FOUR

Teacher Misbehaviors

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be a changed person in the following ways:

1. You should be able to explain what teacher misbehaviors are

2. You should be able to articulate six categories of teacher misbehaviors

3. You should be able to articulate the benefits of student feedback

4. You should be able to explain how to use protection motivation theory to enhance student feedback

5. You should be able to name five U.S. presidents and something special they did for the country (Why not? History is important too!)

Teachers Misbehaviors

When you think about the tools you have at your disposal, I bet you mostly think about the positive things you can do with those objects. A car, for example, helps you get from one place to another without having to use your feet and your legs to cover great distances. Cars are, indeed, a positive presence in your life because they allow you to show up to work, class, or even social events by simply sitting in a seat and pressing your foot on a gas pedal. This is truly amazing—if there were no cars and we all had to walk everywhere, the world would certainly seem like a much bigger, and sweatier, place. What about knives? We all have those tools in our kitchens, right? Knives are great because they help you slice objects that are hard to otherwise split open, and they allow you to use minimal force to achieve a desired outcome like having pieces of tomatoes, instead of whole tomatoes, on a turkey sandwich. Hammers are tools with positive uses too. If you happen to own a hammer, you know that it is a very useful tool for achieving the goal of getting one thing to stick into something else. Can you imagine using your hand to try to punch a nail into the wall just so you can hang your favorite picture of Justin Bieber in your bedroom? For all but the most accomplished karate masters, this would be an impossible feat to accomplish.

Although the way I wrote about cars, knives, and hammers is obviously positive, the thing about tools is that, in reality, they are neither inherently positive nor negative. In other words, despite the fact that most of us tend to see the objects I wrote about as being beneficial in our lives, if they are put to use in a manner that leads to destruction, the things we perceive as being helpful can turn out to be downright dangerous. As I am sure you are aware, hammers, knives, and cars can harm people in a variety of ways, and in some cases they can even be deadly objects. Of course, the same is true for just about any tool you can think of. The reason I bring all this up is because it is important to point out that the things we have at our disposal are really only good or bad to the extent that we use them for good or bad purposes. Knives, for example, are neither good nor bad: It is how we decide to use those knives that make the outcomes we experience with them as either good or bad.

If you understand the idea that tools have the potential to be good and bad, then you will realize that, as a tool for student instruction, the same thing goes for you as a teacher. That said, although many of the things we do as teachers are beneficial for students' development, the fact of the matter is that instructors do not always teach their classes in ways that help students learn. Even worse, teachers often conduct themselves in a manner that is counterproductive to students' academic success (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2016). Thus, although teachers have the potential to help students in important ways, if we engage in behaviors that are counterproductive to student learning, then we have the potential to harm them as well.

At this point, you may be thinking that teachers rarely do things to disrupt student learning. In reality, research on the subject suggests the opposite: According to Goodboy (2011a), students are frequently dissatisfied with their instructors. Other researchers support this claim and note that only a small portion of students report never having experienced conflict with their instructors (Harrison, 2007; Tantleff-Dunn, Dunn, & Gokee, 2002). What does this mean? Quite simply, it means we can *all* do something to improve our instruction. Never heard a complaint from your students? That doesn't mean much to me. Just because you don't hear from your students doesn't mean they are satisfied with their educational experiences. In fact, an important idea to keep in mind when it comes to student satisfaction is that no news is *not* necessarily good news; most students who experience dissatisfaction in their classes never complain to their instructors (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013).

In this section of the book, we are interested in students' capacity to learn the material we present in the classroom. But, instead of seeing students as the sole owners of their educational capacities, this chapter was designed to help you understand *your* role as it pertains to making learning possible, or impossible. Just as the tools we own can be linked to negative outcomes if used incorrectly, this chapter was written to help you realize that the things you do as a teacher can be detrimental to student learning if you behave inappropriately (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991).

Specifically, this chapter was written to articulate what we can do as instructors to make sure that our behaviors do not negatively affect student learning. To do this, we will look at the variety of ways students

report that teachers can misbehave. After we cover the various ways that you can inhibit student achievement, we will discuss an important method for gathering information regarding your teaching practices that might help you avoid some of these detrimental behaviors. After all, if you never learn about how your students perceive the effectiveness of your instruction, you might never know if you are doing what it takes to promote their learning.

Teacher Misbehaviors

Teacher misbehaviors can stem from a variety of instructional activities and are defined simply as behaviors that "interfere with instruction and thus, learning" (Kearney et al., 1991, p. 310). When you first read this definition, you might wonder if these types of behaviors even happen in the classroom at all. This mindset is normal. Researchers mostly focus on the constructive impact teachers have on students and often fail to think about the ineffective or destructive things teachers do in their classrooms (Kearney et al., 1991; Zhang, 2007). I think the same thing is true for us as instructors: Most of the time we see ourselves as instrumental to student learning and we often fail to acknowledge the possibility that our behaviors can be detrimental to students' academic success. In fact, data gathered by Joan Gorham and Diane Millette (1997) indicates that this way of thinking is pervasive. According to these researchers, teachers seem to underestimate the extent to which their misbehaviors can be demotivating. But, what do students think? Compare teachers' ways of thinking to students' interpretations of their classroom experiences. When asked to report reasons for being demotivated in class, the majority of students state that these reasons stem largely from their instructors' misbehaviors including doing things like presenting course material unenthusiastically, failing to demonstrate an interest in students, and failing to structure class in a meaningful fashion (Christophel & Gorham, 1995). Of course, these are just a few of the things teachers can do to interfere with student learning.

So what? Teachers misbehave. Why should you care? The reason you should care is because the way instructors interact with their students can affect how students think and behave in the classroom. Thus, it should be no surprise to learn that misbehaviors are linked to a variety

of undesirable outcomes and student problems (Kearney et al., 1991). For example, teacher misbehaviors are associated with a reduction in students' motivation to learn (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009; Zhang, 2007), reduced student interest in class (Broeckelman-Post et al., 2016), lower positive affect, lower levels of perceived teacher credibility including teachers' competence, trustworthiness and caring (Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006), and lower participation and communication satisfaction (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009). In a nutshell, teachers who misbehave decimate student motivation in the classroom and reduce the potential for developing a sense of relatedness with their students. Both of these factors are important contributors to student success. Thus, by misbehaving, instructors ultimately reduce students' capacity to do well in their academic pursuits.

At this point, you might be thinking that perhaps instructors' misbehaviors are unintentional and that students are likely to forgive teaching problems in class. Maybe. But, the research I have read points more toward the conclusion of "maybe not." According to Kelsey, Kearney, Plax, Allen, and Ritter (2004), students tend to perceive teacher misbehaviors as stemming from internal causes (i.e., misbehaviors are typically seen as intentional) as opposed to external causes such as accidents or mistakes, there being good reasons to misbehave, or circumstances beyond the teacher's control. In other words, students tend not to think of teachers' (potentially valid) reasons for misbehaving. Instead, they are more likely to interpret misbehaviors as a function of teachers' inability to teach well. As a result, students often become disenfranchised with their learning experiences in classes where teachers misbehave. But, you don't have to take my word for it; take a look at some of the sentiments collected from students by Kelsey et al.'s (2004, p. 53) study on the subject:

► "How can she expect me to learn when she's not motivated to teach me?"
► "He conveys the material in a pointless, boring manner that the students can't understand."
► "She has her own views and is not willing to be open minded to what her students think. There's no way for me to communicate my opinion without her saying that it is wrong."

Poor students! We have all had teachers who made us feel the way these unfortunate students felt, and I am sure you will agree that these were terrible experiences. Based on what we have just seen then, it is important that we, as instructors, work hard to make sure that we do not engage in behaviors that students perceive to be harmful to their learning.

So, what are the behaviors we can potentially engage in that lead to detriments in student learning? Perhaps we should ask the people who are in the best position to tell us—our students. In fact, this is exactly what Pat Kearney and her colleagues (Kearney et al., 1991) did in their seminal study on the subject. This is the same thing that Alan Goodboy and Scott Myers (Goodboy & Myers, 2015) did more than two decades later. Essentially, in these studies students were asked to "think back over their college career and to recall specific instances where teachers had said or done something that had irritated, demotivated, or substantially distracted them in an aversive way during a course" (Kearney et al., 1991, p. 313). Despite the list of potential problems being almost limitless (indeed, in their original study, Kearney and her colleagues catalogued a total of 1,762 descriptions of teacher misbehaviors), researchers studying the topic have condensed potential misbehaviors to a core set of categories. Although various researchers label and organize misbehaviors in a variety of ways, below I report a concise definition of 31 potential misbehaviors based on my interpretation of Kearney et al.'s original classification and more recent studies of teacher misbehaviors (e.g., Goodboy & Myers, 2015; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1996).

The first category of teacher misbehaviors refers to the ability to manage time appropriately and reflects teachers' *punctuality and absenteeism.* The specific misbehaviors in this category include:

- ► Being absent (e.g., canceling class without notifying students)
- ► Being tardy (e.g., showing up late without a good reason)
- ► Keeping students over time (e.g., keeping class late or starting before class is supposed to begin)
- ► Early dismissal (e.g., dismissing class early or rushing through the material in an attempt to finish quickly)

The second category of misbehaviors refers to how teachers manage their class resources and reflects the ways instructors *organize and structure course material.* Specific misbehaviors in this category include:

- ► Straying from the subject matter (e.g., wasting class time with tangential personal opinions)
- ► Confusing and unclear lectures/course policies (e.g., having unclear classroom expectations, providing unclear assignments, presenting poorly organized lectures)
- ► Being unprepared and disorganized (e.g., failing to adequately prepare for class, forgetting important course dates)
- ► Deviating from the syllabus (e.g., getting behind schedule, changing course requirements, failing to use assigned books, requiring unnecessary expenses)
- ► Pointless assignments (e.g., asking students to complete work irrelevant to course objectives)
- ► Poor feedback habits (e.g., taking an extraordinary amount of time to provide feedback on exams and papers, failing to provide meaningful feedback on exams and assignments)

The third category of misbehaviors refers to the way teachers treat their students and reflects the extent to which instructors are *insensitive to students as individuals.* Misbehaviors in this category include:

- ► Being sarcastic and using putdowns (e.g., being willing to embarrass or insult students)
- ► Being verbally abusive (e.g., intimidating students, yelling at students)
- ► Having unreasonable/arbitrary rules (e.g., being inflexible, failing to see student perspectives for late work or the need for breaks during 3-hour classes, for example)
- ► Engaging in sexual harassment (e.g., flirting with individuals or making sexual comments in class)
- ► Displaying a negative personality (e.g., acting selfish, showing up to class moody, looking down on students, telling students their opinions are wrong while the instructor's are right)
- ► Having double standards (e.g., doing things in class like checking text messages that he/she asks students not to do)

The fourth category of misbehaviors reflects teachers' willingness to help students both inside and outside of class. This category relates to *unavailability* and includes misbehaviors like:

► Being unresponsive to student questions (e.g., becoming annoyed when students ask for more information or for information to be repeated)
► Being apathetic to students (e.g., failing to learn students' names, failing to acknowledge students' perspectives)
► Being inaccessible outside of class (e.g., being difficult to access outside of regular class time, failing to respond to student e-mails)

The fifth category of misbehaviors refers to the way teachers evaluate students and reflects ambiguous, temperamental, or inconsistent grading. This category is referred to as *unfair student evaluation* and includes misbehaviors such as:

► Unfair testing (e.g., using ambiguous exam questions, failing to review for exams)
► Unfair grading (e.g., refusing to assign 'A's, not having a predetermined grading rubric)
► Showing favoritism or prejudice (e.g., demonstrating preferential treatment to certain individuals)

Finally, the sixth category of misbehaviors refers to the way information is presented in class and is labeled *poor presentation*. This category includes misbehaviors such as:

► Presenting boring lectures (e.g., lacking enthusiasm and variety when delivering information, presenting information without nonverbal immediacy)
► Information overload (e.g., assigning too much work, failing to pace lectures appropriately, having unrealistic expectations, asking too much of students)
► Information underload (e.g., making the course too easy, failing to teach by showing movies instead of lecturing, for example)

> ► Not knowing the subject matter (e.g., providing outdated material, not being able to answer student questions)
>
> ► Having a foreign or regional accent (e.g., speaking in a manner that makes understanding difficult)
>
> ► Speaking with inappropriate volume (e.g., speaking in a manner that makes it difficult to listen)
>
> ► Using bad grammar/spelling (e.g., having poor handwriting, poor English skills)
>
> ► Having a negative personal appearance (e.g., having a sloppy demeanor, behaving in an unprofessional manner like acting crude or too familiar)
>
> ► Failing to use technology (e.g., using outdated delivery methods)

As I noted, the classification system and the six categories reported here are my own interpretation of Kearney et al.'s (1991) original taxonomy (from their Study 1) together with my reading of some of the more recent studies of teacher misbehaviors. That said, there are other ways to classify these behaviors as well (see Kearney et al., 1991, Study 2) including breaking misbehaviors into three categories of: incompetence (e.g., confusing lectures, boring lectures, information overload), offensiveness (e.g., sarcasm, sexual harassment), and indolence (e.g., being absent, deviating from the syllabus). Another classification system (see Goodboy & Myers, 2015) also includes three categories including: antagonism (e.g., yelling at students, discriminating against students), lectures (e.g., lectures in a dry manner, speaks too quickly), and articulation (e.g., has an accent, does not speak English well). The reason I chose to use the categorization system I did is because doing so preserves the full range of misbehaviors for your perusal; the other categorization systems reduce the number of misbehaviors to 21 (Kearney et al., 1991) or to just 16 (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). In my opinion, it is important to be aware of all the ways you might potentially upset your students throughout the course of your time together.

As you have almost certainly concluded, the list of potential teacher misbehaviors is long. That said, it is important to be able to recognize all the ways we can work against our goal of helping students. Still, there are some behaviors that students report as occurring more often than

others, and these may be particularly important to keep an eye out for. For example, Kearney and her colleagues (1991) report that the top five most frequently cited misbehaviors include: boring lectures, straying from the subject matter, unfair testing, unclear lectures, and returning students' work back late. Similarly, some two decades later, Alan Goodboy and Scott Myers (2015) report that the five most frequently cited instructor misbehaviors include: having boring lectures, deviating from the syllabus, unfair grading, lack of technology, and information overload. These behaviors are comparable to the top five most frequently reported misbehaviors articulated by students across American, German, Japanese, and Chinese classrooms including: information overload, boring lectures, straying from the subject, keeping students overtime, and early dismissal (Zhang, 2007).

After reading this section, you now know what instructor misbehaviors are, why they are bad, and you have an idea of the specific things you can do that are interpreted by students as being demotivating, distracting, and detrimental to learning. Having learned all of this, the next step is to try to avoid engaging in these behaviors in class. And how do you do that? If you ask me, the best thing to do is to understand how your students experience your teaching. Only by understanding students' perspectives can we hope to know whether or not we are engaging in behaviors that are known to be harmful to their educational experiences. To learn about how we can gather this information, let's turn to a discussion of student feedback.

Student Feedback

I recently read a book by Adam Grant (2016) titled *Originals* where the author explains how people can work to strategically make a difference in the lives and experiences of other individuals. In one chapter of this book, Grant writes about an organization, Bridgewater Associates, that has been consistently ranked as having an outstanding company culture. This organization is in the business of handling financial investments and, according to Grant, is an exemplar of outstanding company principles. Chief among these principles, Grant notes, is Bridgewater's dedication to the promotion and expression of what the author calls original ideas. Essentially, expressing original ideas in this context refers to air-

ing concerns about the way the company is run and communicating about practices that employees find to be counterproductive to the mission of the organization. Put succinctly, Grant writes that one of the reasons Bridgewater is so successful is because it promotes a culture where ideas, both complimentary and antagonistic, are discussed openly and where people use these ideas to change the organization into a more productive unit. In essence, the folks at Bridgewater see employee feedback as an important source of information with the potential to help correct mistakes and make operations more efficient.

When I read about the people at Bridgewater, I remember thinking to myself that it makes sense for an organization to promote the sharing of information, even—and especially—information that might reflect complaints or problems with the way things are run. This is because information, both the good and perhaps more importantly the bad, can help the people in charge determine what is working and what is not. Instead of crossing their fingers and hoping that their actions lead to organizational success, the people at Bridgewater Associates value both positive and negative feedback because they realize it can help them determine how their behaviors are being translated into results.

From an organizational perspective, gathering information about how to improve makes sense. Specifically, by determining what a company is doing wrong, the people in charge can better position themselves to streamline their business practices to facilitate success. This may explain why researchers examining employee-employer interactions typically interpret the provision of critical feedback from employees to employers as constructive attempts to communicate the need for change (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). Similarly, in the consumer literature, customer complaining is considered beneficial because the information contained in these messages provides retailers with the opportunity to address and repair various problems (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000; Bolkan, 2015). Of course, the same is true in college classrooms. Although asking students for feedback regarding problematic teaching practices may seem like something instructors would want to avoid as a way of protecting their face (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012), similar to organizational settings, student feedback should be considered an important source of information with the potential to help instructors

determine what they can do to best facilitate learning (e.g., Bolkan & Goodoby, 2013). After all, if we want to reduce our ineffective teaching behaviors it seems reasonable to seek help from the people who are in the best position to report on these activities.

In the instructional communication literature, students' provision of feedback regarding problematic teaching practices is called rhetorical dissent and is defined by Goodboy (2011a) as communication for the purposes of correcting a perceived wrongdoing. Because these messages provide teachers with the opportunity to fix various classroom problems, communicating rhetorical dissent to instructors should be thought of as a constructive process of information sharing (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013). Why? Because the more students are willing to speak up about the problems they experience in class, the better we should be able to rectify these issues for (1) the students articulating their problems and for (2) future students who might also experience dissatisfaction as a result of the same ineffective teaching behaviors (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2016).

Unfortunately, most people do not think of rhetorical dissent in such a positive manner. For example, in my experience, many teachers don't want to know about what their students think regarding their instruction and they often report that student complaints are unjustified or reflect the sentiments of students who are only interested in their grades. These conclusions are simply not true. First, researchers note that when it comes to dissent, the principle drivers for this type of communication stem from students' perceptions of ineffective teaching (Goodboy & Martin, 2014). That said, this type of communication seems pretty justified to me. Second, as opposed to being interested in their grades, students who express rhetorical dissent have been found to be particularly interested in their learning (Goodboy & Frisby, 2014). In my opinion, teachers who resist student feedback have adopted a performance avoidance mindset and are unwilling to struggle with the process of getting better at teaching because they are afraid of getting their feelings hurt. Try not to think like this. As teachers, our job is to help students learn to the best of their abilities and, although their feedback regarding our attempts at achieving this goal may be critical, this information is crucial to our development as successful educators.

Okay, having read the foregoing, we might be on the same page regarding the importance of soliciting candid feedback from students. This is good news. The bad news, however, is that most students who experience dissatisfaction in class do not complain to their instructors (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013). In other words, the people who have the best information regarding what you can do to improve your instruction are usually not very likely to share it with you. And for good reason; according to some of the research I conducted, students tend to be strategic with their complaints and will not provide critical feedback to instructors if (1) they do not see problems as egregious enough to warrant speaking up, (2) they do not perceive classroom problems as fixable, or (3) they perceive that there will be costs associated with articulating their concerns (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2016).

So what do these students do instead? Instead of speaking up to their teachers, students who are dissatisfied with their instruction tend to engage in a variety of alternative responses including doing nothing (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013; Horan, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010), airing their grievances to friends or classmates (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013; Goodboy, 2011a, 2011b), talking to their advisors, addressing the issue with the chair of the department or dean of the college, venting on course evaluations, or dropping the class (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013; Goodboy, 2011a). Although some of these responses may be beneficial insofar as they help lead to catharsis (e.g., venting to others) or alert supervising individuals to problems in their subordinates' classrooms (e.g., speaking with the chair), others may prove to be maladaptive if they do not lead to positive outcomes.

So where does this leave us? In this section, we learned that it is important for students to voice their discontent in order to help us identify our potential misbehaviors. However, we also learned that students are not likely to speak up because of a variety of concerns. That said, it makes sense that if we want our students to come to us with information regarding what we can do to improve our instruction, we should focus on these concerns in an attempt to alleviate them. In order to learn how to do that, we'll turn to a discussion of protection motivation theory.

Protection motivation

Protection motivation theory was created as a way to help explain the relationship between fear appeals and changes in people's attitudes and behaviors (Maddux & Rogers, 1983; Rogers 1975, 1983; Rogers & Mewborn, 1976). In the last chapter (Chapter 3), we learned about two components of this theory—self-efficacy and response efficacy—and how they relate to students' achievement goal orientations. In this chapter, we will discuss the idea of protection motivation a bit more fully and relate this notion to helping students provide feedback in our classrooms.

Proponents of protection motivation theory suggest that for fear appeals to lead to adaptive behavior, messages need to address five essential ideas. Put in the context of smoking cessation, this means that there are five things communicators need to be concerned with to ensure that others actually stop smoking as opposed to simply ignoring the message. Two of these ideas include the severity of the problem and a person's perceived vulnerability to the problem. Severity refers to the perceived seriousness of the threat, and vulnerability refers to how much the threat is perceived to affect someone personally (Norman, Boer, & Seydel, 2005). Severity and vulnerability combine to create what scholars call *threat appraisal*. The third and fourth ideas in protection motivation theory include self-efficacy and response efficacy. You already know about these, but to recap, self-efficacy refers to a person's perceptions of their ability to perform a protective behavior and response efficacy is concerned with the perceived effectiveness of a behavior for addressing a threat (Norman et al., 2005). Self-efficacy and response efficacy combine to create a person's *coping appraisal*. Finally, the fifth idea to consider regarding fear appeals refers to the *costs* associated with enacting protective behaviors.

Using the smoking example that we started, researchers conclude that when listening to a persuasive message, people are likely to be motivated to stop smoking (as opposed to simply ignoring the message) to the extent that they believe smoking is a threat because it is harmful (i.e., severity) and because the harms of smoking will actually happen to them (i.e., vulnerability). Next, if the threat related to smoking can be made salient for individuals, people are likely to change their behavior

in a positive manner (i.e., stopping smoking) to the extent that they believe they can cope by actually quitting smoking (i.e., self-efficacy) and to the extent that they believe stopping smoking will, in fact, lead to better health (i.e., response efficacy). Of course, all of this happens in the context of the perceived costs related to stopping smoking. The more it costs people to stop smoking (e.g., withdrawal pains, loss of friendships, etc.), the less likely they are to do so.

At this point, you might be wondering why we are talking about smoking cessation and fear appeals in a book about effective instruction. The reason I brought up protection motivation theory is because the components that have been found to influence people's decisions to engage in healthy behaviors have also been found to predict a variety of other behaviors as well; importantly, one of these behaviors includes speaking with instructors when students experience dissatisfaction in class (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2016). Specifically, as it pertains to the components of protection motivation theory, we know that students are more likely to communicate their discontent to teachers with the hopes of promoting positive change to the extent that the problems they experience are highly threatening, they believe they can cope with the problems, and the costs of communicating about the issues are low.

In reality, the relationships between the these variables are a little more complicated (see Bolkan & Goodboy, 2016). In particular, under conditions of low costs, we know that students are more likely to voice their discontent when the perceived threat related to classroom problems is high (i.e., the severity of the problem and the impact it has on students is perceived to be high). When costs are low, students' perceptions of their ability to cope (i.e., their perceptions regarding whether or not they can communicate the feedback and if it would make a difference in their situations) seem not to affect their decisions. On the other hand, under conditions of relatively high perceived costs (e.g., discomfort associated with providing feedback to an instructor, threat of punishment for speaking up about negative classroom experiences), students are most likely to speak up when both the perceived threat of classroom problems is high *and* when they believe that speaking up will lead to positive change. Put simply, when the costs of speaking up are perceived to be low, students are likely to communicate feedback to their instructors to the extent that they perceive problems to be a big deal.

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However, when the costs of speaking up are perceived to be high, students are likely to voice their concerns only if their issues are perceived to be a big deal and if they think that a solution will be forthcoming.

Although the foregoing information has several working components, the conclusion we should draw from it all is quite simple: If you want to gather information regarding whether or not your students think you are doing a good job teaching, you need to work on reducing the costs of providing feedback, increasing the perceived effectiveness of providing feedback, and helping students to see that no problem is too small to bring to your attention. These three aspects of students' experiences have been shown to be important predictors of students' decisions to voice their discontent and therefore they should be the focus of your efforts to solicit meaningful feedback. That said, let's talk about what you can do to influence each of these ideas.

Reducing costs

Bang for your buck, I think the best thing you can do to help facilitate students' honest feedback regarding your teaching behaviors is to reduce the costs associated with their providing it. These costs typically include perceptions that (1) providing feedback to instructors would be perceived as rude, stressful, uncomfortable, or nerve-racking. These costs also include perceptions that (2) it will take unnecessary time or effort to make a complaint. In addition, these costs include perceptions that (3) communicating feedback to instructors would make teachers mad, hold a grudge, or otherwise think negatively of the student. In my opinion, these costs represent legitimate concerns—especially that last one! Although some teachers might scoff at the idea of retaliating against students in such a way, some of my own research points to the conclusion that instructors may think of, and potentially treat, students differently depending on how they feel toward specific individuals (e.g., Bolkan & Holmgren, 2012). Yikes!

Now that you know some of the costs associated with communicating feedback in an academic environment, what can you do to eliminate these? I think the best way to do this is to ask for anonymous feedback and to do so in class. Asking for information in this manner serves two purposes. First, by keeping the feedback anonymous, students might

feel more comfortable being honest about their experiences because the threat of individual retaliation is diminished. Moreover, there is no need for an awkward or uncomfortable meeting where students must communicate their discontent directly to an instructor's face.

Second, asking for feedback in class makes it easy for students to complete the assessment. Instead of asking them to complete a survey at home, on their own time, students can simply use their time in class to provide the feedback you seek. Making it easy to offer feedback eliminates the cost of preparing comments on their own and, importantly, this should increase the likelihood that students provide the information you desire. Not to mention, making the provision of feedback easy is linked to the notion of *procedural justice* (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran, 1998), which, in rhetorical dissent episodes, has been associated with students' communication satisfaction and motivation in class (Holmgren & Bolkan, 2014).

Having said the above, one way to help reduce the costs of providing feedback is to solicit quantitative feedback from your students. This is because asking for quantitative feedback only requires that students circle (or underline) a number to indicate their sentiments which makes the provision of feedback easier and might also eliminate students' fears of your recognizing their handwriting. Knowing this, one way to collect quantitative data from your students is to make an informal version of your institution's teacher evaluation form and to ask students to rate you just as they will at the end of the semester. Doing this will help you get a handle on classroom problems during the semester and may allow you to correct for any teaching misbehaviors before they become a part of your permanent record. Alternatively, why not list the specific misbehaviors noted in this chapter and ask students to rate, on say a scale of 1 to 7, the extent to which they perceive you engaging in these behaviors in class? Obviously, if you are behaving in ways that students perceive to be problematic, asking students for this type of information will make your engagement in negative teaching practices readily apparent.

In addition to asking for feedback in a manner that reduces the costs associated with its provision, it is critical that you demonstrate your openness to student comments so your pupils perceive you as someone who is not threatened by, and who will not react negatively to, constructive criticism. To do this, it is important that

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you create an atmosphere of politeness and open-mindedness in class. One way to achieve this goal may lie in the way you handle classroom discussions; if students ask questions in class or provide opinions that differ from yours, it may be wise to react in a manner that demonstrates respect for others' viewpoints. Why? Well, there are a variety of reasons to react in the fashion just described. But, as it pertains to soliciting feedback, if students perceive you as being open to alternative beliefs, they may be more likely to provide you with information regarding their perceptions of your teaching effectiveness. What I am promoting here is the notion of demonstrating *interpersonal justice,* which refers to showing respect, empathy, and politeness in the face of alternative viewpoints and, in response to constructive criticism, has been associated with positive outcomes such as commitment and trust in organizational settings (e.g., Tax et al., 1998).

Ultimately, the point I am trying to make in this section is that your students' thoughts about your instruction do not have to be a mystery. If you give students an opportunity to safely and easily share their opinions, they may be more likely to do so. More specifically, you now know that getting rid of the potential for students to experience costs linked to awkward interactions, unnecessary effort, and the potential for retaliation is important if you want to ensure the provision of meaningful feedback.

Increasing the perceived effectiveness of feedback

If you want students to speak up regarding potential teaching misbehaviors, it is also important for students to see that you are willing to change the way things are done in class. One way to achieve this goal is to use the feedback gathered from the evaluations mentioned earlier and to communicate to students what you plan to do to address their complaints. Stated differently, instead of simply collecting the data for your own edification, you should share the results of the evaluation and then demonstrate your commitment to change by outlining the steps you plan to take to address your students' concerns. What does this look like in real life? This looks like you walking into class the next day and articulating (1) the concerns expressed by your students and

(2) the actions you plan to take to alleviate these. Crucially, being willing to change your teaching behaviors based on your students' requests reflects the provision of *distributive justice,* which has been linked to important classroom outcomes such as student motivation and positive affect for both the class and the instructor (Holmgren & Bolkan, 2014). Not to mention, your students might have some great ideas regarding the ways in which you can improve your instruction!

Of course, it is impossible to meet all students' demands. That said, you might find that students appreciate even having the chance to be heard. As such, addressing the issues they brought up and noting why you cannot make specific changes may help students at least understand why things are the way they are in your class. Significantly, providing adequate explanations regarding decision-making policies is linked to the notion of *informational justice,* and this type of behavior has been associated with a variety of positive organizational outcomes such as increased task performance and an enhanced likelihood of engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2013).

If you really want to get empirical when it comes to assessing your students' perceptions of your being open to input, you might choose to use the feedback mechanism suggested earlier to ask your students about their perceptions of your openness as well. To do so, you can simply borrow three items used in a recent study of organizational feedback (Lebel, 2016) and ask your students to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements (I have already adapted them for a classroom context for you):

1. My teacher uses my suggestions
2. My teacher considers ideas from students
3. My teacher rejects new ideas

Ultimately, understanding how students view your openness to feedback might help you determine the extent to which they think sharing their perceptions will make a difference in class. The more your students believe that you are willing to change, the more they may be willing to offer information regarding their experiences with your teaching practices.

No problem too small

Finally, it is important to note that people tend to communicate feed-back to the extent that they see problems as being worth fixing. That said, we might encourage students to communicate their perceptions of classroom problems by letting them know that we are interested in hear-ing about these—both big and small. Though we certainly don't want to increase the severity of the problems our students experience in class, we can communicate that even small problems are serious to us. In my experience, some students simply need the encouragement to come to us with feedback. Thus, perhaps by letting them know just how impor-tant their feedback is to our teaching, students might be more willing to offer us this type of information.

The way I promote the provision of feedback in my classes is to tell my students that I see myself as the owner of a company that is in the business of educating my clients. I tell them that, just as the owner of a burrito restaurant might want to know what he or she could do to have the best burrito product, I want to know what I can do to best facilitate student learning. Essentially, I try to tell my students that I consider feedback to be a sign of loyalty and that I consider suggestions for improvement as information that will ultimately make me a better teacher. By communicating the importance of feedback and by help-ing students see how their suggestions can help me improve, I hope to influence my students to provide feedback even if they don't think their suggestions are all that consequential.

Importantly, when I tell my students all of this, I really mean it. And, so should you. Of course, you don't always have to follow your students' advice, and you don't have to adjust your teaching for every piece of feedback you receive. However, having the information will at least give you the option to react to it. Just remember, when students communi-cate their feedback you should try to keep in mind that they are essen-tially trying to articulate what you can do to teach them more effectively. As far as I am concerned, the most appropriate way to respond to some-one who is trying to help you is with a simple "thank you" and a smile.

Summary

We started this chapter with a discussion about tools and how these have the potential to be either good or bad depending on how they are utilized. We used this idea to discuss our role as teachers and how, as facilitators of student learning, we act as tools in the classroom to help our students achieve academic success. Of course, we mentioned that just like hammers, or knives, or cars, teachers can be capable of both great and not-so-great things. The point for us as teachers then is to do the things that facilitate student success while avoiding behaviors that might be detrimental to student learning.

In this chapter, we learned what some of these detrimental behaviors are and we defined them as teacher misbehaviors. These include 31 specific misbehaviors organized into six categories including punctuality and absenteeism, the organization and structure of course material, insensitivity to students, being unavailable, unfair evaluation, and poor presentation. Next, we learned that the best way to figure out whether or not you are engaging in misbehaviors is to ask the people who experience your teaching themselves. However, we learned that students tend to be hesitant about providing this information, and therefore to help them do so we learned that we should focus on reducing the costs associated with providing feedback, increasing students' perceptions of your openness to feedback, and helping students see that no problem is too small to rectify.

In summary, your job as a teacher is to help students learn as best you can. Thus, if you want to be a great teacher, you should not settle on doing what makes you comfortable. Instead of avoiding problems in the classroom, you should focus on a mastery approach goal orientation and try to use constructive feedback to help you be your best. Consider challenging yourself to uncover your weaknesses so you can work on eliminating these behaviors from your teaching repertoire, and instead of seeing students who offer feedback as nagging or problematic, try to see them as loyal customers—these are people who are willing to speak up to help you do your job to the best of your ability.

END-OF-CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think teachers engage in misbehaviors in the first place? In other words, what is it that causes teachers to misbehave in their classrooms?

2. Do you think the misbehaviors listed in this chapter are, in fact, misbehaviors? Or might some of these behaviors be better labeled as violations of student preferences? Is there a difference? Would this difference matter for student learning?

3. What can you do in your classroom to facilitate more student feedback?

KEY TERMS

Teacher misbehaviors: Behaviors that interfere with instruction and learning

Punctuality and absenteeism: Misbehaviors relating to instructors' ability to manage time appropriately

Organization and structure of course material: Misbehaviors relating to the way teachers manage class resources

Insensitivity to students: Misbehaviors relating to the way teachers interact with students

Unavailability: Misbehaviors relating to teachers' willingness to help students both inside and outside of class

Unfair student evaluation: Misbehaviors relating to the way teachers evaluate students

Poor presentation: Misbehaviors relating to the way information is presented in class

Threat: The combination of the severity (the perceived seriousness of a threat) of a problem and a person's vulnerability (how much the threat is perceived to affect someone personally) to a problem

Coping: The combination of self-efficacy (a person's perceptions of their ability to perform a behavior) and response efficacy (the effectiveness of a behavior for addressing a threat) as it relates to a problem

Costs: The perceived costs of engaging in behaviors to address a problem

Distributive justice: Providing responses that address concerns raised during feedback

Procedural justice: Making the process of providing feedback easy and consistent

Interpersonal justice: Responding to feedback politely and with respect

Informational justice: Providing adequate explanations regarding decision-making policies

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