Abstract

Four major self-inflicting traits that prevent adult students from succeeding in the classroom include apathy, fear of failure, anxiety, and fear of change. By merging Herrmann’s (1996) brain dominance theory and Bandura’s (1997) concept of high and low self-efficacy, eight student types emerge. By understanding these student types, instructors can be more equipped to identify and combat the four self-inflicting traits in the classroom. This chapter provides specific examples and tables—based on two decades of university teaching and administration experience—to aid instructors and administrators in helping students prevent or overcome apathy, fear of failure, anxiety, and fear of change.
Introduction

When Susan leaned her head inside my office door, I was glad to see her. She was clearly one of the school’s best students, but she needed a frank discussion about missing too much class time. Intelligent and full of energy, she should not be wasting so much potential. I waved her to come into my office and have a seat while my mind prepared its best sermon regarding the woes of missing too much class. I was taken by surprise as she laid a piece of paper on my desk, sat down clutching her purse and a book to her chest, and declared, “Hi Dr. Shuler, I’m dropping, and I need you to sign this paper.”

As school director, I had to sign all student drop forms. I admit my first response was simply a gut reaction, “Is everything OK?”

“Yes,” she said, with no further explanation.

“How about changing schools or majors?”

“Nope,” again she spoke without explanation, only this time she began squirming in her seat. Perhaps I could save her, I thought. Asking more questions, I learned that she had decided to stay at home and raise children. While I view motherhood as the noblest of all professions, her reasoning made me cringe. She feared that once she graduated she might “fail in the real world” (her words), so now she was in my office wanting to drop out of school—after accumulating thousands of dollars in tuition, but no college degree.

It amazes me when perfectly capable students find reasons not to succeed. Usually it does not appear to be a conscious effort, but a subconscious mental trigger activated when these students come too close to academic success.

After class one evening, Charles, a young man nearly twice my size who often sat in the back row, approached me and hesitantly said, “Dr. Shuler, I really enjoy school, but I have a problem.”

I curiously replied, “OK, perhaps I can help. What is on your mind?”

Looking at the floor, he began telling me how his wife and friends are worried that after he graduates and gets a good job, he will change and want a new wife and friends.

Susan was experiencing fear of failure, and Charles fear of change. These are two of four common self-inflicting traits that prevent adult students from succeeding in the classroom: apathy, fear of failure, anxiety, and fear of change (Shuler, 2013). How should instructors and administrators respond to such student revelations? Is it possible to identify or even prevent such discouraging sentiments felt by adult students and their inner circle of influence? What follows is an effort to aid instructors and administrators in understanding, identifying, and combating student apathy, fear of failure, anxiety, and fear of change.

Eight Types of Students

Even when two situations appear to be the same, students are not (the same). For example, two students may experience anxiety but react differently. To help classify potentially helpful responses that allow for student differences, I synthesized two models (Herrmann, 1996; Bandura, 1997) to create eight types of students.

Four Student Types

First, I drew from Herrmann’s (1996) work on thinking preferences related to brain dominance and combined this with my two decades of experience in higher education and administration to define the following four student types: Analyzers, Feelers, Visualizers, and Organizers.

Analyzers. Facts and logic are important to analyzers, who often overlook emotions and feelings, though not always intentionally. Analyzers can focus on solving problems to the point of ignoring their surroundings, including others. Their inner power comes from patience and determination. Analyzers gather facts and think reflectively. “What?” questions (e.g., “what are the facts?”) are typical question starters for analyzers. In the classroom, analyzers may get lost in their contemplations regarding a topic mentioned. These students are likely to spend considerable time analyzing topics, syllabi, presentation components, etc., and frequently tell the instructor how to improve these items.

Feelers. Emotions and feelings of others are important to feelers, who tend to stay in the background waiting to provide support to
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Influences of Self-Efficacy

Second, I drew from Bandura’s (1997) work on self-efficacy to create both high and low efficacy examples for each of the four types of students. Bandura defined self-efficacy as people’s beliefs in their own competence or power to produce a desired and intended effect (make things happen).

In general, regardless of student type, students with high self-efficacy will study harder and more often when the subject appears difficult. However, students with low self-efficacy would simply feel overwhelmed or hopeless and not study or study inadequately. This second attitude and resulting action create self-induced failure, further supporting the person’s low self-efficacy. Students’ internal, subconscious view of their self-efficacy plays an external, conscious role in how motivated they are toward a task (Snyder & Wright, 2002). The amount of effort a person exerts is in accordance with the effects they are expecting from their actions. The more reward or self-satisfaction they expect from a task, the more effort they will put into it.

According to Bandura, self-efficacy is influenced by four major sources: personal experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological/emotional factors. Recognizing these influences will help instructors understand how students reach high and low self-efficacy levels.

**Visualizers.** The present and future are important to visualizers who tend to focus on the big picture and possibilities. Full of energy, visualizers do not recognize some human and worldly boundaries. Considering human and natural rules as guidelines (versus hard-and-fast rules), visualizers will attempt to create their own rules. Good at generating ideas, visualizers will not be kept “inside the box” and tend to thrive on change. Visualizers tend to go with their intuition, which can lead to quick decision making. “Why?” and “why not?” questions are the most important questions for visualizers, although they will also speak of possibilities, asking “what if?” questions. In the classroom, visualizers have trouble sitting still and will sometimes ask questions because they feel uncomfortable sitting still and are looking for a reason to physically move (e.g., raise a hand).

**Organizers.** Maintaining structure is important to organizers, who will often focus on rules, guidelines, procedures, and ethics. Organizers think about matters concerning the here and now of the physical world. The future is uncertain, so organizers give little thought to it. “How?” questions (e.g., “how should it be done?”) take precedent over “what if?” or “why?” questions. Organizers’ critical thinking and decision-making skills are likely to involve both discipline and established criteria (rules, guidelines, procedures). Classroom learning is a comfortable activity for organizers, as long as the instructor and assignments follow relevant rules and guidelines. Organizers are uncomfortable if the syllabus or class outline is not followed, assignments do not exactly match instructions, or class does not start and end on time. Organizers will likely look closely at instructor credentials.

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**Social persuasions.** Social persuasions are the encouragements or discouragements we receive from others. Social persuasions can have a strong influence, significantly altering our confidence (Bandura, 1997). Positive persuasions increase self-efficacy levels; negative persuasions decrease self-efficacy levels. For example, when a teacher provides specific feedback to a student on what he or she did well, the student’s confidence, or self-efficacy level, increases. Interestingly, Bandura found it takes less effort to decrease someone’s self-efficacy level than to increase it through social persuasion.

**Physiological and emotional factors.** When placed in stressful situations, people commonly exhibit physical signs of distress such as dry mouth, aches and pains, fatigue, fear, hives, or nausea. According to Bandura (1990), our perceptions of these responses will increase or decrease our self-efficacy levels. For example, if a student gets “butterflies” and starts sweating before making a speech in front of the class, he or she might perceive this as a sign of inability, thus lowering self-efficacy. On the other hand, a student with high self-efficacy is likely to ignore these stress signs and consider them as normal, or even welcome them as a sign of adrenaline that helps in staying alert and focused.

### Merging High and Low Self-Efficacy with the Four Student Types

Students with high and low self-efficacy exist within each of the four student types. This division of each type establishes eight student types. All eight types exist within most classrooms.

Table 1 shows possible traits and actions that might be associated with each of the eight different student types. While these categories are not yet grounded in formal research, I have defined these descriptions based on my understanding of the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks and my twenty years of experience in education circles. This table provides a quick guide to understanding the needs of each of the eight personality types, based on my observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Type</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
| **Analyzers** | High | Analyzers with higher self-efficacy levels  
• speak in terms of facts and details.  
• consider feelings and policies, but speak of them as facts and details.  
• display confidence in making decisions.  
• look for clear expectations and take steps to meet them. |
|             | Low  | Analyzers with lower self-efficacy levels  
• are tied to facts and details.  
• believe that facts equal critical thinking.  
• are perceived as indecisive.  
• use gathering more facts as a reason to not make a decision. |
| **Feelers**  | High | Feelers with higher self-efficacy levels  
• consider feelings when thinking critically.  
• understand that sometimes tough decisions need to be made for the good of the whole.  
• tend to focus more on the positive than the negative emotions of a situation.  
• tend to be good negotiators and mediators. |
|             | Low  | Feelers with lower self-efficacy levels  
• allow feelings to overtake critical thinking.  
• become mired in negative feelings.  
• frequently lose desire to make decisions.  
• tend to be high or low emotionally. |
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Apathy involves having an indifferent attitude toward a subject or object (Blase, 1986). Apathy can occur in the classroom when students believe they have no control over their situation. Apathetic students will often remain passive, even when faced with failure or dropping a class. Apathy is not caused by an actual lack of control, but rather by the perception of having a lack of control (Rotter, 1990). If students believe they do not control their own environment, they will often lack a sense of commitment. This belief may cause students to become discouraged and apathetic, attempting to withdraw from any difficult decision making or action.

People with positive self-efficacy are more likely to persevere and complete a difficult task than people with negative self-efficacy (Bandura, 1990). Even when students with high self-efficacy fail, they tend to believe that they simply have “not succeeded, yet.” Apathetic students would leave off the “yet” and just say, “I have not succeeded.” This one word explains a big difference in attitude and effort.

The self-defense mechanism of an apathetic mind often places blame of failure on something external, such as the instructor, the environment, a fellow student, or the child who kept him or her awake the night before. By helping apathetic students understand how much they control their environment and what actions they can take to effect changes in their environment, instructors influence attitude and behavior versus causing students to shut down. I have discussed each of the student types in more detail below, again based on my experiences and observations.

Combating the Four Self-Inflicting Traits

Using the eight student types described in Table 1, I will now share how I have helped these different types of students when they are struggling with the four self-inflicting traits: apathy, fear of failure, anxiety, and fear of change.

**Apathy**

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**Analyzers.** When analyzers experience apathy, they will either move on or spend their time gathering facts about the situation. Information is comforting to analyzers. By gaining more information (facts), they attempt to understand the situation better. However, apathetic analyzers need to be nudged, and sometimes pushed, to make a decision or take action.

I knew a student, Michael, who always talked about going to Italy as if it were going to happen next week. He eagerly spoke in detail about his yet-to-be-taken trip to Italy to anyone who would listen. He would produce brochures and pictures of the places he planned to visit. When someone asked...
These students needed encouragement and outward recognition of the positive effect their actions were having on others, along with constant reminders of the speakers' experiences.

**Visualizers.** Fun and spontaneity are behaviors many visualizers value. However, apathy often triggers the opposite of these behaviors, which can create conflict within visualizers. Based on my observations, it appears the most common cause of turning visualizers apathetic are their visions of a negative future, even when that future is unlikely. An instructor can help visualizers by painting a clear and detailed picture of a positive future. The objective is to make the positive future more clear than the negative future. I have instructed visualizer students with high self-efficacy in apathetic moods to cut out pictures of goals, such as homes, diplomas, and cars, and post the pictures on their refrigerator or bathroom mirror.

I had one visualizer student with low self-efficacy that was apathetic toward career options after finishing school. Through indirect questioning over a period of several weeks, I found this student’s passions included anything to do with American Indians and reading. By the time the student graduated, she had decided to organize and spearhead the building of a library dedicated to American Indian literature. Perhaps my line of questioning about her passions had something to do with the newfound entrepreneurial endeavor.

**Organizers.** Billy was an organizer with low self-efficacy. If something happened that was not according to written school policy, he argued about it, even if it had nothing to do with him or his class. His father died the week of semester finals. Billy came to my office to tell me of his father’s death and as he started to leave, he commented, “Thank you for all you have done. I will be flunking out of school.” Stunned for a moment, I asked him what he meant. He replied, “Since I will be missing finals, I will be flunking out of school and cannot afford to retake this semester.” I asked him to sit down and I explained that we could arrange for him to take the finals the following week. He explained that he had read the school handbook and class syllabi and there was nothing that allowed for his exact situation and it would not be fair to the other students. This was classic organizer thinking, so I told him I understood and that I would look further into it for him. He left and I looked. Billy was right that we had nothing for his

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him when he was going, he would answer, “I don’t know, but soon!” This continued for three years. One day, he was in my office showing me some new brochures for his trip to Italy and I asked him what was keeping him from going. He replied, “I never seem to have enough money. I doubt I ever will.” He dejectedly sat down, and it was obvious I had deflated his ideal-trip balloon by asking a simple, but practical, question. “How much does it cost?” I asked. With miserable tone, he gave me a figure of several thousand dollars. It was obvious he had done his research; the figure he gave was very exact. It was also obvious that he felt helpless in achieving such a large figure.

I proceeded to help him break down that cost by dividing it by 156 weeks (the number of weeks in the three years I had known him). This new figure was relatively small. I then explained to him that if he had saved that small amount each week since I had known him, then he would be in Italy right now instead of in my office. In the process, I explained how interest would also accumulate, adding to his savings. His eyes brightened and he became excited. He was full of new energy now that he realized he had control over making this dream come true. He left my office thanking me. Just over two years later, I received a postcard from Italy from Michael.

**Feelers.** Apathy in feelers is difficult to overcome. True to their title, feelers feel emotions deeply. To get apathetic feelers to take action, they must be convinced their actions will benefit others in a positive way (Herrmann, 1996). An instructor can explain in vivid detail what others will feel and specifically how they will be helped by the student’s action(s). Another effective tool is modeling. Provide students with specific details of other students taking the same actions and the positive effects they had on those around them.

As part of a group in charge of hiring speakers for a medical technology postsecondary school, I searched for the best speakers. It soon became evident to me that the speakers who students paid more attention to were not necessarily the best speakers in my view. In a field (medical) dominated by feelers, these students were most moved by speakers who had faced the same issues they were facing and succeeded, but not necessarily the first time or in the most successful fashion. They also wanted to hear about the speakers’ relationships and how those relationships were affected by the struggles and subsequent success of the speakers. For students with low self-efficacy, I found that we could not stop at just the speaker series. These students needed encouragement and outward recognition of the positive effect their actions were having on others, along with constant reminders of the speakers’ experiences.
exact situation in the school handbook that allowed him to take the finals later. Therefore, I wrote an exception letter and received emergency board approval. When I produced the approved letter to Billy, his eyes became watery and he simply said, “Thank you, sir.”

I realize not everyone can provide an approved exception letter, but my point in telling Billy’s story is that as an organizer, he felt helpless and that attending school was out of his control because there was no rule in place for his situation. He was willing to walk away from his potential future because of it. Recognizing that verbal approval would not be enough, I took the extra steps to gain written approval and followed through by getting back to Billy as I promised. Had Billy held high self-efficacy views, we could have worked out something in writing between us, but instead he needed to see high-level authority approval.

Fear of Failure

Fear of failure can inhibit critical thinking skills, cause students to feel out of control, and perpetuate a lack of motivation (Kember, Wong, & Leung, 1999). As the potential devastation of failure looms in students’ minds, the price of success may seem too high, so some students may stop trying. Unfortunately, giving up only encourages failure, so the vicious downward cycle continues. If students give up too many times, they are likely to stop trying altogether. Fear of failure keeps people from taking action or following through on intentions. As a result, students often get distracted and hinder their chances to achieve their goals.

Fear of failure involving test taking is common. One strategy I have used to help students overcome test-taking anxieties is to have students take all the tests they can on topics that do not matter, until they are comfortable with the anxiety of the test-taking process. A similar strategy is to have students take practice tests in the exact chair and room as they will take the “real” test. While I do not have scientific evidence, I believe students are less fearful because they are able to visualize a non-stressful test-taking experience in their classroom environment. While the fear does not go away completely, these strategies help students manage their fear so that it does not inhibit critical thinking and decision-making skills.

Analyzers. The best approach for analyzers dealing with fear of failure is to help them analyze the facts. They will recognize the benefit of determining what the facts “say.” Analyzers with high self-efficacy will likely rate each of their successes with more importance than each of their failures. Analyzers with low self-efficacy will likely rate each of their failures with more importance than each of their successes. As instructors, we can suggest that these students put their T-accounts (see Figure 1) in writing. Often students exaggerate the number of negative items in their mind while minimizing the number of positive items. By putting the supporting examples in black and white, students can objectively analyze them. Instructors can also help students focus on the positive column and how to get more items into the positive column. Another helpful component is to add an importance or weighted value to each item. In Figure 1, the positive column is the “YES.”

Fig. 1. “Am I a Good Person?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I never committed a serious crime.</td>
<td>• I tell an occasional lie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I give occasional donations to charity.</td>
<td>• I stole Mrs. Smith’s dollar when I was seventeen years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I volunteer once a month for the elderly.</td>
<td>• I said hurtful things to Jack when I shouldn’t have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I have never yelled at my child.</td>
<td>• I borrowed Nate’s movie and never returned it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I helped John wash his car just to be nice.</td>
<td>• I could have helped Ryan move, but didn’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I did not go to Jennifer’s wild party.</td>
<td>• I was grumpy with David one day last week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I gave Amy my red shirt since she liked it so much.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I always wave when I see a friend.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I try to smile at others even when I feel down.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low self-efficacy analyzers will focus on this column

High self-efficacy analyzers will focus on this column
**Feeler s.** Strong emotions accompany each failure for feelers. What feelers must avoid is falling deeper into the failure trap caused by their deeply felt emotions. The sadness, anger, or helplessness that can accompany failing is typically felt stronger by feelers than other personality types. Feelers must find activities that bring positive feelings soon after a failure to offset and limit the negative feelings. Surrounding themselves with positive people will help a feeler avoid the negative fear-of-failure spiral.

Remember Susan, mentioned in the introduction? Susan appeared to have high self-efficacy, was people-oriented and typically expressive, yet fearful of hurting others. Susan was a feeler and was struggling mightily with fear of failure. She had failed early in her life and now feared she would again, despite her current success and hard work in school. As a feeler, her underlying fear was how her family would react if she failed again. We looked at two things: experiences of others like her (a form of vicarious experience) and how her family would feel about her if she found success or failed. She decided to stay in school after seeing that others similar to her had gone on to succeed, and acknowledging that her family would love her regardless if she failed or succeeded.

Another student, Mary, was returning to school after thirty years of working as a stay-at-home mother. A wonderfully sweet woman, she was a feeler who had devoted her life to helping others. With no children at home and a recently disabled husband, Mary enrolled in our medical assisting program. Feeling very unsure, insecure, and vulnerable in this new academic world, her self-efficacy levels were very low. Almost daily, I made it a point to check in with Mary to measure the “temperature” of her attitude. Almost always, she would speak of her likelihood to fail. “I am just too old for this, Dr. Shuler. I want to do this, but I don’t know; I think I am just too old.” I made it my goal to show Mary that age had nothing to do with her success in the medical assisting program, but I needed to do this from a relationship viewpoint, not by using facts or policies or reports.

I asked Mary if she would bring her husband to school with her one day and let me show him around while she was in class. She agreed and later that week I had the pleasure of meeting and spending some time with “Mr. Mary.” During our visit, we toured the school and I made sure we observed Mary’s class in session. Mary’s husband was soft-spoken, a man of few words; he seemed genuinely interested in everything I shared with him.

After Mary’s class ended, the three of us gathered in my office and I asked some questions about what it meant to Mary’s husband to have Mary pursuing her medical assisting degree. What followed was a strong combination of emotions from both Mary and her husband. He felt inadequate as a newly disabled worker. She had a strong desire to help him shoulder the household financial responsibility. He felt proud of Mary for enrolling. She felt scared entering an academic and work world new to her. He admired her for trying something new—he doubted he could do that himself. They both shed tears at different points.

Those are just a few of the emotions that came out that day, but the amazing thing to me was that none of these feelings had been verbalized between Mary and her husband prior to that day. As they tenderly hugged each other and left my office with red eyes and smiles on their faces, it became obvious that Mary now knew—without assuming—how grateful and proud her husband was of her pursuing this difficult journey. In addition, he now knew that Mary would need his outward support and encouragement. From that point forward, a smiling and positive Mary would greet me each day in the hallways.

**Visualizers.** Visualizers will envision the future. Visualizers with high self-efficacy will see past the failures and think, “If I could just . . . then I will be fine.” Visualizers with low self-efficacy often see glasses as half-empty, versus half-full, and often let a failure generate an image of a failure-filled future. Visualizers’ intellectual vision focuses on the big picture and long-term outcomes. It is best to help students with this personality see details and short-term actions that can lead to the desired big-picture and long-term outcomes. Creating a specific action plan can be effective in getting them out of their current situation.

The following real-life anecdote is more about success after college, but it provides a true example of helping a visualizer overcome fear of failure. Larry was smart and energetic. Full of self-confidence, Larry often spoke of starting his own business when he graduated. Near his graduation date, I asked Larry in private about his plans after school. He spoke of finding a job and “workin’ for the man.” I nonchalantly asked him what happened to starting his own business and he started telling me about a friend of his that tried to start a business, “He failed miserably and he is smarter than I am, so I guess I will skip over that dream,” he said with a nervous laugh.
I asked him if he still wanted to start a business. He emphatically told me yes, so I sat him down and we outlined step-by-step what he would need to do to safeguard his success. In the process, we discussed and identified where his friend had likely gone wrong in his entrepreneurial attempt. Larry had high self-efficacy, but his visualizer thinking only allowed him to see the big picture. He needed help in identifying the details. If he had low self-efficacy, I would have done the same thing, but in addition I would have placed him in contact with a mentor or stayed in contact with him, checking on his status, celebrating small successes, and answering any questions on a regular basis.

Organizers. Organizers will attempt to stay within the policies and rules of a situation, even if it means continued failure. Cautious and prudent, organizers caught in a downward spiral of fearing failure may blame others for their downfall and become withdrawn. We can help organizers withdraw from the situation long enough to organize their thoughts regarding what went wrong and then develop a detailed, written plan for getting out of the downward spiral.

Ned was former military and manager of a health clinic. Starting a second career, Ned had decided to earn a degree in computer software. About halfway through his second computer software course, he came to me, and with a sigh, he began telling me that he was considering dropping out of school. When asked why, he spoke of how he would never make it through this class. He then went on to explain about each assignment in his current class, and how he believed too many were theoretical assignments. “I came here to learn computer software, not the theory behind it. Employers don’t give a crap about theory.”

I asked him if he still wanted to be a computer software engineer, and without hesitation he stated, “Yes, sir!” Then I asked him if he needed this degree to do that. He said, “Yes, sir, I suppose so.”

“Do you need this class to earn that degree to get that job?” I prodded some more.

“Yes, sir I do,” he said.

I replied, “Then you better start learning some theory. The teachers are the experts and they have a reason for you needing to know theory. You will need it on the job more than you realize.” He acknowledged that I was probably right and had a much-improved attitude as he left my office. As a high-self-efficacy organizer, Ned needed to see the big picture that this class and degree were necessary to get where he wanted from a career standpoint. He also needed to hear that those in charge of the classroom knew what they were doing. Had Ned been a low-self-efficacy organizer, I would have also discussed consequences of dropping out of school and organized follow-up meetings to monitor his progress.

Anxiety

Some anxiety or stress is good (Bandura, 1990). Ask any professional athlete when he or she performs best, and the answer will likely be when he or she is somewhat anxious. For decades, I have played tournament tennis. When I am calm and relaxed before a tournament match, I tend to come out flat—not aggressive, energetic, or focused enough. When I am a little anxious, I tend to be aggressive, energetic, and focused. When I am very anxious right before a match, I tend to be too aggressive and my attention is easily drawn to anything that moves or makes a sound, on or off the tennis court. The same can be true of students in a classroom. Having some anxiety heightens students’ awareness and keeps them sharp. However, anxiety becomes disruptive or even dangerous when it overwhelms students and causes memory loss or physical change (such as sweating or dizziness). Too much anxiety can interfere with critical thinking and taking action (Gelman, 2004). Any of the thinking types can suffer from anxiety. However, what causes anxiety and how each student type attempts to prevail over it are different.

Analyzers. One reason analyzers often experience anxiety is their strong desire to achieve perfection. Realizing and acknowledging this is a big step in overcoming anxiety for analyzers. An instructor can help students realize there are many tasks where perfection seldom occurs; therefore, expecting perfection every time is impractical. Attempting perfection in a compliant and realistic manner is an indication of “positive striving” (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004). However, unrealistic expectation of perfection to the point of causing depression, stress, general anxiety, and test-taking anxiety results in emotional distress (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004). Instructors must help analyzers keep a practical, positive-striving perspective.
I have an analyzer daughter with high self-efficacy. She is deflated for a week anytime she earns below 100 percent on any test or assignment. At least once per semester, I have a sit-down discussion with her regarding expectations and instructors striving to make her stretch. She does fine after each session until the following semester. If she had low self-efficacy, I would need to also show specifically how small of an effect this one lower grade had on her class, semester, and degree grade-point averages.

**Feelers.** Feelers experience anxiety if feelings are hurt. Helping feeling students not absorb the feelings of others will limit the anxiety felt by feelers. Of course, this is often easier said than done. These students absorb anxiety from other students and may bring to the classroom anxiety absorbed from their non-school environment. A legitimate method to help feeler students overcome this trait is remembering and employing the difference between empathy and sympathy. A person with sympathy for another joins them in the “ditch of despair,” feeling the same feelings and despair An empathetic person, however, keeps planted in reality to help the other person out of their rut (Stephens Ministry, 2000).

Steven was a very bright student who had earned high A grades in one of my prior classes. During the first few weeks of my current class, he continued to earn As. Then I noticed two Cs in a row. I asked him to speak with me after class one day. After some small talk about family members (classical feeler conversation), I asked Steven about his dip in grades. He described to me in great depth about his grandmother’s illness and how it was affecting his concentration and studies. During the discussion he expressed that it was his grandmother who had encouraged him the most to earn his degree. I asked him what are some of the things that make his grandmother the happiest. His success in school was high on that list. This would have been enough for a high-self-efficacy feeler to take action and do what they could to make their relative happy—in this case, to do well in school. However, Steven was a low-self-efficacy feeler; therefore, I continued to ask him what he had control over when it came to making his grandmother happy. We concluded he had no control over the illness and many other things, but he did have control over something important to his grandmother—his success in school.

**Visualizers.** Visualizers will feel anxiety if they are hemmed in by many rules and policies. While rules and policies can make decision making less of a challenge, they can make visualizers feel valueless and claustrophobic. Helping visualizers find ways to be creative and spontaneous within the rules and policies can prevent these feelings. When appropriate and justified, visualizers can find ways to challenge the status quo (current rules and policies) to feel valuable, challenged, and energized. It requires successful critical thinking to determine what is appropriate and justified, and to determine what actions to take, so I encourage instructors to be proactive in discussing this with classes and individual students.

I recently had a student wanting to turn in an assignment that was far beyond the minimal requirements, but to do so he would have to include an interview with a particular someone in another country. He knew what he wanted, but the time difference was causing issues in getting the interview completed. It was going to cause the student to turn his assignment in a day late. Given the student’s proactive nature in obtaining the interview and in coming to me with his situation, I believed him to have high self-efficacy. I explained that I could not change the due date, but his choices were to turn in an average assignment on time or a great assignment a day late. Then we discussed which would be better for him, grade-wise and knowledge-wise. He cheerfully finished the expanded assignment and expressed gratitude for pushing him beyond his comfort zone. In reality, he had pushed himself and I had simply allowed it by minimizing the anxiety.

**Organizers.** Organizers experience anxiety when things are out of order. When an event does not follow the planned agenda or takes more than its allotted time, organizers will feel anxious. An instructor simply acknowledging that “events involving people often do not go as planned” will aid organizers. Part of this process is to encourage the creation of “what if?” scenarios. Organizers will limit anxiety in their critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making by having documented alternative action plans for each situation (Herrmann, 1996).

The forming of student teams is a common anxiety producer for organizers. Organizers with high self-efficacy will either perform on the team and not say anything or will voice to me his or her displeasure in having to rely on other people to earn a grade. For these organizers, I explain the
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Based on class interactions, I felt certain his self-efficacy was on the high end. We sat down together and wrote down what were the facts, opinions, and assumptions regarding his situation. Then we briefly discussed Herrmann’s four thinking-preference types. This was all he needed to realize how to approach family and friends regarding their fear of change. Had Charles’s self-efficacy been low, we would have discussed the same topics, but I would have emphasized how he could address his and others’ opinions and assumptions.

Feelers. Feelers are okay with change as long as others are okay with the change. Show feelers examples of other students who have dealt with the same changes successfully and how they did it. Vicarious experience and social persuasions work well with feelers. Also, help feelers see where those around them—family, friends, fellow students, or workers—benefit from the change.

Amy came to my office one day very distraught over a change in an assignment I had made earlier in the week. I asked her why it was a concern. She voiced that the changes were “inconveniences” to the students. I probed what made the changes inconvenient and her resistance began to break down. The more details I asked for, the more defensive she became and finally she blurted out, “OK, I don’t see a problem with the changes myself, but Monroe and Susie both feel that . . .” A feeler, Amy was truly distressed by the discomfort I had caused the other students. As a feeler with high self-efficacy, she had taken it upon herself to come to me to mediate a solution that would make everyone happy. Realizing this, I was able to discuss with Amy the best way for Monroe and Susie (and anyone else) to incorporate the changes with minimal disruption.

If Amy had been a low-self-efficacy feeler, she likely would not have come to me and I would have been responsible for noticing her distress and approaching her with questions concerning the root of her distress. Then I would have approached Monroe, Amy, and Susie together to explain incorporating the changes.

Visualizers. Visualizers welcome change and are typically instigators of change (Herrmann, 1996). What they need help with is how to

Fear of Change

As people age, the youthful mode of taking risks begins to disappear (Wood, Busemeyer, Koling, Cox, & Davis, 2005). Facing the unknown may become troubling, as many people fear the unfamiliar. Yet, in an ironic twist, instructors aspire to change students. Instructors strive to change students’ mindsets, abilities, potential, knowledge, and more. Along with these changes, expectations and views of the world may also change unexpectedly. Unforeseen changes can be unsettling.

Analyzers. Most analyzers do not fear change as long as they can analyze the facts and reflect on the change before or during the change. Let analyzers know about potential changes, along with the facts concerning why the change is necessary. This can be as simple as discussing expected changes with the entire class during the first week. Individually, help analyzers sort through the facts and separate these from opinions and assumptions:

- A fact is a truth. The War of 1812 was fought in 1812 (plus several other years). That is a fact.
- An opinion is someone’s belief or viewpoint, such as “The War of 1812 was a worthy cause.”
- An assumption is when someone thinks that something is probably true, usually based on a fact or opinion. “Since the War of 1812 is just named for one year, it must have only lasted one year” is an assumption.

Charles, from the introduction, is an analyzer struggling with fear of change. His introspection of his family’s views and analytical approach to this (and other situations I had witnessed) indicate that he is an analyzer.
Because it was decided that only a teacher with a master’s degree or higher could teach Organizational Politics, I was tasked with teaching organizational politics to Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) students. The HVAC field is dominated by organizers (high and low self-efficacy). These students were very agitated because they would no longer be taught this class, which they felt was a waste of time anyway, by an HVAC instructor. I had heard that the HVAC instructor spent most of the class time discussing HVAC, not organizational politics, which suited the students just fine. During the first class meeting, I took role and then asked them what specific goals they wanted to achieve by earning their degree in HVAC. I wrote everything they said on the marker boards. Then I handed out the syllabus and class outline, and we discussed each. As we did this, I made sure to point out exactly where on the syllabus or class outline each of their goals would be addressed. For example, job security I tied to formal and informal organizational communications, and financial security I tied to business structure checks and balances. Often I connected a class-mentioned goal to multiple places on the syllabus and class outline. Included in the syllabus and in our discussion were specific consequences for misbehavior, tardiness, and absences, for which I made sure to point out and follow to the letter throughout the class. No significant attitude problem existed with the students after that first class.

A Quick Guide for Combating the Four Self-Inflicting Traits

Table 2 provides a framework allowing instructors to identify and combat these four self-inflicting traits in an organized, practical approach. It serves as a quick reference guide based on my own experiences and observations for helping students of each personality type and self-efficacy with each of the four self-inflicted traits. I also encourage you to keep a diary of what has worked and not worked in each new situation, while noting which student type and self-inflicting difficulty types are involved.
Table 2. How to Help Students by Thinking Type and Self-Efficacy: A Quick Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy Level</th>
<th>Apathy</th>
<th>Fear of Failure</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Fear of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Use facts to show actions that can positively affect.</td>
<td>Put facts, opinions, and assumptions in writing.</td>
<td>Make expectations realistic.</td>
<td>Provide the facts and allow them to voice their thoughts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Help determine when to go from “gathering facts” to taking action.</td>
<td>Bring focus on the positive and provide positive activities.</td>
<td>Show cause and effect of specific actions and be supportive.</td>
<td>Provide the facts and address any opinions or assumptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Show actions will improve relationships and others’ feelings.</td>
<td>Provide examples of positive actions and encourage.</td>
<td>Provide assurance of relationships and feelings.</td>
<td>Show how event will or has helped others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide vicarious experiences and support.</td>
<td>Tell them how it makes you feel.</td>
<td>Train them to be empathetic versus sympathetic.</td>
<td>Show how event will or has helped others just like them or those close to them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visualizers

|         | High | Explain positive meanings of physical attributes. | Suggest actions they can take to find success. | Show them where they can be creative. | Help them communicate with others. |
|         | Low  | Create a positive building experience. | Co-create action plan and celebrate small successes. | Show them that you value their input and involvement in class. | Help them communicate with others. |

Organizers

|         | High | Explain organizational and societal expectations. | Help them see the “big picture.” | Provide structure and explain reason for departures. | Provide expectations in writing. |
|         | Low  | Set rules and consequences and follow through. | Put facts in writing and determine a written plan of action. | Provide order and structure. | Provide exact expectations in writing and potential consequences. |

Conclusion

Helping students overcome apathy, fear of failure, anxiety, and fear of change is not a simple task. However, instructors can help students prevent and overcome each of the four major self-inflicting traits that prevent adult students from succeeding in the classroom. The first step is understanding...
the different student types. The second step is understanding the four common self-inflicting traits. Finally, the third step is merging these concepts to create strategies to help move students from thinking “I have not succeeded” to “I have not succeeded, yet” to “I have succeeded!”

References


