

Lack of Work Ethic and Disengagement:

Change in Schools

Comp 150

Ayla Moore

Kristi Newbold

4/19/07

Picture this; a kid playing video games, surfing the internet, and avoiding his chores and homework at all costs. In most people's eyes this would be considered lazy. In actuality, it could just be that he is not being encouraged and pushed enough to become a hard working involved individual. The common belief for the cause of a lack of work ethic is placed on the youth themselves. Their character and how they chose to live life largely considered to be the source of their disengagement and lack of work ethic. This blame isn't necessarily the only cause. We will examine another cause that hasn't been looked at very frequently. A child's character shouldn't be the only thing that is examined to determine the cause for a lack of work ethic and disengagement; the institutions in which they are involved should be examined as well. These institutions are where children spend the most time during their important developmental stages. These institutions have been overlooked as the source or contribution for the youths' so called laziness and unwillingness to become involved. We will examine two texts who have done extensive research on the topic of educational and extracurricular institution's affects on the youths work habits and involvement. *Factors of Influencing Educational Motivation: a study of attitudes, expectations and behavior of children in Sunderland Kentucky and St. Petersburg* by Julian Elliot, Neil Hufton, Anthony Hildreth, and Leonid Illushin examines the academic achievement of the youth trying to determine what pedagogy would encourage the youth to become more active in their communities and to become harder working individuals. The other article we will be examining, *Student Engagement in Instructional Activity: Patterns in Elementary, Middle and High School Years* by Helen M. Marks, examines the relationship between classroom instruction and student engagement. We will examine the findings of the authors and the new ideas that

come with them. The goal is to show that development of work ethic is not only learned at home but is largely influenced by educational institutions in which the youth are involved for much of their lives. Although I acknowledge the fact that youths' character has a large influence on their work ethic and engagement, I claim that the major affecters on lack of work ethic and disengagement amongst youth is caused by a lack of push and encouragement in educational institutions. Research has been conducted in numerous classrooms suggesting that if expectations and motivations were higher the students could achieve much more.

Throughout a child's life they go in and out of school. They start in preschool, move onto kindergarten, then to elementary school and on to high school and hopefully college. Most of a child's life is spent in school. On average students spend about eight hours a day in an educational facility. Then later in life, if they choose to attend college, spend most of their time involved in activities involved with school, including varsity sports, studying, and involvement in clubs. Students are involved in educational facilities for most of their young life. "These facilities have the potential to influence and guide the children in a way that will better them for the real world. In high school mainly, teachers and faculty claim that they are preparing students to be well equipped for the working world. Yet, kids slip by, barely getting passing grades" (Newbold 7). The standards and expectations of the youth aren't what they should be. A C average is considered sufficient at most high schools. Children are unmotivated to push themselves because they are expected only to achieve a minimal grade. "If the students are pushed to achieve more they will probably do more. Their lack of work ethic can't be solely blamed on themselves. It is apparent that students need encouragement in all aspects of

their lives” (Newbold 7). Engagement in the classroom should be an expected thing. Hopefully if a child becomes engaged in their education they will become engaged in life. The expectations of students are too high, but what do we expect? The school standards are low but we expect so much to come of today’s youth. That is why we must reexamine expectations for youth in schools. It is necessary that something be changed to push the students to a higher level. Schools must encourage students more and set an appropriate standard that demonstrates success, encourages a good work ethic, and that causes students become involved in their community.

Although there have not been many studies focusing on pedagogy as the source of student disengagement and lack of work ethic, Marks’ essay focuses on how teaching styles can influence the way students become involved. Marks’ states that even though teaching styles influence the students, their attitudes do as well, and they can be swayed by teaching styles, “Focusing on student engagement in relation to classroom instruction this study conceptualizes engagement as a physiological process, specifically, the attention, interest, investment, and the effort the students expend in the work of learning” (154). This statement is saying that not only do the child’s efforts effect their engagement, but that the teachers and their styles of teaching have an impact on student’s willingness to be a part of something. This is a step up from solely blaming the students. Marks is saying that pedagogy can change a student’s engagement, especially in secondary schools. If a teacher loves what they are teaching, it will rub off onto the students and cause them to wish to become more active in their education. By having a more supportive school environment that encourages participation, students are more likely to become involved, “Some schools, as a part of their reform efforts, have begun to

provide students with more socially supportive school environments, including multiyear advisory groups and schools-within-schools” (158). Schools are becoming more supportive of students and not just a place to learn. By having the place of learning be more supportive, it is encouraging students to be a part of their education. The faculty is putting in more effort to make the students feel a part of something, so in turn, the students are more active in their schooling and out of school environments.

Encouragement to love what they are doing is the first step in helping students love what they do later in life and becoming involved in other organizations. Having a more supportive school environment allows students to be exposed to a positive attitude towards work and becoming engaged.

In other countries there has been success in the ability to get students to be involved and hard working individuals. According to Elliot, Hufton, Hildreth, and Illushin, changing teaching styles can greatly improve students’ achievement and engagement levels. The authors state that, “Reynolds and Farrell (1996) have argued that pedagogic factors, in particular, interactive whole-class teaching, may be the key to raising educational performance in the UK” (76). A change in pedagogy will benefit the students’ ability to have a good work ethic. Having an interactive environment that encourages everyone work together, it can inspire a better work ethic and sense of engagement. The focus on the changing of teaching styles is important due to the fact that the blame of the lack of engagement and work ethic is blamed on someone other than the students. The authors also state that schools aren’t challenging students enough, especially in poorer areas, “It has been widely argued that many children, particularly those from economically disadvantaged communities, are insufficiently challenged in

school” (77). The facilities that the students are involved do not challenge them enough. The authors’ views are similar to those stated earlier. A low expectation of students results in lower achievement levels. Raising the standards will push the students to become involved and to become harder working individuals in the later parts of their life. It is important to push students to achieve the highest levels they can at a young age so they can attain the high levels of expectations in their working life. Schools need to modify their teaching styles and standards to push the students to their fullest potential.

Although previously the blame for lack of work ethic has been placed on the children themselves, there are other aspects to consider. Teaching styles need to be altered to push the children. Academic standards need to be raised so students don’t just strive for the C average grade. If they are encouraged to work harder and achieve B’s and A’s they will be more willing to be engaged and to work hard. Also, if the entire school environment is changed to be more encouraging, there will be a significant change in the students’ attitude toward work. Having a faculty that is involved in the students’ lives will benefit the children. In the long term, if the teachers love what they are teaching, the students will love what they are being taught. The only issue with the articles we previously explored is that all of the information from the studies are from secondary schools and not post secondary schools. Applying the thoughts on teaching methods, an encouraging environment, and a higher academic standard, in colleges, will allow students to not appear lazy and unmotivated.

Works Cited

- Elliot, Julian, Neil Hufton, Anthony Hildreth, and Leonid Illushin . "Factors of Influencing Educational Motivation: a study of attitudes, expectations and behavior of children in Sunderland Kentucky and St. Petersburg." British Educational Research Journal. 25(1999): 75-94.
- Marks, Helen M.. "Student Engagement in Instructional Activity: Patterns in Elementary, Middle and High School Years." American Educational Research Journal 37(2000): 153-184.
- Newbold, Kristi. "Lack of Work Ethic and Disengagement: Who's To Blame?" 2007. 1-8.