

**Communicating (un)fairness in
the classroom:
Research examples and
recommendations**

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Classroom justice (fairness)

- **Student perception**
- **Three types (Chory)**
 - ▣ **Distributive justice**
 - fairness perceptions regarding outcomes or allotments
 - ▣ **Procedural Justice**
 - fairness perceptions regarding the system or process used to determine outcomes or allotments
 - ▣ **Interactional Justice**
 - fairness perceptions regarding relational treatment

Justice

- **Are students concerned with fairness?**
 - Yes

- **Are college instructors concerned?**
 - Most concerned about interactional justice, followed by procedural justice, and distributive justice
 - Potentially, college teachers may assume distributive justice is a given (it's not)

Justice

- **Students have reactions to perceived fairness**
 - Perceive instructor as fair...
 - View teacher as credible; students report higher levels of motivation
 - Perceive instructor as unfair...
 - Resistance, verbal aggression, deception, revenge, & hostility

- **So, if college instructors are**
 - a) concerned about justice but,
 - b) students perceive us unfair, this begs the question of
 - c) what does unfairness look and sound like?

Justice

- Asked 138 college students to describe an experience with an unfair teacher & their reaction

Injustice/Unfairness

- **Distributive (outcomes)**
 - Grade (68.3% of responses)
 - Opportunities (14.6%)

- **Procedural (fairness used for outcomes)**
 - Grading Procedures (33%)
 - Make-up/late policies (19.2%)

- **Interactional (fair treatment)**
 - Insensitive/Rude (42.6%)
 - Implied/stated stupidity (25.5%)

[see article for remaining categories]

Student Reactions

□ **Students' Emotional Reactions**

- Angry (34.8%)
- Pained (18%)
- Others: frustrated, powerless, stressed, cheated

□ **Students' Behavioral Reactions**

- Dissent (complain; 52.1%)
- Inaction/acceptance (31.4%)
- Hostility (6.5%)
- Withdrawal (6.5%)

So what to do?

- Be mindful of fairness
 - ▣ Students pay a lot more attention to this than most think
 - ▣ They have *strong* reactions to unfairness
- Communicate/highlight your fairness efforts to students
 - ▣ A lot of us already behave fairly in many way → highlight some of those to students

Communicating fairness

- **Other fairness recommendations...**
 - Clear assessment forms given to students
 - Removing the mystery behind the grading process
 - Explaining the choices you make
 - Have students turn in subjective work with their names on back of assignment (or use ID number)

- **That said...**
 - Despite students' concerns, what some students identify as “unfair” may still be in the best interest of students.

Thanks

□ Selected references:

- Chory, R. M. (2007). Enhancing student perceptions of fairness: The relationship between instructor credibility and classroom justice. *Communication Education, 56*, 89-105.
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