in SLTE programs are typically expected to engage in reflective practice across a variety of contexts, but especially in relation to the teaching they do for their practicum coursework. At the core of the practicum experience is the opportunity to teach a language class, which provides novice teachers “direct experience interacting with students” and serves as the “contexts and content” for seminar discussions, self-reflection, and supervisor/peer observations (Gebhard, 2009, p. 252). Practicum courses thus simultaneously facilitate novice teachers’ development of practical skills alongside those of reflection on their own pedagogical principles and actions (Gebhard, 2009; Richards & Crookes, 1988). As Richards and Farrell (2011) describe it, the practicum course serves as the link between the theory-laden, academic coursework of the SLTE program and the “‘real’ world of teachers and students in a language-learning classroom” (p. 3).

### **Post-Observation Meetings**

In service to the goal of developing novice teachers’ reflective practice, practicum teaching often involves some level of supervision of the novice teacher—either by a cooperating teacher in the traditional student teaching environment or, as in the context we describe here, by an assigned mentor through periodic observations of a class where the novice teacher is the teacher of record.<sup>1</sup> Practices of supervision/observation often aim to facilitate novice teachers’ developing reflection on their teaching abilities. In the post-observation meeting, the novice teacher is typically asked to discuss some variation on the themes of “what worked well, what didn’t work so well, and what [they] might do differently next time” (Richards & Farrell, 2011, p. 100).

Early work on post-observation meetings within SLTE focused on identifying and describing models of supervision (see Bailey, 2009, for an overview of this work). More recently, researchers have begun to examine the nature of discourse and interactions within the post-observation meeting; such research primarily relies on recordings of actual post-observation meetings and a variety of discourse analytic methods. For example, Vásquez (2007, 2009) draws on narrative analysis to highlight how novice teachers navigate the complexities of identity work, moral stance, and face threat in telling stories (especially of complaints) to their

<sup>1</sup> Bailey (2006, 2009) has provided an excellent overview of models of supervision within language teaching and SLTE.

supervisors. Copland's (2010, 2012) linguistic ethnographic examinations of group post-observation meetings illustrate tensions that may arise when supervisors and novice teachers have differing expectations for the norms of feedback and "legitimate talk" (Copland, 2012, p. 5). Through the close examination of talk afforded by conversation analysis (CA), Waring (2013, 2014) reveals both implicit and explicit ways that mentors may elicit reflective talk from novice teachers, while Waring (2017) describes mentor practices of using depersonalization and invoking principles to effectively manage the giving of critiques and suggestions. Box (2017), also utilizing CA, demonstrates how both supervisors and novice teachers manage competing demands—of doing reflection and demonstrating/evaluating teacher competence. A common feature throughout this work has been a recognition that novice teachers work hard within the interaction to present themselves as competent and thoughtful pedagogues, even (or perhaps, especially) while acknowledging their shortcomings.

### Data and Method

The data analyzed here come from a larger study looking at novice teacher development in a graduate Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program at a large, mid-Atlantic research institution. In this context, mentors are assigned by the TESOL program and required to observe the TESOL student/novice teacher three times. Observations are followed by post-observation meetings (either immediate or delayed, at the discretion of the mentor and teacher); the mentor also provides a written evaluation, highlighting three strengths and three areas for improvement as well as concrete suggestions for addressing these, to both the teacher and the practicum instructor.

In this working paper, the data are from a set of three video-recorded post-observation meetings between one teacher–mentor pair. Lily<sup>2</sup> and her co-teacher Benjamin, both international students from China, fulfilled the practicum teaching requirement by co-teaching an English as a Second Language (ESL) class for adult immigrants at a library near the university campus. Their class met once weekly, and they were fully responsible for planning lessons, developing materials, and teaching. Our analysis focuses on the post-observation meetings Lily had with her mentor, Luca, an alumnus of the TESOL program.<sup>3</sup> Lily and Luca's post-observation meetings always occurred on the day following the observed lesson in a university office. One of us was present to manage the recording equipment but not in the room during their meeting.

As an approach to the study of social interaction, CA offers a systematic analysis of how people coordinate language and action on a moment-by-moment basis. In other words, it describes how participants produce, understand, and deal with talk-in-interaction as it unfolds. CA examines audio- and/or video-recorded naturally occurring talk-in-interaction that is transcribed with the goal of preserving the interactional details of talk as it is produced. CA research shows that the activities of producing and responding to talk exhibit identifiable interactional practices such as turn-taking, sequence organization, and repair (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). For this study, CA is a productive analytic tool given that talk is

<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin had a different mentor, Helen.

clearly central to the practice of reflection within post-observation meetings. More specifically, this study falls under the umbrella of institutional applied CA, that is, research that seeks “an illumination of routine institutional work” (Antaki, 2011, p. 6) in which the analytic focus is on how the everyday business of the institution is carried out through talk.

Narrative analysis of small stories—those told in the fleeting moments of conversation—is a form of inquiry that examines narratives as they unfold within social interaction (Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Ochs & Capps, 2001). The approach to narrative methodology we employ here draws on complementary premises to CA,<sup>4</sup> treating narratives as (a) highly embedded in ongoing interaction, (b) sequentially managed by interlocutors who may participate in co-telling, (c) situated in local contexts and relationships, and (d) driven by emergent meanings and goals (Georgakopoulou, 2007, pp. 4–5; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Stories provide insights not into what actually happened in the world, but into how interlocutors make sense of those happenings as they tell the stories. As such, narrative analysis highlights the identity positions that emerge for storytellers (and relevant others) in the telling and that have relevance in and beyond the interaction itself (Georgakopoulou, 2007). Within the institutional context of our study, two narrative dimensions are particularly relevant: a) *tellability*, a story’s relevance to the work at hand; and b) *moral stance*, a teller’s orientation toward principles and beliefs (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989). Within SLTE, narrative analysis of small stories allows us to catch “glimpses into the processes of professional development as they unfold” (Vásquez, 2011, p. 543); it is in and through telling stories, after all, that teachers (learn to) reflect and solve problems.

In our analysis, we draw on CA to examine the turn-by-turn unfolding of interactional sequences. Our analysis of the teacher’s complaint stories draws on both CA and narrative analysis frameworks in examining the work they do in the interaction and the meanings they may have.

## Analysis

The three complaints we analyze here were chosen to illustrate the diversity of issues addressed and interactional work accomplished by the teacher’s complaining. Each comes from a different post-observation meeting, and all occurred in the beginning phase of the meeting, in which the mentor, Luca, focused on asking the teacher, Lily, what she thought about the lesson he observed.

### Complaint 1: Co-Teacher

Within the post-observation meeting, novice teachers must balance reflecting on challenges within their teaching with presenting themselves as competent teachers. Complaint stories can serve as a vehicle for both, as this excerpt from Lily’s first post-observation meeting will demonstrate. Moreover, complaint stories also do significant moral work; as Drew (1998) observes, “in finding fault with another’s conduct, a speaker in effect formulates some normative standard(s) that the other’s behavior has transgressed” (p. 303). Thus, by attending to the

<sup>4</sup> Readers interested in an overview of narrative methodologies are encouraged to see Georgakopoulou (2007) or Vásquez (2011).

moral stance of Lily's complaint—here, about her co-teacher's lack of concern with what she refers to as correctness—we show how this complaint also surfaces a fundamental belief Lily holds about teaching as well as an issue that could likely benefit from her mentor's advice. While these are both relevant topics for reflective practice and the post-observation meeting itself, we see how Luca's disattending shifts the focus to a less problematic aspect of Lily's story.

In Excerpt 1A, Lily responds to a request from Luca to talk about an example of something from the class that she had not expected.

*Excerpt 1A.* (Lily - Debrief 1, 07:00–07:35)<sup>5</sup>

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

Benjamin is Lily's co-teacher; Helen is Benjamin's mentor.

- 1 M: ((looking down, writing in notes through line 10))  
 2 T: O:h- >we we we< should have uh: (0.4) gone through the  
 3 materials more closely. Uh (.) for me: like in the in the  
 4 class break I checked with you and Helen  
 5 M: ((still looking down, writing in notes)) [Uh huh ]  
 6 T: [(on) °how] do you  
 7 usually say this, how do you usually say that.° And that is  
 8 something that I should (.) finish before (.) I went to the  
 9 classroom right? .hh and also for Benjamin. Um Benjamin is  
 10 [um easy going person. ]  
 11 M: [((stops writing, looks up from notes))]  
 12 M: Mm hmm  
 13 T: And the same. With his lesson planning.  
 14 M: [((nods))]  
 15 T: [So his ] feeling like  
 16 [((voices Benjamin, high-pitched, through line 18))]  
 17 [of course you can say this. You can say that,=  
 18 =[it doesn't matter. ]]  
 19 [(waves hand dismissively))]  
 20 But for classroom I think it matters.

Lily begins her response by positing that she and her co-teacher, Benjamin, both could have improved their checking of their materials. From lines 3–9, Lily then describes how, once she recognized this problem during the lesson, she addressed it by seeking support from Luca and Helen (Benjamin's mentor). As a story that introduces a problem and demonstrates how she took responsibility, Lily's initial explanation is highly tellable. It is relevant to the question that Luca has asked (about something unexpected) and thus hearable as the sort of reflection expected within the post-observation meeting. Her DRS in lines 6–7, marked by a deictic shift to the lesson timeframe and the quiet tone used to ask a question of her mentor in front of students, allows Lily to portray herself as an agentive and responsible teacher (Vásquez & Urzua, 2009). Thus, Lily orients, at least in part, to demonstrating her competence as a novice teacher. By identifying this problem

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix for transcription conventions.



herself, she shows that she is aware that it is not a trait of competence. However, by giving an account of how she handled the issue, she mitigates the fault she could be assigned. (As a novice teacher in the post-observation meeting, it may be more important to show that one can recognize and improve upon one's weakness than to claim that one has no weaknesses at all.)

More is going on here than simply Lily reflecting on her own actions around this issue, though. Her use of "for me:" (line 3) initiates a contrast between her behavior and, from line 9, that of Benjamin in response to an issue for which she believes they both should have taken responsibility. Lily initiates her complaint about Benjamin with a statement that he is an "easy going person." (line 10).<sup>6</sup> To be easy-going—as a person or as a teacher—seems to carry a positive valence. However, being easy-going in one's lesson planning (line 13), especially as a novice teacher whose lesson-planning skills are subject to evaluation, is not a positive trait. This pairing of praise with critique is itself a common way of signaling a complaint (Sacks, 1992, p. 359).

From line 15, Lily develops her complaint by illustrating the problematic nature of Benjamin's easy-going approach to lesson planning. She introduces what eventually becomes a clear moral stance portraying herself and Benjamin as embodying two dichotomous positions on an issue underlying their materials checking: the importance of *correctness* in language presented to students. Specifically, Lily's eventual examples show that she is concerned about teaching the correct preposition (e.g., *to* vs. *into* vs. *for*) and the correct pronunciation of relatively minor aspects of language use (e.g., the tenths place in a dollar amount), and that she is frustrated whenever Benjamin is *not* concerned about this (because he believes that multiple options are acceptable).

In lines 17–18, Lily uses DRS to enact Benjamin's attitude. Her speech is marked by a deictic shift to a conversation she and Benjamin would have had while lesson planning, his "of course" (line 17) responding to a question from her. Lily's high-pitched voice, hand gesture (line 19), and semantic choices ("of course" and "it doesn't matter.") all work to portray Benjamin as dismissive and unconcerned about the issue Lily raised. Thus, through the stylization of reconstructed dialogue (Günthner 1997), Lily presents Benjamin as violating an important moral norm. Regardless of how (or whether) this conversation actually played out during their lesson planning, Lily's use of DRS to portray herself as responsible and Benjamin as uncaring allows her to build a clear contrast (Wooffitt, 1992) between their beliefs and approaches. In line 20, Lily provides an explicit—but vague—statement of her own belief in the importance of correctness in language teaching and materials development.

Following Excerpt 1A, Lily continues to develop her complaint about Benjamin, and in so doing, to further clarify her beliefs about correctness. She tells stories about a student asking how to use similar prepositions and about having to ask Benjamin questions about their materials. Lily worries, however, that asking him such questions during class "might stress him." Directly following a four-second pause and no uptake from Luca, Lily then continues to develop the complaint in Excerpt 1B.

<sup>6</sup> In line 11, Luca's sudden shift from note-taking to eye contact with Lily may suggest that he heard the reference to Benjamin himself as out of place, or this may simply have been the moment when he finished what he was writing.

*Excerpt 1B.* (Lily - Debrief 1, 08:53–09:45)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

Benjamin is Lily's co-teacher; Sunita is another TESOL student teaching in the ESL Program.

- 95 T: °Yeah.°
- 96 (0.6)
- 97 I guess (.) Benjamin and I will have arguments about this.
- 98 (0.6)
- 99 [Again and again.]
- 100 [((nods)) ]
- 101 M: [((smiles)) ]
- 102 T: He's always saying
- 103 [((voices Benjamin, high-pitched, through line 115))]
- 104 [Aaah it doesn't matte::r. (.) People say thi:s. People say
- 105 [tha:t.= ]]
- 106 M: [((nods))]
- 107 M: =mhm
- 108 T: =y'know when we were preparing numbers, the numbers
- 109 [the part that I taught]
- 110 M: [((nods)) ]
- 111 T: uh I really I really wanted to check.
- 112 M: ((nods)) Mmhm
- 113 T: And then I turn to Sunita? (.) who's [also teaching ESL
- 114 Program Name.]
- 115 M: [((nods)) ]
- 116 T: He's a native speaker >so I ask her um< (.) how do you
- 117 usually say (.) y'know like <zero point eight [nine> to the
- 118 US dollars? Like (euro) to (the) US dollars.]
- 119 M: [((nods)) ]
- 120 T: And she said it's zero point [eight nine.]
- 121 M [((nods)) ]
- 122 T: But before I check[ed Ben]jamin was like
- 123 M: [((nods))]
- 124 T: [((voices Benjamin, high-pitched)) ]
- 125 [OH [IT'S FINE. You can say zero point eighty nine.]]
- 126 [((waves hand dismissively)) ]
- 127 M: Mmm
- 128 T: [>I don't believe that.< ]
- 129 [((waves hand dismissively))]
- 130 M [((nods continuously through line 134))]
- 131 (0.8)
- 132 T: I wanted a correct correct [answer.]
- 133 M: [Mmhm ]
- 134 T: I wanted to make sure that I'm teaching somethi:ng (.)

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135           that is common[ly used in daily life.  
136 M:    [((nods continuously to end of Excerpt 1B))  
137 M: [Sure. (.)]  
138 T: [°Yeah.°    ]  
139 M: Sure.  
140 T: (Yeah) [hhuh huh]

In line 97, Lily moves into what appears to be a resolution (albeit an unpleasant one): that she and Benjamin will simply continue to argue about the importance of precision with regard to what she considers correct language use. She frames this as a habitually and indefinitely reoccurring conflict. Her pauses—in lines 96 and 98—seem to invite responses from Luca. Given that he fails to self-select (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), she continues talking. Lily moves from the resolution back into developing her complaint about Benjamin, now telling a specific story that mirrors the general critique of his attitude she already raised. Here, though, her moral stance has become even stronger, thus painting an even starker contrast between their approaches. The high tellability of this incident for Lily may stem in part from a desire to gain Luca's support (and affiliation) of her position.

At the start of this story, Lily again uses stylized DRS to enact Benjamin's dismissive attitude. The content of lines 104–105 is very similar to that of lines 17–18, with two key differences. First, the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) in line 102 characterizes this as something Benjamin does repeatedly, rather than simply a one-off occurrence. Then, the non-word vocalization “Aaah” at the start of line 104 functions as a response cry (Goffman, 1978) evidencing Benjamin's evident exasperation (apparently at Lily's having *yet again* asked a question along these lines).

From line 108, Lily tells Luca about her attempt to figure out how to correctly pronounce the number 0.89, which she considered an important component of their lesson on exchanging money. Chronologically, it appears that Lily first asked Benjamin how to say this number, and he recommended “zero point eighty nine.” (line 125). Unsatisfied with his answer, she then consulted Sunita, a TESOL classmate teaching at the same teaching site who—as Lily makes a point of—is “a native speaker” (line 116). Sunita's answer of “zero point eight nine.” (line 117) satisfied Lily.

However, Lily does not tell this story in chronological order. Instead, she begins with the problem and emphasizes how important this was to her (line 111). Similar to her description of her actions in Excerpt 1A, she foregrounds how she handled this problem, again using DRS (lines 116–118) to portray herself as agentive and responsible (Vásquez & Urzua, 2009). Having established for Luca what the eventual outcome and correct answer would be, she then moves back in time to her consultation with Benjamin, marking the contrast between his and Sunita's responses through the “But” preface in line 122. She uses quotative like (line 122), a deictic shift, and stylized DRS with an accompanying gesture to enact Benjamin's response to her query (lines 124–126), as once again dismissive—and even more so here with increased volume. By presenting the resolution of the problem (Sunita's answer) first, Lily treats it as background information to the real

issue illustrated in this story: the problem of Benjamin's attitude, which to her is inappropriate for a teacher.

Following the story, Lily again explicitly marks the contrast between herself and Benjamin, first by stating that she doesn't believe the same, accompanied by the same dismissive gesture (line 129) that she used in lines 19 and 126. After a pause (line 131) in which Luca continues to nod rhythmically, Lily produces a clearer statement of the beliefs at play throughout this complaint. She names correctness—using the repetition of “correct correct” to emphasize the importance of a true, absolute answer (line 132)—and connects this to the necessity of “teaching something (.) that is commonly used in daily life.”<sup>7</sup> Notably, her earlier reference to Sunita's “native speaker” status (line 116) suggests that she sees these three characteristics—correctness, native speaker intuition, and usefulness for daily life—as directly intertwined.

After the explicit complaint closing in lines 137–140, Luca, then, finally comments (Excerpt 1C).

*Excerpt 1C.* (Lily - Debrief 1, 09:44–10:40)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

- 140 T: (Yeah) [hhuh huh]  
 141                [ ((nods continuously through line 144))  
 142 M:            [Well     ] those are- I mean it's okay to think that  
 143            and I think it's okay to ask that question (.) in class.  
 144            Either to yourself or to your coteacher,  
 145 T: Yeah.  
 145 M: Um just because (0.8) you're in the classroom and (.) like  
 146            uh the class [has started and you have the class going and  
 147 T:                [ ((nods continuously to mid line 150))  
 148 M: the students are working on an activity and you have your  
 149            lesson plan whether it's in your hand or on your table or  
 150            in your notebook or whatever, (.) you're allowed to deviate  
 151            a little bit. [If you realize that (.) y'know y- you made a  
 152 T:                [ ((nods continuously through line 154))  
 153 M: mistake or you want to change something, If you make a  
 154            change your students aren't going to know. The only thing  
 155            your students see (.) is what you do [and what [you say.]]  
 156 T:                [ ((nods))                                ]  
 157    [ (°mmhm°) ]  
 158 M: [So: you can- you can do something completely different and  
 159 T: [ ((nods continuously through line 161))  
 160            your students might not have any idea. And I'm n- And I'm  
 161            not saying do something completely different, but if you  
 162            notice (i-) you want to make a change in the moment  
 163 T: OH. [ ((nods))    ]

<sup>7</sup> Lily's reference to language “commonly used in daily life” (line 135) mirrors language in the description of the community ESL program where she and Benjamin teach.

- 164 M: [You're like the only one who would]  
 165 T: Yeah. [Of course] I can make change.=but since th- the-  
 166 M: [(y'know?)]  
 167 T: that part was from Benjamin.  
 168 M: Yeah.

Throughout Lily's complaint, she has clearly and consistently portrayed Benjamin's attitude as blameworthy. Her complaint thereby functions as an initial assessment, which invites a second assessment from Luca; the strength of her "moral indignation" (Drew, 1998, p. 309) suggests a preference for agreement (Pomerantz, 1984). Luca seems disinclined to similarly produce a negative assessment of Benjamin's behavior, however.

Rather than overtly disagree with Lily's assessment, Luca's response demonstrates what Mandelbaum (1991–1992) describes as "subtle disattending" (p. 98). That is, rather than respond directly to Lily's talk as a *complaint*, Luca develops a different aspect of the story. Instead of addressing Benjamin's attitude, the apparent conflict within their working relationship, or Lily's concerns about correctness, he orients to *making changes mid-lesson* as the main point. This is evident in his assurance that it's okay to "ask that question (.) in class." (line 143), the "that question" here seeming to refer to the question Lily describes posing to him (lines 4–7) and/or her description of asking Benjamin a question about materials mid-lesson (between Excerpts 1A & 1B). In addition, rather than being specific to the instance Lily has described, Luca's advice that follows in lines 145–155 is related to a more general scenario: being located "in the classroom" (line 145), and cast in hypotheticals "If you realize" (line 151) and "If you make a change" (lines 153–154). The move to a less specific framing is reminiscent of Waring's (2017) going general. Luca's advice offers reassurance that "students aren't going to know." if the plan has changed (lines 153–155).

That this was not Lily's intended point is clear from her attempt to reassert the complaint (Mandelbaum, 1991–1992) by reiterating that the problem is "from Benjamin." (line 167). Following Luca's minimal response (line 168), however, Lily does follow his shift to talking about making changes mid-lesson, though she focuses on her concerns about how Benjamin will feel "about those little moments". Luca's disattending therefore results in a shift out of the complaint frame and onto topics he perhaps feels more comfortable discussing with her—or may deem more appropriate for the reflective business of the post-observation meeting: whether it is acceptable to make changes mid-lesson and the value of respecting her co-teacher's feelings when proposing those changes.

Across Excerpt 1, we see that through telling a complaint about Benjamin, Lily's moral stance displays clear beliefs about teaching—ones that are clearly quite important to her, given the emotional charge of her complaint—that could be subjected to the "critical analysis" of reflective practice (Farrell, 2018, p. 1). These beliefs highlight the value of correctness—of preparing to carefully explain to students how to correctly use even minor details of language—which she appears to view as directly connected with both the language of daily life and her classmate's native speaker intuition. Lily's complaint also surfaces an important problem, distinct from the issue of checking materials closely that she named at the start of Excerpt 1: a clear and ongoing conflict between herself and her co-teacher,

for which her best resolution is to expect continued arguments. Throughout Lily's development of the complaint, Luca's minimal responses are aligned with the activity of her storytelling, but demonstrate a lack of affiliation with her concerns or evaluation of Benjamin (Stivers, 2008). Overall, Luca's lack of response, disattending, and topic shift in relation to Lily's complaint about her co-teacher may have some relation to his institutional role, perhaps so as not to be seen as taking sides or critiquing another novice teacher who is not his responsibility. Further, his disattending indicates a dispreference for responding within the complaint frame (Mandelbaum, 1991–1992), thus suggesting that he may not hear Lily's complaint as relevant to the work of the post-observation meeting. As a result, her beliefs remain unexamined and the conflict with Benjamin (which we see later resurfacing as an issue across all three post-observation meetings) unaddressed.

## Complaint 2: Peer Observer

As has already been somewhat evidenced in Excerpt 1, how a recipient responds to a complaint about a non-present third party may involve delicate interactional work, and this might be heightened in institutional contexts where the topic and relational aspects of a complaint may be particularly consequential. In Excerpt 2, from the beginning stages of the second post-observation meeting, Lily complains about her peer observer, a fellow TESOL student who visited her class and then produced many criticisms. This behavior is contrary to the general expectation that a peer observer, while offering constructive suggestions, should also consider the teacher's intentions and be a source of positive feedback and encouragement (Crookes, 2003). In response, we see how Luca disattends to the heart of the complaint by offering a series of more neutral readings of the transgressive behavior.

In Excerpt 2A, Lily initiates her complaint within an unsolicited expression of appreciation to Luca.

*Excerpt 2A.* (Lily - Debrief 2, 04:22–04:46)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

- 1 T: ((rustles cookie bag)) Yeah.=I would say- I >really wanted  
 2 to say< thank you.  
 3 M: ((nods))  
 4 T: Cuz when you are (0.4) (commenting) on my class you are  
 5 encouraging me (.) and it makes me feel ↑good  
 6 M: ((nods))  
 7 T: and I'm willing to take your sugges[tions (.)]  
 8 M: [((nods)) ]  
 9 T: cuz o:ne of my peer o(hh)bserver[s] made me really felt- feel  
 10 umm [((voices self, whiny)) ]  
 11 [I don't want to take her sugge:stio:ns.]  
 12 M: One of your [peer] observers  
 13 T: [Cuz-]  
 14 T: Yeah=  
 15 M: =°Yeah°

Lily begins in line 1 by expressing gratitude for Luca “encouraging” her (line 5) and then sets up a contrast to her experience with a peer observer. While a story about a peer observer may not be commonplace in the post-observation meeting, for Lily it is relevant (and thus tellable) here as a way, at least at the start, to highlight what she appreciates about Luca’s feedback style. The complaint sequence starts in lines 9–11 where Lily describes how the peer observer made her feel: “I don’t want to take her sugge:stio:ns.” This is produced with a whiny voice affect. This reporting of her feelings aligns with what Vásquez and Urzúa (2009) term a direct reported mental state—a thought or feeling rather than actual speech that is often used to highlight negative feelings or emotions. This practice appears on numerous occasions in Lily’s complaining. The whiny voice serves to acknowledge or even preempt a possible critique of whining about taking suggestions from a peer observer (which is a normal and expected part of the teaching practicum).

In Excerpt 2B, Lily develops the heart of the complaint, punctuated by minimal acknowledgement tokens and continuers from Luca.

*Excerpt 2B.* (Lily - Debrief 2, 04:47–05:03)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

- 16 T: Cuz every- for everything she didn’t underst[and, maybe]  
 17 M: [((nods)) ]  
 18 T: some of them I could improve=maybe some of them I have my  
 19 own rationale?  
 20 M: [Sure. ]  
 21 [((nods))]  
 22 T: And the:n [she just (.) °<picked everything (.) out that>  
 23 [((gestures as if picking randomly, repeatedly,  
 24 through line 25))]  
 25 she didn’t under[stand]]°=  
 26 M: [mmm ]  
 27 T: =and said [((voices peer, sharp)) ]  
 28 [NO: [this is wrong. This is wrong.]]  
 29 [((points on table twice)) ]  
 30 I felt [((voices self, resigned))]  
 31 [°oka:y° f(hh)ine huh heh ]

Here, Lily produces an account of why she didn’t want to take the peer observer’s suggestions. The account starts with framing the peer observer as focusing on “everything she didn’t understand” in line 16. Lily acknowledges that some of the points raised she “could improve” (line 18), that is, she could accept the critiques as valid, but contrasts this with how, for other suggestions, she has “her own rationale” (lines 18–19) or in other words, a valid justification for why she did what she did in the observed class. Lily’s perspective reflects a common theme in the practicum that there is not one correct way to teach, but rather a teacher should have a rationale for the teaching decisions that she makes. By claiming she does have her own rationale, Lily may be implying that the point raised by the peer observer has no real basis.

Lily continues to describe how the peer observer chose her feedback points. In lines 22–25, there is a clear negative valence to the description. The extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), “picked everything”, suggests an excessively negative and critical orientation to observing a peer (typically, student teachers and mentors are advised to focus on a few main points for development). In addition, Lily produces an accompanying gesture of *picking*, suggesting a random kind of gathering without thought rather than a systematic selection based on careful criteria. This is followed by an instance of stylized DRS (Günthner, 1997; Haakana, 2007), where she animates or voices what the peer observer said, “NO: this is wrong. This is wrong.” (line 28) with exaggerated prosody and a critical sharp tone. Rather than disputing this with the peer observer, in lines 30–31, Lily portrays herself as being resigned to and giving in to the negative feedback. Although Lily’s lexical choice of “oka:y f(hh)ine huh heh” suggests some alignment (Stivers, 2008) with the activity of giving and accepting feedback, her prosody and laughter tokens communicate resignation to the appearance of acceptance.

Luca responds in Excerpt 2C with a reformulation of Lily’s complaint.

*Excerpt 2C.* (Lily - Debrief 2, 05:04–05:28)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

- 32 M: So she: so a peer observer observed your class=  
 33 T: =mhm=  
 34 M: =and then gave you all the- >all the holes< that she s[a:w]  
 35 T: [huh]  
 36 huh yeah=  
 37 M: How did that ↑feel  
 38 T: I felt mmm (ts) when she talked about the first problem  
 39 M: ((nods))  
 40 T: I wanted to explain (.) [to her my rationale]  
 41 M: [((nods)) ]  
 42 M: Right.  
 43 T: but she [wouldn’t ] lis- listen  
 44 [((shakes head))]  
 45 T: [so later I just ↑oka:y ((nods)) oka:y]  
 46 M: [((nods)) ]  
 47 M: [Yeah]  
 48 T: [I ] fe:lt u:m I felt bad. [Mmm ] (hhh)m  
 49 M: [Yeah.]  
 50 T: hm ((nods, looks down at cookie bag)) ((continues rustling  
 51 cookie bag through line 57))

In lines 32–34, Luca offers a reformulation of the complaint that has a less blameworthy take on the transgressive behavior of the peer observer. First, the choice of “gave” is much more neutral than “picked everything (.) out” (line 22) in how the feedback was communicated. Second, the use of “>all the holes< that she sa:w” suggests that there may indeed have been issues from the perspective



of the observer worth critiquing in the lesson itself, especially when compared to Lily's formulation, "<picked everything (.) out that> she didn't understand" (lines 22–25). This is reminiscent of the finding by Ruusuvuori and Lindfors (2009) that a doctor can reformulate a patient complaint to suggest that there is shared responsibility between the patient and the non-present nurse she is complaining about. As a whole, Luca's initial response does not strongly affiliate with Lily's description of the peer observer's behavior.

In response to Luca's inquiry in line 37, "How did that feel", Lily produces a marked, that is, clausal form of response to the *wh*-question indicating that the question or forthcoming answer is not straightforward (Fox & Thompson, 2010). After a self-initiated self-repair, Lily offers an account for her feeling (yet to be named): She explicitly identifies the issue of the peer observer not listening to her attempt to explain her rationale, and she formulates this as a deliberate (and thus more blameworthy, per Drew, 1998) action by the peer observer. The transgressive behavior of not listening (line 43) is underscored by the shaking of Lily's head, and in line 48, she produces a clausal response, "I felt bad.", to Luca's inquiry. How then does Luca take up Lily's extensive and affect-charged complaint about the peer observer? His acknowledgement token, "Yeah." (line 49), is met with very minimal uptake by Lily who nods and looks down at a cookie bag she is holding (line 50). By Lily withholding a more substantive turn, Luca is obliged to take the floor in Excerpt 2D.

*Excerpt 2D.* (Lily - Debrief 2, 05:29–05:53)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

52 M: ↑Well (1.0) that person maybe means we:ll [right? ]  
 53 T: [((grimaces, shrugs))]  
 54 M: They wanna [(help you)]  
 55 T: [(I guess) ] she just didn't know how to (0.6) be  
 56 a peer observehh[huhr ]  
 57 M: [Yeah.]  
 58 T: °Yeah.° ((brings cookie bag up to mouth to eat))  
 59 M: ↑Well (1.0) ((shrugs shoulders)) maybe it gave her some kind  
 60 of insight for her class  
 61 T: wwhuh huh huh ((eating cookies))  
 62 M: Who knows.  
 63 T: mhmm ((eating cookies)) [((nods)) ]  
 64 M [Who knows.] °Yeah°. (1.0) Well that's  
 65 one benefit (.) of our conversations ((turn continues))

In line 52, Luca's "Well" preface followed by a one-second pause is an indicator that his utterance may be troublesome in some way. He continues on to ascribe possible good intentions to the peer observer, "that person maybe means we:ll right?". Lily produces no verbal response, but her non-verbal grimace and shoulder shrug embodies a distinct lack of agreement. She overlaps the second part of Luca's continued positive interpretation of the peer observer's intentions, "they wanna help you" (line 54), by making the negative observation "I guess she just didn't know how to (0.6) be a peer observehh[huhr]" (lines 55–56). By not even

waiting until a transition relevant point (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), her turn is hearable not only as interruptive but as displaying strong disagreement.

A similar pattern is repeated in lines 58–62. Lily takes a minimal turn and engages in eating her cookies, prompting Luca to take the floor and again he prefaces his utterance with a turn-initial “Well” and a one-second pause (line 59). Here, he shrugs his shoulders and produces another more neutral reading of the peer observer’s behavior. This time, however, it is an attempt to see the bright side of Lily’s negative experience, but rather unfortunately, the bright-side benefit accrues to the peer observer, “maybe it gave her some kind of insight for her class” (lines 59–60), a disaffiliative move (Ruusuvuori, 2013). Rather tellingly, Lily responds in line 61 with an incredulous laugh as she continues to eat her cookie. Eventually, from line 64, Luca moves to close down the complaint sequence by contrasting Lily’s unpleasant experience with her peer observer to the current interaction during which Luca will listen and allow Lily to explain her rationale for her decisions.

In considering Luca’s responses to Lily’s complaint about her peer observer, we can note that throughout his turns, he avoids any negative assessment of the peer observer. We wonder if this is because the peer observer is a student not within his realm of institutional responsibility. In any case, his turns are topically aligned but seem only partially affiliative at best, a form of subtle disattending to a complaint (Mandelbaum, 1991–1992). The effect here is amplified by the repeated lack of affiliation engendering repeated minimal response or uptake by Lily, indexing her apparent lack of satisfaction with Luca’s other-side tellings that give the benefit of the doubt to the target of her complaint. In ordinary conversation, complaints about absent parties make relevant affiliation from a participant who is present (Drew, 1998; Traverso, 2009) and may build closeness in the relationship. Although this may not be necessarily so in all institutional settings, we argue that by withholding strong affiliation or even empathy for Lily’s hurt feelings (Hepburn & Potter, 2007), Luca is not able to validate the emotions that Lily has expressed, or, perhaps more importantly, that it is acceptable for her as a teacher to have these types of feelings. Furthermore, in terms of reflection-for-action (Schön, 1983), there is a lost opportunity for discussing how a novice teacher could cope with receiving critical or negative feedback in the future (from fellow teachers, supervisors, students, or even Luca himself). All of these have potential ramifications for the teacher–mentor relationship.

### **Complaint 3: Practicum Course Workload**

Defending one’s competence is a key concern in the post-observation meeting (Box, 2017; Waring, 2013, 2014). Excerpt 3 shows how a complaint can be packaged as an account for when performance is less than satisfactory. This excerpt comes from early in the third meeting. Lily has previously raised task design as a problem from the class that Luca has observed. She produces a complaint about the practicum course she is currently taking and for which her teaching is a requirement. The complaint concerns the amount of work she has to complete each week for the practicum course, and it is used as an account for why Lily and her co-teacher Benjamin have insufficient time to adequately plan their lessons. In response, Luca displays a clear affiliative stance with aspects of Lily’s complaint,

but in doing so, does not pursue the issue of time management as relevant for critical reflection.

In Excerpt 3A, Lily initiates her complaint by describing the problem that she and her co-teacher have faced.

*Excerpt 3A.* (Lily - Debrief 3, 10:52–11:19)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily); Benjamin is Lily's co-teacher

- 1 T: And one problem is that (.) Benjamin and I: I ↑think from  
 2 f- the fifth or the sixth lesson (0.4)  
 3 M: ((nods))  
 4 T: uh:m (3.0) we just didn't have enough time to: plan a  
 5 lesson.  
 6 [(2.0) ]  
 7 M: [((nods))]  
 8 T: And I- I really want to complain about  
 9 [teaching journal thing.]  
 10 M: [((nods)) ]  
 11 T: It makes no sense=

The sequence begins in lines 1–5 with Lily introducing a problem that she and Benjamin face together: They have not had enough time to plan lessons. The pauses and hesitation marker “uh:m” possibly index the threat to Lily's competency as a teacher since adequate planning is an important part of teaching. Luca nods throughout a two-second pause, before Lily not only produces an explicit complaint, but names what she is doing as complaining in lines 8–9: “And I- I really want to complain about teaching journal thing.” The preceding pause and the self-initiated self-repair indicate a difficulty for Lily in producing the complaint. These features taken together may mark the possible misfittedness of doing complaining in the meeting. They may also index Lily's emotions and seriousness around the issue of the practicum course workload, a topic that may lie on the boundaries of legitimacy in relation to the central task of reflecting on one's teaching practice.

In line 11, Lily offers a forceful negative assessment with an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), claiming that the required teaching journal “makes no sense”. Following Excerpt 3A, Lily describes the overlap between her practicum course data collection assignments and the teaching journal, her loss of motivation for doing the course work and for her teaching, and an admission that she and Benjamin usually procrastinate their lesson planning until the day before they are due to teach. Then, in Excerpt 3B, Lily continues to describe their lesson planning process.

*Excerpt 3B.* (Lily - Debrief 3, 12:14–13:06)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

- 38 T: And then started to (ts) (1.2)  
 39 [putting things up on the lesson plan (0.4) paper]  
 40 [(gestures as if sticking things randomly) ]  
 41 M: Mhm

- 42 T: And (0.6) even if we (1.0) found out that: okay this (.)  
 43 might not work well [and we ] didn't have enough time to  
 44 M: [((nods))]  
 45 T: [change it.]  
 46 M: [((nods)) ]  
 47 M: [Mhm ]  
 48 [((nods))]  
 49 T: That's the thing.  
 50 M: [Mhm ]  
 51 [((nods))]  
 52 T: That's why we- we did not have a (.) good task design,  
 53 [°yeah°. ]  
 54 [((nods))]  
 55 M: [((nods))]  
 56 (2.0)  
 57 T: Maybe in a more ideal lesson would be (.) my coteacher and  
 58 I: work out a whole lesson ↑plan (.) and the:n (.) u:m (.)  
 59 and then after one day (.) we take another look at the  
 60 lesson plan and see if we could change something >making  
 61 some adjustment but then we don't have time to do that<.  
 62 (1.0)  
 63 T: We only w(hh)ant [to huh throw som(hh)- throw everything=  
 64 [((does throwing gesture with  
 65 =we h(h)ave in m(hh)ind .hhh in the lesson plan]=  
 66 alternate hands)) ]  
 67 =do it in class (.) and that's it.  
 68 M: ((nods))

In lines 38–40, Lily describes how she and Benjamin put their lesson plan together in a haphazard fashion, embodied by her gesture of randomly sticking notes to a wall. There are several pauses within this admission which is again a potential face-threat to one's competency. Nevertheless, by presenting these issues here, Lily frames the haphazard planning as being a consequence of the practicum course workload, and thus possibly mitigates the threat to her competency. Another form of mitigation is produced in lines 42–43, and 45, where Lily claims that they are able to recognize that there may be issues with the lesson plan, although they do not "have enough time" to make changes. This promotes a more positive moral stance: Rather than portraying herself and Benjamin as incompetent teachers who don't know how to plan, Lily claims they can recognize when a plan is problematic—they just didn't have time to fix it (because of the heavy workload of the practicum course). In line 49, the pre-closer, "that's the thing.", identifies not having enough time as being the issue, and this is explicitly unpacked in line 52: An insufficient amount of time is the reason why they did not have a good task design.

Luca overlaps Lily's nods with nods of his own, followed by a two-second pause (line 56). With this minimal uptake, Lily goes onto compare a "more ideal"

(line 57) situation where she and Benjamin could plan in advance and have time to work out any changes to their lesson plan, adding to her claims of competency just prior, by demonstrating that she is aware of good practice in terms of the planning process. After a short affiliative exchange about procrastination (not shown in the excerpt), Luca responds in Excerpt 3C to what he terms the “struggle” of balancing planning and other commitments.

*Excerpt 3C.* (Lily - Debrief 3, 13:28–14:16)

M = Mentor (Luca); T = Teacher (Lily)

- 84 M: That struggle is real, [uh that is a] (0.4) a real real  
 85 T: [ ((nods)) ]  
 86 M: challenge to uh figure out (.) how to plan for a class when  
 87 you have (.) other things to worry about like (.) teaching  
 88 journals and blogs to write and a project component to  
 89 work on: and readings to do: uh ((nods)) yeah.=  
 90 T: ((nods through M’s prior turn, nodding becomes more  
 91 vigorous as turn progresses))  
 92 T: =[°Mm hm°]  
 93 M: =[That’s] that- that struggle is real. And you’re  
 94 certainly ((shakes head)) not the only (.) uh student who  
 95 feels that way, right?  
 96 T: Huh huh huhm.  
 97 M: Um and if you feel a certain way (0.4) about the amount of  
 98 work in the course (.) uh that is obviously more than you  
 99 saying [it’s too much work. I’m lazy. ]  
 100 [((voices T as if complaining, nasal voice)) ]  
 101 >Y’know you’re not<. Um (1.0) Yeah I would say that  
 102 would be a valuable piece of information for (.) the:  
 103 curriculum developers of this program to ↑know (.) right?  
 104 T: ((nods))

In lines 84, and 86–89, Luca displays affiliation in the stance he takes to the issue of time management, with the claims “That struggle is real”, and “that is a (0.4) a real real challenge”. He also provides a preemptive to a possible negative reading of her complaint, that she is “lazy” (line 99) though this is done carefully via DRS to voice Lily’s possible perspective. Thus, although Lily has named her talk as complaining in line 8, Luca works against portraying her as a “complainer” (Edwards, 2005; Sacks, 1992, p. 359). It is noticeable however, that the focus of his strong affiliation is with the notion that too many commitments can be difficult to deal with rather than directly with Lily’s complaint target, that of the heavy load of the practicum course. Luca acknowledges several points: (a) that she is not the only student to feel that the workload is too heavy; (b) that, as noted, the complaint does not stem from laziness; and (c) that the “curriculum developers” (i.e., TESOL faculty; line 103) would benefit from knowing about the workload for this particular class. Nevertheless, he does not explicitly display a shared opinion that there is too much work. Thus, in a move similar to that evidenced by child

protection officers in Hepburn and Potter (2007), by displaying empathy with her struggles and frustrations, Luca seems to be able to build rapport with Lily (as evidenced, e.g., by her increasingly vigorous nods in lines 90–91), yet at the same time, he refrains from joining a complaint about a course at the institution that employs him as a mentor.

In Excerpt 3, we have shown how Lily's complaint about the teaching journal (and by extension, the course load) is packaged into an account for her poor task design. She acknowledges that her task design was lacking (a critique that could have been taken up by the mentor), but then shifts the locus of responsibility from her own competence in task design and her own time management to the practicum course workload. We suggest that Lily's complaint allows her to both acknowledge the poor design, and yet not take full personal responsibility for this. In other words, similar to the teachers in Waring's (2014) analysis, she defends her competence around a problematic issue by placing the blame on external factors.

We also note that although Lily does hypothesize about an alternative "ideal" situation, she does not ground this in an actual reality, nor does Luca take up the point about how to practically deal with a time/planning constraint in the future. Although one might argue that at the end of the semester, it may not be productive to spend time discussing this, it is, we suggest, an important consideration for a novice teacher's developing career and would have been a useful point to examine in the context of engaging in reflective practice.

### Discussion

At least for this novice teacher, complaints seem to be part of post-observation meetings. In describing three complaints made by a novice language teacher to her mentor over the course of three post-observation meetings, our analysis has shown the complexity of complaint sequences in their construction, in how they are responded to, and in what they accomplish. Ruusuvuori and Lindfors (2009) have suggested that complaints in institutional contexts can be formulated in a discreet manner within more prominent institutional tasks. This allows recipients to move onto other institutional business or take up an element that is related to institutional business and avoid having to fully affiliate or disaffiliate. In our data, we see numerous instances of this type of moving on in which the mentor disattends to the negativity of the complaint and thus blunts its interactional force (Mandelbaum, 1991–1992). However, we also see in our data that, although some complaints seem to follow this pattern, others suggest some degree of non-congruence in participant perspectives with respect to the potential (mis)fittedness of complaining in relation to the institutional task or context at hand. We have presented instances in which the teacher produces a complaint that is not discreet but is relatively explicit, showcasing many of the characteristics that have been identified as complaint implicative in past work: for example, extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), stylized DRS with exaggerated prosody (Günthner, 1997), and negative evaluations (Drew, 1998). When the mentor withholds strong affiliation, and disattends by producing more neutral or less blameworthy interpretations and/or invoking institutional business, what we see is very minimal uptake by the teacher and often a repeated complaint either later in the same meeting or in subsequent meetings.

In many ways, a lack of congruence between mentor and teacher perspectives is not surprising. First, a post-observation meeting as a speech event may be relatively unknown to novice teachers in terms of its institutional order, for example, its objectives, organizational procedures and routines, and the structure and normative patterns of interaction associated with each phase or institutional task (Copland, 2010; Wagner, 2015). Rather confusingly, its quasi-conversational character may camouflage the distinct objectives and tasks that the mentor orients to as routine or self-evident. Within our data, the mentor rarely responds or follows up substantively to topics or issues raised (whether in complaint form or not) in the first phase of the post-observation meeting, treating it as a space for *hearing what the teacher has to say*, though this is not explicitly verbalized. It is not until the second phase of the meeting when the mentor substantively discusses and gives advice on issues that he has identified as areas of strength or growth, and these do not necessarily match those raised by the teacher. Explication of the structure and interactional practices may increase the effectiveness and productivity of post-observation meetings.

Second, reflection is not purely an “individual ‘in the head’” process (Mann & Walsh, 2013, p. 296). In events such as post-observation meetings, reflection is also a collaborative and co-constructed interactional activity. Firstly, as a reviewer noted, the actual act of reflecting on one’s practice can be interactional in that it occurs within or through the conversation. Additionally, however, simply talking in the post-observation meeting space may not necessarily constitute what the mentor deems to be reflection. To successfully engage in reflection encompasses being seen to be *doing* reflection, in terms of both “process” and “content,” what Copland (2012) refers to as “legitimate talk” (p. 5). Thus, novice teachers must learn the language and interactive practices associated with this form of professional development. We speculate that for novice teachers who are also novices in doing reflection about their teaching, complaining may be an initial first step—but may not be recognized by the mentor as a legitimate way of *doing* reflection. From our own experience, we suggest that complaining is not a normative constituent of professionalism. We are not claiming that experienced and expert teachers do not complain: Rather, it strikes us as unlikely that such teachers would engage in complaining in interactional spaces identified for formal professional development in which one’s professional competency is under the spotlight. This, of course, is open to empirical investigation.

If mentors do not typically recognize complaints as part of reflective practice—perhaps in part due to their negative valence and their non-normative presence within professional development contexts—complaints may present a challenge for mentors in how they should respond. How the mentor affiliates and attends—or not—to the complaint seems to vary according to the specific contextual factors at play. For example, we see evidence for a strong interplay between complaint topic and the mentor’s institutional role(s). In refraining from joining negative evaluations of a co-teacher, a peer observer, or the workload of a practicum class/instructor, the mentor insulates his own professional competence as someone who is cognizant of his institutional duties and responsibilities: A co-teacher, peer observer, and instructor are outside his professional realm, and how they perform in their respective roles is not for him to evaluate as a mentor. This is similar to the finding in Heinemann (2009) that the institutional relationship has a clear bearing on if and/or how complaints can be developed. Although relationships

between complaint recipient and complaint topic can also be relevant in everyday complaints (e.g., Drew, 1998), we suggest that complaints made in institutional settings are likely to be heavily impacted by the various institutional and non-institutional roles that participants embody.

Examining complaints through the lens of morality may add to our understanding of the issues novice teachers orient to in talk about their teaching. Morality—that is, evaluations of “‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’” (Drew, 1998, p. 295)—is constituted in interaction through the storyteller’s portrayal of specific actions and behaviors. In our data, for example, the teacher’s complaints simultaneously portray herself as agentive and responsible and her antagonists as dismissive, unwilling to listen, and burdensome; through her telling of their “transgressions” (Drew, 1998, p. 312), she displays her own pedagogical values. Thus, while the teacher does display some concern with defending her competence (Waring, 2014), she also repeatedly provides evidence that she is doing what she believes a good teacher should do (i.e., she defends her morality). We propose that the issue of morality may be even more relevant than competence for novice teachers: The very nature of novice-ness, after all, affords some space for struggle and growth. Even novice teachers, however, work to portray themselves as enacting the moral values they hold about teaching practice (cf. Lewis, 2018).

### Implications

Our research is directed not only by our scholarly interest in interaction but by our professional interests in SLTE. We believe that by focusing attention on the linguistic and interactional practices that participants are only tacitly aware of (in terms of their use and impact), studies such as ours, and more generally, CA and narrative analysis as research tools have the potential to contribute to “informed professional action, helping professionals to deepen their understanding and develop new competencies” (Richards, 2005, p. 6).

We have shown through our analysis of one teacher’s complaints that even though complaints may not be immediately hearable as relevant to the interactional goals of the post-observation meeting, they can surface important issues, and as such, could be mobilized to support the teacher’s developing reflective practice, provide them with advice or guidance, and/or help them understand and manage their emotional responses. Throughout the excerpts described here, the beliefs and challenges presented by the teacher’s complaints largely do not get taken up by her mentor, which we suggest may represent missed opportunities. This is certainly an easier observation for us to make with the hindsight of transcription and analysis than for mentors to recognize *in situ* as a teacher’s complaint unfolds. However, we believe that awareness of the potential relevance of teachers’ complaints may help mentors—and other teacher educators—learn to see and respond to them in ways that further the institutional task of the post-observation meeting—and SLTE in general.

As teacher educators, hearing novice teachers’ complaints *as simply complaints* may predispose us to hear and treat them as not relevant to reflective practice and teacher learning. This may be related to the negativity inherent in doing complaining; we may naturally try to downplay the negatives and redirect to a positive bright side telling or more neutral professional topics. In doing so, however, we likely



also downplay—or outright ignore—the emotional aspects raised by the complaint (e.g., of a condescending peer observer or frustration with a course’s workload). As teacher educators, our institutional role provides pressure to not join in complaining or offer a similar negative assessment of the complaint topic, an issue also faced by professionals in other institutional settings (Hepburn & Potter, 2007; Ruusuvuori, 2013). We suggest, though, that novice teachers may benefit from responses that display empathy by demonstrating understanding of *their* interpretation of and response to events (Hepburn & Potter, 2007; Ruusuvuori, 2013; Suchman, Markakis, Beckman, & Frankel, 1997). Empathetic responses, such as *I can hear that this upsets you*, allow us to “attend to [the other’s] distress” without “any commitment to the factuality of [their] account” (Hepburn & Potter, 2007, p. 108), as the mentor does partially in Excerpt 3. Without such interactional displays of empathy, novice teachers may feel that educators do not understand their challenges, and our data suggests that the same complaints (e.g., about the frustrating co-teacher) may re-appear repeatedly and that the comments the mentor does offer may not necessarily be accepted by the teacher (e.g., as evidenced by the laughter and cookie-eating in Excerpt 2). Responding to the emotion in complaints may also help us guide novice teachers toward making sense of the “emotional practice” of teaching (Meyer, 2009, p. 80), and recognizing the issues their complaints raise could benefit novice teachers’ developing reflective practice. Learning to hear complaints *as relevant to novice teacher learning* may ultimately enrich our approach to teacher education.

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## Appendix

### Transcript Conventions

[word]	overlapping speech or speech/ action
((word))	non-speech action
( ) or (word)	unintelligibility or uncertainty about speech
::	prolongation of the preceding sound
=	latching (no break/ gap)
.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	continuing intonation
↓	falling pitch
↑	rising pitch
(#. #)	a pause of the length in parentheses
(.)	a micro-pause (less than 0.2 seconds)
°word°	speech that is quieter than the surrounding speech
WORD	speech that is louder than the surrounding speech
>word<	speech that is quicker than the surrounding speech
<word>	speech that is slower than the surrounding speech
<u>word</u>	speech that is stressed
wo-	abrupt cut-off
huh heh	laughter particles
.hh	audible in-breath
hh	audible out-breath