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# “Everything Changed”: Relational Turning Point Events in College Teacher–Student Relationships from Teachers’ Perspectives

Tony Docan-Morgan

*The purpose of this study was to investigate college teachers’ experiences of relational turning points with their students, as well as how these turning point events may affect teacher outcomes. Teachers who were able to identify a relational turning point event with a student (n = 306, 78.5% of the overall sample) completed open- and closed-ended questions about the event. Analysis of participants’ responses yielded four distinct supracategories of relational turning point events, comprised of consultation, transgression, intimation, and realization of student potential or success. Teachers who reported intimation and realization of student potential or success turning point events also indicated increased liking for students, teacher–student interpersonal relationships, teacher self-efficacy, teacher motivation, and teacher job satisfaction. Teachers who reported transgression turning points indicated decreased liking for students, teacher motivation, and teacher job satisfaction. Teachers who reported consultation turning point events indicated either increased or decreased teacher outcomes depending on the nature of the event. At the end of the article, readers are invited to engage in reflective practice and move to action regarding the findings of this study.*

*Keywords: Relational Turning Points; Teacher-Student Relationship; Teacher Self-Efficacy; Teacher Motivation; Teacher Job Satisfaction; Teacher-Student Interpersonal Relationships; Instructor Liking for Students*

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The college teacher–student dynamic comprises a unique and important relationship. Teven (2001) has argued that “in order to maximize learning, it is essential for teachers to develop a good relationship with their students, because the rapport established between teachers and students, in part, determines the interest and performance level of students” (p. 159). Indeed, some college teacher–student relationships develop into supportive and meaningful mentorships and lasting friendships (Rawlins, 2000), some may change very little, and others endure a seesaw of friction and conflict until their demise (Meyers, 2003). In other words, “teaching requires relational development with students” (Hosek & Thompson, 2009, p. 327). These relationships often do shift or change, and as a result appear to affect students’ learning, motivation, self-confidence, and career aspirations, among a host of other outcomes (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009). Previous research (Docan-Morgan & Manusov; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992) reports that college students experience meaningful communication events with their teachers that alter their relationships. More specifically, these students report experiencing *relational turning points*, or events or occurrences associated with change, with their college instructors. However, we know little about teachers’ perceptions of relational change with their students, as well as how these turning points may affect teacher outcomes such as job satisfaction and motivation. Mottet, Beebe, and Fleuriet (2006) argue that “focusing on the often neglected other half of the teacher–student communication process is a step forward in our understanding the transactional nature of the classroom communication process” (p. 146). The purpose of this study is to investigate relational turning points from teachers’ perspectives, as well as how they appear to affect teacher outcomes.

## Literature Review

### *Relational Change in the Instructional Context*

Docan-Morgan and Manusov’s (2009) use of a relational frame—focusing on teachers and students in connection to one another—recognizes that the teacher–student relationship is “unfinished business” and changes over time (Duck, 1990). This notion is perhaps best captured the theory of relational dialectics (Baxter, 1988; Rawlins, 1992), which asserts that relationships are always in a state of flux, where partners constantly experience tensions between contradictory impulses (i.e., expression–nonexpression). Teacher–student relationships involve dialectical processes (Rawlins), and even more indicative of change, they are marked by relational turning points over their life course (Docan-Morgan & Manusov). These moments of change stem from both mundane classroom interactions (e.g., a lecture topic or claim made by a teacher) and less frequent moments of higher intensity (e.g., ridiculing a student during class).

DeVito (1986) offers a linear model that depicts change in the teacher–student relationship, similar to the many developmental stage models of romantic relationships (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Knapp, 1984). DeVito outlines four assumptions of the model: (1) teaching can be described as a relational process from initial contact, intimacy, and dissolution; (2) teacher–student interaction that assists teaching and

learning depends in part on the development of an interpersonal relationship; (3) the development of a relationship between student and teacher will lead to greater satisfaction and more effective learning; and (4) a failure in teaching can be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the relational development process. DeVito illustrates that a good teacher–student relationship is not the only goal of teaching; “rather, the development of the interpersonal relationship is viewed as the means by which more effective, efficient, and satisfying teaching and learning may take place” (p. 53). Although DeVito’s model is a useful depiction of “big” stage changes in the teacher–student relationship, it does not account for one-time events that affect the teacher–student relationship. An analysis of relational turning points between teachers and students may better account for relational changes within or between these stages.

A handful of studies have examined relational turning points in the instructional context (e.g., Bullis & Bach, 1989a, b; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992). Only two studies have investigated undergraduate student reports of relational turning points with their instructors. In their study of 52 college seniors, O’Neill and Todd-Mancillas articulated two macrocategories of turning points. The first macrocategory was labeled *perception of instructional communication competence and character*, which included the subcategories of perceived competence and character. The second macrocategory, *perception of instructor’s management style*, included learning climate, course administration style, rhetorical sensitivity, and feedback. Further, in their study of 640 undergraduates, Docan-Morgan and Manusov offer a typology of relational turning point events made up of six supracategories. These include *instrumental* (e.g., discussion of grade; discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally; discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships; and discussion of course policy/rule), *personal* (e.g., discussion of coursework and personal information; discussion of common interest; compliment; invitation; name used), *rhetorical* (e.g., lecture topic/claim; teaching style), *ridicule/discipline*, *locational*, and *other person turning point events*.

Relational turning point events between college teachers and students from teachers’ perspectives have yet to be explored. Such an exploration and discussion of findings invites teachers to engage in *reflective practice* (Larrivee, 2006) and perhaps move to action regarding the findings of this study. Warin, Maddock, Pell, and Hargreaves (2006) “emphasize reflexivity, an awareness of self-in-practice, as an important aspect of reflective practice for teachers as members of a demanding, ever-changing profession” (p. 234). Self-awareness is a tool for teaching and invites teachers to evaluate their intentions, behaviors, and outcomes with students. Engaging in reflection is an opportunity for professional development and self-improvement (MacLure, 1993), as well as a thrust to change one’s teaching (Elliott, 1993). An investigation of relational turning point events between college teachers and students from teachers’ perspectives also provides a step forward in offering a “more complete and accurate understanding of the teacher student relationship” (Mottet, Beebe, et al., 2006, p. 146) and offers insight as to how turning points affect important teacher outcomes such as self-efficacy and job satisfaction. To gain insight

into the relational turning points experienced by college teachers, the following research question was posed:

RQ1: What specific types of events do teachers report as relational turning points in teacher–student relationships?

Previous research demonstrates that “participants retrospectively cast their relationship development as a series of positive and negative turning points” (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p. 490). In their study of turning points from students’ perspectives, Docan-Morgan and Manusov (2009) found that the following turning points were valenced positively: discussion of a course assignment, course content, or course more generally; discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships; discussion of coursework and personal information; discussion of common interest; invitation; name use; teaching style; locational; and other person. On the other hand, ridicule turning point events were more likely to be valenced negatively. An assessment of valence provides an initial understanding of how relational turning points may affect teacher outcomes. Further, it provides a starting point for understanding what types of turning points both students and teachers constitute as positive and negative. Lastly, an assessment of valence intimates how teachers might work to create turning points with their students. In their study of undergraduates’ experiences of turning points, Docan-Morgan and Manusov proposed that

teachers would be well advised to implement and utilize positive relational turning point events . . . [and] . . . avoid potentially negative turning point events. As teachers, we should look for and capitalize on moments where we might be able to make a significant change in our relationships with our students. (p. 185)

Research question 2 asked the following:

RQ2: What relational turning points with their students do teachers constitute as generally positive and generally negative?

### *Teacher Outcomes*

Mottet, Beebe, et al. (2006) illuminate that “missing from the research literature is extensive evidence of how students influence teachers and their teaching” (p. 145). Student influence on teachers is seen in *teacher outcomes*, such as job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and motivation, each of which play an important role in instruction. Job satisfaction, for example, predicts job retention (Meek, 1998), and work performance and commitment (Arnold, Cooper, & Robertson, 1998). Perhaps more importantly, however, these variables have the potential to affect teaching and ultimately instructional outcomes. For example, teacher self-efficacy, or the “extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance” (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977, p. 137), has been found to predict student outcomes such as student achievement (e.g., Ross, 1998). Simply stated, teacher outcomes are important because they affect the teacher, organization, and student.

Some instructional communication research has examined how student behaviors affect teacher outcomes. Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Medlock (2004), for example, found a connection between the effects of student verbal and nonverbal responsiveness and teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Likewise, Mottet and Beebe (2006) discovered a link between student responsive behaviors, student sociocommunicative style, and the outcome of instructor liking for students. Mottet et al. (2004), highlight that

Student communication affects teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction in ways that are similar to how teacher communication affects student motivation and learning. Like other types of interpersonal relationships, the teacher–student relationship remains interdependent in that teachers and students influence each other by meeting (or not meeting) the instructional and interpersonal needs that both bring to the instructional context.” (p. 159)

This evidence that teacher–student interactions affect teacher outcomes, coupled with findings that turning points affect student outcomes (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992), provides reason to believe that turning points may affect teacher outcomes as well. The second major purpose of this study, then, is to investigate how relational turning point events between teachers and students affect teacher outcomes.

One important teacher outcome identified in the literature is instructor liking for students. Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Paulsel (2004) describe liking as a “byproduct of a positive interpersonal relationship” (p. 36). One recent study, for example, found a link between student–teacher behavior and liking, namely that student socio-communicative style and student responsive behaviors positively influenced instructor liking for students (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Further, Mottet et al. (2004) argue that “if teaching and learning is a relational process . . . then the liking and influence variables found to be effective in the teacher-to-student relationship should also remain effective in the student-to-teacher relationship” (p. 28). Seeing that student–teacher interaction appears to affect instructor liking for students, and that turning points affect outcomes in previous instructional research, a hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Instructor liking for students will change following relational turning point events.

As stated previously in this review, the teacher–student relationship plays a particularly important role in the instructional process. DeVito (1986) argues that the development of the teacher–student relationship “is viewed as the means by which more effective, efficient, and satisfying teaching and learning may take place” (p. 53). Mottet (2000) found that “as instructors’ perceptions of students’ nonverbal responsiveness increased, instructors perceived their teacher–student interpersonal relationships as being more warm, close, and comfortable” (p. 158). Teacher–student interpersonal relationships with students are also likely affected by turning points they experience with students.

H2: Teacher–student interpersonal relationships with students will change following relational turning point events.

Another important teacher outcome is teacher self-efficacy, which is defined as “the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance” (Berman et al., 1977, p. 137). Previous research demonstrates that teacher–student interaction has the potential to affect teacher self-efficacy. For example, university instructors who were exposed to high nonverbally and verbally responsive students perceived themselves to be more self-efficacious than instructors who were exposed to low nonverbally and verbally responsive students (Mottet et al., 2004). Therefore, relational turning point events between teachers and students also likely affect teachers’ self-efficacy.

H3: Teacher self-efficacy will change following relational turning point events.

Teacher motivation is “a teacher’s internal state of readiness to take action or achieve a goal” (Mottet, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006). Teacher motivation is particularly important as it has been linked to student achievement and a host of teacher outcomes (Bishay, 1996; Kocabas, 2009). A recent study reported that teachers are motivated, in part, by a positive work climate and positive relations with colleagues (Kocabas, 2009). Turning point events with students may also affect teachers’ motivation and therefore merits investigation. Previous research concludes, “the student may have the ability to influence teacher motivation” (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000, p. 184). More specifically, Baringer and McCroskey found that student behavior—higher immediacy in this case—led to teacher reports of increased motivation. Therefore, turning point events also likely affect teacher motivation.

H4: Teacher motivation will change following relational turning point events.

Teacher job satisfaction, also an important teacher outcome, refers to the “state of mind determined by the extent to which the individual perceives his/her job-related needs being met” (Evans, 1997, p. 833). Teacher–student interaction has the potential to affect teacher job satisfaction. For example, university instructors exposed to students demonstrating high verbal and nonverbal responsiveness perceived themselves to have more job satisfaction than when exposed to students demonstrating low verbal and nonverbal responsiveness (Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, & Medlock, 2004). In another study, lack of student interest led to decreased teacher job satisfaction (Cohn, 1992). Teachers’ interactions with students, then, appear to affect job satisfaction. Turning points between teachers and students likely influence job satisfaction.

H5: Teacher job satisfaction will change following relational turning point events.

## Method

### *Participants*

After receiving institutional review board approval at a large northern United States university, I requested that all department administrative assistants forward an e-mail invitation to participate in a survey to all department faculty members, part-time instructors, and teaching assistants. An invitation to participate in the current study

was also sent to the Communication Research and Theory Network (CRTNET) listserv. Three hundred and ninety college teachers participated in the study. College teachers were asked to participate in a survey involving their interactions with students. Similar to prompts used in previous relational turning point studies (e.g., Barge & Musambira, 1992; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; Johnson, Wittenberg, Villagran, Mazur, & Villagran, 2003), participants were asked if they could recall a turning point, described as “any event or occurrence that is associated with change in a relationship” with a college student. Most ( $n = 306$ , 78.5% of the overall sample) were able to do so and completed demographic questions and open- and closed-ended questions about the turning point. These participants included 183 females, 116 males, and 7 unidentified. They represented a variety of positions at the time in which the turning point occurred, including graduate teaching assistants ( $n = 92$ ), instructors and lecturers ( $n = 67$ ), assistant professors ( $n = 48$ ), associate professors ( $n = 45$ ), full professors ( $n = 34$ ), unreported ( $n = 10$ ), unranked ( $n = 8$ ), and visiting lecturers ( $n = 2$ ). The majority of these participants ( $n = 258$ ) reported that the turning point occurred while teaching at a university; 37 reported a community college, and 11 did not report the type of institution. One hundred and sixty six of the turning points reported occurred with a female student and 129 occurred with a male student. Eleven teachers did not report the sex of the student. Participants responded that the turning point occurred in their office ( $n = 122$ ), in the classroom ( $n = 98$ ), in a public place ( $n = 53$ , e.g., restaurant, hospital lobby), over the Internet ( $n = 24$ ), and in both their classroom and office ( $n = 7$ ). Two participants could not recall where the turning point occurred. Analyses of the data found three significant differences regarding the demographic data.<sup>1</sup>

### *Procedure and Analysis*

I employed the critical incident technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954), as the recall of specific events is less subject to distortion than summary judgments of events occurring frequently (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Schwartz, 1999). Kain (2004) argues that the “appeal of the critical incident technique of research lies largely in this systematic approach to inquiry—into what significance others place on given events” (p. 72). The questionnaire in the current study presented college teachers with the definition of relational turning points, provided previously in this paper, and then prompted teachers to recall a turning point. If participants were able to do so, they were asked to respond to a series of open- and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions included: “Please describe the physical location, time of day, and other details where the event occurred in as much detail as possible. Please describe the event itself in as much detail as possible. Specifically, what happened? How did this turning point change your relationship with your student?”

The CIT involves “an analysis of thematic content, arrived at by inductive reasoning” with the objective of providing “a detailed, comprehensive and valid description of the activity studied” (Woolsey, 1986, p. 248). To begin, I engaged in open coding by organizing the events into piles based on the similarity of their

content, and created tentative labels. Using the constant comparative approach and multiple line-by-line readings of each response, I compared examples for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After receiving feedback on these initial categories and their definitions from two reviewers, I enlisted a colleague unfamiliar with the dataset to analyze the data independently using the constant comparative approach. Previous research attests to the benefits of using multiple analysts at this point in data analysis (Berends & Johnston, 2005). We met to review and compare one another's categories, offer feedback on them, and discuss possible definitions. For example, during this open-coding process, we identified and labeled a supracategory—*consultation*—which, based on the data, comprised three subcategories: discussion of advancement in education or career, discussion of course policy or assignment, and intervention. Each of these subcategories was developed further, thereby adding additional depth to the subcategory and supracategory.

Throughout the coding process, we also engaged in axial coding. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that “open coding and axial coding go hand in hand” (p. 198). We used axial coding to integrate and connect categories discovered during the open coding process. During axial coding, “the relationship between or among variables is explicitly examined” (LaRossa, 2005, p. 849). For example, we noted that *consultation turning point events* and *transgression turning point events* were linked by the “axis” of teacher–student communication about course or college-related issues. This relationship between variables, however, was not evident in *intimiation turning point events* and *realization of student potential or success turning point events*. To illustrate with another example, *intimiation turning point events* and *realization of student potential or success turning point events* shared the axis of recognition of the other as a unique, special individual. In other words, we focused on examining similarities and distinctions in the turning point categories that were identified in the open coding process. These connections are discussed further in the discussion section.

During a second meeting, we discussed whether the categories appeared sound, exhaustive, internally homogeneous, and externally heterogeneous. During this process, we further clarified, redefined, and combined the categories until it appeared that they did not need further modification. Toward the end of this process, both analysts “felt right” about the categories and their definitions—a phrase coined by Corbin and Strauss (2008), which “means that after being immersed in the data the researcher believes that the findings reflect the essence of what participants are trying to convey, or represent one logical interpretation of data, as seen through the eyes of this particular analyst” (p. 47). Analysis of data yielded four supracategories, labeled *consultation*, *transgression*, *intimiation*, and *realization of student potential or success*. Three of these supracategories include subcategories, which are discussed in the results section.

To establish reliability, two coders—a trained research assistant and I—separately read and categorized each of the 306 responses into one of the eight subcategories or into the one supracategory that did not entail any subcategories (i.e., *realization of*

*student potential or success*). Intercoder reliability on all 306 responses coded for the categories was high ( $\kappa = .87$ ).

### Measures

*Valence of turning point event.* Participants were asked to characterize the valence of their reported turning point based on six items: positive, negative, or neither positive or negative; good, bad, or neither good or bad; satisfying, unsatisfying, or neither satisfying or unsatisfying; pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant or unpleasant; liked it, disliked it, or neither liked or disliked it; and harmless, harmful, or neither harmless or harmful. Lower scores indicated more negative valences. *Alpha* reliabilities revealed that the valence-based items were answered consistently ( $\alpha = .96$ ). A “valence” variable was then created using the sum of these six items. Participants’ scores ranged from 6 (highly negatively valenced) to 18 (highly positively valenced). Approximately 13% of responses ( $n = 39$ ) had scores ranging from 9 and 15, thus not indicating clearly a positive or negative valence. The majority of turning points, however, were rated as either very negatively valenced (received a score ranging from 6 to 8;  $n = 88$ ) or very positively valenced (received a score from 16 to 18;  $n = 179$ ). As a result, 267 turning points reported by participants were rated as either positive ( $n = 179$ , 67%) or negative ( $n = 88$ , 33%), and these were used to answer research question 2.

*Instructor liking for students.* Instructor liking for students was assessed using Mottet’s (2000) six-item bipolar liking scale. The bipolar adjectives included the following: Like/Dislike, Good/Bad, Enjoyable/Painful, Wise/Foolish, Positive/Negative, and Desirable/Undesirable. Participants were asked to complete the scale to measure their liking for students both before and after the turning point. Previous research (Mottet) demonstrates that the scale has a unidimensional factor structure, as well as an above-average internal consistency. With a scale range of 6–42, the measure yielded a mean of 31.70,  $SD = 5.79$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .71 before the turning point event, and a mean of 32.12,  $SD = 6.97$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .85 after the turning point event.

*Teacher–student interpersonal relationships.* Teacher–student interpersonal relationships was assessed using Mottet’s (2000) five-item bipolar interpersonal relationships scale. The bipolar adjectives included the following: Good/Bad, Warm/Cold, Close/Distant, Shallow/Deep, and Comfortable/Uncomfortable. Participants were asked to complete the scale to measure teacher–student interpersonal relationships both before and after the turning point. Previous research (Mottet) demonstrates that the scale has a unidimensional factor structure. With a scale range of 5–35, the measure yielded a mean of 26.15,  $SD = 4.85$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .77 before the turning point event, and a mean of 26.85,  $SD = 5.21$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .77 after the turning point event.

*Teacher self-efficacy.* Teacher self-efficacy was assessed using a teacher self-efficacy scale (Mottet, 2000; Mottet et al., 2004; Mottet, Richmond, et al., 2006). The scale includes five bipolar adjectives: Effective/Ineffective, Efficient/Inefficient, Skilled/Unskilled, Capable/Incapable, and Successful/Not Successful. Participants were asked to complete the scale to measure teacher self-efficacy both before and after the turning point. Previous research (Mottet, 2000) demonstrates that the scale has a unidimensional factor structure. With a scale range of 5–35, the measure yielded a mean of 27.59,  $SD = 4.73$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .87 before the turning point event, and a mean of 27.84,  $SD = 5.12$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .74 after the turning point event.

*Teacher motivation.* Teacher motivation was assessed using a teacher motivation scale (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000; Mottet, Richmond, et al., 2006). The scale includes six bipolar adjectives: Motivated/Unmotivated, Interested/Uninterested, Want to Teach/Don't Want to Teach, Inspired/Uninspired, Excited/Unexcited, Looking forward to It/Dreading It. With a scale range of 6–42, the measure yielded a mean of 34.31,  $SD = 6.20$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .88 before the turning point event, and a mean of 34.07,  $SD = 6.90$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .88 after the turning point event.

*Teacher job satisfaction.* Teacher job satisfaction was measured using a teacher job satisfaction scale (Mottet et al., 2004; Mottet, Richmond, et al., 2006). The scale includes five bipolar adjectives: Satisfied/Unsatisfied, Pleased/Not Pleased, Happy/Sad, Gratified/Ungratified, and Fulfilled/Unfulfilled. With a scale range of 5–35, the measure yielded a mean of 26.69,  $SD = 5.05$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .80 before the turning-point event, and a mean of 27.45,  $SD = 6.40$ , and a Cronbach alpha of .92 after the turning point event.

## Results

### Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked the following: What specific types of events do teachers report as relational turning points in teacher–student relationships? Analysis of participants' responses yielded four supralevel categories of turning point events, some of which included lower level categories. The supracategories include *consultation*, *transgression*, *intimation*, and *realization of student potential or success*.

#### *Consultation*

*Consultation* relational turning points ( $n = 77$ , 25.2%) comprised events in which the teacher consulted, provided advice, or offered guidance to the student. Within these events, the teacher aided the student with a class, college, or career-related matter. The focus of these events was not marked by a highly personal or intimate exchange as with the latter category of *intimation*, but instead with the goal of consulting or directing students. Three categories of consultation turning points emerged:

discussion of advancement in education or career, discussion of course policy or assignment, and intervention.

*Discussion of advancement in education or career.* Turning points that resulted from a discussion of advancing in college pursuits, internships, career paths, and letters of recommendation were categorized as *discussion of advancement in education or career* ( $n=23$ , 7.5%). All of these responses indicated that the student initiated the interaction. Some teachers, for example, reported a turning point when asked to write a letter of recommendation: “One of my students from the previous semester asked if I would write her a letter of recommendation for a scholarship program. It was early in the morning at the library.” Others reported interactions that also included career advice:

A student came to me after he had been a student in my class and asked me for career advice. It was in my office in the afternoon. The student had done an internship over the summer and was interested in getting my advice about other career possibilities. We talked about an internship at Microsoft that he was interested in; I agreed to write him a letter of recommendation. It began a longer relationship with the student.

Some instructors reported being surprised by the student’s request for advising or a letter of recommendation:

The student stopped by, unannounced, to ask if I would write her a recommendation letter for law school. She had received notice that she was on the wait-list at Harvard Law and was hoping that sending some extra material—like another rec letter—might sway the admissions committee to accept her. I was caught off-guard but had a distinct recollection of the student—although admittedly, I was not entirely sure my recollection was for this student. I verified that she was indeed the student I was thinking of and told her that I could write her a recommendation letter but that my recollection of her was that she did surprisingly well in my class despite the fact that she didn’t come to half the classes. I told her I would write that in the letter and she said that it probably wouldn’t be worth it for her to have me write the letter . . . I told her that she should write a personal statement explaining her situation because given her personal situation, her accomplishments are quite extraordinary. We had a nice discussion and she left.

*Discussion of course assignment or policy.* Turning point events that involved a discussion of a course assignment, exam, grade, or policy were categorized as *discussion of course assignment or policy* ( $n=32$ , 10.5%). All events in this category were initiated by the student. For example, one teacher reported a relational turning point when “the student, who previously like me seemed to be enjoying the class, became distressed and angry after discovering their grade was a C+ and not the anticipated A.” Similarly, one teacher reported that:

The student contacted me via e-mail about a grade complaint. We scheduled a time to meet in my office, but we had to reschedule. As a result, we ended up having a conversation by telephone in the evening. She and I were both online, and so we referred to information that we sent back and forth during the call. The student complained that she was graded down because she went beyond the parameters of the assignment, something she interpreted as performing above and beyond. In the

discussion, we talked about the importance of going above and beyond, of following instructions, and of writing and rewriting word so that it is within the page limitations.

In addition to discussions of grades, teachers also reported turning points about course policies, such as:

At about 10:30 am, which is the time class started, the day after homework was due. It was midway through the quarter. In the classroom (large lecture hall), in the front of the room. Since class was about to start, most of the other students were seated in the room. The student came up to me and asked to turn in the homework. We had a policy that homework could not be turned in late, so I told her I couldn't accept her homework. She made a generic remark (I don't recall what exactly) and went to her seat.

Teachers also reported turning points with their students concerning discussions about the nature of course assignments:

[The turning point occurred in] the crowded hall outside of the classroom, late morning, after class. The student told me that the class' first speech assignment was not what he expected. He felt that it was too simple and it did not match a speech that he had planned to give (which was a version of a speech he had given in high school!). He said that he had discussed his disappointment with his parents, who are educators, and they agreed with him that the assignment seemed odd. My initial reaction was to think that he was a little punk: How dare this 18 yr. old freshman tell me how to teach! I amazed myself, in that I was able to overcome this reaction and ask him to describe his expectations for the course. I assured him that the class would include the type of assignment he expected. I also told him that I was not interested in hearing something he had already presented. We parted in a congenial manner.

*Intervention.* Turning points that occurred when the teacher identified a problem and approached the student in an attempt to address the problem were categorized as *intervention* ( $n = 22$ , 5.6%). In all of these cases, the teacher took action in an effort to improve a specific student's academic performance. Some instructors identified turning points with a student when asking them to meet. For example:

It was a small classroom with large floor to ceiling windows. It was a cloudy day, but there was plenty of daylight in the classroom. There were about 16 students present. Students were working in small groups . . . One student who was failing the class due to poor attendance and many missing assignments was in a group of three students. I had previously called the student and e-mailed him to ask him what I could do to help support him in the class. I had been working with my instructional Dean on a project asking faculty to take attendance and call at risk students at home in order to increase retention. This particular student would come into class and leave right at the start and end hours. I had a hard time finding time to interact with him one on one. I walked up to him in the small group and told him it was good to see him . . . I asked him to come see me and talk about how he can get through the rest of this quarter.

Although many intervention turning points were planned out by the teacher, others happened in the spur of the moment:

The class was a grammar class, and students were doing a timed free-writing, to be edited later. One young man had been having trouble with writer's block all quarter. His frustration flash-point was very low . . . On the day of the event, this student was

having his usual difficulty with writer's block. He had used about half the time writing one much-erased sentence. Suddenly he slammed down his pencil, grabbed up his book bag and stomped toward the door, saying loudly, "I'm outa here!" Without thinking, I stomped after him, caught him just outside the door, and said, "You get yourself back into that classroom and WRITE your anger!" I was furious with him. We stood staring at each other for just an instant. Then he turned, stomped back inside, sat down, and began to write. He wrote furiously—and eloquently, it turned out—for the rest of the period.

### *Transgression*

*Transgression* relational turning points ( $n = 76$ , 24.8%) largely comprised events in which the student or teacher acted in a defiant manner, often breaking spoken or unspoken rules. These events did not entail advice giving or intimate communication as with other categories, but instead were marked by misbehavior. Three categories of transgression turning points emerged, including *deception*, *conniption*, and *contrition*.

*Deception*. Turning point events that involved a student misleading, exploiting, or deceiving the teacher were labeled *deception* ( $n = 38$ , 12.4%). Knapp (2008) remarks that deception is a "term that encompasses various fraudulent, tricky, and/or misleading behaviors" (p. 10). In some cases, for example, the teacher reported feeling exploited or taken advantage of:

I agreed to show up to a student study session to help them prepare for the exam. When I got there I was helping some students on my left answer a question, and a student to my right decided to open my personal note book and record what I had written down (i.e., transcribe my personal class notes). I was outraged. I told the student that I had agreed to help them with their exam studying and that he had . . . tak[en] advantage of me.

Teachers reported other events in which students engaged in deceptive behavior:

The event occurred in my office at 3:30pm on a Friday. There were two other graduate students sharing my office at the time of the event. The student came into my office (by appointment) and asked about her final exam grade from the previous quarter. While in my office, she asked about her course grade and implied that she was upset that it was so low. When I asked her why, she said that she had performed well in the class up to the final. She produced a copy of her midterm exam which stated that she received a 75, while my records showed a 55 on that exam. Also, many of the marks on the exam did not look like my handwriting. I returned the exam to her and informed her that I would be e-mailing the dean of the school to set up a meeting. After she left, I filed academic misconduct charges against her for submitting a fraudulent exam.

In some events, the student engaged in deceptive behavior by submitting work that was not their own: "I had asked the student to come and talk to me about why he had submitted a report with identical information as another student." Similarly, one teacher reported that the event:

Occurred in the evening, in my home (student not, there, obviously!), while I was grading essays. I realized the student had copied verbatim from a website. The paper

seemed quite obviously stilted, couldn't quite figure it out, so I googled the specific phrases that bothered me and found the content on a website.

*Conniption.* Events that entailed strong reactions of aggression, anger, shock, or indignation were categorized as *conniption* ( $n = 33, 10.8\%$ ). In all cases, the student was the reported enactor and the interaction involved a negative outburst. For example:

While teaching a class, a student raised her hand and told me that the class was too much—that there was too much work being assigned and she and the others were sick of it. I told her that it was a difficult subject, and that it took reading and writing about the subject to really make it work. She then said, “Well, I have a list of complaints I would like to read.” I said, “I appreciate that—but I’m not going to take up everyone’s time with that when we’ve really been having good discussions and unpacking the readings. Why don’t you meet with me later?” She said, “No, I’m going to read them. That’s my academic freedom.” I said, “No, it isn’t. So moving on . . .” and began to give an overview of the lecture. She slammed her notebook shut, gathered her materials, and left. I never saw her again.

Similarly, one teacher reported the following student *conniption* or outburst:

A student was placed in one of two beginning language classes, but was unsure which one was more appropriate. During our discussion about which one he should be in, he became agitated (later learned why, but at the time was merely astonished by his behavior). We were talking about the class when another said to him casually, “everything okay man?” The agitated student turned on him and using expletives told him to mind his own business. This shocked the other student, who was merely offering a concerned comment. Thereafter, the agitated student’s presence in class, and in his dealings with me, was marked by nervousness and stress on his part, and considerable apprehension and sometimes fear on my part (and the rest of the class) . . . For weeks after the quarter ended and he presumably disappeared, I worried that he would come back mad at me and everyone else, bringing a gun.

*Contribution.* Turning point events that involved a violation of a spoken or unspoken rule, but that focused on feeling and/or communicating remorse were categorized as *contribution* ( $n = 5, 1.6\%$ ). In all cases, the teacher reported feeling or communicating remorse. One teacher reported the following turning point:

I administered the quiz a few minutes after the bell rang. The students were given 10 minutes to complete it. XY walked in with about 5 minutes to spare for his quiz. I handed him the quiz and he started to work. He seemed a little disheveled. After the 10 minutes was up, the students turned in their completed quizzes. XY was still working as I walked over to his desk. He handed me the quiz, upside down, and tried to force it into the bottom of the pile of papers in my hand. I grabbed it from the pile and looked at it. He answered 2 of 5 questions and they were both wrong. I held up his quiz, made a “dude, WTF?” face at him while exposing his unfinished quiz to the class. I didn’t say anything, but sort-of chuckled as I held up the quiz. I then moved on to teach the course without incident. After the class, XY confronted me . . . the other students had already left. He said he was offended by my behavior, which he more or less called insensitive and rude. He called his quiz “retarded” as in: you basically exposed my “retarded quiz” to the class. He was on the verge of tears as he explained how hurt he was. I began to defend myself, but immediately stopped. I concurred with XY (and told him as much) that my actions were inappropriate and indefensible. I promised him I would never act that way again, toward him or any other student. I explained to him that I meant no

disrespect and, again, that I was very sorry for hurting his feelings. And continued to apologize at least 3 or 4 more times before he walked away.

Perhaps slightly less face threatening than the above example, but still violating a rule and feeling contrite, one teacher responded:

This event negatively impacted my relationship with one student and perhaps others. I was returning papers by hand and was able to match the name to the face for most students. Unfortunately I had great difficulty learning to distinguish four of the 12 Asian females from one another. I had this problem well through the quarter. Precautions had been taken: students volunteer[ed] for photos, so I had a key, but I couldn't blatantly pull it out as I walked around. Looking back there are solutions to this problem, but at the time I hadn't dealt with it well. I mistakenly gave the wrong paper to the same student on more than one occasion, and I know it was hurtful and detrimental. As a gay white male I think I'm sensitive to issues of identity, so this was mutually painful.

### *Intimation*

*Intimation* relational turning points ( $n = 100$ , 32.7%) were marked by an intimate, affiliative, or highly personal exchange by the teacher and/or student. These turning points often involved a disclosure of one's personal self and recognized the other as a unique, important individual. The thrust of these events were not marked by course consultations, transgressions, or realization of student success, but instead by personal, private revelations. Two categories of intimation turning points emerged, including *revelation* and *appreciation*.

*Revelation*. Turning point events that entailed the disclosure of private, personal information by the student, teacher, or both parties were categorized as *revelation* ( $n = 72$ , 23.5%). In some instances, the teacher and student first discussed class or college related issues, which then led to a discussion of personal information:

An undergraduate student of mine came to my office hours one afternoon to discuss a paper that I had assigned in our class. We sat in my office and immediately she told me that she was engaged. I gave her a big hug and then we chatted about her engagement for a while. Following that, I found out that she was from Wisconsin and so we started talking about how great the Greenbay Packers were and how we both hoped that they would go to the Super Bowl. The turning point here was that she ended up disclosing some personal information about herself (e.g., engagement, hometown, school, etc.). We had a lot in common and shared a similar sense of humor. This was the first time that the two of us actually made a "connection."

On the other hand, some teachers reported that a turning point occurred when they self-disclosed to particular students:

I was chaperoning the student club on a bus trip. I disclosed my pregnancy to the female student, feeling like I needed a confidant . . . I told her I needed to share some info with her, because I wanted at least one person to know—just in case anything were to happen. From a previous class, I knew this student loved babies, etc.

In another exemplar, the instructor highlights both a specific turning point event and the broader nature of self-disclosure between teachers and students:

For me the turning point was the opportunity to know each other beyond the “typical” interactions that take place in the classroom—where the student/teacher roles blur into a deeper knowing of the person, a perceived mutual respect, the vulnerability of sharing experiences where we felt unsure (e.g., “Which doctoral programs should I apply to? Do I want to be a professor? Can I handle the pressure or rejection?”), and appreciating our mutual passion for ideas, social justice, and advocacy. The student and I had similar experiences in the sense that we both struggled early in our academic careers and that when we truly dedicated ourselves to learning we found a calling that we did not think was possible in our early twenties. The connection made during that and subsequent meetings/e-mails has meant a lot to me.

*Appreciation.* Teachers’ reports of experiencing a relational turning point when the student made a gesture of appreciation were categorized as appreciation ( $n = 28$ , 9.2%). These turning points included incidents in which the student thanked their teacher, offered an invitation to an event, or gave a gift to the teacher. For example, one teacher reported the following turning point:

My student e-mailed to invite me to attend her basketball game as her chosen faculty. The student [wrote] a short narrative of why she chose [me] and what she likes about the university. This [was] printed in the program. After the game, she handed me a card which I read later. It was a very nice card thanking me for coming and supporting the team.

Similarly, the following event constituted a turning point for the teacher:

This [event] was between me and an international student. In class, the student rarely spoke and displayed very little change of facial expression. In my office hours, the student verbally disclosed that this was the most impactful class he had ever taken, that he found the material exciting, even transformational, and he was very appreciative of my teaching style, course design, and contribution to his education.

#### *Realization of Student Potential or Success*

Turning points reported by teachers in which they realized a student’s potential, success, or hard work were labeled *realization of student potential or success* ( $n = 53$ , 17.3%). Although in some instances, the teacher and student were discussing course material, the focus of the turning point was the actual realization of the student’s success or potential. One teacher simply reported, “she made clear a superior level of understanding of the research problem she was working on.”

Another teacher reported a turning point when course content began to “click” for a student:

Literally before my eyes as she talked it out with some prompts, it ‘clicked’ and she got it. Her frustration with me during the quarter evaporated as she got the point of the assignment and realized that this was a skill that she could take with her into her areas of her work as a nurse.

Similarly, the below teacher response indicates the teacher’s realization of the student’s effort:

Students were giving “toasts” as their final speech, where they had to toast another student for his/her efforts in the class. This particular student, Florence, had prepared

an acceptance speech after another student had toasted her. And it was so sweet and honest. She really had put effort into it...It made me realize how special and hardworking she was, and it brought tears to my eyes.

## Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked the following: What relational turning points with their students do teachers constitute as generally positive and generally negative? To answer this question, chi square analyses were run for each of the four turning point supracategories to assess the relative frequency of positive and negative values scores in each. In cases when the omnibus test was significant, additional chi square analyses were run for each of the individual categories for those event types that were made up of a range of categories.

### *Consultation Turning Point Events*

A chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *valence* and *consultation turning point events* was significant,  $\chi^2 = 7.23$ ,  $p = .007$ . Out of 61 teachers who reported a consultation turning point event with their student, 41 (67%) indicated that the turning point was positively valenced.

*Individual categories.* The relationship between valence and turning point events regarding *discussion of advancement in education or career* was clear, although a chi square test could not be performed, as all of the responses fell into one category. Of the 22 teachers who reported a turning point event about a *discussion of advancement in education or career* with their student, 22 (100%) indicated that the turning point was positively valenced. The chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *valence* and turning point events regarding a *discussion of course assignment or policy* was significant,  $\chi^2 = 4.172$ ,  $p = .041$ . Out of 29 teachers who reported a discussion of course assignment or policy turning point event with their student, 20 (69%) indicated that the turning point was negatively valenced. The relationship between *valence* and turning point events regarding an *intervention* was also clear, although again a chi square test could not be performed, as all of the responses fell into one category. Of the 10 teachers who indicated that the intervention turning point was either positive or negative, 10 (100%) indicated that it was positive.

### *Transgression*

A chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *valence* and *transgression* relational turning points was significant,  $\chi^2 = 59.507$ ,  $p < .001$ . Out of 71 teachers who reported a transgression turning point event with their student, 68 (95.8%) indicated that the turning point was negatively valenced.

*Individual categories.* The chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *valence* and turning point events regarding *deception* was significant,  $\chi^2 = 30.421$ ,  $p < .001$ . Out of 38 teachers who reported a deception turning point event with their

student, 36 (94.7%) indicated that the turning point was negatively valenced. The chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *valence* and turning point events regarding *conniption* was significant,  $\chi^2 = 24.143$ ,  $p < .001$ . Out of 28 teachers who reported a *conniption* turning point event with their student, 27 (96.4%) indicated that the turning point was negatively valenced. The relationship between *valence* and turning point events regarding *contrition* was also clear, although a chi square test could not be performed, as all of the responses fell into one category. Of the five teachers who reported a *contrition* turning point event with their student, five (100%) indicated that the turning point was negatively valenced.

### *Intimation*

The relationship between *valence* and turning point events regarding *intimation* was clear, although again a chi square test could not be performed, as all of the responses fell into one category. Of the 85 teachers who reported an *intimation* turning point event about with their student, 85 (100%) indicated that the turning point was positively valenced.

*Individual categories.* The relationship between *valence* and *revelation* turning point events was clear, although again a chi square test could not be performed, as all of the responses fell into one category. Of the 60 teachers who reported a *revelation* turning point event with their student, 60 (100%) indicated that the turning point was positively valenced. Similarly, the relationship between *valence* and *appreciation* turning point events was clear, although again a chi square test could not be performed, as all of the responses fell into one category. Of the 25 teachers who reported an *intimation* turning point event about with their student, 25 (100%) indicated that the turning point was positively valenced.

### *Realization of Student Potential or Success*

The relationship between *valence* and turning point events regarding *realization of student potential or success* was clear, although a chi square test could not be performed, as all of the responses fell into one category. Of the 50 teachers who reported a turning point event regarding realization of student potential or success, 50 (100%) indicated that the turning point was positively valenced.

### *Summary*

The findings indicate that consultation turning point events, overall, were positively valenced significantly more often than they were negatively valenced. More specifically, turning points positively valenced include discussion of advancement in education or career and intervention, whereas turning point events regarding a discussion of course assignment or policy were negatively valenced. Transgression turning point events were more likely to be negatively than positively valenced. Each of the three transgression turning point events—deception, *conniption*, and

contrition—were more likely to be negatively than positively valenced. Intimation turning point events were positively valenced significantly more often than they were negatively valenced. In particular, revelation and appreciation were positively valenced. Finally, turning point events regarding realization of student potential or success were more likely to be positively than negatively valenced.

## Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicted that instructor liking for students will change following relational turning point events. A repeated measures ANOVA on turning point events yielded a significant main effect on instructor liking for students before and after the event, Wilks' lambda = .889,  $F(3, 284) = 1.184$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ . Follow-up tests were conducted using repeated measures  $t$  tests, one for each event type. Repeated-measures  $t$  tests indicated significant differences in instructor liking for students before and after turning point events. In particular, instructor liking for students increased following revelation, appreciation, and realization of student potential or success turning point events. Instructor liking for students decreased following discussion of course assignment or policy, and deception turning point events (see Table 1). Overall, there was support for this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that relationships with students will change following relational turning point events. A repeated measures ANOVA on turning point events

**Table 1** Instructor Liking for Students Before and After Turning-Point Events

Categories	Subcategory	Before turning point		After turning point		$t$	$df$	$p$	$\eta^2$
		$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$				
Consultation		5.57	1.08	5.40	1.17	1.337	74	.185	.02
	Discussion of advancement in education or career	5.39	1.21	5.69	1.32	-2.005	22	.057	.15
	Discussion of course assignment or policy	5.67	.90	4.85	.93	4.141	29	<.001*	.37
	Intervention	5.61	1.19	5.86	.99	-1.295	21	.209	.07
Transgression		5.28	.71	4.87	1.28	2.562	74	.012*	.08
	Deception	5.33	.55	4.61	1.57	2.665	37	.011*	.16
	Connoption	5.25	.90	5.10	.86	.884	31	.383	.03
	Contrition	5.10	.37	5.37	.64	-.594	4	.585	.08
Intimation		5.14	1.04	5.51	1.06	-4.306	87	<.001*	.05
	Revelation	5.35	1.04	5.50	1.07	-3.124	65	.003*	.13
	Appreciation	4.52	.72	5.52	1.03	-3.732	21	.001*	.15
Realization of Student Potential or Success		5.12	.95	5.73	.93	-3.667	49	.001*	.07

\*Significant difference.

yielded a significant main effect on relationships with students before and after the event, Wilks' lambda = .926,  $F(3, 281) = 7.452$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ . Follow-up tests were conducted using repeated measures  $t$  tests, one for each event type. Repeated measures  $t$  tests indicated significant differences in relationships with students before and after turning point events. In particular, relationships with students increased following intervention, revelation, appreciation, and realization of student potential or success turning point events. Relationships with students decreased following discussion of course assignment or policy turning point events (see Table 2). Overall, there was support for this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that teacher self-efficacy will change following relational turning point events. A repeated measures ANOVA on turning point events yielded a significant main effect on teacher self-efficacy before and after the event, Wilks' lambda = .889,  $F(3, 280) = 1.167$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ . Follow-up tests were conducted using repeated measures  $t$  tests, one for each event type. Repeated measures  $t$  tests indicated significant differences in teacher self-efficacy scores before and after turning point events. In particular, teacher self-efficacy scores increased following revelation, appreciation, and realization of student potential or success turning point events. Teacher self-efficacy scores decreased following contrition and discussion of course assignment or policy turning point events (see Table 3). Overall, there was support for this hypothesis.

**Table 2** Teacher–Student Interpersonal Relationships Before and After Turning-Point Events

Categories	Subcategory	Before turning point		After turning point		$t$	$df$	$p$	$\eta^2$
		$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$				
Consultation		5.39	1.06	5.25	1.23	.972	74	.334	.01
	Discussion of advancement in education or career	5.38	.99	5.63	1.18	-1.449	22	.162	.08
	Discussion of course assignment or policy	5.61	1.03	4.67	1.21	3.821	29	.001*	.33
	Intervention	5.09	1.13	5.63	.98	-3.043	21	.006*	.31
Transgression		5.19	.97	5.03	1.01	1.049	71	.298	.02
	Deception	4.93	1.17	5.05	1.10	-.512	34	.612	.01
	Connption	5.34	.67	4.94	.96	2.028	31	.051	.12
	Contrition	6.00	.00	5.52	.66	1.633	4	.178	.40
Intimiation		5.26	.93	5.63	.90	-4.656	87	<.001*	.20
	Revelation	5.31	.94	5.61	.90	-3.483	65	.001*	.16
	Appreciation	5.12	.91	5.68	.92	-3.205	21	.004*	.33
Realization of Student Potential or Success		5.03	.94	5.58	.87	-4.329	49	<.001*	.28

\*Significant difference.

**Table 3** Teacher Self-Efficacy Before and After Turning-Point Events

Categories	Subcategory	Before turning point		After turning point		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Consultation		5.81	.82	5.52	1.27	2.242	73	.028*	.06
	Discussion of advancement in education or career	5.74	.93	6.01	1.04	-1.325	21	.199	.08
	Discussion of course assignment or policy	5.67	.93	4.72	1.36	4.639	29	<.001*	.43
	Intervention	6.07	.46	6.13	.61	-.350	21	.730	.01
Transgression		5.62	.80	5.47	1.03	1.673	71	.099	.04
	Deception	5.85	.61	5.66	1.01	1.22	34	.231	.04
	Connption	5.36	.95	5.35	1.09	.059	31	.954	.01
	Conrition	5.76	.33	4.92	.38	34.293	4	<.001*	.99
Intimiation		5.35	1.11	5.66	.86	-4.306	87	<.001*	.17
	Revelation	5.33	1.10	5.58	.82	-2.815	65	.006*	.11
	Appreciation	5.44	1.14	5.89	.94	-6.002	21	<.001*	.63
Realization of Student Potential or Success		5.20	.89	5.61	.88	-4.688	49	<.001*	.30

\*Significant difference.

**Table 4** Teacher Motivation Before and After Turning Point Events

Categories	Subcategory	Before turning point		After turning point		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Consultation		5.84	1.23	5.73	1.34	.809	74	.421	.01
	Discussion of advancement in education or career	5.41	1.37	6.00	1.13	-3.385	22	.003*	.33
	Discussion of course assignment or policy	6.01	.85	5.12	1.29	4.293	29	<.001*	.39
	Intervention	6.05	1.44	6.28	1.35	-1.717	21	.101	.12
Transgression		5.79	1.00	5.31	1.18	4.026	71	<.001*	.18
	Deception	5.92	.96	5.66	.84	1.547	34	.131	.07
	Connption	5.68	1.11	4.90	1.44	4.181	31	<.001*	.36
	Conrition	5.60	.09	5.47	.27	1.633	4	.178	.40
Intimiation		5.64	1.00	5.85	.97	-2.648	84	.010*	.08
	Revelation	5.68	1.02	5.78	.99	-1.192	62	.238	.02
	Appreciation	5.50	.93	6.07	.87	-2.755	21	.012*	.26
Realization of Student Potential or Success		5.57	.86	5.84	.98	-3.717	49	.001*	.22

\*Significant difference.

**Table 5** Teacher Job Satisfaction Before and After Turning-Point Events

Categories	Subcategory	Before Turning Point		After Turning Point		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Consultation		5.59	.94	5.54	1.38	.429	74	.669	.01
	Discussion of advancement in education or career	5.60	1.22	5.79	1.56	-1.416	22	.171	.08
	Discussion of course assignment or policy	5.68	.88	4.93	1.33	3.268	29	.003*	.27
	Intervention	5.45	.65	6.09	.91	-4.683	21	<.001*	.51
Transgression		5.55	.90	4.90	1.36	3.878	71	<.001*	.17
	Deception	5.90	.72	5.35	1.11	2.145	34	.039*	.12
	Connipion	5.17	1.00	4.37	1.47	3.266	31	.003*	.25
	Conitrition	5.52	.11	5.12	1.20	.816	4	.460	.14
Intimiation		5.24	.99	5.88	.99	-6.968	84	<.001*	.37
	Revelation	5.35	1.06	5.80	1.01	-4.744	62	<.001*	.26
	Appreciation	4.92	.68	6.10	.91	-6.305	21	<.001*	.65
Realization of Student Potential or Success		4.92	1.20	5.61	1.17	-6.186	49	<.001*	.44

\*Significant difference.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that teacher motivation will change following relational turning point events. A repeated measures ANOVA on turning point events yielded a significant main effect on teacher motivation before and after the event, Wilks' lambda = .902,  $F(3, 278) = 1.009$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ . Repeated measures  $t$  tests indicated significant differences in teacher motivation scores before and after turning point events. In particular, teacher motivation scores increased following discussion of advancement in education or career, appreciation, and realization of student potential or success turning point events. Teacher motivation scores decreased following connipion and discussion of course assignment or policy turning point events (see Table 4). Overall, there was support for this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that teacher job satisfaction will change following relational turning point events. A repeated measures ANOVA on turning point events yielded a significant main effect on teacher job satisfaction before and after the event, Wilks' lambda = .794,  $F(3, 278) = 2.404$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ . Repeated measures  $t$  tests indicated significant differences in teacher job satisfaction scores before and after turning point events. In particular, teacher job satisfaction scores increased following intervention, revelation, appreciation, and realization of student potential or success turning point events. Teacher job satisfaction scores decreased following deception, connipion, and discussion of course assignment or policy turning point events (see Table 5). Overall, there was support for this hypothesis.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine relational turning points from college teachers' perspectives, and how they appear to affect teacher outcomes. An analysis of the data yielded 4 distinct supracategories of relational turning point events, some of which comprised subcategories. Consultation relational turning points—including of the subcategories discussion of advancement in education or career, discussion of course policy or assignment, and intervention—entailed events in which the teacher consulted, provided advice, or offered guidance to the student. In all of these events, the teacher aided the student with a class, college, or career-related matter. Transgression relational turning points—including the subcategories of deception, connoption, and contrition—involved events in which the student or teacher acted in a defiant manner, often breaking spoken or unspoken rules. Intimation relational turning points, marked by an intimate, affiliative, or highly personal exchange by the teacher and/or student, included the two subcategories of revelation and appreciation. Finally, realization of student potential or success turning points included reports in which the teacher realized a student's potential, success, or hard work.

These findings, as a whole, lead to a number of important conclusions. Three of the four supracategories of turning points reported by teachers fit within Surra and Huston's (1987) category of *dyadic turning point events*, which occur in interaction with another person. Nearly all consultation, transgression, and intimation turning point events took place when the teacher and student were in face-to-face exchanges. Realization of student potential or success turning points, however, fit within Surra and Huston's category of *intrapersonal turning point events*, and entailed more of an internal thought process versus a reciprocal exchange with a student. Surra and Huston's two other categories of relational turning points—*social network* (individual from either or both partner's social network affects the relationship) and *circumstantial* (an event beyond the partners' control affects the relationship)—did not emerge as clearly. That dyadic, and to a lesser extent intrapersonal relational turning point events, comprised the majority of responses in the current study offers evidence that many of the most significant moments in instruction occur during one-on-one, interpersonal exchanges with students. Further, these exchanges also have the potential to affect important teacher outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and self-efficacy.

A number of additional connections and distinctions among the turning point categories also emerged. In particular, consultation turning point events and transgression turning point events involved teacher–student communication about course or college-related issues; whereas, intimation turning point events and realization of student potential or success turning point events did not. On the other hand, consultation turning point events differed from transgression turning point events in that the former involved providing advice or offering guidance; whereas, the latter often entailed communication about the breaking of rules. Further, the transgression turning point events (i.e., deception, connoption, and contrition), as well as the subcategory of discussion of course assignment or policy were judged as negative events. Perhaps these difficult instructional communication events merit additional exploration in future

research, as well as topics of focus in teacher-training programs (i.e., teaching assistant trainings, campus teaching workshops). Conversely, turning points perceived as positive events included discussion of advancement in education or career, intervention, revelation, appreciation, and realization of student potential or success.

As the first study to-date to capture teachers' perspectives of turning points in their relationships with students, we also gain a richer understanding of the similarities and differences students and teachers report in their turning points with one another. Similar to students in previous studies (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O'Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992), teachers reported that turning points occurred during discussions of course policies and assignments, discussions of advancement in education or career, and self-disclosures. Further, both teachers and students reported moments of intense, heated interaction. More specifically, students detailed turning points when they were ridiculed by their instructor, and reported their instructor using language or behavior in a mocking or humiliating manner. In the current study, teachers reported turning points that also appeared to have a negative intensity, but came in the form of connotation turning points, which entailed strong reactions of aggression, anger, shock, or indignation. Other differences marked teachers' experiences of turning points from students', namely in that teachers reported realizing students' potential or success and engaging in interventions. These findings point to both the shared and related, but also unique and divergent experiences and expectations emergent in the constantly changing teacher–student relationship.

The current study also offers support for and extends DeVito's (1986) stage model of change in the teacher–student relationship. In particular, the stage of intimacy was well accounted for in the current study. Perhaps the intimacy stage is marked by revelation relational turning points, where the teacher and/or student disclose private, personal information. One possible extension to DeVito's model is that entering a stage requires a *transitory move* or shift, often occurring as the result of a teacher or student's behavior. In many cases, these transitory moves come in the form of relational turning point events. For example, a teacher–student relationship in the intimacy stage may quickly shift to the dissolution stage because of an unexpected transgression turning point. Their relationship, however, has the potential to continue to transform. Perhaps this dissolution stage could then loop back to the intimacy stage via an appreciation turning point later in the semester. Turning points, then, have the potential to signify or mark, as well as transition to a relational stage. In the discussion of this model, DeVito claims that a “the development of the interpersonal relationship is viewed as the means by which more effective, efficient, and satisfying teaching and learning may take place” (p. 53). Indeed, relationship events—turning points in the case of this study—do have the potential to increase byproducts or outcomes such as teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy. However, the current study also points to the notion that the development of the teacher–student interpersonal relationship does not always lead to “more effective, efficient, and satisfying teaching” (p. 53). Relationship development can also lead to decreases in satisfaction, among other outcomes, which is discussed further later. The teacher–student relationship is one that is in flux, and has important relational and personal effects.

The current study also contributes to Baxter and colleagues' theory of relational dialectics (Baxter, 1988, 1990, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Rawlins, 1992) within the instructional context. Although the primary purpose of the current study was to investigate relational turning point events, the data both support and extend Rawlins' (2000) identification of dialectical tensions experienced with his own students. The poles of the *affection-instrumentality dialectic* (Rawlins, 2000) were evident in turning point accounts teachers reported for the current study. Intimation turning point events often included what Rawlins' labeled as affection, and the instrumentality pole is captured in turning point events involving discussions of advancement in education or career, discussions of course policy or assignment, and interventions. One dialectical tension that emerged that has not been identified in the instructional communication literature concerns the tension to intervene or withhold. In many intervention turning point events, for example, teachers reported a long-standing tension about what to do with a struggling student, and often times did pursue an intervention. Future research should investigate this tension further as it not only is an important turning point identified by teachers, but has the potential to positively or negatively affect the student in the short and long term.

Baxter's (2004) notion of dialectical flux—the “backward-forward, up-and-down motion” (p. 11), unfinalized, and indeterminate nature of relationships—is captured in the turning point accounts offered in the current study. These events, however, also appear to change teacher outcomes, further illustrating the importance of turning points in the instructional context. In particular, teachers who reported revelation turning point events also indicated increased liking for students, teacher–student interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. Similarly, previous research (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009) examining turning points from students' perspectives found that students who reported turning points involving a discussion of personal information indicated increased cognitive learning, affective learning, and student motivation. The results of these studies support the claim that self-disclosure in instructional settings can be a useful tool (e.g., Cayanus & Martin, 2004, 2008), and helps advance the idea that it is not only the self-disclosure that matters—it is the relational turning point that emerges from the self-disclosure, which in turn appears to affect both student *and* teacher outcomes.

Analyses of demographic variables also revealed important findings regarding intimation turning point events. Specifically, female teachers were more likely to report a revelation turning point event compared to male teachers. These findings make sense seeing that women tend to self-disclose more than men, although these differences are small (Dindia, 2000), and that female teachers are expected to be more personal and interact more with their students (Anderson & Miller, 1997; Sandler, 1991). Although data from the current study does not represent how often specific turning point events occur, it does prompt speculation that revelation turning point events were critical or worthy of reporting more often for female participants in this study. Similarly, female teachers were more likely to report an appreciation turning point event compared to male teachers. Finally, teachers who reported a realization of student potential or success turning point event were more likely to report it

occurring with a female student than a male student. These findings, coupled with some open-ended responses (e.g., “As a gay white male I think I’m sensitive to issues of identity, so this was mutually painful”), point to the importance of teacher and student demographic characteristics in the instructional context. In light of the current study, however, these results further intimate the importance of recognizing the teacher–student relationship as systemic—all instructional variables and processes are connected by the relationship and affect the relationship.

Consultation turning point events also influenced teacher outcomes in the current study. More specifically, teachers who reported interventions also indicated increased job satisfaction and teacher–student interpersonal relationships. Teachers who reported discussion of advancement in education or career turning points indicated increased teacher motivation. Interestingly, previous research indicates that students who reported turning points labeled *discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships* indicated increased perceived cognitive and affective learning (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009). Teacher–student discussions about opportunities for advancement do not only serve as an informational encounter, but also have the potential to positively affect larger outcomes for both parties. Some consultation turning points, however, also have a more negative side. In the current study, teachers who reported discussion of course assignment or policy turning points also indicated decreased liking for students, teacher–student interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy, motivation, and job satisfaction. Similarly, students who reported *discussion of grade* turning points indicated decreased cognitive learning, affective learning, and student motivation, and students who reported *discussion of course policy/rule* turning points indicated decreased cognitive learning (Docan-Morgan & Manusov). These findings about turning points in the teacher–student relationship suggest worthwhile avenues of exploration in future research. In particular, what kinds of communicative tactics are most useful for discussing grades and course policies with students? Perhaps using Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe’s (2006) rhetorical/relational goal theory as lens would draw additional light. It appears that teachers’ rhetorical and relational goals and students’ relational and academic needs are woven tightly into discussions of grades and course policies. More specifically, one might ask: What are teachers’ rhetorical and relational goals and students’ relational and academic needs in their discussions of a student’s grades? What communicative strategies work best to align teachers’ goals and students’ needs in these discussions?

Teacher outcomes were also affected by transgression relational turning points. Teachers who reported transgression turning points indicated decreased liking for students, teacher motivation, and job satisfaction. More specifically, teachers who disclosed deception turning points also indicated decreased liking for students and job satisfaction. Further, teachers who reported conniption turning points indicated decreased job satisfaction and teacher motivation. Many of the behaviors teachers reported within these categories fit within what previous research labels as student incivility and resistance (Kearney, Plax, & McPherson, 2006; Nordstrom, Bartels, & Bucy, 2009), thereby indicating that previously identified instructional issues emerge as relational turning point events. Indeed, student incivility and resistance impedes

learning (Kearney et al.), but also negatively affects teacher outcomes as evidenced in the current study. Although student incivility and resistance “might only represent a small portion of classroom experiences” (Kearney et al., p. 236), 25% of turning points reported in the current study fit within this category. The specific transgression turning points identified in this study merit additional research. To date, we know little about student deception. Perhaps interpersonal deception theory (Buller & Burgoon, 1996), which recognizes the interactional and relational nature of deception, could prompt fruitful insight about this topic. More specifically: What types of deception (i.e., falsification, equivocation, concealment) do students and teachers use in their interactions with one another and how, if at all, do these behaviors affect their relationship and instructional outcomes? How do key deception variables—suspicion, strategic and nonstrategic behavior, truth bias, motivation, and deception detection accuracy—play a role in teacher–student interactions involving deception?

The current study is not without limitations. First, it relied on teachers’ retrospective accounts of turning points with their students. Although respondents did offer detailed accounts of their turning points, their recall of the event could have changed over time. Second, the current study asked participants to recall only one turning point event, when participants may have experienced more. For example, when asked to select and report on the event, one respondent wrote, “This sort of thing happens to me almost every quarter.” Perhaps allowing respondents to report on multiple or all of their turning points would offer richer, more telling data. Third, the current study addressed turning points from only one relational partner. To address these shortcomings, future research might utilize the diary method. Student and teacher participants could be instructed to keep a detailed log of turning point events throughout a semester, academic year, or over a longer period of time. Such data would offer a “fresher” account of the events, allow participants to report on multiple turning points, and account for the dyadic nature of the turning point events. Despite these limitations, the findings in the current study are important for instructors to reflect on and perhaps use to move to action.

### **An Invitation for Reflective Practice and Action**

I invite readers of this article to engage in *reflective practice* and perhaps move to action regarding the findings of this study. Reflection “is the act of looking upon the action after it has passed” (Ryan, 2007, p. 365). Warin et al. (2006) “emphasize reflexivity, an awareness of self-in-practice, as an important aspect of reflective practice for teachers as members of a demanding, ever-changing profession” (p. 234). Self-awareness is a tool for teaching and invites teachers to evaluate their intentions, behaviors, and outcomes with students. Engaging in reflection is an opportunity for professional development and self-improvement (MacLure, 1993), as well as a thrust to change one’s teaching (Elliott, 1993). I encourage you to use the below reflective prompts and questions to journal about regularly, discuss with colleagues, and use to move to action:

1. What types of relational turning point events have you experienced both as a student and a teacher?
  - a) How did you perceive and react to the behavior of those involved?
  - b) How did these events affect your identity as a student and/or teacher?
  - c) What were the outcomes for you in the short and long term?
  - d) How might these experiences and reflections shape how you process and react to future interactions and/or turning point events with students?
2. How do your judgments, assumptions, interpretations, and expectations about teaching, teacher–student relationships, and relational turning points between teachers and students affect your instruction?
3. How do your personal and professional histories affect how you communicate with your students, your relationships with your students, and turning points with students you have had in the past?
4. Some relational turning point events lead to positive outcomes for both teachers and students (e.g., teacher–student discussions about opportunities for student advancement; revelation; appreciation).
  - a) How, if at all, do these types of events play a role in your teaching and your students’ advancement?
  - b) How and when might you be able to facilitate or create an opportunity to create positive turning points with your students?
5. Undergraduate students have identified a number of problematic relational turning point events, including being ridiculed or disciplined and having discussions about course policies, rules, and grades. Likewise, instructors have identified problematic turning points, such as deception, conniption, contrition, and discussions of course assignments or policies.
  - a) How, if at all, do these types of events play a role in your teaching and your students’ advancement?
  - b) In what ways might you be able to create safeguards so they are less likely to happen?
  - c) When these types of events arise, what are the most effective ways to handle them?
6. How or in what ways might you engage in continued dialogue about relational turning points that occur in the teacher–student relationship?

I invite readers of this article to visit <http://RelationalTurningPoints.org> for teaching resources that may help facilitate positive relational turning points.

The current study’s use of a relational frame recognizes the systemic nature of relationships, and further “helps explain not only that instructional variables and processes are linked by the relationship, but that the systemic functioning of the relationship works to affect outcomes as well” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 183). Relational turning point events and their effects on outcomes (e.g., instructor liking for students, self-efficacy, job satisfaction) occur because of the systemic nature of the teacher–student relationship. The dynamic, changing nature of human relationships is especially important within the instructional context as these shifts affect both personal and individual outcomes. This study focused “on the often neglected other half of the teacher–student communication process” (Mottet, Beebe,

et al., 2006, p. 146) and resultantly offers an important piece to our understanding of the teacher–student relationship puzzle.

## Note

- [1] Analyses of the data found three significant differences regarding demographic variables. A chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *revelation turning point events* and teacher sex was significant,  $\chi^2 = 6.391$ ,  $p = .011$ . In particular, female teachers ( $n = 45$ , 65%) were more likely to report a revelation turning point event compared to male teachers ( $n = 24$ , 35%). Additionally, a chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *appreciation turning point events* and teacher sex was significant,  $\chi^2 = 6.143$ ,  $p = .002$ . In particular, female teachers ( $n = 22$ , 79%) were more likely to report an appreciation turning point event compared to male teachers ( $n = 6$ , 21%). Finally, a chi-square test indicated that the relationship between *realization of student potential or success turning point events* and student sex was significant,  $\chi^2 = 8.321$ ,  $p = .004$ . Specifically, teachers who reported a realization of student potential or success turning point event were more likely to report it occurring with a female student ( $n = 37$ , 70%) than a male student ( $n = 16$ , 30%).

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