A typology of relational turning point events in college teacher-student relationships

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Abstract: The purpose of this brief report was to develop a typology of relational turning point events between college teachers and students. Participants were 640 undergraduates who were asked whether they could recall a turning point with a teacher, and if so, to report the turning point event in detail. Analysis of the data yielded 6 large categories of turning point events, including instrumental *(discussion of grade; discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally; discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships; discussion of course policy/rule),* personal *(discussion of coursework and personal information; discussion of common interest; compliment; invitation; name used),* rhetorical *(lecture topic or claim; teaching style),* ridicule/discipline*,* locational*, and* other person*. As the first of a series of studies on relational turning point events between teachers and students, the current study presents new insight into the literature on relational turning points and the larger body of literature on teacher-effectiveness. The current study also offers teachers an understanding of how to establish and build meaningful relationships with students.*

Keywords: teacher-student relationship, relational turning point events, undergraduate students

I. Introduction and Literature Review.

Research spanning the field of teacher effectiveness has contributed a wealth of knowledge about the significance of instructor behavior (Frymier, 1994; Frymier and Wanzer, 2006), student motivation (Christophel, 1990; Docan, 2006), classroom climate (Dwyer, Bingham, Carlson, Prisbell, Cruz, and Fus, 2004), and teaching methods (Chesebro, 2003; Docan-Morgan, 2007; Wulff and Wulff, 2004) on outcomes such as student learning and motivation. One key element that cuts across each of these areas, albeit rarely recognized explicitly, is that of the *relationship* between teacher and student. 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" (Teven, 2001, p. 159).

The professor-student relationship has been conceptualized along a continuum of relational development (DeVito, 1986), which asserts that: (1) teaching can be described as a relational process from initial contact, intimacy or closeness, 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

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lead to greater satisfaction and more effective learning; and (4) and 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).

Similar to DeVito (1986), Dobransky and Frymier (2004) also conceptualize the teacher-student dynamic as an interpersonal relationship; however, in their analysis, the teacher-student relationship is marked by control, trust, and intimacy as conceived by Millar and Rogers (1976). Millar and Rogers posit that the ways control is shared, the level of intimacy, and the amount of trust help define the relationship. In their study, Dobransky and Frymier found that "students who perceived their teachers as exhibiting higher levels of shared control, trust, and intimacy reported greater learning" (p. 211). Not only do relationships exist between teachers and students, but they develop through distinct stages (DeVito, 1986), involve shared control, trust, and intimacy (Dobransky and Frymier, 2004), include relational elements such as control and affection (Lowman, 1984, 1994), entail relational communication behaviors (Graham, West, and Schaller, 1992), and are goal-based like other types of relationships (Frymier and Houser, 2000).

One of the most significant factors identified in relationships is that of *relational turning points*. A relational turning point is "any event or occurrence that is associated with change in a relationship" (Baxter and Bullis, 1986, p. 470). Turning points affect outcomes such as closeness and relational satisfaction (e.g., Golish, 2000; Surra, 1987), are deemed important by those involved (Baxter and Bullis, 1986), and often have a powerful effect on relational development (Masheter and Harris, 1986). Only a few studies have examined relational turning points in the academic arena. For example, Bullis and Bach (1989a, 1989b) examined turning points in the graduate student-professor relationship and discovered nine types of turning points: academic recognition, perceived similarity, mutual confirmation, advising, personal bonding, relational clashes, relational evolution, relational decline, and miscellaneous.

To date, only one published study has analyzed turning points in faculty-undergraduate student relationships. O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas (1992) asked 52 college seniors to "recall turning points pertinent to an out-of-the-ordinary (either very positive or very negative) and recent relationship with an instructor" within the classroom environment (p. 282). The results indicate two macro-categories of turning points divided into six sub-categories. The first category was labeled perception of instructional communication competence and character (including subcategories perceived competence and character) and the second was labeled perception of instructor's management style (including learning climate, course administration style, rhetorical sensitivity, and feedback). Although in many ways a useful investigation, O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas's sample consisted of only 52 students, all of whom were seniors, and only classroom interaction was examined, whereas out-of-classroom encounters may have contributed to relational turning points. O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas's study does, however, call for further investigation into the relational turning points experienced by students and teachers. In their call, O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas remark that "ultimately, the undertaking of such research can only add further to our understanding the 'how,' 'why,' and 'so what' of student-faculty relational dynamics" (p. 290).

The following study is the first of a series of studies aimed at unraveling the communication events that change the teacher-student relationship. The goal of the current study is to develop a typology of relational turning point events as perceived by students. The following research question was asked:

What specific types of events do students report as relational turning points in teacher-student relationships?

II. Method.

A. Participants.

The sample for this study consisted of 640 students at a large northwestern university recruited from communication courses meeting general-education university requirements and enroll students from all undergraduate majors. Students were asked to participate in a study involving teacher-student interaction and accessed a questionnaire on the Internet, which allowed students ample time to decide whether to participate in the study, ask the researcher questions,

and ensure confidentiality. The questionnaire took approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. Participants were offered extra credit and their participation was voluntary. Students ($n = 17$) who did not want to take part in the study or who were enrolled in multiple classes that were solicited for participation were given the option of completing an alternative extra-credit assignment. Of those who did participate, six reported on a turning point with a K-12 teacher, thus their cases were deleted from the data set. Participants who were able to recall a turning point ($n = 394$, 62%) subsequently completed open-ended questions about the turning point. The majority of participants *able to recall* an event ($n = 280$) were female. Their ages ranged from 18 to 49 ($M = 20.49$, $SD = 2.57$). Two hundred fifty four reported as being White, 84 as Asian, 20 as Hispanic or Latino, 14 as mixed race, 9 as African American, 8 as native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 2 as American Indian or Alaska Natives, 2 as Middle Eastern, and 1 did not report his or her race/ethnicity. Four people did not report their academic status; 42 said they were in their first year, 137 were sophomores, 130 were juniors, 79 were seniors, and 2 were graduate students.

B. Procedure and Data Analysis.

Research demonstrates that the recall of specific events is less subject to distortion than summary judgments of events occurring frequently (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986; Schwartz, 1999); therefore, this study utilized the critical incident technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954). The CIT,

> involves asking a number of respondents to identify events or experiences that were 'critical' for some purpose. These incidents are then pooled together for analysis, and generalizations about the event or activity are drawn from the commonalities of the incidents. (Kain, 2004, p. 71)

The CIT is appropriate for analyzing relational turning points as it allows participants to provide accounts of their firsthand experiences. Given that relational turning points are experienced by relationship partners themselves (e.g., Baxter and Bullis, 1986; Johnson et al., 2003), an analysis of turning points requires that data capture their experiences. Kain (2004) remarks 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). Specifically, the CIT asks respondents to tell a story and explain why it is significant or important for a given context (Kain, 2004). By focusing on a specific event, the contextual and case-specific nature of the phenomena under investigation is captured. The questionnaire defined *relational turning point* and asked students to report the turning point in detail.

The current study utilized Flanagan (1954), Woolsey (1986), and Kain's (2004) approach for analyzing data. The CIT, according to Woolsey (1986), 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" (p. 248). To begin, I selected a small sample of incidents and sorted them into piles and tentative categories. Using the constant comparative approach, I compared examples for similarities and differences (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). After establishing these tentative categories, I developed definitions for each category, and added additional incidents to each category. Throughout this process, I added, redefined, combined, and revised categories until the categories did not need further modification. During the analysis process, I subdivided the larger categories into smaller groups and placed together the incidents that described very nearly the same type of behavior. I then re-examined the definitions for all the categories and major headings in terms of the actual incidents classified under each category and subcategory.

III. Results.

Analysis of the data yielded 6 larger categories of turning point events, some of which were subsequently divided into more specific sub-categories. The six larger categories of relational turning point events were labeled as *instrumental*, *personal*, *rhetorical*, *ridicule/ discipline*, *locational*, and *other person*. Each of these categories, as well as their subcategories, are explicated below. The Appendix summarizes the types and frequency of turning point events reported.

A. Instrumental.

Instrumental relational turning points ($n = 170$, 43.1%) consisted of events based largely on reports of the teacher helping or assisting a student with class or college-related issues or concerns. Four subcategories emerged from the data, including *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*.

Discussion of grade. Turning point events that were reported to occur when the student and teacher discussed a student's grade on an exam, assignment, or a final course grade were categorized as *discussion of grade*. Other applicable turning points included in this category consisted of a teacher grading a student's work in his or her presence and discussing it, discussing consequences of a grade, and how to make up a bad grade ($n = 21$, 5.3%). For example, one student wrote the following:

> I went to my professor to ask about a question I got wrong on a test to see if I could possibly get some points back. I showed him the question and explained why I think I should get it right in clear detail. He took very little time to hear what I had to say and did not give me any points or an explanation of why not.

As can be seen, the focus was on talking about the grade.

Another instrumental, grade-related turning point reported by a student entailed the following:

> I scheduled a meeting to discuss a possible error in exam scores. I knocked on the professor's door to find that there was a miscommunication with the meeting time. I had come earlier than expected, but was welcomed in anyway. We looked over the scores to find that I was actually given a higher score when I had thought I was graded lower. The professor gave me the higher grade and assured me that the low test grade would not affect my overall grade and that I had nothing to worry about.

Again, the primary focus of the event described was the grade discussion, be it a positive or negative experience from the students' perspective.

Discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally. Turning point events that occurred when a student and teacher discussed an assignment (e.g., paper, upcoming or previous exam), course concept or topic, a student's progress or standing in course, or the course more generally comprised the current category ($n = 111$, 28.2%). For example, one student's discussion with her/his teacher about a class presentation served as a turning point:

> In my class, we have to write a marketing plan that has to be 15 pages long, and we have to give a presentation by the end of the quarter. My team members and I were not sure how the presentation should be since the teacher did not give specific instructions. I decided to ask my instructor after the class is over.

Another student responded:

> My TA explained to me for two hours the entire overview of Political Science … International Relations and didn't laugh no matter how obvious the answer was to him. What I realized was that he actually cared about my learning and that this wasn't such a cold university.

Discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships. This subcategory comprised turning points that occurred when the main topic that a teacher and student discussed was college, a specific major or majors, what classes to take, independent study possibilities, job opportunities, job offers, future goals, studying abroad, and/or internship possibilities, and letters of recommendation ($n = 26$, 6.6%). Some students reported a turning point occurring when they approached their teacher for career and graduate school advice:

> I went to her office to speak with her about my decision of where to go to school. She was a Communication teacher. She came from a smaller, intimate college for her undergraduate work. I wanted her opinion.

In another response, a student's instrumental request focused on a school-related opportunity:

> There were many other people in the cafe other then myself and my professor. The event was when I asked him to write a recommendation for me. I am planning on studying abroad this summer and I needed a letter of recommendation from him. This meeting was when I was able to give him more information about myself.

Discussion of course policy/rule. Turning point events that occurred when a student and teacher discussed a course policy or rule (e.g., turning in an assignment late, extending a deadline, time to complete a test) or a teacher allowing students to have extra time on an assignment or test were categorized as *discussion of course policy/rule* (*n* = 12, 3.0%). For example, one students reported the following turning point:

> It happened in the morning (approx. 9:20AM), at the end of class. In a classroom. I approached the teacher. A female grad student who was teaching the technical communication class. I asked why she had announced a pop quiz the day before, after I and several other students left the class early. I had notified her prior to this that I had a class far away right afterwards, and that some days I would be leaving early to make it to tests, quizzes, etc. on time.

In a similar discussion, one student perceived a change in her/his relationship with the instructor based on a conversation about making up an exam:

> I missed my midterm earlier that day, and after I emailed my professor and explained the situation to her, she was kind enough to let me take the midterm later that day with no consequence to my grade. She was extremely kind and considerate about my situation.

B. Personal.

Turning point events based largely on the sharing of private, personal information, or if there was a specific, approach/affinity seeking behavior or statement intended for one person (e.g., compliment, invitation, name used) were labeled as *personal* (*n* = 104, 26.4%). Five subcategories emerged from the data.

Discussion of coursework and personal information. Turning point events occurring when the teacher and student discussed *coursework* (e.g., paper, grade, participation, late work, course/topic/subject) or were in the context of the class (e.g., during class activity, after class) *and discussed personal information* (e.g., includes discussion of events that happened in life (e.g., life experiences, recent tragedies/sickness, family, background, personal life, weekends) (*n* = 46, 11.7%) were labeled as *discussion of coursework and personal information*. The following example illustrates one relational turning point event between a teacher and student coded in the current category:

> I had to talk to [my teacher] about my final project ideas. I arrived about 10 minutes early and my professor wasn't in yet. He had posters of "no war on Iraq" on his door, and on his window there were various signs of his beliefs and interest as well as student work (for example gay and lesbian rights). This explained that he is very interested in his students' interests, ideas, and works. During my session with him, he was first interested in who I am as a person. He asked about my ethnic background, my hobbies, my beliefs, and many other questions. Then we went into detail about my ideas. This was used in a way to bring out what I might want to do about for project. For the first time, I felt that a professor was engaged with what I had to say. It was the professor feeding me more and more information but we were working together to help me.

Discussion of common interest. Turning points occurring when a teacher and student discussed a common interest or experiences, either course related (e.g., chemistry research) or not course related (e.g., favorite car) were categorized as *discussion of common interest* ($n = 15$, 3.8%). For example, one student remarked, "…after class…We began to talk about authors and found a common interest in Faulkner. I was just introduced to the author and he was writing his doctoral thesis on it." Another student reported that a turning point occurred when:

> The class was asked if anyone knew the make/model/year of an automotive figure on an overhead projector in a course during my freshman year. The model car was a 1963 VW Type 1 Beetle. I raised my hand and nailed it dead on. I then went on to explain details which the model lacked, such as the standard production vent windows and a few other features. The teacher then mentioned that he was a VW Beetle enthusiast and owned a superbeetle. I stated that I also was a large VW enthusiast and had restored/customized a 1967 Beetle. We then talked for about ten more minutes during lecture about our vehicles.

Compliment. Turning points occurring when a teacher provided a student with an expression of praise, commendation, or admiration were categorized as compliments ($n = 21$, 5.3%). Responses indicating that a teacher thanked or disclosed appreciation for a student's participation in class, complimented student on their behavior in the classroom, or offered verbal or written praise on work returned to a student were labeled compliments. One student perceived a change in her/his relationship with the teacher in this event:

> It was outside of the regular class time and was just between the teacher and I. I sought out my accounting teacher for extra help. He was able to explain things much more clearly than in class and also displayed a strong desire to make sure that I truly understood the material. He also let me know how much he appreciated my class participation and eagerness to learn in his class.

Invitation. Turning points occurring when a teacher or student requested the other's presence or participation of the other, or a request to participate or be present or take part in something were categorized as *invitation* ($n = 8$, 2.0%). Invitations were made for attendance at a meeting, going out to eat or for a walk, and to participate in a group or activity. For example, one student responded "My TA asked me to go for a walk outside and asked me on a date." Another student reported:

> After enrolling in this class, I promptly found out it was not a regular class. We did not have regular meeting times, but rather we arranged times to meet with the professor personally. Additionally, the professor is very personable and invited a few of his students to attend a MIT alumni meeting that Google was hosting. I jumped at the invitation.

Name used. Turning points reported by students that focused on the teacher using or failing to use the student's name were labeled within this category ($n = 14$, 3.6%). For example, one student reported a turning point with her or his teacher at a basketball game: "I saw my

professor and he remembered my name. Out of 120 students in the class he remembered me!" Within the classroom context, another student responded:

> My professor had a seating chart the first day of class and the next day knew everyone's names. This helped me get engaged in the class and the material. I felt like she new me when she called me by my first name. This makes a huge difference and feel like I had a part in the class.

C. Rhetorical.

Turning points based largely on a teacher-directed behavior or statement intended for the entire class were labeled *rhetorical* (*n* = 57, 14.5%). Two subcategories include *lecture topic or claim* and *teaching style*.

Lecture topic or claim. Turning points that occurred when a teacher discussed a topic, made a claim, provided an example, or discussed experiences related to a topic, the course, or college *during lecture* were labeled *lecture topic or claim* (*n* = 31, 07.9%). The following response is a turning point reported by one student:

> The event occurred in…the afternoon during a 2 hour lecture. A discussion was raised regarding the general acceptance of illegal immigrants in certain regions of the country and whether or not this was acceptable.

In a similar response, another student reported:
> Rather than being taught from an objective perspective, this particular professor immediately used this class as a platform to instill his own beliefs onto us. We were talking about race matters in America when he concluded that we should all be active in our fight against racism through any means, including violence and destruction of property.

Teaching style. Rhetorical turning points also concerned the teacher's style (*n* = 26, 6.6%) or the manner by which the teacher engaged or failed to engage the students (e.g., informal, held everyone's attention, interacted in funny manner; used humor). Such turning points also included the manner by which the teacher led discussion and a teacher's overt discussion of her or his teaching style. For example, one student reported the following:

> [F]irst day of class I was just very impressed with the teacher's personality and teaching style. She had a great ability to catch and hold the attention of everyone in this huge lecture hall.

One teacher's discussion of her teaching style emerged as a turning point for a student when she
> explained to the class that part of her teaching style was not to shy away from controversial or potentially touchy subject matter during class discussions. she believed that encouraging lively debate about real-world issues would improve the quality of the essays we were to write for the class. i remember that this was a turning point for me because it represented one my first experiences outside of the high school environment

where everything (especially subject matter) is so much more controlled and sterilized. i remember this event as being very refreshing, worthwhile, and effective.

D. Ridicule/Discipline.

Another larger category of turning points reported by students included being ridiculed or threatened by the teacher (*n* = 31, 7.9%). Responses mentioning ridicule entailed the teacher using language or behavior in a mocking or humiliating manner. Responses mentioning being disciplined entailed the teacher bringing the student to a state of order and obedience or punishing the student. The following event was reported as a turning point by one student:

> The event took place in a classroom during class in front of all other students enrolled. I had recently missed a day of class because I had to attend my grandfather's funeral. My professor asked me to get a note written by someone important having to do with the funeral in order for me to not lose credit for missing class. My mom wrote a note for me to give to him the next day. He took one look at the note and said that his name was not correct. At first I thought it was not correct because it was written in English and he was a Spanish professor. Then he proceeded to tell me that it was still not the reason he said it was wrong. So I again said another option of his name and he still said it was wrong. So the day after my grandfather's funeral in front of our entire Spanish class, I had to stand there and be ridiculed by him.

E. Locational.

Turning point events based on being in a different location or environment than normal with a teacher were categorized as *locational* (*n* = 25, 6.3%). Students' responses focused on seeing their teacher outside of the usual academic environment. The following example illustrates the location-based nature of this type of turning point:

> The location was at a barbeque at our professor's house during the day celebrating my professors birthday. The setting was very informal where we talked and ate and changed the dynamic between us lab students and our professor.

Similarly, students reported locational turning points off campus, including the following:
> I was at the train station and went into the bathroom to wash my hands. Next to me was one of my professors from the previous quarter. I had to say hello just because it was so weird seeing her outside of school. I told her I had been in her class and how I enjoyed it. Then we talked about where we were traveling.

F. Other Person.

The final category of turning points, labeled *other person*, includes turning points that occurred not because of the teacher's behavior, but instead as a result of someone else's behavior (*n* = 7, 1.8%). The majority of these turning points occurred because of a third party's interaction with the student. The following examples illustrate the *other person* category:

> The professor was sent out of the room and a lady from some sort of office came in and we discussed the good and bad teaching techniques used by our professor. The lady created a memo for the professor telling her what we thought she could improve on for the rest of the quarter.

Another reported,

> Early in the quarter, probably the 2nd week, another student came up to me during our 10-minute break in class. She asked me my name and then told me she would need to be absent from class one day the following week. She said our teacher had recommended for her to get the notes for that day from me.

IV. Discussion.

The purpose of this study was to identify relational turning point events that college students perceive occurring with their teachers. Previous research posits that the teacher-student relationship develops through distinct stages (DeVito, 1986), includes relational elements such as control and affection (Lowman, 1984, 1994), entails relational communication behaviors (Graham et al., 1992), and is defined by control, trust, and intimacy (Dobransky and Frymier, 2004). However, one of the most salient features of relationships—that of relational turning points—merits explication in the teacher-student context. The present study attempted to establish a typology of relational turning point events as perceived by students from which the teacher-student relationship could be more readily understood. The events identified in the current study provide a richer conceptualization not only of the teacher-student relationship, but helps us better understand one-time events that shape students' perceptions of their relationships with their teachers.

In their analysis of relational turning point events, O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas (1992) advance two macro-categories and six sub-categories of turning point events: *perception of instructional communication competence and character* (perceived competence and character) and *perception of instructor's management style* (learning climate, course administration style, rhetorical sensitivity, and feedback). The current study extends their work by providing six macro-categories, some of which are divided into sub-categories: *instrumental* (discussion of grade; discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally; discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships; discussion of course policy or rule), *personal* (discussion of coursework and personal information; discussion of common interest; compliment; invitation; name used), *rhetorical* (lecture topic or claim; teaching style), *ridicule/discipline*, *locational*, and *other person*.

Upon a closer examination, there are notable similarities and differences between these two typologies of turning point events. Both studies address relational turning point events based on the use of a student's name, a course policy or course administration style, grading, and the location at which the turning point event occurred. When comparing these studies, three types of turning points appear to align more closely, however.

In particular, being ridiculed or disciplined by a teacher was a common theme in both studies. Although they do not provide a separate category for this type of turning point event, O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas (1992) refer to issues of ridicule in their sub-categories of *character* (e.g., students commented that their professor was "condescending to students," "yelled at the students," and "made derogatory remarks") and *rhetorical sensitivity* (e.g., one student reported

that a teacher stated, "Didn't you listen to me during lecture when I assigned the project?"). Similar types of turning point events were found in the current study and subsequently labeled *ridicule/discipline*. For some students, then, being ridiculed by their teacher appears to change their relationship. Seeing that students identify being ridiculed by their teacher as a significant moment in their education, teachers should be aware of the effects of their disciplinary strategies.

Another relational turning point event common in both studies concerned the teacher's style. O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas's (1992) sub-categories of *perceived competence* and *learning climate*, as well as the current study's subcategory *teaching style*, address the manner by which teachers engage or fail to engage students. For example, both studies discuss relational turning point events based on the teacher using humor, being enthusiastic about their teaching, and presenting lectures that were difficult to follow. A teacher's style, then, also appears to facilitate relational turning points for some students.

Finally, both studies found that one-on-one interactions in which the student and teacher engaged in what students described as a more "personal interaction" facilitated a relational turning point. O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas's (1992) sub-category *rhetorical sensitivity*, in-part, addressed getting to know teachers on a more personal level, as well as one-on-one interactions whereby teachers were described as understanding, helpful, receptive, and friendly. In the current study, the macro-category, *personal*, entailed the sharing of private, personal information, or the presence of a specific, approach/affinity seeking behavior or statement (e.g., compliment, invitation, name used). One-on-one interactions that involved sharing personal information and/or when the teacher is perceived as receptive appear to facilitate relational turning points for students. The commonalities between O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas's and the current study demonstrate that a diverse range of events work to facilitate relational turning points for students. More importantly, perhaps, students in both studies illuminated the importance of teachers acting in ways that are understanding, helpful, receptive, personal, and friendly.

Although previous research, specifically O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas's 1992 study, and the current investigation have important crossover, the differences between the two also help advance our understanding of relational turning points in college teacher-student relationships. Perhaps the most salient difference is that O'Neill and Todd-Mancillas's typology of turning point events focuses on students' judgments *of the professor* (e.g., perception of instructional communication competence and character, perception of instructor's management style), whereas the typology advanced in the current study focuses on perceptions *of events* (e.g., discussion of common interests).

In previous research, turning points events have been conceptualized broadly as *intrapersonal/normative* (individual evaluates him or herself, the partner, or relationship against an ideal or standard), *dyadic* (occurs in interaction with another), *social network* (individual from either or both partner's social network affects the relationship), or *circumstantial* (an event beyond the dyad's control affects the relationship) (Surra and Huston, 1987). Similarly, the typology advanced in the current study offers a description of turning point events that involve dyadic (e.g., labeled *instrumental*, *personal*, *ridicule/discipline*), social network (e.g., labeled *other person*), and circumstantial (e.g., labeled *locational*) turning point events. The general typology for turning point events asserted by Surra and Huston (1987) is therefore represented effectively in the typology advanced in the current study aimed at the teacher-student relationship.

Bullis et al. (1993) intimate that a typology of turning point events in any context should account for the entire spectrum of events. The typology of relational turning point events

articulated in the current study is descriptive of actual events and accounts for a wide range of behaviors enacted in the teacher-student context. The macro-categories in the current study clearly describe the nature of turning point events in adjective form (e.g., instrumental, personal, rhetorical), and the sub-categories offer a specific classification of events. The descriptive focus on types of events in the current study versus perceptions more generally offers a richer account of the many interactions that teachers and students engage. The typology advanced here also recognizes the diverse contexts in which teachers and students interact (e.g., *rhetorical* or during lecture, *personal* which is often one-on-one).

The current study elucidates that relational turning point events in college teacher-student relationships are dynamic. First, a diverse range of events can facilitate turning points, including using of a student's name, discussing a course policy, grading, ridiculing, sharing personal information, or interacting in a new environment, for example. Second, turning point events can occur in virtually any context of interaction (e.g., during a fieldtrip, lecture, office hours, walking around campus, in public, in a hallway). Finally, turning point events appear to come in a number of types in the teacher-student context, including dyadic, social network, and circumstantial. Overall, then, relational turning point events are dynamic in that nearly any event may work as a turning point for a student, turning points can occur in all communication contexts, and they can vary in type.

V. Implications, Future Directions, and Conclusions.

One of the major implications of this study is that teachers have the capacity to change their relationships with students in a multitude of meaningful ways. Indeed, college teachers should understand that their everyday behaviors, or lack thereof, whether calling a student by name, providing a compliment, engaging in a discussion of common interests, discussing a course policy, ridiculing a student, disclosing personal information, or their own particular teaching style has the potential to and often does shape students' perceptions of their relationship. Further, taking steps proactively to change relationships with students will likely be advantageous (e.g., setting up clear grading procedures, calling students by name, engaging students in discussions about internships and careers, giving compliments, sharing personal information, avoiding ridicule). These behaviors may also have strong implications for instructional outcomes, including cognitive and affective learning and student motivation, each of which will be explored in a future study.

Additional studies investigating the turning points in teacher-student relationships will likely lead to other meaningful implications. Researchers need to examine relational turning points from college teachers' perspective as well as assess the ways in which teachers and students work together in their understanding of the event. Seeing that relationships involve interdependence (Wood, 2000), develop through interaction (Canary and Dainton, 2006), are maintained through communication (Canary and Dainton, 2006), and entail a bond that unites partners (McCall, 1970), teachers' experiences must be captured to understand the complexities of relational turning points with students.

A study similar in nature to the current analysis of turning points (i.e., large sample, use of the CIT), but from teachers' perspectives, may provide telling similarities and differences when compared with students' reporting of turning points. Important questions include: How are teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students affected by relational turning points?

How are important teacher outcomes such as teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, and motivation (see Mottet et al., 2006) affected by relational turning points with their students?

The current study opens up an assortment of other instructional issues to investigate. Keeping in mind that change is inherent in relationships (Wood, 2000), stage models of teacher-student relationships that identify when and how stages change have the opportunity to advance previous models of the teacher-student relationship (DeVito, 1986) and provide a fuller explanation and description of this dynamic between teachers and students. Some key questions include: What are the stages of teaching assistant-undergraduate student, teacher-undergraduate student, and professor-graduate student relationships? What prompts change from one stage to the next? At what stage, if any, is student learning at its peak? How can teachers facilitate their relationships with students to arrive at a stage optimal for learning?

The results of the current study expand and present new insight into the literature on relational turning points and the larger body of teacher-effectiveness literature. In particular, turning point events reported by students ranged from instrumental, personal, rhetorical, ridicule/discipline, locational, and other person events. As important, perhaps, the current study paves the way for future studies of relational turning points in the academic context. Finally, the current study offers teachers an understanding of how to interact with students in a way that establishes and builds meaningful relationships with students.

Appendix 1. Turning Point Events.

Turning Point Event	Frequency
Instrumental	$n = 170$ (43.1%)
Discussion of grade	$n = 21$ (5.3%)
Discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally	$n = 111$ (28.2%)
Discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships	$n = 26$ (6.6%)
Discussion of course policy/rule	$n = 12$ (3.0%)
Personal	$n = 104$ (26.4%)
Discussion of coursework and personal information	$n = 46$ (11.7%)
Discussion of common interest	$n = 15$ (3.8%)
Compliment	$n = 21$ (5.3%)
Invitation	$n = 8$ (2.0%)
Name used	$n = 14$ (3.6%)
Rhetorical	$n = 57$ (14.5%)
Lecture topic or claim	$n = 31$ (7.9%)
Teaching style	$n = 26$ (6.6%)
Ridicule/Discipline	$n = 31$ (7.9%)
Locational	$n = 25$ (6.3%)
Other Person	$n = 7$ (1.8%)

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