Engaging Middle School Students in School Work and its Effect on Cheating

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Engaging Middle School Students in School Work and its Effect on Cheating

Final Dissertation By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2009
ABSTRACT

Engaging Middle School Students in School Work and its Effect on Cheating
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Academic cheating undermines teachers’ ability to assess student learning and disadvantages honest students. Today’s students increasingly express both an acceptance of cheating and a conviction that cheating is the only way to succeed. Academic dishonesty reflects a larger educational problem in which students fail to value school work. Research on cheating suggests that cheating is more prevalent in older grades but neither the cheating behaviors of middle school students nor the development of cheating habits is well understood. Using goal orientation and neutralization theories, this study examined the conditions under which typical eighth graders perceive cheating as acceptable though not right. A cross-case study method compared student views with those of their teachers. Data included focus groups, interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts. Findings indicate that characteristics of assignments, student-teacher relationships, classroom orientation, and student accountability are central to reducing cheating. Results suggest implications for teaching practice and administration in fostering academic honesty.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the institutional support from Boston College that I have received during all four years of my degree. Both the financial support and the professional opportunities afforded to me the space to focus on my work and the opportunity to grow. During my tenure at Boston College, professors have always been exceedingly generous with their time. Recognizing that every member of my committee serves on numerous dissertation committees in addition to their personal research, course load, and service to the university, I truly appreciate the time involved in providing the kind of thoughtful feedback that I received from each of them.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to my esteemed advisor, Jerry Starratt, for being “present”. His expertise has allowed me to finish this work. I have stopped counting how many times I have heard, “Jerry is your chair? You are so lucky to have him.” Dr. Starratt, your oral and written comments have been extremely perceptive, helpful, and appropriate.

I would like to thank Diana Pullin for her prompt feedback, valuable discussions and accessibility despite distance this past year. I particularly enjoyed both her Educational Law and Law seminar classes that I took during my first year of doctoral work. It was in these classes that I fully embraced the notion that education courses can be extremely academically rigorous.

I would like to extend my appreciation to Pat Mcquillan who agreed to serve on my committee after just a few conversations about my topic. Throughout the year, he sent me relevant articles and showed his support by gently inquiring about my progress. Thank you for your collaboration as I taught my first college course. I truly appreciate your confidence in my work, the way that you treated me as a colleague, and your endorsement that provided me with the opportunity to teach a second class this past spring.
In addition to my committee, I would like to extend my most heartfelt thanks to the following professors:

To David Scanlon, who afforded me with the experience of working with him on the Learning Disability Quarterly. I admire you as a model of all that a professor should embody. As editor, scholar, teacher, and mentor you have been a wealth of information and thoughtful advice.

To Karen Arnold, I appreciate your encouragement and ability to create a community of doctoral students in our seminar class. In the future, individual learning contracts are an element of teaching that I would like to incorporate into my own practice.

To Arline Riordan, thank you for your smile, warm encouragement, and genuine effort to help me to find assistantships that would not only support my studies but would also provide me with new challenges. I have enjoyed our conversations about Boston College, grandchildren and nephews, gardening, and retirement.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents Susan and Michael Zito for always being there when I needed you most. You deserve far more credit than I can ever give. You have showed genuine interest in only the way parents can by inquiring about every step of this degree, sympathizing with every hurdle, and celebrating every milestone along the way. You have selflessly offered encouragement, feedback, advice, and praise. Your pride in my accomplishments and constant support of all that I pursue gives me the strength and confidence to meet lofty goals. There is no greater gift than the education that you have so generously bestowed upon me.

To my brother Ari, I would have liked to study together with you for this degree just as we did our masters work, side by side. I have always aspired to be the writer you are. It is with great pride that I watch you shine as a teacher, coach, and father.

And to my husband, Rich, thank you for being patient with me, for not thinking I was lazy as I slept in as you went to work. Your sacrifice in moving to Boston from Brazil is a testament to your enduring support of my work. Everyday I wake up thankful to have you in my life to love and laugh with all of my days.
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Chapter One: Purpose of the Study

Introduction: Our Cheating Society

The media has a captive audience interested in watching the mighty stumble and fall. The prevalence of news stories relating incidences of cheating extends to the world of business, sports, politics, and personal relationships. Yet, in many instances, there is greater public outrage for lying about cheating behavior than the actual commission of cheating acts. Unsurprisingly, a culture of cheating behavior has spilled over into schools. Despite almost unanimous agreement that ethics and character are important in personal and professional relationships, students increasingly express both an acceptance of cheating behavior in school and a conviction that cheating is the only way to succeed (Josephson, 2006).

Cheating ought to be of concern to educators because it dissolves the integrity of students’ academic work and undermines the honest relationship between the teacher and student. Cheating distorts evidence for teachers to assess student learning. Cheating misrepresents what students have learned and will be able to apply after they have left the classroom. When students cheat, they deprive themselves of learning opportunities and at the same time rationalize to themselves that they are not capable of doing the work on their own. Furthermore, cheating hurts the community of learners, as well as harms the individual, by disadvantaging those students who are not cheating and by putting these students in a stressful situation to either confront their peers and face social exclusion or remain silent and condone the dishonest behavior. According to a study by Nonis and Swift (2001), there is a relationship between cheating in a classroom and cheating in the workplace: “Once an individual forms the attitude that cheating is an acceptable behavior, he or she is likely to use this behavior, not only in the educational arenas but in others” (p.75). According to Nonis and Swift (2001), the
frequency of cheating in school (college) is positively correlated to the frequency of engaging in future cheating behavior in one’s professional life. Josephson (2002), founder of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, comments on survey results that affirm widespread cheating in schools, “It can't be comforting to know that the majority of the next generation of police officers, politicians, accountants, lawyers, doctors, nuclear inspectors and journalists are entering the workforce as unrepentant cheaters” (Josephson, 2002, p. 5).

In 1968, Schab (1991) developed a survey instrument, which was administered to 1,629 high school students in 1969, 1,100 students in 1979, and 1,291 students in 1989. The study revealed that students increasingly believe cheating is essential for success, advertising is more apt to be considered untrustworthy and success in business is more likely described as synonymous with deceit. Only 24% of those surveyed in 1989 believed that most people in the United States are honest compared with 49% in 1969 (Schab, 1991). Schab’s (1991) study demonstrates not only the prevalence of cheating behavior but a trend of rising frequency and increased acceptance.

More recently, data from the Josephson Institute of Ethics (2006), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles, also confirm the trend of increasing dishonesty that Schab noted in his studies conducted over time. According to survey data, 28% of the 36,122 high school students surveyed admitted stealing from a store within the past year and 82% confessed they lied to a parent about something significant. 60% admitted to cheating on a test during the past year, with 35% of students sharing that they did so two or more times, and 33% responded that they plagiarized an assignment from the Internet (Josephson, 2006). The same study conducted in 2008 disclosed that 30% of the nearly 30,000 high school student surveyed admitted stealing from a store within the past year and more than 83% confessed they lied to a
parent about something significant. Again, indications point to increasing cheating given that according to Josephson’s (2008) report, 64% admitted to cheating on a test during the past year, with 38% of students sharing that they did so two or more times, and 36% admitted to using the internet to plagiarize an assignment. Josephson’s work also affirms Schab’s findings of acceptance for dishonesty. 92% of those surveyed by Josephson (2006) said they were satisfied with their personal ethics and character and 74% agreed with the statement that “when it comes to doing what is right, I am better than most people I know” (p.2). In 2008, those same figures were 93% and 77% percent respectively (Josephson, 2008). Furthermore, 59% contended that “in the real world, successful people do what they have to do to win, even if others consider it cheating” and 23% agree with the statement “People who are willing to lie, cheat or break the rules are more likely to succeed than people who do not” (Josephson, 2006, p.2). At odds with their behaviors is that 97% of the same students in 2006 and 98% of the students surveyed from 2008 said “It’s important to me that people trust me” and 83% in 2006 and 84% in 2008 believed “It’s not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character” (Josephson, 2006, p.2). To students it is not a contradiction to value integrity and then behave dishonestly because students do not characterize cheating as unethical when they are in certain situations. Students believe it is beyond their control that they cannot act in accordance with their expressed values and behave ethically if they want to succeed in today’s world.

The Josephson (2006, 2008) reports and Schab’s (1991) research resonate with the literature as a whole in terms of the increasing incidence of cheating among students, which is both widespread and increasingly more common as students advance into higher grades (Finn & Frone, 2004). Approximately one third of students in elementary school admit to cheating and over 60% of middle school students contend that cheating is a serious problem in their school
(Cizek, 1999). According to Eisenberg’s (2004) study, out of 3000+ high achieving high school students 80% self-reported cheating. High achieving refers to students who have an A or B average and intend to go to college. McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield’s survey (2001) of high school students reported that more than half of 4500 American students surveyed admitted to plagiarizing from the internet, 74% admitted to cheating on exams, and 97% admitted to cheating on homework. As students mature, so do their cheating habits.

Unfortunately, parents often dismiss their children’s cheating behavior as a minor offense. Researchers not only point to rising percentages of cheating students, but a number of studies reveals increased parental tolerance for cheating (Vennochi, 2007) and teacher collusion in cheating behaviors (Jacob & Levitt, 2004; Jacob & Levitt, 2003; Hildebrand, 2007; Kleiner, 2000). These scandals have aroused public concern, especially when they arise in privileged school districts. Concerned about the validity and fairness of standardized testing, schools across the country have hired private test security companies such as Utah based Caveon Test Security, who estimates that about 1 to 2 percent of schools tested show a high probability of adult-led cheating behavior (Tyre, 2007). The cheating behavior varies from evidence of teachers who give students the actual exam to study from to teachers who write strings of answers on the board or check completed exams by replacing wrong answers with the right ones (Tyre, 2007). Thus, in today’s schools we have evidence that students are more likely to act dishonestly than ever before, with increasing incidences among populations of older students who should have a greater capacity for moral reasoning, increasingly condoned by parents and teachers. According to Josephson (2004), “If we want to understand the insidiousness of a culture of cheating we need look no further than our schools” (p. 21). And yet, cheating is a symptom rather than the
actual malady. Cheating is a manifestation of a larger educational problem in which students fail to value what they are learning.

Focus of the Study

The overarching research question for this study is: What do middle school students and teachers believe are school-based characteristics that influence cheating in middle school? Based on a 5-point scale in which 1 = agree and 5 = disagree, Anderman and Murdock (2007) conclude that students cheat to save time on work that they consider unimportant. Therefore, the focus of this study will be on student attitudes toward academic work in terms of its relevance and importance to them. The primary interest of this study is to examine student and teacher attitudes towards particular school assignments and to investigate whether there are fewer incidences of cheating on work that students believe is personally valuable to them. If students view their school work as unconnected to their interests, knowledge, or experiences and they do not understand how that work will be personally useful or meaningful they will attach less value to its completion and exert less effort to finish it well. Furthermore if that work is imposed upon them, interfering with the personally interesting activities also vying for their time, the work becomes an exercise to be gotten through as quickly and effortlessly as possible. In all likelihood it becomes easier for students to justify cheating when the work does not matter. Comparably, teachers contribute to student rationalizations about cheating when they view the work that they assign to students as only measuring whether students can regurgitate back what was presented in class without asking students to interpret, connect or apply their learnings. Their teachers fail to honor the integrity of the subject matter and the potential of students to engage thoughtfully with the material. If the assignment does not ask students to communicate deeper understanding, does not motivate students to seek personal ownership, and does not inspire creativity, there is
little opportunity for dialogue about the subject between students and teachers. When assignments can be completed in the same way by every student, teachers may create opportunities for students to cheat.

The intent is to address the attitudes of students toward assigned academic work and to explore the possible link between the value students ascribe to the work itself and the commission of acts of cheating. The study will also inquire about the value that teachers attach to their assignments and whether they expressly communicated those meanings to students as a way of motivating them to engage in the work of learning. The study will probe classroom characteristics that influence beliefs about honesty on school work. The result of this study will be a descriptive rendering regarding the attitudes of middle school learners as well as their teachers towards school work.

*Research Questions*

1) How do students and teachers define cheating?

2) How do middle school students and teachers believe classroom based characteristics influence cheating as they define it?

3) What are characteristics of assignments students and teachers perceive reduce the opportunity for students to cheat?

4) What are characteristics of assignments that students and teachers perceive motivate students to value the work itself and complete the assignment without cheating?

5) Is there a connection between the responsibility of a teacher to assign authentic learning assignments and the responsibility of students not to cheat?
Definition of Terms

Educational terms can have slightly different meanings; therefore I will define the terms relevant to this dissertation. According to the Oxford English dictionary, to cheat means to defraud, to deprive by deceit. In an educational context, Cizek (1999) defines cheating as behavior in which an individual deceptively or fraudulently represents his knowledge. In completing academic work, rules govern the evaluation of work and spell out to students how they are expected to complete the assessment. Those rules may be announced verbally by a teacher, printed on an assignment or grading rubric, found on the class syllabus, or articulated in a code of academic conduct. When these expectations are violated then the action is cheating. As Cizek (2003) states, cheating can be grouped into three categories: (a) “giving, taking, or receiving information”, (b) “using any prohibited materials”, and (c) “capitalizing on the weaknesses of persons, procedures, or processes to gain an advantage” on school work (p. 42). In the university setting this also means unauthorized assistance in academic work that diminishes the ability to grade the student accurately (Garavalia, Olson, Russell, & Christensen, 2007). To understand the extent of college students’ understanding of cheating, once presented with a definition of cheating, Burrus, McGoldrick, and Schuhmann (2007) have used the following explicit definition

Cheating is (a) the submission of work that is not one’s own (b) the giving or receiving of Illegal aid from other persons or materials or from materials brought into the classroom by you (such as looking at someone else’s paper or “cheat sheets” (c) the use of prior knowledge of the contents of the test or quiz without authorization from the instructor-“Knowledge of the contents can include conversation about the test with students who have already completed it or unauthorized viewing of the test paper. (p.4)
For this study the participating school defines cheating in its school handbook as the deliberate copying of another’s work on tests, examinations, reports, or homework. In general, plagiarism is defined as the uncredited or undocumented use of work not one’s own. Students should be clear that a voluntary offer of one’s own work for such purposes constitutes a form of cheating.

In terms of what constitutes work, this refers to assessments both formative and summative. This work is designed and assigned by a teacher and completed either individually or in groups. This includes any assignments on which students receive feedback, grades, or are held accountable in the classroom and at home. In terms of characteristics of work, this refers to the following qualities that I predict students and teachers will address. This could include but is not limited to (a) directions, the way that work has been introduced and explained to students; (b) student investment, the opportunity for student choice within the assignment; (c) significance, work with practical application, personal meaning to students; (d) difficulty, work that is neither challenging nor work that is not too hard that it is overly frustrating; (e) amount, work that is assigned respectful of other assignments, activities, and life occurrences that are vying for students’ time; (f) connections, work that is tied to prior student knowledge or tied to other disciplines; (g) type of assessment: e.g. selected response versus essays; (h) accountability, whether the stakes are high vs. low; (i) presentation, the opportunity to share the work publicly; and (j) feedback, thoughtful, formative, timely feedback on student work.

In terms of defining middle school, I am referring to grades sixth through eighth. However, Northwest School houses students Pre-K to 8 and within the school itself participants may refer to further division levels. Within the school lower school refers to Pre-K to 3, middle school is grades 4 and 5 and the upper school encompasses grades 6 to 8. Particular to this study
is the term advisory which is familiar to those in middle school environments. In this model, every student has an assigned faculty member who is responsible for mentoring their students’ academic, social and emotional development. Throughout the year the advisor provides ongoing and steady guidance serving as a communication liaison between the parent and the school and as advocate for the student in level meetings, in discussions with other teachers, and in any disciplinary proceedings. At the school in this study, advisory groups meet for one class period and one lunch each week, plus a daily homeroom period, to address a variety of character education themes.

In terms of opportunity to cheat, I am referring to the possibility for cheating to occur. For example, does the answer vary from student to student or is there one correct answer that students can copy from one another? Can the assignment be downloaded from the internet? Do parents or tutors have the opportunity to provide too much assistance?

Motivation refers to whether or not students would want to cheat on the work. Are students engaged in the work and want to complete it for its own sake? Do students understand why the work is important and therefore feel that they should complete it on their own? Do they believe the work will help them acquire skills and knowledge that they need? Do students feel an ethical responsibility not to cheat? Do they want to honor the learning community, other students, the teacher, the subject matter?

Although I recognize that a person’s character can refer to both negative and positive attributes that comprise an individual’s moral constitution, a developed character is much more than an individual’s predictable patterns of behavior (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). According to Ryan and Bohlin (1999), character describes the sum of our intellectual and moral habits; character pertains to daily action. And good character, according to these authors, is about knowing the
good, loving the good, and doing the good. Knowing the good pertains to practical wisdom and the ability to understand what a situation demands and then prioritize what needs to be done in order to choose well. Loving the good refers to wanting to do what is right and includes an ability to empathize with others. Doing the good means that after thoughtful considerations of all the circumstances and relevant facts, one will demonstrate the will to act. Because character deals with our habits, developing character is a social act (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Education fosters the development of strong moral habits. Through character education, children learn to gain control of personal desires, develop a deep regard for others, and put aside one’s personal interests and sometimes even personal needs in order to serve others.

Another term requiring explanation is values. Values are either moral or non-moral. Moral values such as honesty, responsibility, respect and fairness carry obligation (Likona, 1991). As Likona (1991) clarifies, moral values tell us what we ought to do, while non-morals relate to what we want or would like to do. An example of a non-moral value could be that I personally value exercising every day but I am under no obligation to do so. Likona (1991) further distinguishes moral values into two categories: universal and non-universal. Universal values “bind all persons everywhere because they affirm our fundamental human worth and dignity” (p. 38). Non-universal moral values do not carry a universal moral obligation. Examples of non-universal moral values pertain to duties specific to one’s religion or culture such as praying, fasting, or celebrating holidays. Although one might argue whether there are any universal values or that a list of universal values is impossible to construct and therefore teach in schools, Likona (1991) contends that although we may disagree about the actual list of values, the priority of those values, or how to apply those values in every situation we can readily agree on the basics: “We don’t want them [students] to lie, cheat on tests, take what’s not
In this study, I will also use the word value as a verb to describe the extent to which an individual holds meaning for a task. In this case the extent to which students assign significance to the work they do in school. Students may value the work from a sense of personal significance and ownership because (a) they are interested and therefore engaged in learning at the present moment or (b) they characterize the task as onerous and dull but have an appreciation for the relevance and importance of the assignment for their future work.

Recognizing that in ordinary usage the word morality tends not to enjoy a precise definition and usage and that the definition depends on the context, it is necessary to define morality. In referring to morality I am not implying any religious overtone. Horace Mann (1865) distinguishes between religion and morality. He contends, “The former comprises the relations between man and his Maker, and the latter the relations between man and his fellow men” (Mann, 1865, p. 143). Secondly, for the purpose of this dissertation, morality does not refer to habitual conformity to societal conventions, regardless of the motive from which this compliance arises. Whitely (1960) distinguishes a morality which emerges from within an individual from one that has been imposed on an individual. In the context of this dissertation, morality is the content of conscience. Morality drives those actions which an individual believes he or she ought to do regardless of inclination or personal advantage (Whitely, 1960).

Lee (1928) distinguishes ethics from morality by identifying ethics as a branch of philosophy rather than a standard of conduct. Ethics philosophizes on conduct. Central to the philosophy of ethics is an emphasis on the reflection upon an individual’s actions and
evaluations. Ethics is a systematic, rational, critical investigation to understand conduct but does not seek to regulate conduct. Ethics seeks to formulate the theoretical principles that provide the rational basis behind the evaluation of conduct (Lee, 1928).

Theoretical Groundings of the Study

The literature on academic dishonesty demonstrates that students engage in higher incidences of cheating behavior when they perceive an increased justification for dishonest behavior (Murdock, Miller, & Goetzinger, 2007). LaBeff, Clark, Haines, and Diekhoff (1990) apply the term situational ethics to the circumstance in which students justify cheating behavior based on some aspect of their classroom. To understand the situational ethics of cheating depends on the extent to which students measure their academic competence in comparison to others (goal orientation theory) and assume responsibility for their cheating behavior (neutralization theory). Beyond the fact that these theories position cheating behaviors as context specific, they are also to a certain extent are within a teacher’s control to influence.

According to goal orientation theory, classroom environments influence students’ views about the nature and purpose of learning (Ames, 1992). Goal orientation theory attributes student motivation to the structure of the classroom as either oriented toward performance or mastery (Stephens & Gehlbach, 2007). The differences between these two conceptions of academic success deal with how the two structures foster thinking about oneself, the work assigned, and the outcome of the work (Ames, 1992). The focus of attention for students in a mastery goal classroom is on the intrinsic value of learning based on the belief that effort will lead to success, or by a sense of mastery. Students invested in the mastery of material care about improvement rather than how their ability compares to others. To attend to mastery goals, individuals focus on
developing new skills, understanding their work, improving their level of competence, and learning from their mistakes (Anderman, 2007).

Resnick (1995) proposes that educational settings should be built around the assumption that effort actually creates ability and design learning activities that foster effort. She describes five essential features of an effort-oriented education system: (a) clear expectations for achievement that are well understood by everyone, (b) fair and credible evaluations of achievement, (c) celebration and payoff for success, (d) as much time as is necessary to meet learning expectations, and (e) expert instruction. These same features that Resnick (1995) contends would encourage effort could also be applied to features of a classroom that would foster learning without cheating and would possess qualities of a mastery classroom. Students who believe that their intelligence is based on their effort will recognize that cheating would limit their ability to acquire their potential intelligence. Students who did exert sincere effort on their assigned work would not be able to demonstrate mastery of the skills required to complete that work. Teachers who incorporate these five elements into their classrooms would foster not only effort but also academic honesty.

Ryan and Deci (2000) posit that the type of motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic) shapes students’ attitudes and behaviors. When motivation comes from within, students have increased self-autonomy and a greater capacity to determine their own fate. In contrast when student motivation comes from the direction of teachers, parents or from a situational pressure, students exert less autonomy and internalize decreased control of the outcome (Stephens & Gehlbach, 2007). When students are intrinsically motivated to learn the content they do not engage in acts of cheating since this would undermine this learning goal. Students who perceive pressure from others or from a situation to complete assignments may feel less interested in engaging in that
content because they did not have any choice. In this instance, cheating may achieve the goals that others want them to attain. I would expect to find higher perceived rates of cheating in classrooms in which students are not given the autonomy to choose their own goals and who are pressured to achieve extrinsic ones.

Classrooms with mastery focused goal structures emphasize effort and personal growth as opposed to performance focused classroom which stress competition, rewards, and peer comparison (Murdock et al., 2007). Performance-oriented students are concerned with how their aptitude measures up to other students. They care about appearing competent and smart (Stephens & Gehlbach, 2007). Data suggests that students perceive practices that are characteristic of performance-oriented classrooms as inherently unjust or unfair (Covington & Omelich, 1984; Murdock et al., 2007). Generally, students in classes that students describe as emphasizing mastery goals display more effort, persistence, and help seeking behaviors than do students in classrooms that focus on performance goals (Kaplan, Middleton, Urdan, & Midgley, 2002). Whereas in a performance goal oriented classroom students adopt failure-avoiding patterns of behavior (Ames, 1992). My first hypothesis is that I would expect to find higher self-reporting of cheating in classrooms emphasizing performance goals rather than mastery ones.

According to neutralization theory, first proposed by Sykes & Matza (1957) to explain juvenile delinquency, individuals will adapt strategies to deflect responsibility for deviant behavior from oneself to others. These authors represent neutralization as an outcome of social learning and environment. In terms of cheating this might look like “denial of the crime” (cheating was not wrong), “denial of the victim” (i.e., it doesn’t harm anyone), “denial of responsibility” (i.e., there were things outside my control that led to this), “condemnation of the condemners” (i.e., the teacher’s fault) and “appeal to higher loyalties” (i.e., other goals or values
were more important)” (Murdock & Stevens, 2007, p.233). Studies indicate that neutralizing attitudes toward cheating characterizes students who behave dishonestly than students who behave honestly (Murdock & Stevens, 2007). And in fact, research on academic dishonesty or cheating behaviors using neutralization as an independent variable has typically confirmed that students who cheat use neutralization techniques (Daniel, Blount, & Ferrell, 1991; Diekhoff, LaBeff, Clark, Williams, Francis, & Haines, 1996; Michaels & Meithe, 1989; Storch & Storch, 2002). My second hypothesis is that I would expect to find greater incidences of neutralizing attitudes towards cheating among dishonest middle school students.

Research Design

Although a great deal of research has been conducted in the secondary and university setting to describe attitudes towards cheating, how to detect cheating and factors that make students more likely to cheat, there is insufficient evidence tying the extent to which cheating in middle school can be connected to characteristics of teachers and their classrooms. To my knowledge, there is negligible research examining the impact of the characteristics of work assigned on cheating, nor does it address middle school students. This qualitative descriptive study seeks to understand the multiple perspectives of middle school students and their attitudes toward honest work in school (Merriam, 1998). This study attempts to uncover the often overlooked thoughts and feelings of students as well as their teachers in education research, recognizing that individuals do not all share the same perspective. This study uses a cross-case study method and a cross-case analysis which slightly differs from a typical single study case study by including two single units of study: eight students and five core teachers at the same middle school. Each case has been analyzed as a single unit of study and then in comparison to the other unit.
Data was collected through observation, focus groups, and interviews. The participants for this study were purposefully drawn from one private middle school in the New England area. There was one formal one-hour interview with the 4 core teachers, plus 2 foreign language teachers and two one-hour focus groups consisting of four students. From these focus groups the study incorporated in-depth, one hour, semi-structured, follow-up interview with each of the participants in the focus groups interviews. In order to better understand the context for the responses of students and teachers the study also included classroom observations to gather data when teachers are introducing assignments, proctoring in class assessments, returning student work or providing feedback or when students are sharing their work with their peers.

Significance of the Study

In the past, a case for the situational factors to reduce cheating has been derived from high school or college studies. The significance of this study extends beyond this age group to the ways that middle school students think about cheating in relation to the work assigned. The inquiry into the nature of students’ attitudes towards work in middle school holds the potential for understanding the positive and negative attitudes students bring to academic work. Based on this understanding, teachers might be better able to evaluate their instructional practice and the work they assign to avoid involuntary reinforcement of cheating behavior on the part of students. The results of this study can inform conversations at this middle school and other middle schools that are grappling with issues of cheating and how students’ attitudes towards their work influence their motivation to cheat. The study has implications for the role of administrators as instructional leaders. In building a school culture that honors authentic learning, administrators must be sure to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate, reflect, and improve academic integrity in students’ work.
Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation has five chapters. The first chapter has provided an introduction to the study discussing a statement of the problem, the theoretical rationale, the significance, an abbreviated research design, some limitations of the study, and some defined terms. The second chapter discusses the relevant literature which has guided the focus and the methodology of the study and has pointed to particular gaps in the literature that this study aims to address. The third chapter presents the overall research design, outlining the specific methodology used to gather, analyze, and report data as well as the rationale for using that particular methodology, sample, and pilot study. Chapter 4 communicates the findings of the case study. Chapter 5 discusses those findings within the theoretical rationale proposed in Chapter 1 and the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and makes recommendations in light of the findings for policy development, for school practices, and for further research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction: Overview of the Chapter

Schools have varied approaches to promote academic honesty which may include explicit indoctrination about cheating, strict surveillance, deterrence, punishments, or honor codes. In order to gauge how these measures fail to eliminate students’ commission of cheating behavior requires first an understanding about which students are cheating, how students are cheating, and why students believe that they or their classmates cheat. The most significant finding in the literature is the extent to which situational classroom characteristics explain students’ decision to behave dishonestly rather than any other factor addressed by the research.

To begin, the chapter offers a discussion of existing studies on how students understand cheating and how this differs from teachers’ definitions of cheating. Although students may not entirely understand what constitutes cheating they certainly can articulate what defines “good work” (Goldwasser & Bach, 2005). Afterwards, the chapter traces the incidences and types of cheating that students commonly engage in when completing academic work. In order to help teachers predict which of their students are more likely to cheat, a number of researchers have looked at common characteristics of cheating students, the social contexts for student dishonesty, and attitudes of students towards the commission of cheating behaviors. However, as we will find, this type of research is insufficient since no singular demographic, academic, behavioral, and personality profile of students who cheat emerges. To better explain why students cheat I turn to the theories of goal orientation and neutralization. According to goal orientation, when classrooms attach importance to understanding rather than performance teachers are more likely to value the work they assign and students are more likely to value the school work they complete. And subsequently, if students value the work itself rather than how their product
measures up in comparison to others then cheating is rendered irrelevant. Neutralization theory explains how students who do not value their school work or regard some other value as more important than mastery of this work justify their dishonest behavior as acceptable though not right. This discussion ties to specific literature on what arouses student interest and motivates ongoing engagement, what constitutes authentic learning and what are qualities of assignments with low incidences of cheating behavior. Lacking in the literature is a focus on the intersection of these related bodies of literature at the middle school level, specifically on the characteristics of work that is assigned and the value that students attach to the assignment as related to cheating behavior. The significance of this literature review is that teachers have the opportunity to structure their classrooms in ways that they do not need to indoctrinate, deter or punish. Instead they can inspire students to value the work itself and build an intrinsic desire within their students to complete academic work honestly.

Defining Cheating

Student Understandings

Throughout the literature, scholars note that students across grade levels do not have a clear idea of what constitutes cheating (Diekhoff et al., 1996; Evans & Craig, 1990; McCabe, Trevino & Battlefield, 1999). In a survey conducted at 30 universities by McCabe et al. (1999), some students claimed that the definition of cheating varies depending on the assignment. A student said, “Assignments are the greyest area with me because I feel that as long as you learn during the assignment it doesn’t matter how you learned it.” Another shared, “People have very different views of what exactly constitutes cheating. For example, I have probably incorrectly footnoted or altered lab results so they ‘fit’ but this has been more because I didn’t realize it” (McCabe et al., 1999, p. 7). McCabe’s (1999) study demonstrates that students will engage in
cheating behavior if educators are not clear from the beginning about what cheating looks like on the work they assign.

Burrus, McGoldrick, and Schuhmann (2007) indicates that even when presented with an inclusive definition of cheating that some college students still fail to consider discussing a take-home exam with students as cheating unless the instructor expressly prohibits the behavior. Furthermore they argue that although students and professors may agree about blatant behaviors they may disagree on more subtle examples of cheating such as bibliographical falsification, working collaboratively on homework when it has been explicitly forbidden, using older versions of a test to study without the teachers’ knowledge and obtaining answers for an exam from someone who has previously taken it.

An important study conducted by Evans and Craig (1990) investigated the extent of student misunderstandings about cheating behavior. They sought to gain further understanding about students’ knowledge of the critical attributes of cheating behavior and how those understandings compared with teachers’ perceptions of cheating. Evans and Craig (1990) used a sample of 7th through 12th grade students citing a disproportionate number of studies querying college students. In this study, 1,763 middle and high school students and 107 teachers completed a questionnaire, looking at among other scales awareness and evaluation of cheating behaviors. Data revealed that students were much less likely than their teachers to judge passive behaviors such as sharing answers with their peers or providing advance test information cheating behavior (Evans & Craig, 1990). Students were also less likely to identify a planned absence from a scheduled test without a legitimate reason as wrong (Evans & Craig, 1990). Furthermore, students grossly misunderstand the characteristics of plagiarism. For example, paraphrasing another’s work without any acknowledgment was not recognized by many students
as a form of academic dishonesty (Evans & Craig, 1990). The significance of this study is confirmation that addressing the problem of cheating requires more than moral outrage that cheating behavior is detrimental to the individual and the community. Since the literature demonstrates that students will not inherently have the same degree of knowledge about cheating behavior that educators may have, scholars advise teachers to define the various types of cheating behaviors to students, provide systematic instruction on the guidelines for referencing alongside justification as to why the different types of cheating are wrong (Neils, 1996).

Although students may not be clear on what constitutes cheating behavior a study conducted by Goldwasser and Bach (2005) addressed what students characterize as good work. The data came from a series of 18 semi-structured focus groups of between eight and twelve 11th and 12th graders from public schools in New York and New Jersey. Specifically researchers asked, “How do you know when you’ve done ‘good work’ in school?” (Goldwasser & Bach, 2005, p.5). Regardless of the discipline, definitions of good work had a great deal more to do with how students felt about their work, the amount of effort they exerted, and if what they learned had any relevance to them. Although some students reported that grades and teacher feedback determined the worth of their work, for the majority of students good work was tied to their self-appraisals, a standard they could recognize individually. Thus, students may not always characterize a behavior as cheating but they certainly can distinguish between work that they believe is challenging and fulfilling to them, generating a product that they are proud to share with others, and work which does not result in any lasting knowledge, is not gratifying and students are not proud to share (Goldwasser & Bach, 2005).
Incidences and Type of Cheating

The majority of the literature on academic cheating addresses behaviors of high school and college students in terms of the methods of cheating; little research on cheating has focused on adolescent populations (Anderman, Griesinger, & Westerfield, 1998). The following is a brief summary of high school and college studies that address the incidence and type of cheating regarding copying, crib notes, plagiarism, and fabrication. Studies found common cheating practices entailed copying from others or allowing others to copy the work (e.g., Davis, Grover, Becker & McGregor, 1992; Genereaux & McLeod, 1995; Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce, 1996; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes & Armstead, 1996; Robinson, Ambrugey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004). Other studies report the frequency of student’s using crib notes (e.g., Brandes, 1986; Davis et al., 1992). Research has also been conducted on the prevalence of plagiarism (e.g., Baird, 1980; Bennett, 2005; Brandes, 1986; Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce, 1996). In other studies such as Newstead et al. (1996), Syer and Shore (2001), and Bennett (2005) investigators found a prevalence of the fabrication of data and/or references.

Increasingly the misuse of technology to abet cheating behavior has become a large problem in classrooms. Today’s students use cell phones, PDAs and pagers to send, store, or receive test answers, take photos of exams, and even search for test information on the internet during the test (Garavalia, Olson, Russell, & Christensen, 2007; Terian, 2001). Outside of class, as well, students employ technology to cheat with greater efficiency than with more traditional methods (Garavalia et al., 2007). Given younger students’ lack of knowledge about proper use of the internet and older students gross misinterpretation that information on the internet is public and does not require citing, the internet has become a significant source of plagiarism (McCabe, 2001). Also, a multitude of companies sell essays on the Web such as www.schoolsucks.com,
www.ivyessays.com, or www.lazystudents.com. Others even post essays free of charge, or help students to trade papers online (Flannery, 2004). McCabe’s 1999-2000 academic year study on frequency of internet plagiarism indicates that more than half of high school students reported copying a few sentences from a website without a citation and 16% turned in a paper obtained from a website. Less than fifty percent of high school students considered lifting a few sentences from a website without footnoting them a serious offense (McCabe, 2001). Furthermore, a number of students describe their teachers as unknowledgeable about computer technology, making it easier for students to cheat (McCabe, 1999). But while the Web has become a convenient method of cheating for dishonest students, it has not necessarily created new cheaters and at the same time technology has helped teachers catch cheaters. Subscription based services such as Turnitin.com makes it easier for teachers to spot plagiarized essays. Future qualitative research as opposed to asking student to respond to Likert survey items could provide rich descriptions about the kinds of assignments students are likely to use unauthorized materials or assistance to complete including internet, cell phones, PGAs, and pagers. Furthermore, qualitative research could also help educators gain a better understanding of the exact difficulties middle school students have in using technology to gather information, interpret the quality of sources, paraphrase information, and cite sources, so that teachers need not continue to engage in an escalation of technological savvy with students.

The following is a more detailed discussion of a few important studies on the type of cheating behavior students report engaging in and the frequency of their dishonest behavior. Norton, Tilley, Newstead, Hollinger and Lanza-Kaduce (1996) investigated 267 college students and found that more than half of the students surveyed acknowledged paraphrasing information without a citation and inventing data. Baird’s (1980) study investigated the cheating behaviors of
college undergraduates for 33 different types of cheating behavior found that students confessed to cheating more often on less important tasks, like tests and quizzes, than on important ones, like midterms and final exams. Haines, Diekhoff, LaBeff, and Clark (1986) reported that at a small state university out of 380 undergraduates 34.2% admitted to engaging in cheating behavior on class assignments, 23.7% on major exams, and 22.1% on quizzes. A study conducted by Michaels and Meithe (1989) administered a questionnaire to 685 undergraduates from sociology classes at a large state university. Respondents shared their frequencies of cheating in college on in-class exams, papers or projects, and homework or lab work. 41.9% reported having cheated on exams, 22.9% cheated on term papers or projects, and 77.5% cheated on homework to be turned in. In total, 85.7% of the sample had cheated either on exams, papers, or home-work. Baird (1980) reported that for 200 college undergraduates obtaining test information from other students prior to taking a test, allowing someone to copy work, copying from someone else, and plagiarizing were the most commonly reported cheating acts. Unsurprisingly, with instantaneous access to knowledge, studies such as Dawkins (2004) have looked into and discovered students with marked frequency cheating on the internet. Other forms of cheating such as copying from other students’ exams, sharing tests or test information with students who have not taken them, collaborating on assignments when professors have expressly prohibited it are also other frequently cited forms of cheating (Robinson, Amburgey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004). This sample of studies is representative of literature on the incidence and type of cheating. Furthermore, the varying responses indicate that students cheat in many different forms and although the studies do not precisely agree on the most frequently committed cheating methods, they do all point to a pervasive culture of cheating in high school and college.
These results are unsurprising when comparing these studies to other sources of data. For example, according to Who’s Who Among American High School Students (1998) 65% of students surveyed admitted to copying someone else’s homework, 39% acknowledged cheating on a quiz or test, 33% admitted using published book notes instead of reading the book and 10% confessed to plagiarizing published work. Robinson et al. (2004) found that out of more than 100 surveyed college students the majority cheat on an occasional or regular basis. Clearly, school environments are wrought with cheating students and knowing how students cheat is critical in designing and implementing strategies to get them to stop.

However, educators cannot assume that students in middle school classrooms are committing exactly the same behaviors. Studies indicate that students who develop cheating habits continue to behave dishonestly throughout their academic life and yet there is a gap in the literature on when cheating behaviors first develop and why, which limits a discussion of cheating behavior across grade levels. The literature indicates that college-age students may cheat less frequently than younger students. (Davis, Noble, Zak, & Dreyer, 1992). Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995) found in their first study that students aged 25 years or older were perceived by other students and lecturers to cheat less often than those aged either 21-24 or 18-20 years. Yet there is little data to substantiate the direct effect of age on cheating although there is a perceived increase in cheating from elementary school to high school and then a decrease after completion of an undergraduate degree (Davis et al., 1992).

Another consideration in comparing students across divisions is the degree of competition and high stakes for students. Students may be cheating at higher rates in middle and high school when the stakes are higher to earn high grades, enter into certain tracked classes, graduate, and compete to enter elite colleges. Older students may be less likely to cheat since
they are working with intrinsic rewards in mind (Miller, Murdock, Anderman & Poindexter, 2007). Furthermore, in middle and high school settings there are often school grade average requirements to participate in sports and other extra-curricular activities, which may induce students to cheat on their school work to protect their other often more personally relevant and important activities.

Furthermore, situational factors vary greatly between these school divisions. High school and middle school students attend multiple classes every day, while a university age student attends classes with fewer meetings per week but classes may last for three hours. Therefore, high school and middle school students can pass along information to other students about the test content and the ways to cheat successfully in a given teacher’s classroom. Research indicates that the structure of high school in comparison to college explains findings that high school students report greater boredom with material and lack of meaningfulness for their school work than college students (Shraw, Olafson, Kuch, Lehman, Lehman, & McCrudden, 2007). Students may be more likely to cheat in middle school and high school because of course requirements limiting choice for younger students. Since personal interest for a discipline has been tied to both motivation and self-efficacy it is unsurprising that college students have been found less likely to engage cheat in a class within their academic major (Shraw et al, 2007). Therefore, middle and high school students may be more likely to cheat because they lack autonomy over their course of study.

Another variable to consider is that the repercussions for cheating may have higher stakes as students move along in their academic careers. Students in college caught cheating may find themselves facing severe academic repercussions in terms of receiving a zero in the course, a period of separation from the college, or even expulsion. Whereas, in middle and high school
settings students caught cheating may face less punitive measures and the opportunity to rebuild fractured trust. Researchers such as Miller et al. (2007) point to the effects of age on cheating as an area in which further data is required. There are many differences between middle school, high school, and college age students in terms of their moral development, attitudes towards their work, school structure, high stakes learning environment, and autonomy for learning. Studies particularly addressing middle school students are few, and studies on college populations or even high school populations do not necessarily explain cheating behaviors for middle school students. This lack of data on middle school population supports a case for additional research to compare the differences in cheating attitudes and behaviors across divisions or investigate academic dishonesty solely in middle school populations.

Literature that discusses students’ moral development and its relationship to cheating behavior rely predominantly on Kohlberg’s stages of moral development. Through analyzing data of longitudinal and cross-cultural subjects and their responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas, Kohlberg found that moral reasoning develops over time through six stages; each higher stage characterizes more mature reasoning (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). According to Kohlberg’s theory, moral reasoning progresses from the lowest Pre-Conventional levels (stages 1 and 2) to the most advanced Post-Conventional levels (5 and 6), at which point individuals make moral decisions because of an internalized universal ethic (Kohlberg, 1984). Based on his theory of moral development, Kohlberg (1984) claimed that moral reasoning “can be a quite powerful and meaningful predictor of action” (p.397).

Recent literature continues to consider students’ moral development and its relationship to academic dishonesty in school in terms of Kohlberg’s stages of moral development. Yet moral reasoning and cheating behavior have not been significantly correlated in the literature (Miller et
A number of other classroom characteristics interact with students’ moral reasoning confounding data to support findings that students with higher versus lower levels of morality cheat less frequently (Corcoran & Rotter, 1987; Hartshorne & May, 1928; Miller et al., 2007). And even as Kohlberg admits, it is the reasoning about moral decision making rather than the decision itself that is of concern. Cheating could be viewed as the morally right thing to do at any stage of moral reasoning. Although a relationship between moral development and cheating does exist, studies suggest other intervening variables. Even with students who score high on moral development scales cheat under sufficient pressure (Corcoran & Rotter, 1987; Garavalia, Olson, Russell, & Christensen, 2007). The presence of incentives, peer influence, surveillance, classroom norms, among other factors interacts with students’ moral reasoning and confounds findings that students with higher versus lower levels of morality cheat less frequently (Miller et al., 2007). Students’ stated beliefs contradict their self-reported behaviors. Thus, students’ reasoning about the acceptability of cheating depends to a greater extent on situational variables rather than their stage of moral development (Murdock & Stevens, 2007). Because Kohlberg’s stages of moral development do not sufficiently predict cheating behavior on the part of students, researchers must turn to other theoretical underpinnings to explain why students engage in dishonesty in their academic work.

Eisenberg (2004) conducted a study investigating the moral reasoning of 196 high school students taking exams. Eisenberg proposes that students could have attained a high moral development stage but do not recognize cheating as a moral problem. Consequently, he goes on to show that the moral character of the act does not impact student behavior. Eisenberg compares cheating with jaywalking to illustrate the differing responses of students. He posits that many view jaywalking as a moral issue while others consider jaywalking as violating law and order.
Eisenberg deduces that while cheating is clearly forbidden in the vast majority of schools only some view the behavior in moral terms. Eisenberg’s study differentiates between students who view cheating as a moral issue (‘morals’) and those who do not see it as a moral issue (‘a-morals’). People who do not view cheating as a moral issue rely on other decision-making factors such as social convention, peer norms, and school rules. Eisenberg’s evidence validated his hypothesis that a-morally oriented students approved cheating behavior significantly more than morally oriented students.

The following are some of the very few studies that address cheating in middle school classrooms in comparison to high school students. One significant study conducted by Brandes (1986) on 1,037 sixth graders and 2,265 high school students reported that high school students are much more likely to report incidences of cheating than sixth graders. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between cheating and situational factors and to compare responses from high school students with middle school voices. A major finding in the study was that all forms of cheating were reported with greater frequency among high school students than among middle school populations. The most common type of cheating behavior for both populations was copying from others on tests. For 6th graders, plagiarism was one of the most commonly cited forms of dishonesty, while for high school students using a cheat sheet during the test was highly reported. At both age levels the most frequent reason for cheating was a failure to study or prepare for tests and a fear of failure. According to the results, sixth graders believed that their peers were less accepting of cheating than high school students. Among sixth graders 38.9% acknowledged that most of their classmates would not care if someone cheated on a test, while in contrast 75.3% of high school students believed the same of their peers. Although there are similarities in this study regarding cheating attitudes and behaviors between middle and
high school students, this study’s significance shows a marked difference in frequency, cheating methods, and acceptance among ages. As Brandes (1986) affirms in this study, researchers cannot assume that data regarding cheating within high school and college populations can be generalized to describe middle school students and yet there exists very little research investigating the perceptions and behaviors of middle school students.

A second significant study that included middle school students was conducted by Anderman and Midgley (2004). Their work cited higher rates of cheating in high schools than in middle schools suggesting that cheating behavior is tied to the increased quantity and higher stakes of academic demands on high school students (Anderman & Midgley, 2004). Researchers examined changes in early adolescents’ self-reported cheating behaviors in mathematics before and after the transition from middle to high school. Students were surveyed in school regarding their cheating behaviors in math, and the motivational goal structures perceived in their math classrooms. Surveys were completed twice during the eighth grade year and once in ninth grade. Results indicated that self-reported cheating did not change in the year prior to the high school transition, but that reported cheating increased after the transition. Self-reported cheating was positively correlated with a perceived classroom focus on performance goals. A limitation of this study was that the researchers were only able to assess cheating at three points in time at a few sites. This study is significant because it hypothesized that in the transition from middle school to high school classrooms become more performance focused and therefore students’ motivation for learning also changes. This study was consistent with prior research in which students reported higher incidences of cheating in high school settings than in middle schools (Schab, 1991). Future studies could develop a more precise trajectory of change. There is very little literature on the cheating behaviors of middle school students and very little qualitative literature
on examining how lifetime cheating habits begin, how they differ from older student behaviors, and under what conditions they persist in comparison to the literature on high-school and college students.

**Characteristics of Cheaters**

Scholars hope to better understand the demographics of cheaters so they can identify likely cheaters, target those student characteristics, and then reduce incidences of cheating in their schools. A great deal of the literature examines the characteristics of students who report to have cheated. Background information such as gender, (Dawkins, 2004; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, & Armstead, 1996; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Robinson, et al. 2004; West, 2004; Whitely & Keith-Spiegel, 2001) personality variables, (Nathanson, Paulhus, & Williams 2006), scholastic competence, (Nathanson et al., 2006), and social contexts (Dawkins, 2004) have proven significant predictors of cheating behavior. However, there is a great deal of discrepant conclusions on cheating students that entirely focus on student demographics. For example, some studies contend that women are less likely to cheat than males with the studies suggesting that women are more intrinsically motivated than males (Newstead et al., 1996; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Robinson et al., 2004; Dawkins, 2004). While other studies point that cheating behavior occurs indiscriminately across gender (Dickhoff et al., 1996; West, Ravenscroft, & Shrader, 2004; Whitely, 2001). This inconsistency might be explained by the context of the behavior, the way cheating behavior was assessed in the study, or a gender difference that men are more likely to admit to cheating behavior. Discrepancy in the literature exists over which gender is more likely to engage in cheating behavior.

In addition to gender, literature on personality variables varies across studies, making it difficult to evaluate which personality variables most affect honest behavior. A little research has
been conducted on student impulsivity and sensation seeking, both characteristics that Miller et al. (2007), believe have potential for investigation in future studies. An important study on early adolescents, conducted by Anderman, Griesinger, & Westerfield (1998), correlates cheating behaviors with students who demonstrate effort avoidance, defiance of authority, and external locus of control. In discouraging cheating behavior, future work that address student personality variables has the potential to reveal a great deal about academic cheating but given how many different personality variables are related to cheating, such a study would be complex and speculative. In general, the wide range of characteristics of cheating students in the literature demonstrates the difficulty in using solely student demographics as a predictor of cheating behavior.

Another highly correlated characteristic of students who cheat and equally complex is that of scholastic achievement/ability. In the literature, ability is often cited as inversely correlated to cheating behavior. Both intuition and research lead one to believe that struggling students have less interest in learning than their higher achieving peers and are more prone to cheat since they feel that the only way to success is through dishonest means (McCabe, 2001; Nathanson et al., 2005). Some of the research indicates that low achievement as defined by scholastic measures such as grade point average, academic attitude, and task performance results in increased rates of cheating (Baird, 1980; Diekhoff et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2007). Studies indicate that students with low academic self-efficacy tend to cheat at higher rates than those with high academic self-efficacy. (Evans & Craig, 1990; Finn & Frone, 2004). In Anderman et al. (1998), self-handicapping behaviors were positively correlated with cheating behavior. Self-handicapping strategies including blaming others and making excuses for low performances. To reduce cheating, scholars advise that teachers create an environment where relative achievement
is deemphasized so the disadvantaged student will feel less vulnerable and may not resort to cheating (Murdock, 1999).

However, other studies indicate that students at the top of their classes, vying for advanced placement, high marks, honors and college admissions spots are also likely to engage in cheating. Students in competitive situations may also resort to cheating to be successful (Anderman et al., 1998; Taylor, Porgrebin & Dodge 2002; Whitely, 1998). A student in a focus group shared, “I think people are going to cheat so it will help them get into an Ivy League school” (McCabe, 2001, p. 41). In a study of middle school students (Murdock, Hale, & Weber, 2001), researchers found that adolescents, including high achieving students, were more likely to cheat if they lacked confidence that they could do well. Also, the pressure of competition has been correlated to cheating behavior; current data shows that high-achieving students may be equally if not more responsible for cheating behaviors in schools (Murdock, 1999). The California Department of Education’s study and a survey conducted for Who’s Who among American High School Students implies that top students may actually cheat more frequently than others because of the extreme pressure among high school students to attend selective colleges and universities (Murdock, 1999). Based on these studies cheating most likely occurs among students who either struggle academically or are very high achievers, competing for elite professional or academic admission spots. In addition, other studies claim that regardless of ability, students who worry about doing well in school were also more likely to report cheating behaviors (Anderman et al., 1998; Evans & Craig, 1990). Again, given the diversity of ability in the population of students behaving dishonestly, the research indicates how difficult it would be for educators to predict cheating behavior in their classrooms based on student aptitude.
Student Attitudes towards Cheating

In addition to scholastic ability, research has looked at student attitudes towards schooling as tied to cheating behavior. Studies consistently portray students viewing cheating as a prevalent problem and the majority of students consider cheating a serious problem. It is the students who appear more inclined to view cheating as a problem in their particular schools than their teachers; 61.4% of seventh and eighth graders viewed cheating as a problem in their school while 50.1% of their teachers did (Evans & Craig, 1990). In the same study, 70% of high school students viewed cheating as a problem and 71.3% of their teachers considered cheating a serious issue. It is unclear from this quantitative data if cheating becomes more prevalent in high school or students and teachers are more concerned with cheating behaviors persisting at this age. According to a study conducted by Michaels and Meithe (1989), most college students in general describe cheating in negative terms. About 40% reported that they would react neither negatively nor positively if they knew that their closest friend had cheated. Furthermore, 67% regarded cheating on homework or lab work as "not at all" or "only slightly" serious (Michaels & Meithe, 1989). The researchers concluded that many students cheat because they view cheating as not very serious conduct and consider friends to be somewhat tolerant of this activity. Similarly, questionnaire data that Evans and Craig (1990) gathered reveals a widespread belief among students that people who cheat do not view anything wrong with their behavior.

According to a study conducted by Graham, Monday, O’Brien, & Steffen (1994), based on a list of 17 cheating behaviors, college students and professors generally shared consensus on what behaviors did and did not constitute dishonesty. The percentage of each group who identified a behavior as cheating did not vary by more than five percent. Although students identified the 17 behaviors as more acceptable than the professors, the students were accurate in
predicting the faculty members’ far severer judgments. The researchers concluded that while students rationalize cheating behavior, they recognized that their professors would harshly condemn such behavior. In contrast, the professors failed to recognize that students are far more tolerant of cheating (Graham et al, 1994).

Scholars contend that students who admit that dishonest acts are acceptable will engage in dishonesty more frequently than individuals who assert that dishonest acts are less acceptable (Nonis & Swift, 2001). According to Specter Gomez (2001), about half of students who engage in cheating behavior report that it is not a big deal. Bolin’s (2004) study confirmed that acceptable attitudes towards cheating rather than self-control explain why students take advantage of opportunities to cheat. More than 35% of students interviewed by the Josephson Institute (2002) agreed with the statement: “I would be willing to cheat on a test if it would help me to get into college” (p. 16). Students who report that the purpose of attending college is to secure employment are also more likely to view assignments as hurdles to be cleared rather than learning experiences to value (Diekhoff et al., 1996, Robinson et al., 2004). A significant study conducted by Anderman et al., (1998) gathered survey data on 285 middle school students. They reported that within the group of students who considered cheating unacceptable, 21.3% reported having cheated in the past. For these students who indicated that cheating was sometimes acceptable, 42.7% reported having cheated. When students’ attitudes towards cheating behavior are more accepting, students are more likely to report cheating behavior, although one cannot then automatically assume that cheating behavior is necessarily more prevalent. The research can only say for certain that students are just less likely to feel guilty reporting academic dishonesty.

The scholarly attention on student demographics reveals a need to incorporate these collective characteristics of cheaters, with contextual elements in order to more fully understand
why students cheat (Miller et al., 2007). Such holistic studies may help to explain some of the inconsistencies across solely demographic studies. In answering the questions why do students cheat, researchers have addressed both individual and situational variables relating to theories of personal and situational interest or engagement (Anderman & Murdock, 2007). Miller et al. (2007) contend that rather than examine individual characteristics about cheaters that we need to ask, “Under what conditions do students cheat?” instead of, “Who cheats?” A qualitative study would address the complex, contextualized, multi-faceted elements of school and student honesty. In addition to examining individual characteristics, which does not eliminate cheating from the classroom, research should investigate situational factors that can be more easily changed.

On the whole, the literature suggests that classroom and school variables have a much larger effect in determining the likelihood of cheating than student demographics (Anderman et al., 1998). In some studies (e.g. Anderman et al., 1998) demographic variables were found to be unrelated to cheating behavior. Szabo and Underwood (2004) describe a variety of situational factors on pedagogy related to cheating such as classrooms with greater pressure on students, the perception of relevance the material has, and the limited time allocated to complete tasks. Cizek (1999), in a comprehensive review of the literature on academic cheating, concludes that students cheat less if class size is smaller, assessments are clear and relevant, and teachers proactively attempt to deter academic cheating. Students are more likely to cheat when they think the class content is unimportant, uninteresting, or irrelevant (Strong et al., 1995). Students are more likely to cheat if they do not feel a sense of valuing and belonging in school (Finn & Frone, 2004). For this reason future work on academic cheating ought to move beyond the
demographics of cheaters, but recognize that these variables contribute to acts of cheating and may persist despite attending to classroom characteristics.

*Reasons Students Offer to Explain their Cheating Behavior*

Scholars have explored at length the type of cheating behaviors and the causes of academic dishonesty such as student fear of failure (Evans & Craig, 1990; Murdock 1999), desire for a higher grade (Calabrese & Cochran, 1990; Newstead et al., 1996; Schab, 1991) and pressure from parents to do well in school (Evans & Crag, 1990; Michaels & Miethe, 1985; Murdock 1999). Cheating is also motivated by other factors including a perception of school as unfair (Schab, 1991), lack of time (Newstead et al., 1996), and accepting attitudes towards cheating (Michaels & Miethe, 1985; Schab, 1991). Although some reasons vary depending on the student population, overlap exists across students suggesting that these reasons are real to students. In the work of Diekhoff et al. (1996), students cited fear of failure as found in other studies but they also reported the time to prepare sufficiently takes too much effort. Some of the reasons cited by Shraw, Olafson, Kuch, Lehman, & McCrudden, (2007), for student cheating include lack of time, the deterioration of morals in society, a school culture in which cheating is common, the belief that cheating is essential to receive high marks, and the facility of the internet which makes it easier to cheat. When students felt that teachers were not technologically savvy, students were more likely to plagiarize from the internet (Shraw et al., 2007). Shraw et al. (2007) gathered survey data, interviews with undergraduates, and interviews with underachieving high school students and found that certain situations decreased cheating. Among those were when students have an effective teacher, like the class or discipline, fear getting caught, and express guilt about the possibility of acting dishonestly (Shraw et al., 2007). In the same study, situations that students cite as increasing cheating behavior are situations in which students are unprepared,
lack study time, have a poor or failing grade, struggle with difficult material, do not feel as though teachers are watching, have a high-stakes exam, know others are cheating, and consider work insignificant or uninteresting (Shraw et al., 2007).

In a study conducted by Sheard, Markham, and Dick (2003), undergraduate and graduate information technology students rated 14 possible reasons for cheating on a scale ranging from not at all likely to highly likely. For both groups of students, the reasons most likely to explain cheating referred to not enough time, too much work, and fear of failure. Although other significant explanations included the difficulty of the assignments, a friend in need, parental pressure, self-laziness, a culture of cheating among students, and parental pressure to succeed (Sheard et al., 2003).

Schools can investigate ways to specifically address the most commonly cited reasons in the literature. The work of Evans and Craig (1990) indicates that students are more inclined than teachers to attribute cheating to characteristics of teachers and their classrooms. In their qualitative study, students more than teachers voiced strong agreement that cheating is more likely to occur when large amounts of material are covered, where grading is on a curve, and where grades are based on just one or two exams (Evans & Craig, 1990). These examples are all areas in which teachers could respond to students and work to reduce cheating by attending to the pressure a student feels, the interest a student has for an assignment, and the self-efficacy a student has towards completing it. Yet very little research has been conducted in middle school settings to address the reasons that students cheat. Middle school students are a very different population from high school and college students, with different needs and attitudes towards learning. They may have some similar reasons for cheating but they also may have different reasons for behaving dishonestly. Given that a great deal of the high school and college
responses could be affected by the classroom teacher’s behavior, teachers across grade levels
would be interested in the results of this study. Furthermore, qualitative data in particular on
middle school students would contextualize those reasons in the school setting and provide
multiple sources of information to better understand the academic demands of students and their
responses.

Conditions that Influence Cheating Behavior

Student Interest

A significant component of student engagement and learning is student interest (Shraw et
al., 2007). Very little research has been done on the relationship between student interest and
cheating (Shraw et al., 2007). Because the literature suggests that students cheat on tasks they
perceive as unimportant, Shraw et al (2007) hypothesized that interest would decrease cheating
behavior. First they defined interest as two distinct types: personal and situational (Shraw et al.,
2007). They define personal interest in terms of its enduring personal value for students, internal
activation, and topic-specific context (Hidi, Renninger, & Krapp, 1992). Situational interest is
context-specific and environmentally activated. Situational variables connected to student
interest and cheating include factors such as competition, test importance, and engaging seating
arrangements (Shraw et al., 2007). Schraw and Lehman (2001) describe situational interest as
either a product of the text students read, the task they must complete, or knowledge they have.
The text-based features associated with raised interest are, “the unexpectedness of information,
character identification, activity level, structural aspects of text such as coherence and
completeness, concreteness and vividness, suspense, imagery, and relative ease of
comprehension” (Shraw et al., 2007 p.63). Task-based interest refers to the actual assignment.
Task-based interest is most affected by the number and difficulty of assignments and the amount
of time teachers allow for students to complete them. Knowledge-based interest pertains to the effect of prior knowledge on the part of students.

Personal interest is more stable than situational interest which is temporary, dependent on context and easier to manipulate. According to Shiefele (1992), personal interest can be separated into two subcategories: feeling-related and value-related interest. Feeling related interest describes a student’s positive attitudes for studying a particular topic. These positive feelings provide a strong motivational incentive to engage in the activity. Value-related interest refers to the perceived significance of a particular topic or learning activity. Value-related interest raises student engagement because the student believes that the learning activity or content has personal relevance to future goals (Shraw et al., 2007).

Very little research has looked at the relationship between interest and student cheating. Shraw et al. (2007) claim that their study examining the relationship between cheating and student interest is the first of its kind. In their mixed method undergraduate and high school study, students exhibiting personal interest were found less likely to cheat than their peers. Typical responses included, “If I am not interested in a class, it’s a lot harder to motivate myself to learn” and “If you’re interested, you’ll want to learn the material and won’t need to cheat” (Shraw et al., 2007, p. 67). A second finding was that situational interest was also negatively correlated with cheating behavior. When researchers interviewed high school students a recurring response was that students were more engaged and less likely to cheat when instruction and content were personally meaningful and relevant. In this study the effect of value-related interest was not discussed nor was the population of middle school students studied. Therefore, future research would contribute to the literature when it addresses the uninvestigated middle student population and the little studied relationship between student interest and academic
cheating. One of the suggestions from Shraw et al. (2007) for further research is to examine the impact of the types of assessments on cheating, as well as the quality and timeliness of feedback. Studies that would contribute to the existing literature could explore students’ value for different types of assignments across disciplines. Such a study could examine under what conditions assignments have a high value-related interest, would investigate when students view a learning activity or content as connected to future goals and would consider if under those circumstances there are fewer incidences of cheating.

**Engaging Work**

Strong, Silver, & Robinson (1995) survey research in which students describe what stimulates engagement for students revealed that engaging work should excite curiosity, inspire creativity, and foster positive relationships with others. According to Strong et al. (1995) students lack motivation for work which is repetitive, requires little thought, and is forced upon them. The survey revealed specific conditions under which students find work completely engaging. In terms of the need for mastery, first students must feel success. Second, Strong et al. (1995) contend that to honor students’ need for understanding educators must inspire curiosity within learners. Third, engaging work must fulfill student need for self-expression in that students must utilize originality. And finally, engaging work must attend to students’ need for involvement with others and therefore engaging work must affirm relationships (Strong et al., 1995). Other work on what inspires student engagement includes a report by Schlecty (1994) in which he proposed that students who are completely engaged exhibit three characteristics: (1) they are attracted to their work; (2) they persist in their work despite challenges and obstacles and; (3) they take visible delight in accomplishing their work.
It is difficult to judge the quality of research conducted by both Schlecty (1994) and Strong et al. (1995) because neither of these sources clearly explains research design, data collection, or data analysis. Although the research questions of Strong et al. (1995) ask what kind of work do teachers and students find totally engaging and what kind of work do students hate to do, a reader cannot tell who was the sample, how many were sampled, how data were collected, or how data were analyzed. Judging from the instructive tone of both pieces the intended audience is teachers and the purpose of the research is practical application. The study informs some of the questions worth asking in future research such as asking about what are characteristics of assignments which bring about enjoyment, arouse curiosity, call for originality, and encourage relationships. Based on this study, one might predict that students and teachers might connect these elements of assignments with cheating behavior.

A more rigorous qualitative grounded theory study conducted by Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) reports that reluctant learners reengage in school when teachers rely less on extrinsic motivation, emphasize the value in school curriculum, focus on building relationships, and encourage effort particularly as students struggle through disappointment. The work of Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) primarily emphasizes that a disengaged learner must see immediate relevance of the material and be truly interested in what he is being taught. Although the Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) study was limited because the sample was comprised of just four high school boys, the implications of this study suggest that teachers ought to listen to what students “can and cannot stand” and design a curriculum that addresses those needs (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005, p.13). The interviews with these boys indicate that external rewards such as grades or the favor of teachers were not strong enough reasons to induce students to engage in school.
Erickson (1986) warned educators that students must assent to learn before the school experience will assume any value. To guarantee this assent, educators must align the knowledge students value with learning experiences the school honors (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). When educators fail to align curriculum with student interest and instead dictate what we believe is best for them, teachers become the sole gatekeeper to knowledge rather than foster students to pose their own learning questions and develop autonomy. Disengaged learners will not work simply because their teachers tell them they should. Because these four students from the study (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005) were not concerned with pleasing their teachers and did not see value in achieving at school, low grades meant little. This study indicates that teachers can create classrooms that foster engagement despite outside influences. This assumption resonates with Ames and Archer’s (1992) findings that the characteristics of certain classroom tasks “foster willingness in students to put forth effort and become actively engaged in learning” (p. 263). Future studies should target work that meets this criteria of engagement and discuss with students their motivation or inclination to engage in the work or to cheat. Although none of the work mentioned ties engagement with cheating behavior, the discussed literature is helpful in building classrooms without cheating. If students are engaged in the learning, they will have little desire to compromise their mastery of material by cheating.

*Classroom and School Characteristics:*

*Performance Oriented vs. Mastery Oriented Classrooms*

When schools reduce a student’s worth to merely academic achievement, educators cultivate a win-at-all-cost mentality that results in raised acceptability of cheating (Niels, 1996). Classroom learning that focuses on competition and not collaboration establishes structures where learners defeat peers rather than work with one another (Kohn, 1999).
educational system evaluates students by comparison. Class ranking, national and local percentile rankings on standardized tests, curve grading, grade point averages, valedictorian and salutatorian are all measures of performance based on competition. Kohn contends that a “structural imperative to beat others, invites the use of any means available” (Kohn, 1992, p. 161). Anderman, et al. (1998) found that more students cheat when the task’s product is emphasized by a teacher. If a teacher communicates to a student that the goal of an academic task is to get a high grade or to demonstrate competence then cheating may be a justifiable means to that end. However, if the goal involves mastering the task and constructing a personal learning experience then cheating defeats achieving that goal (Murdock, Miller, & Kohlhardt, 2004). If we change the rules of the system then we can eliminate the behavior it produces.

A focus group conducted by McCabe et al. (1999) questioned 32 high school and college students about their experiences regarding academic cheating. The students’ comments showed that students would not see any reason to cheat in classrooms that truly care about mastery, effort, and improvement suggested by comments such as, “If the teacher just takes the time to make sure that you actually learn the information, I think that would decrease a lot of cheating” (McCabe, 1999, p.686). Because the majority of research on academic dishonesty has relied on survey data, McCabe et al.’s (1999) study provided researchers with qualitative data and a richer understanding of how students feel about cheating. Consistently evident in both quantitative and qualitative data is that students often turn to cheating in order to receive higher grades and gain acceptance to a good college. Thus, a number of studies have investigated the connection between classroom orientation, student motivation and academic cheating (Anderman et al., 1998; Anderman & Anderman, 2000). In a significant study conducted by Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, and Armstead (1996), researchers investigated the incidence and causes of cheating at an
English university. Based on a questionnaire administered to 943 students and that addressed 21 cheating behaviors, evidence points out that those with high achievement motivation are more likely to cheat than those with lower levels. One of the more frequent reasons cited for cheating was to increase one’s grade (20%), which researchers infer as indicating a performance orientation on the part of students.

One highly regarded motivational theory often used in the study of academic cheating is goal theory (Anderman et al, 1998). Goal theorists believe that students adopt either mastery or performance goal orientations mirroring the practices of their classrooms and schools (Ames & Archer, 1988; Maehr & Midgley, 1991). Central to mastery-oriented classrooms is the belief that there exists a positive correlation between effort and success. In a mastery goal orientation classroom, students possess intrinsic value for learning and define success as understanding the material. To meet mastery goals, students seek to develop new skills, understand their work, improve their level of competence, and learn from their mistakes (Anderman & Murdock, 2007). Conversely, performance-oriented students are concerned with how their aptitude measures up to other students, “by surpassing normative-based standards, or by achieving with little effort” (Ames, 1992, p. 262). They care about appearing competent and smart (Stephens & Gehlbach, 2007).

When students are in performance-oriented environments they too emphasize grades, performance, peer comparison and competition instead of an intrinsic motivation for learning (Anderman, 1997). The reason students cheat is tied to the meaning that students assign to the learning task: “When tasks are seen as valuable in their own right, cheating occurs less frequently than when they are completed for other reasons” (Anderman & Murdock, 2007, p.3).
learn quickly that what is not evaluated is not worth learning (Ames, 1992). Conversely, mastery goal classrooms promote long-term and high-quality engagement in learning. Students develop effort-based strategies in mastery orientation classrooms because learning activities address questions such as, “How can I understand this?”, "How can I do this?", or "How can I master this task?” (Ames, 1992, p. 262).

Students endorsing mastery goals have reported valuing and using those learning strategies that are related to focusing, processing, applying effort, self-monitoring, and deriving satisfaction from work (Ames & Archer, 1988). Based on these findings, researchers have attempted to link mastery and performance classrooms with cheating in adolescent populations (Ames & Archer, 1988; Anderman et al. 1998; Anderman & Midgley, 2004).

In a highly relevant study by Ames and Archer (1988) 176 students in grades 8-11 responded to a questionnaire on their perceptions of the classroom goal orientation, use of effective learning strategies, and task choice. Results indicated that students with a classroom orientation toward mastery goals used more effective learning strategies than performance-oriented students, preferred challenging tasks, liked the class, and believed more strongly that success is based on effort than performance oriented students. Students who favored performance goals tended to focus on their ability rather than effort, evaluate their ability critically and attribute their failure to lack of ability. In confirming that students’ perceptions of the classroom were related to student motivation this study influenced research on self-regulated learning and interest in learning. Although this study does not investigate student attitudes towards cheating or dishonest academic behaviors, this study has a great deal of relevance to academic cheating and is frequently cited when connecting motivational orientation to important educational outcomes (Ames & Archer, 1988).
Anderman et al. (1998) used a survey in one of the few studies examining the cheating beliefs and behaviors of middle school students applying the goal orientation theory. In analyzing the data from 285 urban students, they found that those who reported engaging in cheating behavior described their school as more performance-oriented, with a greater focus on grades than learning. Anderman et al. (1998) concluded that when students perceive classrooms as performance-oriented, stressing extrinsic goals, they have more favorable attitudes towards cheating and a greater propensity for cheating. When these students perceived that getting a good grade or demonstrating one’s ability to others constituted the primary purpose of school work then the students viewed cheating as a supportive strategy. When students in this study viewed grades and ability as determinants of school success they felt more justified to cheat. As Anderman et al. (1998) posits, “Indeed, why should a student be concerned about the inherent value of learning if, for example, the reward of getting on the honor roll is based purely on the grade that the student earns?” (p. 6). Although this study is highly relevant in terms of the age group and theoretical perspective, this study was limited to science classrooms.

The data from this study affirms other research which indicates that cheating may be more prevalent in science than in other content areas (Schab, 1991) but in investigating the orientations of other disciplines, researchers would have a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between classroom orientation and student motivation. Further research could help to corroborate whether the classroom orientations of classrooms in other disciplines also predict cheating behavior. In terms of limitations, Anderman et al.’s (1998) study also did not look at measures of actual performance such as grades or student work which may provide more detailed findings. Also, Anderman et al.’s (1998) work was quantitative in nature with no open response. Students responded to Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very
Without qualitative information the study does not address the complexities of students’ learning experience as holistic, contextual, and interactive. Although data was collected on sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, data was collected on only one school, which limits the generalizability to other students in other schools.

Another study in which researchers examine cheating and its connection to classroom orientation is a study conducted by Murdock et al. (2004) using hypothetical vignettes to examine a number of variables including classroom structure (mastery vs. performance), pedagogy (bad vs. good) and the likelihood of cheating. Participants included 204 ninth and tenth-grade students from a Midwestern semi-urban middle-class high school. After reading the scenario, students answered survey questions and expressed their views on (a) the extent to which the participant blamed students and teachers (b) the acceptability of cheating and (c) the likelihood of cheating in the scenario. Students also answered survey items to understand their own goal orientation.

The researchers predicted that when students perceived their environments as performance-oriented versus mastery-oriented they would judge students as lacking control over their grades because any effort on their part could be outperformed by students with greater ability. Cheating was anticipated to be considered more acceptable and more likely to occur if students encountered performance-oriented classrooms. In the event that cheating did occur, the researchers predicted that students would blame teachers as opposed to students. As expected, students rated cheating as more justifiable and more likely when the emphasis on learning was portrayed as performance-oriented versus mastery-oriented and the teacher regarded by students as pedagogically poor versus good. These same variables affected the amount of blame attributed to teachers versus students in these situations. Murdock et al. (2004) found if a teacher’s
pedagogy was portrayed as poor, then the perceived likelihood of cheating was uniformly relatively high but it is unclear because the study was based on the use of vignettes if poor pedagogy extended to the work students actually do. Their findings showed consistency with other studies which proposes that all students can rationalize cheating in certain situations rather than predicting who will cheat by assuming cheaters have certain characteristics.

The study itself cited as an unresolved question the extent to which students’ responses were tied to their perception of the classroom goal structure versus their perception of poor pedagogy. For example, students may have resorted to cheating because they viewed a teacher as an ineffective communicator. If the teacher could not explain the content well students would be less willing to seek teachers’ help and perhaps more likely to condone cheating behavior. Furthermore, the use of vignettes while allowing researchers to bring up particular variables only represents a classroom context and fails to include all that could occur in a real classroom situation. One would expect that students personal inclinations to cheat would be affected by individual experiences, self-efficacy and prior achievement; these factors are not included in the vignettes. Also, students were not asked about their personal cheating behaviors although presumably students’ past behavior influenced their responses to the scenarios; further research could investigate actual students’ behavior in addition to attitudes towards cheating (Murdock et al., 2004).

A significant study by Anderman and Midgley (2004) examined changes in early adolescents’ self-reported cheating behaviors in mathematics before and after the transition from middle to high school. Students were surveyed in school regarding their cheating behaviors in math, and the motivational goal structures perceived in their math classrooms. Surveys were completed twice during the eighth grade year and once in ninth grade. Results indicated that self-
reported cheating did not change in the year prior to the high school transition, but that reported cheating increased after the transition. Self-reported cheating was positively correlated with a perceived classroom focus on performance goals. This study is significant because it hypothesized that in the transition from middle school to high school classrooms become more performance focused and therefore students’ motivation for learning also changes. This study was consistent with prior studies in which students self-reported higher incidences of cheating in high school settings than in middle schools (Schab, 1991). Future studies could develop a more precise trajectory of change. Given that a number of studies indicate that middle school environments are more focused on grades and performance than are elementary schools (Anderman & Midgley, 2004; Anderman & Murdock, 2007) and students are more likely to cheat when the teacher focuses on extrinsic rewards such as grades (Strong, Silver & Robinson, 1995), one would expect as students move from elementary classrooms to middle schools, the increased focus on grades may lead some students to cheat (Anderman et al., 1998). A limitation of this study could be the influence of peers. Perhaps students talked among each other about their cheating behaviors in a particular class contributing to their perceptions of a performance goal structure. The study is significant because it is the first longitudinal study that examines adolescents’ perceptions of a mastery goal structure in the learning environment in relation to changes in self-reported cheating (Anderman & Midgley, 2004).

In a study with 224 undergraduate students, Murdock, Miller and Goetzinger (2007) used hypothetical vignettes informed by classroom goal structure, pedagogical competence, and academic cheating. After reading the scenario, students answered survey questions and expressed their views on (a) the extent to which the participant blamed students and teachers, (b) the acceptability of cheating, and (c) the likelihood of cheating in the scenario. Students also
answered survey items on their own history of college cheating. Their hypothesis was that if students perceived the learning situation as less fair by reducing personal control over their achievement that students would be more likely to blame the teacher for the situation instead of the student, rendering cheating more acceptable (Murdock et al., 2007). The two factors Murdock et al. (2007) used were performance goal structure and poor pedagogy. Researchers observed that participants blamed the teacher more when the pedagogy was portrayed as poor versus good as well as when the goal structure was portrayed as performance-oriented versus mastery-oriented. As the authors indicated, unclear from this study was how context variables influence cheating judgments and behaviors. They suggest a more thorough investigation regarding what students actually experience in a classroom as well as the meanings students ascribe to their teachers’ behaviors.

Summary of the Studies

Collectively research indicates that altering students’ perceptions of classroom achievement goal structures bring about changes in student outcomes (Ames & Archer, 1998; Anderman et al., 1998; Anderman & Midgley, 2004; Ames, 1992; Murdock et al., 2004; Murdock et al., 2007). Students who define their classrooms as mastery-oriented tend to use more adaptive educational strategies such as persistence (Miller et al, 2007), adopt more high level processing strategies and engage in less cheating behavior than students who perceive their classrooms as emphasizing performance goals (Anderman, 2007). Basically, when students adapt mastery goal orientations they are less likely to cheat because cheating undermines understanding whereas a performance-oriented student “participates in class discussions, completes assignments, and puts forth maximal effort on tests, term papers, and so forth in order to obtain the best prize- a high grade” (Cizek, 1999, p. 101).
Researchers have shown that the instructional practices of teachers have a strong relationship with academic cheating. And yet the studies often relied on quantitative data gathered in either science or math classrooms or qualitative data based on vignettes as opposed to real life situations. Although one study was longitudinal and looked at cheating increases as students move from middle school to high school (Anderman & Midgley, 2004), the trajectory of students’ holistic experiences in middle school, a transitional period between elementary and high school, is yet to be fully explored. No research has compared students’ goal orientation in one classroom and their cheating attitudes and behaviors versus the very same students’ goal orientation in other classrooms and the student’s engagement in cheating behaviors. Research on the instructional practices of teachers is important because when teachers structure their classrooms around grades, focus competition, and highlight ability differences, students are more likely to justify cheating and engage in dishonest behavior (Anderman, 2007). But fortunately, as Maehr and Midgley (1996) contend, with strong leadership, middle-schools can change from environments that focus on ability to ones that attend to mastery and personal growth.

Neutralization theory

Neutralization theory attempts to explain why individuals violate laws in which they believe. Sykes and Matza (1957) developed a theory behind neutralization techniques in which they assume that individuals learn delinquent behavior, like most social behavior, through social interaction. Delinquents justify their deviant behavior with rationalizations that they accept but neither the legal system nor the larger community view as valid (Sykes & Matza, 1957). These justifications, in the past have been regarded as protecting the individual from personal responsibility and the blame of others after the deviant act has been committed. Sykes and Matza (1957), in contrast to other theories propose that delinquents deflect disapproval from the
conforming social order in advance. When justifications precede deviant behavior, they make deviant behavior possible in that offenders ignore social controls that serve to hamper deviant motivational patterns. The delinquent continues to believe in the values of the dominant normative system but also qualifies deviant behavior as acceptable though not right. As Sykes and Matza (1957) conclude, “the delinquent represents not a radical opposition to law-abiding society but something more like an apologetic failure, often more sinned against then sinning in his own eyes” (p. 667). Students’ likelihood to cheat is not governed by a person’s absolute sense of whether it is right or wrong but by the extent to which the individual can rationalize cheating in a given situation. According to neutralization theory, individuals will use five specific strategies to deflect responsibility for deviant behavior from oneself to others: the denial of responsibility, the denial of injury, the denial of the victim, the condemnation of the condemner, and the appeal to higher loyalties.

The denial of responsibility.

As a technique of neutralization, the delinquent seeks to deflect responsibility and if successful, the disapproval of self or others is sharply reduced as a mediating influence. Forsyth, Pope, and McMillan (1985), describe how attributing cheating to something external helps students maintain a positive self image: “such attributions would reduce students’ feelings of guilt and immorality after cheating in a classroom situation and allow them to continue to think of themselves as moral persons who simply bent to environmental pressures” (p. 73). Sykes and Matza (1957) contend that the denial of responsibility not only means that the offender perceives the behavior as an accident but the delinquent also perceives external forces, outside of the individual and beyond his control, to blame for the cheating behavior. In a study with 32 high school and college students from New Jersey, student comments similarly deflected
responsibility for cheating acts and maintained high self-perceptions: “People cheat. It doesn’t make you less of a person or worse of a person. There are times when you just are in need of a little help” (McCabe, 1999, p. 683). For example, the student justifies cheating behavior because of an unfair schooling system in which the student will fail a class, be excluded from a higher track in school, or miss out on elite higher education opportunities unless he or she cheats.

In a study conducted by Daniel, Blount, & Ferrell (1991), students perceived that their peers were using neutralizing strategies to justify cheating. The students believed that others might accept cheating under conditions all external to the student such as overly difficult material, job or family responsibilities on the part of the student, and the excessive amount of work. A limitation of this study is that researchers did not ask students themselves what neutralizing behaviors they might adopt to justify cheating nor is this study necessarily generalizable to students beyond other university students.

A significant student conducted by Evans & Craig (1990) studied students from grade 7 upwards to college using 37 questions to address the reasons students cheat. The researchers grouped the responses into three attribution categories. Students either attributed cheating behavior to the qualities of the teacher, classroom, or student. And while across all ages, respondents assigned somewhat more blame to student characteristics than to teacher or classroom characteristics, many responders cited conditions external to the student, such as the cheating of their friends, and the pressure they received for good grades from their parents. Specifically out of thirteen attributions that were cited by at least 75% of the students, 10 were external to the students. This study is significant because it compared students across age divisions and is one of the few applying neutralization theory to middle school students. Also by showing that teachers and students strongly agree that certain teacher characteristics are
conducive to cheating on the part of students, the study suggests that teachers could prevent
cheating in their classrooms.

In a study conducted by Michaels and Miethe (1989) favorable attitudes toward cheating
(pro-cheating attitudes) was measured based on eight statements on a six-point scale ranging
from 0 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The items captured the pro-cheating attitudes
and neutralizations regarding cheating. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .78. This
indicates that college students have a moderately strong attitude toward cheating depending on
how they perceive the circumstances. Examples of the items were “cheating is understandable if
a student has to make good grades in order to stay in school,” “cheating should not be considered
such a serious offense because so many students do it,” and “cheating in dumb courses with poor
instructors is understandable” (Michaels & Meithe, 1989, p.876). Although the data cannot
necessarily be generalized to middle school populations, the study does use neutralization theory
to explain the cheating behavior of students. A qualitative study would be able to better
understand the particular situations of students and how they perceive those situations as
justifying cheating behavior for themselves and for their peers. Particularly, students could also
be questioned to better understand what they believe constitutes a dumb course and a poor
instructor to inform teaching practice.

Thus, a number of studies have examined cheating behavior in light of neutralization
theory. Together the discussed studies show that students use the strategy of denying
responsibility for their actions and blaming other external factors for creating a situation where
they must cheat or face failure. The common underlying sentiment is that there are times in one’s
academic career when cheating is acceptable to students. None of the studies cited are qualitative
in nature and most of the studies focus on university settings. Further research could look
qualitatively at students from other ages so that scholars could have a more complete understanding of what conditions lead students to believe that cheating behavior is acceptable and under what conditions students would cheat themselves because of such justifications.

The denial of injury.

Criminal law has long made a distinction between crimes which are *mala in se*, or acts that are inherently wrong, and *mala prohibita*, acts that are illegal but not immoral. The delinquent can also make the same kind of distinction in evaluating the wrongfulness of his behavior. While these efforts to reframe the behavior as illegal rather than immoral are probably less effective in changing the evaluations of adults, for the delinquent, wrongfulness many depend on whether any injury has occurred. If the delinquent can rationalize that the behavior does not really cause any harm despite the fact that it runs counter to law, then the offender can neutralize the behavior. For cheating this may mean that students fail to understand how cheating hurts their own opportunity to learn or harms the community by providing unfair advantages to some students.

The denial of the victim.

As a neutralization strategy, even if the delinquent acknowledges that the deviant behavior has caused an injury or hurt, the moral blame from one’s self and others may be neutralized by a belief that the injury is fair in light of the circumstances. In the example of a crime of vandalism for example, no one has been targeted as the object of the offense. In the example of cheating since the victim is physically indefinite the delinquent lessons the awareness of the victim's existence and renders the offense more tolerable. In terms of cheating, students may neutralize their cheating behavior because they do not recognize that others are harmed by their behavior.
One of the primary strategies for neutralization is to shift the focus of attention from the delinquent’s own deviant acts to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of the violations. In changing the focus from the deviant behavior to an attack on others, the wrongfulness of the delinquent can more easily repress or conceal the offense. Students cite concrete or perceived failings of teachers as a pretext for cheating (McCabe, 2001). In a study of college students, those who reported having cheated in the past year endorsed 11 neutralizing techniques in significantly greater proportions than non-cheaters and the most frequently used neutralization techniques involved blaming the teacher for the students’ deviant behavior (Haines, Diekhoff, LaBeff, & Clark, 1986). The results of this study revealed that those students who neutralized cheating, were less likely to internalize guilt, embarrassment, and negative reactions from friends to be a deterrent for cheating (Haines et al., 1986). According to Evans and Craig, (1990), students are prone to cheat in classrooms because they feel that the teacher either does not care about quality instruction or does not have the capacity for good teaching. A number of studies associate students’ judgment of teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills with increased acceptability of cheating behavior; when teachers are perceived as incompetent, unknowledgeable, or not committed to good practice students more frequently justify cheating behavior (Murdock et al., 2001; Shraw et al., 2007; Szabo & Underwood, 2004).

According to Murdock (1999), having an unfair teacher was rated by participants as one of the five most acceptable motives for cheating. If students do not feel that teachers treat them fairly cheating may be a manifestation of disrespect for a teacher used by students to defy the teacher’s authority (Murdock, 1999). In some instances, students feel warranted by their circumstances to deceive teachers and they do not regard their actions as wrong (Britton, 1998).
In a study conducted by Shraw et al. (2007), one undergraduate student said, if the “teacher is out to get them” or “that the teacher doesn’t care about them” then they think, “I am going to get them back by kind of undermining what they’re trying to do here” (p. 71). This statement exemplifies the idea that students view cheating behavior as retaliation for a teacher’s unfair behavior, disliked character, or lack of relationship with students.

The evidence from the literature indicates that students cheat when they view teachers as incompetent. A significant study conducted by Evans and Craig (1990) revealed that teachers and students agreed that teachers who were vague in explaining the relevance and/or purpose of learning can create environments conducive to cheating behavior. Evans’ and Craig’s (1990) findings further denote that teachers unconsciously promote cheating when they engage in poor practice and the study provides particular examples such as rapidly covering large amounts of material, grading based on a curve, and using one or more exams as the sole grading measurement. In addition to how students are accessed, students discuss the incompetence of teachers in terms of presenting material as well. In a focus group conducted by McCabe (2001) with high school students from an AP calculus group, students fault cheating on poor instructional methods: “[The teacher] leaves most of the teaching up to the students and he’ll throw, like, a chapter out there, like a couple of chapters. You gotta' learn this…It just drives people to cheat” (McCabe, 2001, p. 41). McCabe describes student attitudes of anger toward teachers who give tests that cover material not discussed in class or covered in homework assignments and how such feelings tie to the ease with which students then justify cheating in those classes (McCabe, 2001). These practices could either be interpreted by students as lack of care or weak pedagogy or both. If students sense they exert little control over their learning,
cannot explain what they are expected to do, do not feel prepared or supported by the teacher, and do not value the task then they have a greater likelihood to cheat (Koch, 2000).

Similarly, Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999) described correlations between undergraduate students’ attitude toward cheating and perception of other instructive attributes. These included the level of instructor interest, clarity, organization, and engagement. As the perceived quality of instruction decreased, students were more likely to justify academic dishonesty in that classroom and to self-report cheating behavior (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999). Participants rated eleven neutralizing statements and indicated whether they had cheated in that class. Cheaters had higher neutralization scores than non-cheaters and rated the class lower on organization, clear instruction and on presentation. Furthermore, students who were more critical of the classroom environment were also more likely to say that it was okay to cheat in the class if students needed the grade or if they perceived everyone else was doing it. Taken together, the studies of Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999), McCabe (2001), and Evans and Craig (1990) indicate that college and high school students correlate poor instructional practice and assessment as fostering cheating because students interpret that teachers do not care enough about the discipline or the student to justify students’ effort to complete the assignments honestly. If a teacher is not going to honor the material and the student by teaching well than the student sees little responsibility to honor the teacher or the material by completing it honestly.

Similarly, on the survey data collected by Shraw et al. (2007) the single variable most cited as decreasing cheating behavior was the impact of an effective teacher. All of the interviewees discussed the influence of the instructor as either increasing or decreasing cheating behavior. Furthermore, many cited the teacher-student relationship as a factor in dishonest behavior, “If you really like the teacher and they teach really well then you’re not as likely to
“cheat” (Shraw et al., 2007, p. 71). Other conditions that influenced cheating behavior were students’ perception of teacher caring and the presence of mutual respect, “She was a good teacher and I respected that. She genuinely cared about her students and whether or not we were learning the material” (Shraw et al., 2007, p. 71). Many other scholars have suggested that the relationship a teacher has with a student has an impact on a student’s decision to cheat. Students are more likely to do honest work if they have small classes and if they experience a quality inter-personal relationship with the teacher (Koch, 2000).

Stearns (2001) documented a correlation between self-reporting cheating behaviors and college student attitudes towards their instructor. The results of the study indicate that students’ evaluative perceptions of instructor behavior, and by extension, students’ perceptions of the student-instructor relationship are related to the commission of acts of academic dishonesty. Although this study addresses only older students, it does affirm the perceived teacher’s influence in contributing to a student’s decision to cheat. Stearns’ (2001) study indicates that students who admitted to cheating have lower estimations of their instructors than students who have not admitted to cheating. Although the study indicates a need to develop better student-instructor relationships, we cannot conclude that instructors who students report to like and respect have eliminated cheating from their classrooms. Nor do we know from this study what the qualities are that students esteem in their professors. An area of future research in middle school populations would be to investigate if younger students also cheat when they do not respect the professor.

Other studies also indicate that students see themselves as more capable when they have instructors who they believe care about them. Students are more likely to commit to the instructional program if the student believes that the teacher “is personally interested and
emotionally invested in the success of that student” (Collier, 2005, p.4). Such teacher caring leads to student perceptions that the teacher sees them as an individual, which leads to student growth and performance (Collier, 2005, Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Murdock and Miller (2003) have examined the relations between 206 eighth-grade students’ achievement motivation and their perceptions of teacher caring. Seeing one’s teacher as supportive and caring increases the likelihood that a student will value education, believe in self-capability, adopt values that are consistent with those expected in schools, and avoid participation in behaviors such as cheating (Murdock & Miller, 2003). A significant study because it addressed younger students and investigated both the likelihood and perceived acceptability of cheating by examining the influence of instructor competence and teacher caring was one that Murdock et al. (2004) conducted with 183 ninth and tenth-grade students. Each student was randomly assigned to read one of four vignettes describing a math teacher. The vignettes portrayed this teacher as varying in her pedagogical effectiveness (bad vs. good) and her interpersonal caring (caring vs. uncaring). Students were asked to respond to the likelihood of cheating in a classroom under one of the four conditions and to give their opinion on the class regarding (a) the extent of student and teacher blame for cheating, (b) the acceptability of cheating, and (c) the likelihood of cheating. Both poor teachers and uncaring teachers individually affected student judgments about rationalizing cheating. By comparing the effect sizes, Murdock et al. (2004) found that teachers’ pedagogical competence has a stronger determining influence of students’ justifications than teacher caring. The study is significant because it demonstrates that teacher characteristics can influence student’s decisions about cheating. Taken together these studies indicate that if students perceive teachers care about them, respect them, and value teacher-student relationships
then students are more likely to care about teachers, respect them and honor the teacher-student relationship by not cheating.

*The appeal to higher loyalties.*

Students sacrifice the demands of the larger society for the demands of the smaller social groups to which the delinquent belongs such as peer groups. It is important to note that the delinquent does not necessarily reject the tenets of the dominant normative system, despite a failure to uphold them. Rather, the delinquent views himself caught up in a dilemma that must be resolved, unfortunately, at the cost of violating the rules. Deviation from certain norms may occur not because the norms are rejected but because other norms, held to be more pressing or involving a higher loyalty are accorded precedence. In cheating this may mean that students feel compelled to cheat to help others, to maintain friendships, or to live up to parental expectations for academic success.

Cheating may be an ethical choice in which students were compelled to sacrifice one value for another. Often as educators we ask children to rank values by placing one value in direct competition with another. For example, we convince students that it is absolutely critical to get high grades in order to attend elite colleges and secure a prestigious job. Students must weigh two values and choose one over the other. On the one hand an assignment or an exam completed on their own honestly may threaten their chance of obtaining a high mark, school admission, and their financial future. On the other hand, they have been taught to heed a moral compass. Given these two choices, the tangible reward may appear more valuable to them. Another example is that often as educators we compel students to tell teachers when their peers have cheated. On the one hand, we have taught students to value loyalty and friendship and on the other we have educated students to be honest and truthful. Students must decide which value
is more important. Therefore, when students make the decision to cheat they are not acting amorally, rather they have decided that the value they have for honest work is simply not as precious to them as some other value.

A study examining high school and college students’ judgments of the acceptability of cheating in 19 different circumstances (Jensen, Arnett, & Cauffman, 2002) revealed that two of the most acceptable motives referred to the negative personal consequences that come to the students who did poorly (needed to pass the class to get a job that would help her family and would be put on academic probation if she did not pass). Jensen et al. (2002) also found that high school students considered moral violations much more acceptable when they were sacrificed to help a friend. In contrast, personal need for a good grade which was measured by the item “is competitive by nature, wants to maintain her class rank” were among the six motives ranked as least acceptable (Jensen et al., 2002, p. 217). Other motives receiving high acceptability rankings included not wanting to disappoint one’s parents, not having enough time to study because of the responsibility of holding a job, test anxiety resulting in failure to recall the answers, and being treated unfairly by a teacher. When students attributed higher acceptability ratings, there were more frequent self-reported cheating behaviors. Students are torn between competing values and often cheated not because they viewed cheating as acceptable but because they considered some other value more important than honesty.

Summary of Neutralization Theories

Neutralization theory posits that the delinquent views deviant behavior as acceptable but not necessarily right. The offender believes that one can avoid moral culpability and the consequences of the behavior by explaining that there was no criminal intent. An individual justifying cheating behavior would view societal rules as flexible and not binding in every
situation. For example, although killing is a crime, at times such as during war or under laws of capital punishment society suspends this law and condones killing. In the instance of cheating, the dishonest student perceives that certain conditions justify the dishonest behavior. Sykes and Matza (1957) divide the justifications delinquents use into five categories: the denial of responsibility, the denial of injury, the denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners and appeal to higher authority. A number of researchers have applied this theory in school settings. Only a few studies address middle school learners (Evans & Craig, 1990; Murdock & Miller, 2003). A number of studies justify cheating because of a lack of respect students have for a teacher’s content knowledge or pedagogical skills (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; McCabe, 2001; Evans & Craig, 1990). In addition, teachers who are perceived as unfair, uncaring, or uninterested in building a relationship with students are more likely to encounter dishonest students (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Shraw et al., 2007; Stearns, 2001). Also, lacking from the research is very many qualitative studies. And most qualitative studies are tied to hypothetical vignettes. Although, vignettes do help researchers to create situations that they may not be able to observe and to discuss issues that students may not raise themselves. However, vignettes are limited because they do not address the lived experiences of students. A qualitative study in which students discuss particular instances in which they felt justified to cheat would enable researchers to understand the actual external factors that students consider as rendering their cheating behavior acceptable. Furthermore, another commonly used research method is to ask students what their peers consider acceptable or to ask students if they consider certain behaviors acceptable defenses for cheating behavior. Individuals may be more likely to judge others less severely for cheating when they are avoiding negative outcomes because they can see themselves presented with similar situations (Murdock & Stevens, 2007). However studies using such
questions do not report exactly how students themselves are behaving. Such information would be useful in how teachers present material, build relationships with students, address cheating, and assess learning.

The Conditions that Influence Cheating Behavior: Social Contexts and Institutional Values

The beliefs shared by students guide their behaviors and understandings of the value of school work, and influence the level of their engagement, or, on the contrary, their academic dishonesty. Statistics indicate that egregious cheating behavior in schools is not deviant behavior; it is normal. It is the non cheater who is in the minority (McCabe, 2001). A powerful influence of school culture is the attitudes and behaviors embraced by students. Higher incidences of cheating have been found when high levels of peer tolerance for dishonest behavior exist (Diekhoff et al., 1996; Dawkins, 2004; McCabe 1999; McCabe, 2001 Robinson et al., 2004; Schab, 1991). According to Beale, (2003) the influence of one’s peers in school is no different from the behavior social psychologists use to describe the behavior of society as a whole. For example, Beale (2003) points out that people will stand in line to see the movie touted as the box office hit. Teenage girls are more likely to get pregnant when they are around other teenage girls having babies; citizens are more likely to vote for a candidate once they learn that he or she is popular (Beale, 2003). Students might believe cheating is more acceptable to them if others are doing it. They may feel obligated to do so to compete with their peers (Schab, 1991). They may learn attitudes, motivations, and strategies for cheating behavior from their friends as suggested by differential association theory in which individuals learn deviant behavior through relationships with others, just as other conventional behaviors are learned (Anderman, Freeman, & Mueller, 2007; Vowll & Chen, 2004).
Students may consider their sense of connectedness to a community more important than an academic outcome. Dawkins (2004) studied the relationship between cheating and the participation in particular student activities such as fraternities and sororities, suggesting that students who select to take part in a social context in which student attitudes endorse cheating as acceptable behavior have a greater tendency to engage in acts of cheating behavior. According to Robinson et al. (2004), socializing with cheaters or joining Greek organizations increased rates of cheating. Robinson reported that “the perceived endorsement of cheating by fellow students seems to induce more cheating….cheaters thought that cheating is pervasive and that their actions were simply conforming to a larger pattern” (p. 390). Similarly, Dawkins (2004) found that for college students the living situation influenced cheating behavior specifically the characteristics of the residence and the number of roommates.

A study conducted by Finn and Frone (2004) examined cheating behaviors in a group of 16-19 year old high school and college students. Results indicated that students, low achieving students especially were more likely to engage in cheating behavior when they felt little sense of value and belonging in the school. Schab’s (1991) 30- year study of cheating revealed not only a small percentage of adolescents who expressed willingness to report incidents of cheating, but also increasing reluctance to report cheating. In 1969, 12.4% of student would tell a teacher about student cheating compared with 4.3% of students in 1989 (Schab, 1991). Together these studies indicate that student behavior is significantly motivated and continues to become more so, by peer norms and students’ longing to fit in.

A significant study was Eisenberg’s (2004) questionnaire research that showed, for close to 200 hundred middle school students, peer norms do affect student attitudes towards cheating. Results confirmed his hypothesis that class norms would affect students’ attitudes toward
cheating. Students regarded cheating as more justified in situations where the peer culture was portraying someone who did not engage in copying during exams as a “sucker” and someone who preferred not to let others copy as “egotistic” (Eisenberg, 2004, p. 12). This finding highlights the crucial influence of peers’ norms for students, especially in the formative years. When imposed adult norms are at odds with peer-group norms, many students would rather protect their peer relationships. When students remain silent about the cheating behavior of their peers, students cheat themselves of an honest learning community. McCabe (2001) contends that the growing influence of peers contributes to the increased problem of cheating but considers the larger loss a trend indicating the declining influence of parents and teachers on students. His advice is that parents, teachers, and administrators take proactive measures teaching students to view cheating as detrimental to learning so that the sway of student influence serves as a positive force for other students’ behavior.

Future research could qualitatively investigate the ways students pressure one another to accept dishonesty and engage in cheating behavior. In order to build a culture where students value honesty requires an understanding of the extent to which peer culture affects the frequency and type of cheating and how middle school students, explicitly and implicitly communicate and model how to complete assigned work. Anderman et al. (2007) assert that almost no studies have addressed the relationship between peer pressure and cheating in early adolescence, although there is a lot of literature supporting the central role of peers in child development. The majority of studies on this topic address undergraduates and some address high school students (Anderman et al., 2007). Furthermore, the work that has been done is primarily survey work and a qualitative study would provide a more exploratory and descriptive approach using interview methods and a focus group.
Another variable that is often connected to lower levels of cheating includes the presence of strong institutional values such as honor codes (McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2002). McCabe (2001) suggests that to promote academic honesty, colleges must recognize and affirm academic integrity as a core institutional value. He asserts that schools must affirm the role of teacher as mentor, clarify expectations for students, develop creative forms of assessment, reduce opportunities to engage in academic dishonesty, and help define and support school wide academic-integrity standards if schools want to reduce cheating behavior (McCabe, 2001). McCabe’s work is relevant to the work of this study because he connects the responsibility of diminishing cheating with specific behaviors on the part of educators. The existing research expounds on students’ outlooks and behaviors towards cheating, but these studies largely focus on college students. Although there are a moderate number of studies involving high school students, no studies examine honor codes of middle schools.

Detection vs. Education

Opportunity and punishment may be the most direct ways in which the teacher’s behavior influences the prevalence of cheating. Cheating behaviors are “inhibited or deterred in direct proportion to perceived probability and severity of punishment” (Michaels & Miethe 1989, p. 871). According to Robinson et al. (2004), cheating is not a matter of ethics but rather a consideration of opportunity weighed by the risk of punishment. Cheating was committed less frequently when there was a fear the behavior would be detected and penalized (Robinson et al., 2004). The literature supports that teacher vigilance decreases the opportunity to cheat in the classroom when educators ensure that students can do the assignments on their own and students both understand the consequences of cheating will be consistent and immediate and know what the school defines as cheating behavior (Satterlee, 2002). In a study conducted by McCabe
(1999) a student summarized the sentiment that cheating occurs when there is a high opportunity with a low risk and a desirable benefit to student: “You can only do as much as they let you get away with. So if they let you get away with, then that’s on them” (p. 683). Students may cheat if they believe the advantage that they can gain by cheating outweighs the risk in getting caught and the possible punishment. They consider teachers themselves at fault for failing to monitor, detect, and punish cheating behavior. Regardless of high moral development, if presented with an easy opportunity to cheat students may ignore their conscience.

The literature points to educators’ two general approaches to cheating with one based on catching students and the other based on educating students. The first is based on suspicion. Teachers assume that students are trying to cheat and therefore actively work to make cheating more difficult to do, easier to detect, and punishable with swift, consistent consequences. Such strategies include “vigilant proctoring, seating students far apart during tests, using multiple versions of exams, requiring that book bags be left outside examination rooms, and checking student photo IDs” (Cole & Kiss, 2000). After all, there is an increased incidence of cheating in environments where exam proctoring is loose (Covey, Saladin, & Killen, 1989), seating arrangements are not spaced (Houston, 1986), or only one version of a multiple-choice exam is used (Houston, 1986). According to Specter Gomez (2001) when teachers provide multiple versions of the same test, students are 25% less likely to cheat (Satterlee, 2002). And Eisenberg (2004) contends exam settings in which there was stronger supervision led to less favorable student attitudes towards cheating. But students may still risk cheating if the payoff offsets the risk (Miller, 1987). And while these strategies will certainly reduce the incidences of cheating they do not increase students’ confidence in their abilities, affect their value for the learning activity, address their level of problem solving skills or change a classroom culture that accepts
cheating (Murdock, 1999). And while there is evidence to suggest that students are more likely
to cheat when there is no fear of detection, relying on detection and punitive measures to deter
cheating has been likened to an arms race between students and educators in which each side
develops increasingly sophisticated stratagems to outsmart the other (Cole & Kiss, 2000).

Another approach is to assume that it is educators’ responsibility to build a community
where students view cheating as unethical. The assumption underlying this approach is that if
students internalize they shouldn’t cheat, if they understand why academic integrity is important
that they will develop a self-conscience and proctor their own behaviors. Research on honor code
schools indicates that schools with honor codes often report lower rates of cheating even though
they have a greater opportunity for cheating, given that exams are un-proctored and self-
scheduled (McCabe et al., 2002). Perhaps students that are more inclined to behave honestly are
attracted to these schools. Perhaps there is enough social pressure for students to behave honestly
or perhaps these institutions have changed students’ attitudes towards cheating. Because such
studies are self-reported, it is difficult to estimate the effect of social desirability. Certainly there
is a greater awareness at these institutions about what constitutes cheating and that it is wrong to
cheat in comparison to non-honor code schools where it might be less clear in defining what
cheating behavior looks like and more socially acceptable for offenders to admit to cheating
behavior.

*Authentic Learning*

According to Starratt (2004), authentic learning means more than regurgitating
memorized information. The learner experiences curriculum as a dialogue in which the student
turns to multiple methods, sources of information, and types of evidence to discover some
pattern, relationship, or significance (Starratt, 2004). In the work of Wiggins and McTighe,
authentic learning experiences signify a reorientation in the student’s character from a passive vessel in which teachers deposit knowledge into a more active constructor of meaning. Authentic learning experiences involve students in learning activities at the heart of the discipline that are engaging, address important concepts that students often have trouble grasping, and have enduring understandings beyond the classroom setting (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Authentic learning has relevance and meaning beyond the classroom by entering into a conversation with the wider community. The student contributes to the discourse on an issue by sharing findings emerging from the learner’s work, rendering students responsible for what they learn (Starratt, 2004).

According to Starratt (2004), the opposite of authentic learning is make-believe learning in which students guess the right answer. In classrooms with make-believe learning, students chase someone else’s approval and move through learning experiences without ever engaging in the necessary journey to develop a personal identity and to understand the relationships between self and the “natural, social, and cultural world” (Starratt, 2007, p. 27). In make-believe learning, students act like they know what they are doing. In contrast, students experiencing authentic learning act responsibly toward the material (Starratt, 2004). They respect the integrity of the material and therefore act purposefully and attentively to the learning it requires. Inauthentic learning inhibits students from becoming authentic beings. By authentic beings, Starratt (2007) means:

To own oneself, to sing one’s song, to improvise one’s place in the drama of life, to be real instead of phony, to be a somebody instead of a cardboard character mouthing a script someone else has provided, is to be responsible to the truth of who one is, has been, and is capable of becoming, and the truth embedded in one’s relationships (Starratt, 2007,
One would expect that students who are committed to authentic learning, who are journeying towards becoming authentic beings are unlikely cheaters since cheating sidesteps actual learning (Murdock, 1999). Similarly, one would expect that students who engage in authentic learning experiences do not have the motivation to cheat since the materials matters to these students and demands their full participation. Cheating would deprive students of skills and knowledge that interests them, has been shaped by their inquiries, and resonates with their future goals.

According to Elmore’s (2003) theory, actual learning occurs when students and teachers consent to the principles of agency and reciprocity. Agency refers to the control of learning, which according to Elmore (2003) should pass from teacher to student back to teacher. Reciprocity refers to what the teacher learns from the student. A teacher demonstrates engagement by eliciting student participation in activities that lead to learning and by actively responding to students’ comments and questions. A student consents to engage with teachers in the social activity of learning, recognizing that the teacher can impart knowledge that has value. To Elmore (2003), agency does not mean agreeing to be taught. The teacher transfers agency to the student who through the act of experiencing the subject matter asks questions and passes control of the subject back to the teacher. The teacher positions students to access further knowledge, thus transferring agency back again. Elmore prescribes the engagement of both student and teacher in which there is little doubt who is the student and who is the teacher but advocates for a classroom orientation in which teachers present complicated problems for students to propose solutions, rendering students experts. A teacher consents to actively engage in learning material at a deeper level through the very act of teaching. Through dialogue with students a teacher honors student solutions which may alter the nature of the knowledge the
teacher ostensibly knows. The resulting learning activities are authentic indicators of students’ construction of knowledge.

Starratt (2008) proposes a triangular model entitled the Ethical Practice of Teaching to encapsulate the moral dimension of teaching and learning. Each of the three legs of the triangle interacts in both directions, meaning that virtuous practice entails a dialogical relationship; none of the legs act upon the other but rather all interact with one another to build engagement, meaning, and knowledge. The first leg of the triangle in a virtuous teaching learning situation is a dialogical working relationship of mutual respect and care between the teacher and the learners. According to Starratt (2008), students “need to know that the teacher is interested in them, cares for and respects them as human beings” (p. 15). To this aim, virtuous practices entail taking the time to understand students’ academic strengths and weaknesses, their cultures, as well as their extra-curricular interests. He contends that, “The learners need to see the teacher as an authentic person, not as some distant, cardboard authority figure, but someone who can laugh and cry, someone who is consistent and reliable, someone who tells the truth” (p. 15). The second leg of the triangle concerns the teacher’s knowledge of the curriculum. To promote virtuous teaching, content knowledge is both inside the teacher, integral to educators’ self-identity and external to the teacher. The content is (a) “revealing something important about natural, cultural, and social worlds”, (b) potentially transformative of students’ identities and (c) useful in the future to learners and to society (Starratt, 2008, p. 34). The third leg of the triangle, the dialogue between the students and the subject matter involves the translation of adult knowledge of the curriculum into meaningful student understanding. To this end, the teacher implements learning activities in which students take part in active dialogue with the content, personally tying learners to their natural, social, and cultural world. Cheating runs
counter to the workings of this model spoiling the relationship between students and their teachers, corrupting the students’ relationship with the content, and dishonoring the teachers’ reverence for the subject matter.

**Assignment Characteristics**

According to Garvalia et al. (2007) “good assessments” have four characteristics (p. 35). They are reliable, which means that good assessments have consistency in measuring student mastery of the material. Second the assessments are valid, meaning that the test measures what was taught and weights the material that was emphasized accordingly in the assessment. Also, the test allows the teacher to make accurate decisions about the student’s evaluation and progress, which is important for consequential validity or how the test results are used. Certain assessments have high stakes consequences for students. A faulty judgment based on such an assessment could have a sizable faulty impact. Third, students experience standardization of testing procedures, except those students with individual education plans as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act. Otherwise, no student should have an unfair advantage over other students by having a different testing procedure. Fourth, a good assessment should not possess a bias, meaning that certain groups of test takers should not score higher because they have an advantage over other groups of test takers. When students cheat then assessments do not meet these four criteria. The teacher has no idea if a student knows the material, can demonstrate a certain skill, or has mastery of a concept. And the teacher cannot make an accurate judgment about what the student has learned. Cheating sabotages consequential validity in that a teacher has a misrepresentation of a student’s work upon which to make decisions that impact a student’s class standing, grade advancement or entrance to a school track or school. When students perceive that assessment are unfair, they may disengage from
learning or they may justify cheating using the strategies of neutralization theory. If students are compared with other students who are cheating, if decisions are made about students’ future opportunities based on unfair measures then students will feel justified to cheat to level the advantage others have.

During a testing environment in school, Specter Gomez (2001) recommends that to reduce cheating, educators should use multiple versions, give verbal warnings before each test, and require students to explain their answers. On writing assignments teachers should provide feedback on student work at each stage of a writing project (Specter Gomez, 2001).

Johnson (2004) describes particular characteristics of assignments with a low probability of plagiarism. According to Johnson (2004) such characteristics are those assignments with clarity of purpose and expectations, student choice, relevance to students’ lives, narrative prose, higher level thinking skills, creativity, a variety of information-gathering activities, hands on elements, technology, collaboration, opportunities to share results with other caring people, authentic assessment rubrics, a revision process, and enough time and resources to complete. Educators can motivate students to behave honestly by assigning work that students would choose to complete without cheating. That means the work must have a personal value for students that exceeds the student’s regard for any other competing value. Johnson contends that students cheat less frequently when directions have been clearly explained and students understand the purpose and expectations of the assignment. Low probability of cheating projects (LPP), provide opportunities for student choice. By offering alternatives to students, learners work on a product that is personally interesting. For example, in many instances the topic may not matter and can be chosen by the student, but a teacher may care about a particular format of the assignment, the elements that are discussed, and the manner of discussion. LPP projects have
relevance to students' lives. In this way, students connect what they are studying to something real in their own lives outside of the classroom. LPP projects often have students write in a narrative rather than an expository style. This means that rather than summarizing the facts students can tell the project of a story and how they arrived at the final product. Johnson (2004) explains that teachers who assign work with higher-level thinking skills and creativity raise the level of student engagement in assignments. For example, instead of writing a report on a scientific topic, students propose an original theory, design a way to test it, and then effectively communicate their findings to a wider community.

Johnson also contends that to increase the meaning of student work, school assignments should answer real questions. Instead of asking students to answer questions to which teachers purport to already know the answer, LPP projects allow students to pose questions that we do not know the answers and then share with their peers and teachers how they came up with a solution. Cheating occurs less when teachers assign work that requires many information-gathering activities such as through books, interviews, data collection, observation, internet etc… LPP projects most often are hands-on. For example, students in a science classroom become scientists or in a history classroom engage in ways that actual historians would behave. When students have opportunities to practice multiple skills such as writing, interviewing, videoing, and speaking they are less likely to find ways to cheat. Engaging work with a lower risk of copying is creative and often incorporates technology. In designing projects that creatively use technological tools such as graphic programs, desktop publishers, spreadsheets, and Web page construction students are motivated to do original work. Students can collect artifacts and then scan and post them on their website, which will stimulate artistic intelligence. Thus, LPP projects often engage multiple senses since students communicate their findings verbally and visually.
Since large projects can be daunting, LPP projects are often complex but have been broken down into manageable steps. When teachers help students to plan out the smaller steps, build timelines, be accountable to frequent deadlines, and schedule multiple conferences students are less overwhelmed by the work and less likely to cheat to complete it. LPP projects are often collaborative, which develops practical interpersonal skills, reduces the likelihood of plagiarism, and models real-world work environments. LPP projects allow students opportunities to share results with adults who care about their work. With public performances, demonstrations, talks or celebrations of student work adults really appreciate and comment on student work. When students know that others will be looking at their work, they may be less likely to cheat. Such assessment authentically uses measurement criteria comparable to evaluating a person’s performance in the real world. Johnson (2004) advises teachers to provide students rubrics and checklists at the time assignments are made to guide their work. LPP projects allow learners opportunities to reflect on and revise their final projects. If students misuse information gathered from other sources, they are given the chance to correct the mistake. And finally, Johnson (2004) explains that LPP projects have been designed by adults who believe that with enough time, resources, and motivation, all students are capable of good and original work. When teachers convey to students that the ability to make choices, solve problems creatively, and complete complex tasks is expected not only of the very talented then every student is motivated to meet the high expectation of good work (Johnson, 2004).

Conclusion: The Story of Cheating

The literature indicates that there are differences between what students and teachers would characterize constitutes cheating behavior, although precisely what those difference are in a middle school setting are unclear (Evans & Craig, 1990; McCabe et al., 1999). It would be
helpful for teachers and students to understand these discrepancies so that teachers can assess learning fairly. There has been a great deal of research on the incidence and type of cheating behavior taking place in high school and university settings but there is an imbalance in the literature since very few studies specifically address middle school learners (Miller et al., 2007). Educators cannot assume that middle school students understand cheating or engage in cheating behavior at the same frequency or in the same way as older students. Middle school populations differ from older students in terms of their moral development, school structure, autonomy for learning, and classroom orientation. Further research on middle school populations would provide scholars with a more complete trajectory on when and how cheating habits form and under what conditions they persist. Numerous studies have investigated the characteristics of cheaters to help teachers predict who will engage in cheating behavior with the aim to target preventative measures to those students. However, in examining the demographics of the cheating student, the profile is too complex and inconsistent in the literature to serve as a predictor for cheating activity. Instead, others have investigated under what conditions all students are more likely to resort to cheating.

A qualitative study could address the complex, contextualized, multi-faceted elements of classrooms allowing researchers to understand all the influences on a student’s decision making to complete work honestly. Rather than focus on student characteristics, situational factors can be modified such as classroom orientation, instruction, means of assessment, and detection strategies. Such investigations would use the literature to examine more holistically the reasons students cheat, students’ attitudes towards the acceptability of cheating, students’ personal and situational interest, influences that foster persistent engagement in learning activities, and the social and institutional values that influence student behavior.
Goal orientation theory and neutralization theory together explain much of why students cheat. Students’ judgments about whether cheating is or is not okay and their willingness to cheat are affected by classroom characteristics rather than absolute ethics (Diekhoff et al., 1996). Learners believe more than teachers that cheating relates to the characteristics of teachers and classrooms (Evans & Craig, 1990). Students in performance-oriented classrooms are not likely to identify cheating as a moral decision because the message they infer from teachers is a value placed on the completion of the work and the final grade attached to that work as opposed to a value being placed on the integrity of the work (Anderman et al., 1998). Students are more apt to cheat and to believe that cheating is more acceptable in classrooms where the classroom structure emphasizes extrinsic motivation and rewards for performance. When adolescents learn in environments that stress competition, some students see cheating as a means of survival. Furthermore, students are likely to view their behaviors as acceptable, but not right using the five neutralization strategies of denying responsibility, denying that their behavior causes an injury, denying that there is a victim, condemning the condemner, and appealing to higher authorities (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Qualitative studies to more fully investigate students’ understanding of what constitutes fair and just classroom practice would help clarify how students reason about cheating in specific contexts (Murdock & Stevens, 2007). Finally, although there is a lot of agreement on how teachers need to prevent cheating in their classrooms by giving clear directions, separating students during tests, attentively watching students as they take tests, and punishing students with appropriate, swift, and consistent consequences for cheating little research has been done to look at the qualities of particular assignments that students and teachers believe would reduce incidences of cheating (McCabe et al., 1999). In reporting what work students value to complete
honestly so that cheating become irrelevant, other teachers could make changes in their practice to add value to the learning activities students experience in their classrooms. Some of the qualities of assignments that students would value and want to complete honestly include those involving student choice, relevance to their lives, creativity, hands on activities, collaboration, public presentations, authentic assessment rubrics, a revision process, and enough time and resources for thorough completion (Johnson, 2004). Authentic learning is learning that has personal relevance to students, is central to the discipline, has real world application, and is shared in meaningful ways with others (Starratt, 2004; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). When students and teachers recognize the responsibility to honor the integrity of authentic learning cheating becomes irrelevant.

Based on this synthesis of the literature, the study I have completed contributes to the literature by addressing the understudied elements cited above. First, the study further explains the differences between what students and teachers characterize as cheating behavior using qualitative data as opposed to the disproportionate studies relying on quantitative data. Because researchers have focused their work on college and high school students, this study targets middle school learners, a distinct population and one that is important in understanding the trajectory of when and how cheating behaviors begin and persist. Given the complexities of predicting cheating behavior based on student demographics, this study addresses the situational factors that may influence all students rather than those with particular characteristics. To characterize the classroom structure this study is grounded in goal orientation theory. And to explain how students’ propensity to cheat depends on external justification, regardless of moral reasoning, the study applies neutralization theory. Given that little literature addresses the specific qualities of the work assigned, this study will connect those characteristics of the work...
assigned with students’ and teachers’ perceived value for doing it. Finally, I compare the characteristics of assignments students and teachers describe as having value with the qualities of assignments that Johnson (2004) purports will result in low incidents of cheating behavior.
Chapter Three: Design of the Study

Introduction

This qualitative descriptive study seeks to describe and understand the attitudes, values, and behaviors of middle school students and middle school teachers regarding the practice of assigning school work and committing acts of cheating. This chapter provides a detailed description of participants, procedures, type of data, analysis employed in the study, and formats for communicating the data collected. The critical issue in this cross-case study centers on the attitudes and values held by students and teachers toward school work and the connections of these attitudes and values to cheating behavior. Broadly the study investigated what middle school students and teachers believe are school-based characteristics that influence cheating in middle school. In particular, this study explored the following questions:

1) How do students and teachers define cheating?
2) How do middle school students and teachers believe classroom based characteristics influence cheating as they define it?
3) What are characteristics of assignments do students and teachers perceive eliminate the opportunity for students to cheat?
4) What are characteristics of assignments that students and teachers perceive motivate students to value the work itself and complete the assignment without cheating?
5) Is there a connection between the responsibility of a teacher to assign authentic learning assignments and the responsibility of students not to cheat?

Research Design

The design of this study follows a qualitative cross-case study design, seeking a rich description of the complex relationship of multiple classroom situational variables on academic
dishonesty. In contrast to a typical single study case study in which the researcher investigates a single unit, this investigation includes two single units of study. There are two more or less typical individual case studies; one consists of eighth grade students at the school and one is comprised of teachers at the same middle school. Each case has been analyzed as a single unit of study and in comparison to the other unit.

A cross-case study is identical to a case study approach in that both seek meaning making, in this instance how students and teachers in one middle school make sense of their world. (Merriam, 1998). As Merriam (1988) describes, a case study develops an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system” (p.12). By concentrating on the case, this approach seeks to reveal the interaction of significant situational factors characteristic of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1988). The case study model helps to:

understand the nature of that setting- what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting- and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that thing….The analysis strives for depth of understanding (Patton, 1985, p.1).

Since the case study is particularistic, the specific illuminates the general (Merriam, 1998). In this instance, the investigation gathers as much information about the problem of middle school academic dishonesty as possible with the intent of interpreting or theorizing about the phenomenon of academic dishonesty in middle school classrooms (Merriam, 1998).

The cross-case study as a design is useful to address these particular research questions for a number of reasons. First, the cross-case study allows the researcher the means both to
examine the way a particular group of people handle a specific problem using a holistic standpoint and to clarify a general problem found in middle schools (Merriam, 1998). By attending to the complex context of social action, this study attains a full perspective on the participants’ motives that underlie specific decisions and events (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). A cross-case study can illuminate the complexities of a situation through obtaining information from a variety of sources. The cross-case study clarifies differences of opinion on the issue, in this instance, the situational influences on cheating incidences, and suggests how these differences have influenced the result. For example, among students there may be different understandings and attitudes towards academic dishonesty and therefore will result in cheating at different frequencies. Furthermore, in comparing teachers with students in terms of their perceptions of factors that influence cheating behavior in classrooms, I can better understand as a whole under what conditions both groups value the work they either assign or complete.

Second, the case study approach involves naturalistic inquiry, meaning completing the research in its real-life context or the school setting which leads to an accurate representations (Cousin, 2005). A case study allows readers the vicarious experience of ‘being there’ so that readers can share in the interpretation of the case, discerning its merit alongside the researcher (Stake, 1995). The case study method permits the researcher to “render social action in a manner that comes closest to the action as it is understood by the actors themselves” (Feagin et al., 1991, p.8). To fully understand how teachers and students ascribe values and meaning to the work that they do in school and to understand the connection between meaning-making and cheating requires the researcher to spend time in the social context of the school. The narrative form of presenting the findings is specifically attuned to convey the “the ‘lived’ experience- as experienced by people” (Feagin et al., 1991, p.21).
Finally, the cross study qualitative approach best suits the exploratory nature of this study. First, there are very few studies on academic dishonesty within populations of middle school students and second, the majority of data collected and written about has been quantitative. A qualitative study can explain the quantitative data by more fully describing the incidences of cheating, the differences between teacher and student understandings of cheating behavior, and situational factors that contribute to cheating. In order to explain what students think about the work assigned and to explain why there is more likely to cheating on some types of assignments as opposed to others requires rich data which could only be accessed by asking participants to explain their thinking process. The benefit of open-ended questioning is that it “allows respondents to give answers in their own way. These questions are useful in getting unanticipated answers and for describing the world as the respondent really sees it rather than how the researcher does” (Fink, 1995, p.32). The case study is inductive, building “abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than testing existing theory (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). The thick, rich description of both cases illustrates, supports, or challenges the theoretical assumptions of goal orientation theory and neutralization theory. The insights help structure future research (Merriam, 1998, p. 41).

Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study relevant to this project, interviewing three middle school teachers who are graduate students in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College in K-12 administration in order to demonstrate the feasibility of this study. Two of the three teachers currently work as teachers. One has been working for the past year and a half as a special education teacher at a charter school; one has five years of teaching experience as a seventh grade math teacher at a public school; and one was a former English and religion eighth
grade teacher at a parochial school in Chicago for two years. Teachers were interviewed separately at Boston College using a semi-structured interview guide; all interviews were recorded. The interviews produced rich data because the researcher did not have to worry about establishing a bond with the participants given that rapport was already established based on shared experience of being a teacher, being in the same graduate program, and having a prior friendly relationship. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded on three separate occasions consistent with the approaches for three different methods (phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography) as exercises for a research methods course. The researcher made three separate interpretations using these three approaches, writing brief reports for each method and presenting the findings and analysis to peers for discussion. In addition to peer feedback on the process, the researcher received feedback from a qualitative research methods professor on the interpretations. The pilot study’s implication for this study was that it confirmed for the researcher that both teachers and students view cheating as connected to a lack of value for the work. Four main themes emerged in addressing the value of the work for students: practicing sound pedagogy, cultivating authentic relationships with students, building engagement, and holding students accountable. The pilot study provided the opportunity for the researcher to test and revise interview questions as well as to help the researcher decide which research method to employ for this study.

Research Methodology

For the study at Northwest, data was collected through observations of middle school classrooms, artifacts, two focus groups of students from two different advisories and one semi-structured individual interview with each of the eighth grade teachers and all students from the focus group. Speaking with both students and teachers is the best way to gather information
about academic dishonesty because these are the two groups that most influence cheating and are most affected by classrooms with academic dishonesty. It is important to conduct interviews because as Merriam (1998) describes, “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the whole around them” (p. 72). And interviews are useful to obtain information about past events that are impossible to replicate and observe (Merriam, 1998). The interviews were semi-structured, with prepared questions and with particular issues to be explored, but both the exact wording of the questions and the exact order were provisional so that I could respond to the comments of the subject and be open, “to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p.74). In order to obtain the most accurate information these interviews were conducted during the school day on-site and discuss with teachers and students information about their classrooms and school work that is easy for them to recall. The interviews with all four core teachers and two world language teachers ensured enough data to result in thick descriptions of the details, emotions, and textures of the participants. In interviewing all core teachers, I collected a holistic picture of the eighth grader’s school experience with information about their math, science, English, history, and foreign language classrooms.

In order to practice my interview technique, refine the interview protocol, as well as settle on the size of the ideal focus group I practiced conducting three focus groups. I spoke with a group of 10 students, and then with two smaller groups of doctoral students to determine the size of the focus group. I generated the questions in my interview protocol from findings in the literature, experiences in the classroom, and past conversations with teachers and students about cheating. I made changes to the questions after listening to my taped recordings of the focus groups with doctoral students and high school students and my interviews with teachers. The
final interview questions have been generated from literature, from experiences in the classroom, and from the recent piloted interview conversations with teachers and students about cheating.

Because students’ attitudes towards school develop in relation to other students and student behavior is often influenced by their peers (McCabe, 2001), the researcher conducted two, one-hour focus groups, each comprised of four interested students from one advisory to provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their own beliefs by listening to the ideas of others. The aim of the focus group was to create interactive conversation about cheating among students in a safe environment. The reason that one advisory group was initially selected for study is that an advisory is an ideal cross section of students since the school groups students in advisories purposefully with a balance in terms of gender, social groupings, extra curricular interests, and academic achievement.

In addition to interviewing, I conducted observations so that I could witness the natural field setting that the participants are talking about in the interview and obtain a first-hand account of the data in addition to the second-hand data obtained in an interview. Through more open-ended techniques of classroom observations I sought to understand the context for which work is assigned, for example, the way that expectations and direction are conveyed about work, in terms of working with others, eliciting help, using online resources etc… Observation assisted triangulation of the data collected in the interview by substantiating or challenging what was said. The observations provided me with some knowledge of the middle school’s classrooms that can be used as reference points for future interviews. Also, in some cases the observation revealed information that I did not obtain in an interview and offered something that a subject may not have thought of to discuss or was unwilling to share with me as an interviewer (Merriam, 1998).
To meet the standards of triangulation and to present a larger picture of the problem, the study used multiple sources of data, multiple types of data, and data from multiple points in time (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I also looked at student work, observed formal presentation of student work, examined the rubrics used, and read the written feedback given to students. These documents were both relevant to the research questions and could be collected in a reasonably practical yet systematic way. “The data can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses…” (Merriam, 1988, p. 126). Because the artifacts are a product of their environment they are grounded in real classrooms, “This grounding in real-world issues and day-to-day concerns is ultimately what the naturalistic inquiry is working toward” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 234).

Site

The school is a private, non-denominational, coeducational, non-profit day school. From its initial group of 65 children in Pre-Kindergarten through grade one, the school has grown to its present size of approximately 398 students of diverse backgrounds enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten through the eighth grade with 47 students in the seventh grade. The lower school includes pre-K to grade 2. The middle school houses grades 3-5 and the upper school is comprised of grades 6-8. The average class size for middle school classrooms is 13-16 students with an overall faculty to student ration of 8:1. In the school community 28.5% of students and 17.5% of the teachers, administrators identify themselves as Non-European Americans. Tuition costs $20,000. Generally two and a half hours of homework are assigned each night. Math is tracked; eighth grade math placement is determined by teacher recommendation, previous class performance, and the math placement exam that is given to all entering middle school students. Students attend
classes with a different group of students in every subject but heterogeneous tracking in other classes is limited by accommodating students’ math program.

The school was purposefully selected because the school is co-educational, private, and in the Massachusetts area. Also, the school has a highly regarded academic reputation, an advisory program and a focus on the holistic development of students including their character. The school’s mission is consistent with the aims of the study, which include examining academic integrity and thoughtful pedagogy, and raising student and teacher value for school work.

Specifically the mission of the school states

Northwest School is a warm, child-centered community of exuberant learners with an unparalleled commitment to both the development of the mind and the development of the self. Through a distinctive balance of challenge and encouragement, the school fosters excellent lifelong habits of scholarship and instills deep respect for others and a healthy sense of self. Ultimately, Northwest strives to graduate academically accomplished individuals of conscience, character, and compassion.

Given that the school has character development as a central element of the mission, I anticipated an interest in the subject of cheating, a fundamental phenomenon of this study.

Sample

The students and teachers for this study were purposefully drawn from this one private middle school. Purposeful sampling is critical to obtain information-rich cases (Sandelowski, 1998). My hope was to build strong relationships with the participants on account of the shared experience of being a middle school teacher and shared value of seeking to optimize learning for students. Because middle schools cluster by team level, the study included all four core class teachers of the eighth grade team, plus two world language teachers. Permission to conduct the
The type of purposive sampling I employed to select students and teachers is typical sampling; the students and teachers interviewed reflect the “average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 1988, p. 94). Selection criteria for teachers were identical to those used in the pilot study and depended on teachers’ willingness to participate in in-depth interviews and discuss openly issues of academic honesty. I visited the school prior to the beginning of the study to meet with members of each middle school team in order to select from the 6th, 7th or 8th grade team the one that was the most interested in participating in the study. Similarly, selection criteria for students depended on their interest to participate in one focus group and one in-depth interview and willingly to discuss openly and honestly issues of academic integrity. The participants represented variety because the school carefully selects advisory groupings. Each advisory is a diverse and well balanced group of ten to twelve students. This case has the potential for surfacing significant findings because of the researcher’s access to participants, the amount of time that can be spent with the informants, and the willingness on their part to share openly.

Data Collection

The schedule and content followed the timeline in Table 1 and was completed in the spring semester. The classroom observations provided an opportunity to understand each teacher’s classroom and the work that they students were doing. The focus groups allowed students the opportunity to become comfortable with the researcher and the subsequent one hour interview provided time for further probing questions that were raised in the focus group. Table 2
outlines the data sources, participants, and frequency per participant and total data that was collected at Northwest.

Table 1.

*Data Collection- Schedule and Content*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Observation</th>
<th>Interviews with Teachers</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Interviews with Students</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Interviews with students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two planned observations: teachers introduce assignments, give feedback or students make presentations, take tests etc…</td>
<td>Discussing how teachers see the type of assignment and value students have for work as affecting how honestly students complete it</td>
<td>Conversation about what cheating is, why students do it, whether there is ever a good reason to cheat, if there are classrooms w/ cheating and classrooms w/out cheating, and what the differences are</td>
<td>Discussing w/ the students from the focus group how they see the type of assignment and value students have for work as affecting how honestly students complete it</td>
<td>Conversation about what cheating is, why students do it, whether there is ever a good reason to cheat, if there are classrooms w/ cheating and classrooms w/out cheating, and what the differences are</td>
<td>Discussing w/ the students from the focus group how they see the type of assignment and value students have for work as affecting how honestly students complete it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

*Data Collection- Data Sources, Participants, and Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Frequency per participant</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>From two advisories of 8 eighth grade students, their four core teachers and two world language teachers</td>
<td>One 60 minute semi-structured individual interview with teachers and one 60 minute semi-structured individual with students</td>
<td>Six 60 minute semi-structured individual interviews with teachers and eight 60 minute semi-structured individual interview with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>One 60 minute focus group session with 4 students</td>
<td>Two 60 minute focus group interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation Advisory Observation</td>
<td>Two classroom observations per teacher Several advisory observations</td>
<td>8 classroom observations and 3 several advisory observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>Two assessments to be brought to teacher interview</td>
<td>Four sets of 2 artifacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I visited the school a few times prior to data collection to get a sense of the school, meet teachers, and speak with administrators. Before data collection began I followed IRB procedures for Boston College to ensure the protection of all human subjects involved in the
study. Refer to Appendix E (p. 191) to read the consent forms signed by the headmaster, teachers, and parents as well as the assent form for student participation. Once data collection began I visited the school two or three times per week for the whole school day for three months until I conducted all interviews, focus groups, and observations as well as collect artifacts. I conducted the one-hour teacher interviews during their planning periods and conducted the focus groups during advisory block using the interview protocol (See Appendix A). I spoke with students individually in follow-up interviews either during their study hall periods or advisory using the interview protocols (See Appendix C and Appendix D). Students did not miss class or other enjoyable school events to participate in this study such as activity block, sports, or lunch. All interviews were tape recorded so that during the interview itself the researcher could focus on attending to the conversation by listening carefully to what was being said and what was not being said and asking thoughtful follow-up questions. I obtained permission from the participants and principal to use the tape recordings. The interview protocol for the focus group included a discussion of scenarios from Appendix B and the focus group questions. After participating in a focus group, all students were interviewed in an in-depth, one-hour formal session to follow up on issues raised during the focus group but with the opportunity to hear one student’s expanded beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Students had the opportunity to hear what their peers had said, but also had the chance to clarify their own position. I employed member checks in order to be sure that I had collected the data accurately. To check for understanding I framed questions with, “What I am hearing you say is…” and “Would I be correct in concluding that this is what you meant?”

After collecting the data, I transcribed all the interviews. I visited each core teacher’s classroom twice and asked teachers to inform me when they were introducing assignments,
talking about issues of academic honesty, returning work to students, or leading a class in which students shared their work with their peers. During the classroom observations I paid particular attention to whether teachers explicitly mentioned the mission of the school or any codes of conduct to integrate these values into classroom pedagogy. By attending several advisory meetings, I investigated the role of the advisor to understand if the issue of cheating was addressed formally with students during advisory meetings. I wrote memos after each site visit and begin to generate a list of possible codes for data analysis.

Human Subject Considerations

The following ethical considerations were attended to throughout the study: informed consent, right to privacy, protection from harm. All participants were informed about the study through the informed consent agreement. Only those volunteering to participate for the study were included. Participants could have chosen to leave the study at any time. I obtained consent from the principal to conduct the study, consent from teachers to carry out interviews, consent from parents of the minors and assent from the minors to conduct the focus groups and interviews with students. During the focus groups I was sure that students set ground rules for the conversation that included respecting each other’s opinions (no put-downs), confidentiality, and no use of names of students or teachers. There was no risk to participants and the study went through the appropriate processes as outlined by the Human Subjects Review Board. Names of the site and subjects were changed to protect anonymity and taped interviews were kept secure and then erased after the completion of the dissertation. I did not share students’ exact responses with teachers so that students felt that they could speak freely without fearing consequences for their commission of past cheating behaviors. I refrained from making any judgment of students’ opinions or behaviors. In return for the opportunity to investigate this topic I offered to hold a
In particular I offered to share with teachers what other researchers have found about cheating in schools, some generalizations about how teachers and students perceive the problem of cheating at their school and how cheating is harmful to learning communities. I did not reveal exactly what students at their school shared with me to protect those students from harm. Because students have shared some information about their cheating behaviors during the interviews, as a researcher I did not make any judgments about those behaviors.

Method of Data Analysis

Consistent with qualitative research, the data analysis entailed a process of coding to identify meaningful data, followed by organizing the data using linkages, and aiding in the interpretation of the data as a particular concept, thus leading to an explanation of what the data meant. Coding data assists in uncovering relevant phenomenon, collecting examples of the phenomena, and analyzing those phenomena in order to note patterns and exceptions. Coding helps to “conceptualize the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships within the data, and discovering the data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.31). Coding breaks the data apart so that it can be put together in creative ways that moves beyond the data and provides a fresh perspective (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The goal of analysis was to uncover patterns across the data regarding cheating, to organize this information and to develop some potential connections between a shared value for the work and assignments assigned and completed honestly (Stake, 2005). Ultimately, I attempted to “come up with reasonable conclusions and generalizations based on a preponderance of data” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 139). To analyze the data the six analytic strategies outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) were used, including (a) the coding of data from observations and interviews, (b) writing reflections on the data, (c) sorting the data into similar groups, (d) looking for commonalities and
differences among the data for further analysis, (e) reducing the codes to a concise group of
generalizations, and (f) analyzing these generalizations in light of known research. I applied the
constant comparison method to analyze data from the interviews and observation (Glazer &
Strauss, 1967). Once interview data had been coded and patterns have been noted, I clustered
patterns by events, meanings, and/or processes in order to conceptualize the codes with similar
qualities and better understand the case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Other researchers have
approached case studies through configuring types or families and then clustering cases into
groups sharing similar patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The main difference between a cross-
case study and a single-case study is that in a cross-case study, there are two stages of analysis:
the within case analysis and the cross-case analysis. For the within case analysis, I treated each
case as a comprehensive case in and of itself. Once the analysis of each case was complete, I
began cross-case analysis. I presented a cross-case analysis suggesting ways in which teachers
and students agree and disagree about the definitions of cheating and as well as compare and
contrast the ways these two groups perceive classroom characteristics to influence the incidence
of cheating behavior in middle school.

First, I read the teachers’ transcripts multiple times and immersed myself in the data by
writing comments and questions in the margins to “…isolate the initially most striking, if not
ultimately the most important aspects of the data” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 191). Then I
read the teachers’ transcripts again to apply line-by-line in-vivo coding. Key words were written
in the right margin of the transcript to signify important variables that were “semantically close
to the terms they represent” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 65). To capture the participants’
thinking, I used the participants’ words if possible in the codes. Second, as Eaves (2001)
proposes, I kept a separate running list of all the in-vivo codes and shorter codes were developed
to capture the main idea of what the subject said. From this list, I built an outline with subdivisions emerging from the regularities or ideas that seemed to be present regularly across the teacher subjects. After three or four transcripts, I reduced the code phrases, grouping together similar codes by compressing some disparate codes into more encompassing categories when appropriate. At this point I decided on a list of preliminary codes and then applied this list of codes to the remaining transcripts, adding new ones when encountering data that did not fit within the existing codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Next, the patterns and regularities triggered groupings into which items were sorted. Similar groupings were clustered together and then labeled to form categories (Eaves, 2001). Categories are different from codes in that they are more abstract and are formed when “codes are compared against one another and pertain to a similar phenomenon” (Eaves, 2001, p. 658). Categories grouped what fits together and distinguished data that is different. In order to develop a manageable and meaningful number of categories, I used counting to quantify a theme or pattern in terms of the number of times a pattern or theme occurs and the number of times it appears in a particular way. I retained data from the transcripts that stood out because of their uniqueness. After I was satisfied with the categories I went back through the data for more relevant information. I used Guba and Lincoln’s (1981) strategies for filling out the categories. For example, I included information that identifies new information, challenges already known information, or exemplifies the nature of the category. By simultaneously analyzing and collecting data, both processes constantly changed one another. For example, analysis continuously evolved as I modified the treatment of all the data in order to accommodate new data and new insights. Once I finished generating categories for teachers I went back and repeated each of these steps in exactly the same way for the transcripts pertaining to students.
I used triangulation for the cases of students and teachers to confirm key patterns serving as a basis for interpretation, by using other data-gathering techniques beyond interviewing (e.g. observation and artifact collection). The analysis within each case involved forming linkages among categories to generate conceptual order (Eaves, 2001, p. 658). A tree diagram organized these categories into a hierarchal structure for each case (Eaves, 2001). Definitions for each category and code were developed. Exemplars for each code and category were identified from the data. Once the variables were established within each case and the patterns were named for each case, the relationship among the variables for each case was discussed separately.

Subsequently, I used cross-case analysis to then to make comparisons and contrasts across the two cases. Using the categories and codes for each case I then aligned the similarities and distinctions. The next step was to create linkages among these parallels and differences to generate a conceptual order across the two cases. A third diagram arranged the categories from the combined cases into a hierarchal structure. With coding complete, the process moved towards generalizing and theorizing about what the data meant, noting and questioning the relations between variables and finding conceptual and theoretical coherence in the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996)

Using this conceptual order, I completed a cross-case analysis synthesizing the similarities and differences across cases. My intent was to elicit a small group of generalizations explaining the commonalities which could be presented as interpretive constructs. I used the categories, codes, and diagrams to propose an explanation including the “how” and “why” of the phenomena of academic dishonesty. Thus, the steps progressed from establishing the findings, relating the findings to one another, naming the patterns, to identifying a corresponding
construct. The process reflects a clear connection to the original conceptual framework regarding valuing school work and pertains specifically to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). And finally, since the case study is a bounded product, the thick description of findings discusses all the situational influences on cheating behavior found as well as their interaction with one another. This has lead to a precise account of the experiences of the participants (Merriam, 1998). The ‘thick description’ of the case ensures that the reader shares in the interpretation with the researcher. In order to justify why one coherent explanation is better than another, I have reflected on the quality of the data, examined exceptions, and tested the explanation upon which I have arrived.

Reporting the Data

In terms of reporting the data with the purpose of conveying understanding, I use rich descriptions to transport readers vicariously into the classrooms of the participants described. Readers have access to a place they may have never been. Educators have an opportunity to see a phenomenon with a new perspective, and compelling stories will vividly and clearly illustrate the problem of academic cheating and the complex and holistic situational factors. To share the findings, first the data has been organized thematically as two separate case studies. Within each case, I incorporated the participants’ words with my observations and gathered artifacts. Then I compared and contrasted the two case studies in terms of those themes.

Specifically, the description pays particular attention to each case separately, comprised of quotes from subject interviews and focus groups as well as artifacts and field notes based on observation. Second, general descriptions situate the vignettes and quotes into the data as a whole within each case separately. Finally, interpretive commentary generates a conceptual framework for understanding the particular and general descriptions for each case as a distinctive
unit (Merriam, 1998). After presenting each case one by one, the findings then carry on to a cross-case analysis organized by theme. Quotes are used to demonstrate how the two cases are similar and then to highlight the differences across the two cases. The analysis proposes initial conclusions and explains the underlying processes that led to an arrival upon those explanations. Finally, there is a discussion expounding on the implications for teaching, learning, instructional leadership, and further research.

*Rigor and Validity*

Three common pitfalls cited by Miles and Huberman (1994) affecting data quality that I have attended to throughout the process are sampling non-representative informants, generalizing from non-representative events, and drawing inferences from non-representative processes. Data quality was assessed by checking for representativeness. A common source of inaccuracy according to Miles and Huberman (1994) stems from an over reliance on convenient informants. To avoid this bias, this cross-case study used purposefully representative advisory groupings and an entire team of teachers rather than interviewing any teachers in the school who show interest. Second, a non-continuous presence at a site can often result in over weighting striking events. To avoid this pitfall of generalizing from non-representative events, I remained all day on site, and spent time prior to gathering data to simply get a sense of the school, classrooms, and culture. I spread my visits over time. While I was on site, I was sure that participants understood why I was there, what I was studying, how I collected information and what I planned on doing with it. In understanding the purpose and benefit of the study, participants were less likely to mislead me. I also showed my field notes to a colleague because often others are more likely to see if, where, and how I am being misled. Also, I gave greater weight to stronger data. Stronger data included data that was collected later after repeated contact.
rather than at the time of entry or that was observed firsthand rather than heard secondhand (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to avoid the third pitfall of using non-representative informants and events to inform my emerging constructs, I kept my research questions firmly in mind and did not drift towards a more dramatic event. I had prolonged engagement with participants, with relevant literature, and with the data collected to ensure that I understood the collected case studies. I kept a running log of data quality issues in the margins of my field notes with remarks on how to improve data quality in subsequent visits which I reviewed prior to returning (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher strengthened the evidence gathered by triangulating sources. The case study incorporates data collection not only from multiple sources of people including students and teachers but also by using multiple means, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations which will further inform interpretations and validate the responses of the primary research participants. The researcher employed member checks. Through both the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher shared the provisional findings with respondents for their comments in order to acknowledge, for instance, rival explanations. Additionally, I also have multiple data types including interview recordings, artifacts, and memoing. This triangulation advanced impressions and formulations emerging in the data collection and analysis process.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The following results and analysis will present and then interpret the study’s findings, specifically discussing how the data addresses the research questions followed by an explanation of the study’s significance and its implications for researchers and practitioners. Chapter four imparts a rendering of Northwest school and the participants, discusses the participants’ beliefs about what cheating looks like in their classrooms, and compares the similarities and differences in how students and teachers define cheating. Then using the tree diagram which combines the responses of both students and teachers, I illustrate the major themes in a hierarchal order tied to student and teacher perceptions of classroom characteristics and the work assigned as influencing the incidence of cheating. At the end of the chapter there is a description of three assignments that students and teachers describe as possessing qualities which are likely to reduce cheating behavior.

Description of the school

A green sign and painted crane mark the entrance to Northwest school. The open gate leads down a paved road past faculty housing and an outdoor ropes course. On the right, lies a soccer field guarded by carved foxes positioned to frighten birds from flocking on the fields, appearing so real that visitors take a second look to detect movement. Surrounded by field grasses and pussy willows, a small pond edges the field and driveway, which students skate upon during winter recess and investigate during science class. In the mornings, long lines of luxury vehicles and SUVs extend in an endless caravan as parents drop their children off at the crest of the hill. The cream colored walls of the red-roofed school house curve around a courtyard of granite pavers. Behind the k-8 school building, children ride tricycles around the faculty parking
lot and others race down the winding plastic slides and hang from their ankles on the jungle gym. Older boys casually throw lacrosse balls in the courtyard or lower field while other students juggle hackey sacks, shoot soccer balls, or hang out with friends.

As one enters the lobby one can expect to hear steel drums practicing from the dark depths of the auditorium and varied music making from many of the adjacent practice rooms. The foyer welcomes visitors with plush couches in the school’s green hue. Coffee tables are carefully laid with yearbooks from years past and student-made chess boards. The walls display temporary student art alongside permanent framed portraits of past headmasters and photographs mounted with enlarged playbills of each year’s eighth grade play. As the day begins, kindergarten students holding hands turn their heads in awe as eighth graders brush past them on their way to class.

Teachers

The eighth grade team consists of the core class teachers plus the athletic director and a computer lab administrator. They meet in weekly meetings in the English classroom to discuss student issues and grade level planning. As a team, they meet to approve the study and propose that interested foreign language teachers should also be included in this research project.

At the time of the study the science teacher is in his first year of teaching at the school. He is Canadian and has spent the last eleven years teaching overseas in American Schools. He enjoys the weekly foreign language lunches where students sit with other interested students and teachers speaking only either French or Spanish. Craig has a guitar club and coaches basketball. His favorite part about teaching is making connections with students outside of the classroom. He wistfully notes that the science gymnasium with its smart board, commissioned murals and
adjacent state of the art science labs is in the basement of the school away from the eighth grade cluster of classrooms.

The math teacher is a Haverford College graduate, an institution with a strong emphasis on an academic and social honor code. She mentioned that attending Haverford has strongly shaped her value for honesty in academic work and respect for others in the community. Avery’s classroom is clean and desks are clustered at right angles; however, on the board underneath the date and daily agenda she writes a corny joke. Skeins of yarn and knitting needles peek out from shopping bags. During activity block a group of girls will sit and talk with Avery as they together they stitch scarves and hats.

The English teacher, Al, leads the eighth grade team. He has been teaching at the school the longest among the core teachers. His classroom has a smart board, a number of computers for editing, and tables arranged in a way conducive for discussion. He coaches boys’ soccer in the fall, plays classical violin and occasionally performs with students. He serves as the director of the Northwest faculty/staff/parent Choir. He is the father of twin girls just turning two. His dog recently has bitten one of his daughters in the face and he writes a personal piece about his difficult decision to give up his dog which he shares with his students.

The history teacher, Paul, displays a dry sarcastic humor. His presence in the room demands the students’ attention. He is direct with students and gives them a hard time using friendly banter. He is a former defense attorney who never enjoyed practicing law and decided that the cut in pay was worth shaping student minds and spending more time with his family. He has taught at one other school prior to Northwest and considers these students to be basically really good kids. He shares, “At this school the biggest problem sometimes is they talk in class. Aww… that is a really huge problem, come on. They are pretty good.”
One of the Spanish teachers is a native speaker from Venezuela. Her background is in environmental city planning. Upon moving to the United States with her husband, she accepted both a new home and new career. She has two small children who attend the school and she likes that she can see how they are doing during the day. She loves art and cooking as well as singing and dancing in front of her students. Her older daughter is embarrassed by her mother’s unabashed passion. Ella wants students to feel comfortable taking risks and she likes laughing with students when new Spanish words tumble out with pronunciation mistakes. Her younger son speaks to her in Spanish and she loves that he still publicly hugs her.

Becca is the other Spanish teacher and has been teaching at the school for a number of years; she is the department chair. She worries that students are not as respectful with Ella because she is not American and has a thick accent when she speaks English. Becca is pregnant and soon will share her news with her students because she feels that students will notice. She has lived overseas and has received monies from the school’s professional development funding to travel to Costa Rica to practice Spanish during the next holiday. She may postpone the trip due to her pregnancy.

Students

Initially, Craig’s advisory of ten students was selected to participate in the study. Based on the number of interested students Paul’s advisory was added. The case consists of four students from each of the two advisories.

Tania is the only African American student in the eighth grade. She feels pressure from her mother because has not been accepted to a high school at the time of the study. She lives far from the school, and her mother often has to take her to work where she does her homework and sleeps before coming home. Her favorite subject is math but overall she is not a strong student.
She rarely talks during all of the classroom observations but clearly has a lot of friends with whom she laughs loudly and socializes gregariously.

Lynn has been recently disciplined by the school for a non-cheating related issue. We had to reschedule our interview because she was serving an in-school suspension. She shares in the focus group that the only reason that she likes to come to school is to see her friends. However, her performance as an attorney in the mock trial is a standout. She is articulate and thoughtful and her questioning of a witness clearly influenced the overall decision of the jury in her legal team’s favor. She is one of the few students able to adapt questions based on the witnesses’ responses.

Tom is very clean cut, confident and articulate young man. He seems older than the other students and interacts maturely with adults. Tom’s father is a teacher at the school. During Tom’s interview he speaks assuredly and his responses are generally twice as long as the other participants. Clearly he has a reputation for being intelligent among his peers. Students defer to his leadership during group work. He likes the science wiki project because it requires students to teach themselves a concept, which he feels not all students can do. He recently received a full scholarship to a prestigious high school.

Courtney views herself as having an adult perspective. She takes pride in declaring her entire group of friends as social outcasts. Their exclusion, she explains, is based on their shared strange interests and intellectual conversation. She loves to read and would describe herself as very academically inclined. She shares that she can be reclusive and spends time alone in her special place, which is a hideout behind her house.

When I asked Kate what her favorite classes “English is sort of easy because I have always been into reading so it is something that just comes easily to me. It is a good class
because I know a lot. I like math because I just like getting the right answer and figuring things out. I guess I sort of like science because I want to be a doctor.”

Mike has striking red hair and acne. He is shy during the interview. His answers are short. His favorite class is history and he describes how much fun he thought lab experiments were in science. He is a star soccer player and also plays lacrosse on the school’s team.

John is the only ‘sand box’ kid in the group meaning that he has attended the school since pre-k, a total of ten years. He likes working on assignments that entail physically building them. He plays lacrosse both for the school and a club team. He has a fraternal twin who also attends the school.

Sarah has long blond hair which she wraps around her fingers as she speaks. She is a field hockey player. Her favorite classes are English and history. She comes from a musical family and as the youngest in the family she wants to break away from that tradition. She loves to read and hang out with her friends.

Cheating at Northwest

Both students and teachers acknowledge that there is cheating at Northwest School but most share the sentiment expressed by Paul, the history teacher, “I think probably students do cheat at some point, not all students. But at all middle schools, somebody cheats.” Students in general do not believe that cheating at Northwest is rampant but as Courtney express, “Yeah you know we are kids, you know. It definitely happens.” Sarah has a similar viewpoint and reminds me, “You aren’t going to have 300 kids who are going to be perfect kids, who won’t cheat, who won’t think about it. There is always going to be someone who didn’t get enough sleep last night, who didn’t have enough time, had to copy some answers.” Teachers and students have a similar but not identical sense regarding the kind of cheating taking place in their classrooms.
with both groups most commonly citing copying homework as the most widespread form of cheating. Regarding cheating at Northwest, the principle difference found between cases is that students cite cheating during tests and teachers felt that they effectively deter this from happening.

According to teachers, the following are the most common forms of cheating: copying homework, sharing questions on quizzes with sections who have not taken the quiz yet, getting inappropriate help on written work from tutors, parents, or friends, and using online translators. As a group, students consistently cite the following cheating behaviors as the most common in their classes: copying answers off of a test, copying homework, working with peers when they have been expressly told not to, plagiarizing, and sharing questions on quizzes with sections who have not taken the quiz yet.

Participants reported that the type of cheating varies depending on the discipline. In foreign language the most frequent types of cheating behavior are copying homework assignments and using online translators for written work. As Ella explains “I am very suspicious when I look at [student work] and the words that they use. For example I have seen verb tenses that they haven’t learned and I know.” Becca, the other Spanish teacher agrees and describes a time when she suspected a translation service. “Even in English it didn’t sound like her writing. And she had sourced her work and I went to the web-site and found it right there, word for word. I find it is more in their writing.” She also adds that she has caught students cheating by working together during study hall or copying someone’s homework for a workbook activity. When she assigns text book activities she concedes, “They probably copy and for me it is really hard for me to know who has done it and who has not.” In foreign language more than
other classes, teachers and students note that workbook assignments tend to focus on grammar with short correct answers that are easier to copy than other assignments.

In most classrooms teachers believe that students are not cheating during tests because of the room set-up, directions and the teacher presence during assessments. Like other teachers, Paul does not believe that students are cheating on tests at this school very frequently. Most classes are under twenty students and teachers “set the classroom up so that really isn’t possible. [Students] can’t really see what everyone else is doing.” Craig noted that at other schools he taught a common form of cheating was for students “blatantly trying to get answers on a quiz from other students” but he had not caught any students at Northwest during his first year. Some students acknowledged here might be a few instances where people copy off of tests. And one shared a common practice of discussing questions on the test within earshot of others who have not taken it. He claims, “You walk down the hall you hear kids talking about a test.” Teachers such as the English teacher comment that students indeed are sharing information with sections about a quiz they have already had. He describes how, “One section goes in cold, not knowing anything but for other sections coming in later they will share information about it.” In response teachers create multiple versions of tests and ask questions requiring lengthy responses to demonstrate proof of understanding.

Al also believes that depending on the assignment that students “probably copy each others’ homework from time to time if it is practical. You know if they are answering questions from a textbook or something like that.” Paul, the history teacher, agrees with other teachers in that he does not think a great deal of cheating goes on at the school but that “The type of cheating that I am aware of is at this school, a lot of it is for convenience on homework that they have to turn in.” Student responses confirmed that teachers were mindful of common cheating
behavior. Courtney, a student, shares that copying a friend’s answers on the homework: “That is middle school cheating.” John, another student cites that most cheating occurs on homework. He says, “You can see it if you were to walk into study hall unless there is teacher. They will stop in front of a teacher. And if I ever walked into a study hall I could probably point out two or three people that were cheating.” Kate replies that cheating in eighth grade looks like “asking someone for an assignment and just writing down their answers exactly or taking a really good idea that they came up with themselves and then writing about it.” The majority of the cheating is copying the work of their peers and takes place outside of class.

Teachers like Craig and Al cite students having received too much assistance from tutors or friends or parents as a common form of cheating behavior. In English, Al shares that the biggest issue is when students “through a process that I cannot even fully comprehend end up getting what I would say is inappropriate help from their parents on that work.” Al tries to have the conversation first with the student rather than the parent on the first instance and encourages the student to “set the guidelines, set the boundaries.” Because it is difficult for students to do, he has on occasion actually talked to the parents. He acknowledges that “It is a very hard thing to just come out and directly accuse about or directly complain to a parent about. I have never said to a parent, ‘In my opinion you wrote this paper.’ But Al has had those difficult conversations with parents and laments that if students receive conflicting messages about doing their own work they are less likely to behave honestly.

In terms of plagiarizing, students are mixed. Mike cites plagiarism as the “big one.” Yet, Courtney does not believe students are plagiarizing as much as high school students because “here they teach you so much about it that you don’t really do it.” She believes that “it is easier to cheat on a test or homework or something than it is to plagiarize. I mean sure plagiarizing can
be copying and pasting but I just think it is easier at least for me to cheat off of someone else’s paper.” But other students do believe plagiarism is a concern in middle school. Teachers such as Paul spend class time discussing plagiarism and the consequences. He feels they avoid plagiarizing in history because they understand what it means and are fearful of getting caught.

Defining Cheating

When I gave students and teachers a list of behaviors and asked them whether or not they viewed these items as cheating, students and teachers did not respond exactly the same. Teachers tended to view the responses more clearly while students were inclined to contextualize the examples. As a group, students for most of the responses affirmed that the behavior was probably cheating but would often provide an example when a behavior, otherwise deemed cheating, might be permissible. All students and teachers viewed that turning in a paper purchased on a web-site, helping someone else cheat on a test, copying from another student during a test, and using prohibited notes during a test were cheating in every situation.

The following are select examples of when students contextualize cheating. Every teacher and every student but one indicated that discussing what questions are on the test with someone who had not taken the test yet was cheating. Yet the student who marked the behavior as ‘not sure’ defined his response as both ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ He expressed that while he does believe that students who are purposely sharing the questions with other students are cheating, he explains that students might be carelessly talking about completing tests in the presence of students who have not taken them and he does not feel that their listening to that conversation constitutes cheating on the part of the students engaged in the conversation.

Even on a fairly straight forward example of cheating behavior such as letting a peer copy your homework, students offered many situations when such prohibited help might be
permissible. Although all teachers said that it was indisputably cheating, two students believed that in some situations it might not be. Courtney responded that the cheating label depended on whether the assignment was graded or not, how much of the work was copied, and the type of assignment it was. She clarified, “If it were one or two math problems then I probably wouldn’t really mind. I know sometimes it helps me to have the answers from another student and just kind of figure how that works.” Tom described how certain group projects entail taking credit for the work of others: “If three kids go off and do one part each and come together and put their answers together and turn that all in that is not really cheating because that is sort of how the project works.” Even though students conceded that teachers would be likely to say ‘yes’ that a behavior was cheating they believed that the question could also be answered ‘no’ in certain instances. This illustrates that students recognize what the rule is regarding cheating and know when they have violate it. Yet they believe that the rule is not an important one to follow under specific conditions.

Although most students do articulate cheating as providing an unfair advantage, some students in some instances do have a poor understanding of cheating. For example, two students said that copying a few sentences from a site on the internet without footnoting was not cheating. Of those students, Tania said that it was only cheating if the teacher required the citation. And Lynn said that it was not cheating because “it is only a few sentences and it is not from someone who had the same assignment.” These examples of underdeveloped understanding regarding cheating represent the marginal evidence from this study supporting a lack of student understanding of cheating.

Among all the items, students in this study are consistently unclear in one area about what constitutes allowable and fair assistance from tutors and parents. Seven of the eight
students express doubt on whether parents and tutors can give answers on written work. Furthermore, although teachers viewed every item as cheating, the one exception was when a single teacher qualified receiving answers from a tutor or parent as possibly permissible. Paul explained that perhaps if adults are fostering understanding of the material then giving students a small number of answers do not have to be labeled cheating. Almost every student would agree with this sentiment.

Students explained that sometimes help from adults besides the teacher is justified. Tania explains, “It kind of depends on how many questions, how many answers they are giving you. It depends on how hard the question is or if you don’t understand it. Another student, John believes that teachers are probably not going to accuse a parent of cheating on an assignment, “I think they would be very hesitant to call out the parent and say don’t do this and don’t do that. What if the parent complains?” Additionally he believes that the label of cheating depends again on the quantity and quality of the help. “I think it is not that wrong a couple of answers. I think it depends how bad it is if it is a whole paragraph or do you know when this battle took place and stuff.” However, he does admit that “the teachers wouldn’t think it was fair.” Another student, Tom distinguishes giving answers from assisting in the process. In his mind parental help is acceptable if “the parent shows you how it works and then helps you along as you answer it yourself but helps you get there. You are doing the work they are just doing at home teaching, which is sort of like home schooling pretty much, home schooling with your parent teaching you.” Similarly Lynn makes the same distinction when she shares, “If they give them the whole answer to the questions” that is cheating but if a parent “just helps with a question that they don’t understand or don’t know how to do it” then she believes that it is not cheating. And one last student speaks from personal experience, “Well, I don’t know. I know I ask my parents if I don’t
understand something I will ask them to explain it to me. Even if it is not the specific question, I will ask them to explain it in a different example or ask them to give me another problem.”

The concern of some teachers is that students do not understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate assistance. Avery, the math teacher, notes that for students cheating on tests is clear cut but on homework “it is fuzzier because there is an expectation that they think through the work themselves but they might be getting help with it.” Although certain help would not constitute cheating, Avery believes that “It might be hard for them [students] sometimes to understand the difference between being helped to understand something by somebody and being helped to just get the answers on their paper.” Other teachers quickly add that students can recognize when work is their own and when they are cheating. When asked if students would know in their hearts whether the behavior is cheating, Al is confident that students would: “Would they say it? I think that they would say it. I feel very confident that they would know it was cheating. I am not sure what they would say. Some would definitely say, most would definitely say that it is cheating.”

Evident from the data is that students may not always apply steadfast rules regarding how to define cheating nor do all students have a thorough understanding of what cheating is. The ways in which most students identify and describe instances of cheating vary depending on the situation. When work does not reflect students’ original ideas and unique understanding or was completed with an unfair advantage students recognize it as inauthentic. In comparing student and teacher definitions of what amounts to cheating with the cheating that teachers and students cite as happening at Northwest, one clear finding is that teachers need to better explain what constitutes appropriate help from adults and tutors.
Major Themes

Both students and teachers pointed to specific characteristics of their work and classroom that would influence the rate of cheating. Within the case of students four major themes emerged: (a) relationships with teachers, (b) value laden work, (c) engaging work, and (d) student accountability.

Figure 1. Student Themes

Themes are organized in order of significance to students. The hierarchy was determined based on the depth of the students’ response, prevalence across student interviews and emphasis in terms of how extensively and vigorously students spoke on a topic through interviews and observations. The single most repeated and firmly held sentiment by students was that the quality and nature of the relationship that students had with teachers was highly connected to the acceptability and likelihood of cheating behavior in their classrooms.

Within the case of teachers five major themes emerged: (a) structuring sound pedagogy, (b) value laden work, (c) student accountability, (c) building relationships, (d) and engaging work (See Appendices for a definition of each code and few significant examples).
For the across-case analysis, five major themes characterized teachers’ and students’ responses: (a) value laden work, (b) sound pedagogy, (c) student-teachers relationships, (d) engaging work, and (f) student accountability. Teachers and students also shared how these themes featured prominently in particular assignments that had reduced incidents of cheating.
**Value Laden Work**

In terms of value for the work, participants shared that students are more likely to complete the work when they consider the work to be personally meaningful beyond the extrinsic motivation of praise and grades. Generally, students are more likely to consider the work important if they perceive that they will need the understanding behind the work in the future. Meaningful work ties to other disciplines, skills, and knowledge. Students have varying attitudes towards the kind of work that can be assigned based on the class. Interestingly, the data suggests that students are more likely to complete work honestly for disciplines that the school, their parents, and students themselves deem as important.

**Figure 4. Student Tree Diagram: Value Laden Work**

In terms of value for the work, teachers responded similarly to students. One distinction among teachers’ and students’ responses was that teachers described the rationale behind some knowledge as inherently important for a literate person to have. Students, on the other hand, rather than view knowledge as valuable for knowledge’s sake were more inclined to describe knowledge as valuable in terms of its utility. Additionally, both teachers and students described work that was valuable as focused on understanding. Teachers referred to this quality of work under effective pedagogy whereas students seemed to discuss work that focused on understanding as valuable to learn. They compared the value of work that focused on understanding and its intrinsic value with the extrinsic value of work that existed to produce a grade.
Both students and teachers acknowledge that whether students will complete work honestly is tied to students’ perceived value for the work. Based on interviews and focus groups, participants deemed work worthy of their honest effort if learners (a) can apply the learning in other situations (b) make connections between the learning and their personal lives, other skills, and other disciplines (c) work towards understanding rather than a grade and (d) value the discipline. The main difference between the comments of students and teachers in terms of discussing value for the work is that teachers describe how students will complete work with genuine effort when they are convinced that the work they are doing is inherently important. Students must consider the material essential to know in order to be a literate person and recognize the skills as indispensable to be able to apply as an adult. Paul describes how he tailors his response to students when they ask “Why do we have to learn this?” depending on the student. He acknowledges,

Some people have a legitimate question, why do I have to know about this particular aspect of the American Revolution knowing that is not what they are going to do in their future. I can explain to them it doesn’t make any difference that you know this but the ability to be able to discuss something like this and the skills involved with this are important.
For other students Paul concedes that they do not care about the American Revolution for its own sake or to know more about the character and actions of heroes and ordinary men and women who established the guiding principles, values, and laws of our country. Rather, for these students they may be interested in hearing how the American Revolution will connect to other units, future history classes, or will be useful in order to think about conflicts like it. Some students unfortunately just want to know if the information will appear on the test. When all of these types of students believe that assignments relate to knowledge that is important for them to know then they are less likely to cheat on that work. Avery described students as having an entirely different attitude toward work, “if they perceive it [the work] as more meaningful for their life, they are going to put a different kind, different attitude into it.” In contrast, students did not discuss content knowledge or skills as central to the discipline or crucial in order to be a literate member of society; rather students were more concerned with knowledge in terms of concrete application.

Knowledge worth knowing.

When I asked students what kind of knowledge they consider worth knowing the comment that typifies the response of students is learning something “you will be able to use in the future, or in another way.” Similarly, teachers recognize that when students understand how the learning can be used either in their future schooling or in the real world they are deterred from cheating: “They realize that if they cheat and they don’t do the work here then it is going to catch up with them down the road.” For students, knowing they will build on the content later in the year or in high school justifies working towards understanding. Students expressed frustration about classes without life application. One student comments that meaningful learning is, “stuff that I will use in real life because I know there are couple of classes where I would
never use the stuff in real life.’’ When teachers cannot explain to students how the material will apply to their lives in the future students are less likely to exert the genuine effort required to do a good job on the assignment. One student recalls a time when “I asked her when do we need to know this and she said, ‘I don’t really know.’ Then why are we doing it? So then I don’t think I did the homework that night.” The science teacher describes how students value work when they derive some benefit from having done the assignment, “I think a lot of times cheating happens because students truly do not see the value in doing the work. Often times they think of an assignment as handing a piece of paper in with words on it.” Craig describes that he can tell by the quality of the work that students turn in whether students value their work, “If the assignment comes in and there is a very superficial treatment of the material I think I can see then that students are not seeing the value in doing this and are simply doing it to get me off their back or to not lose the grade, take off earning from the assignment.” When he sees greater depth in their responses he concludes that students truly embrace the value of the work.

The English teacher concurs that students work harder on assignments that are meaningful to them but he recognizes that not every assignment is going to be fun or tied to what students’ love. He says, “I think that I know that work that is closely tied to a student’s deepest or most accessible interests is work that they are most motivated to do for its own worth. I value that but I also think that I need to strike a balance between what they want and what I think they need.” This belief implies that work cannot merely cater to what students enjoy or find meaningful because they will miss out on important skills and content outside of their personal preferences that are central to the discipline and critical to their future work.
Future application.

Students differentiate between work that they only need for high school and understanding that they will need in the future. Tom suggested that worthwhile learning can be used in multiple situations, “It is important that I get the understanding. Blind memorization is helpful in the fact that you know the facts but understanding really lets you take what you know and apply it. If you know something but you can only use it in the one way that you had to memorize it then that doesn’t really help you.” Students believe that they should learn both content and skills while they are in middle school. Sarah explains how middle school learning should prepare students for both high school and the real world. “Right here at Northwest it is all in a bubble and when you are out in the real world it is very different. It should prepare you for that. It should definitely prepare you for all the classes that you are going to have in high school and also all of your social skills and things like that you are going to need in the world.” As Courtney explains, when students view learning as preparing them for the future then they value the work itself, “I mean if they saw that it had a point and was going to be really useful to them they probably wouldn’t cheat on it. They want to get the benefit from it.” When students value the work they honor teachers’ expectations to complete it honestly.

Connections to other areas of knowledge.

Secondly, when work applies to other contexts students become excited and see the connection between the work they study and their personal lives, other skills, and other disciplines. As Sarah notes, “I will hear people talking and will say something I will be like I just learned that in school. I know a lot about this. I can join in the conversation.” Students view work as valuable that demonstrates linkages among disciplines. In talking about an English assignment Sarah saw meaning in reading Persepolis and discussing Iranian culture because “it
also is connecting to history class and it is just something that you need to know about and that is interesting to learn about how other people are so different from your culture.” A Spanish teacher explains that it is easy for students to see the value in learning a second language and students become excited when they can converse outside of the classroom when they travel. She explains that they come back after a vacation and share with her that, “I was in Costa Rica this summer. And I ordered in a restaurant. Or I could understand. I had a little conversation with a person in the hotel.” Spanish speakers are in their communities as well. Students said the other day, “Oh in church. I was in church this Sunday and we were talking to someone there who spoke Spanish.” Similarly the history teacher concludes if students “don’t see the connection between answering this question and anything they need to know the chance there will be copying is probably much greater.” Teachers who explicitly make connections between learning activities and students personal lives, other skills, and other disciplines raise student motivation to complete the work honestly.

*Focus on understanding.*

Students fail to complete work, turn in quality or work, or work honestly when students do not perceive work “as proof of understanding.” According to teachers, written work should serve as a diagnostic tool for helping students understand what they understand, to diagnose problems with that understanding, and then to try to help them become stronger. The science teacher notes, “I think the more that students can buy into that process of written work or assignments being a means to their academic improvement then I think that discourages cheating.” A few years into his teaching career, Craig remembers giving an assignment in which students had to do a reading on evaporation and boiling. He explains that “the majority of the students came in with the assignment completed and then when I started to ask questions about
the reading very few of them could demonstrate even the most rudimentary understanding of the work that they had just submitted to me, complete.” He remembers being very surprised that it took him so long to realize that students could complete such assignments without understanding the material: “It really became apparent that it was possible for students to do those assignments yet not have any understanding, or not have a deep understanding of it.” As a result, all written work he assigns targets proof of understanding with the singular goal of providing students with feedback on their “idea development or their academic skills to help them become better students.”

The science teacher explains that students “are in a very tight competition for places at other high schools and so I think they are just more prepared to assume that the work they are being asked to do in eighth grade is really to prepare them for that, prepare them for high school, and so they kind of buy into the process maybe a little bit more than students at other schools.”

Students value the work in middle school because they want to be prepared to move onto more challenging material. Unfortunately, both students and teachers described how important grades are regardless of the emphasis on understanding in the classroom. Although participants comment that ideally the goal of the teacher in the class is on learning and not on grades realistically the school operates in a larger context. As the math teacher explains, “This is an environment where there is a lot of pressure on kids about grades. I wish it weren’t like that.”

She adds that although she communicates a focus on understanding she is skeptical about the impact, “I don’t know how big of an impact. But if they were getting the message that a grade of B is an all important thing then that would lend itself to a sense of then I just have to do what it takes to get the grade.” The Spanish teacher, Becca, notices: “It all of a sudden becomes important when they don’t necessarily get a good grade that is going to affect their secondary
school.” No longer do students view learning as providing the opportunity for them to acquire skills and knowledge they will use but rather their final marks will determine their future educational and professional opportunities.

Students agree, commenting that they feel a lot of pressure entering into high school and believe schools are only interested in their grades. One student shared a common sentiment that, “A lot of kids feel that grades are really important. I mean they are but they feel like that is the only thing that is really important. On a quiz or test they are going to cheat because they want to get a good grade.” And Ella, the other Spanish teacher explains that too often student motivation to do work comes entirely from how much the assignment may affect their grade: “how much something will count.” She believes that without grades students would not try. Students recognize that if assignments were not graded that they would be not cheat; however they also would not care about the quality of their work either. One student admits, “You don’t cheat on things that aren’t graded. Without the grade you don’t do a good job.” To students, intrinsic motivation is an inspiring concept but unrealistic with high-school admissions looming.

One student explains that the focus on grades does not come from teachers. In fact teachers often convey to students that to earn a low grade is okay as long as you understand the material. But other students chime in, “But really it is not.” Students insist that “teachers are just wasting time by repeating that over and over no matter how many times they say it kids aren’t going to listen to it.” As the student speaks, others nod, “You get to the high school and college application it’s good you understand this but you still didn’t get a good grade and we aren’t going to let you in.” Applications may include other measures like interviews, letters of recommendations, personal statements, and extracurricular activities yet students emphasize that “What we send to the schools from our school is our grades and in this case it is the most
important [goal] not really to understand the information, but to look like you understand the information to get good grades so your high schools can see you gets good grades and will obviously do well here.” Other students agree, “That is it in a nutshell: looking like you know it as opposed to actually knowing it.” Most students can appreciate why understanding is more desirable than high grades and they do not question the sincerity of teachers who emphasize this notion. At the same time, students point to those in high achieving high schools, attending ivy-league colleges and holding successful jobs as hard evidence to the contrary.

_Value for the discipline._

Finally according to teachers and students, students have increased value for the work in a class depending on the discipline. Many teachers expressed concern that the students’ value for their work depends on whether or not parents and students see the subject as important. One teacher who had taught science, math, French and PE noticed that there are some subjects that parents and students give a lot of value to: “I would put math up there. If a student doesn’t understand a math concept parents become very concerned and students become very concerned but if student does not understand a French concept there is a lot less concern.” He explains that it is because foreign language is not seen as an area “that students need to be able to survive, it is a course in which they are flexing their academic muscles. It is not necessarily critical material for future success in life.” He views such beliefs about the subject as tied to student engagement. “Where they see that there is value in doing well in that class and learning that material then I think there is a higher level of engagement and so part of the challenge I think of every teacher then is to help students understand why their class going to be of value to them.” The foreign language teachers agreed and added that institutionally although the school says it values foreign language the class is treated differently from other core classes:
I think that Spanish is one of those classes that are not considered a core class. And so I think that students’ work ethic in general is a little different. I think even just the way the schedule is. We are a class that doesn’t have an hour class. It is more considered a special. It is not a special but it is considered a special, like art or music. I think because we are not a part of a team it affects how kids picture us or picture the subject.

A difficulty is trying to separate the value that students have for the discipline and what students and teachers perceive as the nature of the discipline. Many students and teachers view disciplines like math and foreign language as classes that students are more likely to cheat in because of the nature of work that is assigned in these classes is more likely to resemble skill and drill problems from a textbook. Students who do not have time, are frustrated by a difficult concept or think that they will not be caught because there is only one correct answer are more likely to cheat on this type of work. The history teacher explains, “It is a little bit harder almost impossible in English to cheat. It is your expression. And in history it is sort of the same thing. What do you think about, what is your opinion about this particular issue? You have to come up with your rationale without just accepting it.”

*Sound Pedagogy*

In terms of sound pedagogy, both teachers and students discussed elements of sound teaching practice. However, teachers were more inclined to describe these aspects as pedagogical decisions and students were more likely to discuss similar elements in the context of building respectful relationships with students or assigning engaging work. The following is a tree diagram is a diagram combining the common elements expressed by students and teachers that relate to sound pedagogy.
Teachers and students describe students’ inclination to behave dishonestly as tied to particular characteristics of classroom environments, strategies of instruction, and classroom management. The components of sound pedagogy as expressed by these particular students and teachers include (a) providing clear expectations, (b) setting up the classroom to prevent cheating, (c) assigning appropriately challenging material, (d) explaining content clearly, (e) developing open-ended assignments, and (f) requiring reasonable amounts of work.

**Clear expectations.**

When students are not given clear directions about what is expected from them, students become frustrated and may turn in the work of others. Students need thorough explanations about what cheating looks like or as Kate explains, “people would take advantage of that lack of direction.” Another student explains that with bad instruction “there are going to be a lot of grey ideas where you are not sure if what you are doing is cheating.” Whereas, if a teacher gives “good instructions you will probably know it is bad.” Teachers believe that students know what cheating is because it feels like it gives one an unfair advantage. For the most part students can recognize cheating but they take their cues from teachers. Spanish teacher Ella said, “If the teacher doesn’t tell anything about cheating and seems not to care, yes the students will not care. They need to know that the teacher expects them to be honest.” Students rise to the standard that teachers set for them.
In science, Craig discusses how students who have taken a test “help” other students by sharing the questions with their peers before they have taken the test. In addition to devising multiple versions, Craig builds understanding with his students about why the behavior is cheating and how it is harmful.

Without even giving the context I will just have this conversation. My dad has really high cholesterol and we talk about why that is dangerous in terms of his health. And then I say, so periodically his doctor gives him a cholesterol test. And so what we do is I find out from doctor, my dad’s doctor when those tests are coming. And when it comes time for my dad to give his blood, I actually give my blood, because I have low cholesterol. I give my blood to my dad in a little vial and he actually uses my blood. The results come back really good, low cholesterol. He is happy and my doctor is happy because my dad’s cholesterol is low. And I say to the class, ‘Well, everybody wins.’ And the students are like, ‘He didn’t win. He isn’t healthy he just has a good test result.’ So we talk about. Sometimes you can have a good test result but getting a good test result isn’t the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is to be academically healthy or whatever, physically healthy. That gets them to look at when you allow a friend to cheat on a test and you give them your answers, that is really not helping them that is hurting them because a teacher cannot diagnose learning problems.

Craig and other teachers believe that students need to understand that cheating is not an uninformed policy but exists to protect the learning of students. “There is some specific thing about their learning that this quiz or this assignment was designed to bring to the surface.” Craig makes the comparison that if a class is waiting to be taught and a person stands there and physically prevents him from getting into the classroom that it is going to frustrate him because he has “a job to do and people who are depending” on him to providing learning experiences that will help them to develop their scientific content knowledge and skill. He explains how both physically preventing him from doing his job is comparable to preventing him from tampering
with the integrity of a quiz and his pursuit to “diagnose students’ learning difficulties and help them to improve.” Craig comments that by framing it in this way, students understand this is not just an arbitrary rule the school has. But there are real consequences for compromising the content and degree of difficulty of a test.

*Classroom set-up.*

Both students and teachers discuss how teachers can set-up a classroom to decrease cheating. During tests, teachers separate students, put up dividers, and use tests with items that have more than one word responses to reduce the temptation to cheat. Teachers make sure that students “are not sitting right next to somebody.” As one teacher explains, “I do my best to make sure that they do not have somebody else’s paper visible.” One student notes that students can’t cheat “if you set up the class so that the teacher sees all the kids all the time.” And another explains that, “Our science teacher has us sit in desks away from each other so we obviously can’t cheat on tests.” If students see teachers as maintaining the rules “then the kids won’t try to cheat because there is a good chance of their getting caught.” On the other hand, when teachers compromise the integrity of a testing environment, students feel cheating is acceptable, even though not right. One teacher describes that he sees this happen when a teacher has students exchange papers to correct one another’s work. He explains that, “Kids I think are sophisticated enough to recognize that one reason a teacher might be doing that is to save themselves the trouble of correcting each paper individually.” Thus, he continues students may “allow themselves a lower degree of respect for the content as a result so that might not seem as serious an offense to change something here or there. It is just that the sacredness is not really being protected by the teacher who has the power to protect it.” When teachers honor the work students follow their lead.
Appropriately challenging material.

Both teachers and students commented that work needs to be appropriately challenging. Students will cheat if the work is too hard and they feel that they cannot do it any other way. Similarly, if the work is too easy students will feel bored increasing the likelihood of completing the work dishonestly. A student comments that her work “gets so boring after six problems that you have gotten right and you obviously understand the information that you would be able to do whatever they throw at you and it is like why do I have to do all fifty problems if I know that I understand it?” Such work that does not further understanding may prompt students to complete it dishonestly. One student justifies getting help from a friend even if the teacher expressly prohibits such help. A student explains that the choice is, “either me working with someone else and understanding what I was doing because of their help or me not doing the assignment because it was too hard.”

Students suggest that teachers use class time to allow students to start the assignment so that they can ask questions. As Avery the math teacher noted, teachers need to give work with “manageable steps for getting through it and support so they can get to a point where they are able to show what they are able to do independently.” When learning is scaffolded and students are supported teachers can tackle difficult work. Ella shares, “I will say to them this is going to be really hard and you are going to feel really good when you are done with it.” When teachers structure learning as a challenge and build pride around demanding work, students feel good about what they can do.

Clear explanations of content.

A student explains another reason that may promote cheating behavior is when a teacher fails to thoroughly explain a concept. A student remembers a time when, “In the last five minutes
she explained these really hard math terms and no one really got it. And you are not supposed to work in groups but sometimes they help.” When students feel disadvantaged by poor explanations, they may turn to dishonest means to level the playing field. Although students recognize that teachers may consider it cheating to work in groups and have given clear directions about what constitutes cheating students may engage neutralizing attitudes. For example, if students do not understand the work but have been told not to work with others, some students justified still working with others, “because it is not really cheating, if you are learning to understand it. It is not following directions.” Another agreed positing that a student could either fail to do any of the homework individually or complete it all wrong, in which case “the next day the teacher is most likely probably going to be mad at you” or this same student explains “you can do it with a friend. Then you will get there the next day and you will have it done. You have it understood. Which one sounds better?”

*Open-ended assignments.*

When asked what makes good assignment the English teacher responded by saying those that are “relatively cheat proof.” He went on to explain that those assignments would look “as individual as individuals are.” He believes an effective assignment is one that “requires you to answer in a way that you need to pull yourself in; then it is very hard for you to substitute anything else for what you know or what you have inside of you.” Students agree that “You don’t want to do it if there is only one right answer.” And when a teacher says, “just do this sheet of paper for tomorrow,” then Tom says, “kids can cheat because everyone has the same thing, everyone is trying to get the same answer.” One student explained “If it is your opinion you wouldn’t cheat on that. If it is a long question, a couple of inches to answer it will be a lot harder to cheat on and easier to get caught.” As one student explains certain assignments generate
further inquiry, “You can kind of sometimes get different answers so you have to figure out what was different that went on. There isn’t just one answer and no other answer.” Otherwise, students have to exert a great deal of effort to stay focused and just get through otherwise boring work. In designing work that challenges students to produce unique products students neither want nor are able to imitate the work of their peers.

**Reasonable amounts of work.**

A common theme across student and teacher responses was that students feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they face when they finally get home from their music recitals, lacrosse practices and art lessons. In particular, students object to teachers who assign excessive amounts of homework, “Sometimes I don’t think they realize that there are other subjects. If I had the same amount of math or Spanish homework as I did in other subjects, then I would be up all night.” When work is too hard or too long students feel overwhelmed. One student recalls a time when “I had a science paper, an English paper, a math test coming up and then a Spanish paper. It just sometimes feels that you are drowning in work. You start to get really desperate then.” In addition to assigning a reasonable amount of work, Lily thinks effective teachers should communicate more with other teachers to better balance student workloads, “Oh, you have a major paper coming up maybe I will just back off a little bit and give you a little bit less homework tonight than I would on other nights.” Students in general felt that teachers did not fully appreciate how much work they have each night and how little time they had to complete it given their commute and other extracurricular activities and sports. One student bemoans her lack of free time, “This year I have barely picked up a book since the beginning. I have just been doing all homework.” Another student agrees, “You don’t have a life outside [of school]. When teachers do not respect the pressure students face, students respond in
ways that they believe are justifiable but not right. A student explains, “If you have a lot of homework, if she gives a couple, six or seven pages in one night you are going to cheat, because one you feel cheated and two you don’t have time so you are going to copy someone’s answers.” Another student explains that although cheating is wrong, when teachers assign too much work, cheating is a reasonable response. He rationalizes, “If you were not to cheat it would be four or five hours of homework so you are just not going to do that much. So, I think it would be acceptable but not right then.”

Teachers viewed assigning reasonable amounts of work as sound practice and would affect cheating rates. A teacher shares that “Teachers have to take into consideration we teach only one of the classes that [students] are doing here. So we have to think about how much time they have after school. This is something that has led me to cut a little bit of work.” Becca, a Spanish teacher feels that students need more time to produce quality work, “A lot of what I am finding is to use class time to do the work.” Another teacher shares that, “They come the next day telling me that they played in a game from six to eight and they come in telling me that they went to bed at ten o’clock, eleven o’clock. That is not fair.” Teachers discussed the quantity of homework in terms of sound practice while students viewed the proportionate assignment of work as being respectful and caring about students’ time.

Student-Teacher Relationships

All six teachers recognized the importance of how they are perceived by students and how respectful interactions with students affect students’ value for honest work.
In contrast to teachers, students described a caring relationship with the particular teacher as the single most determining factor for whether a student will cheat on work for a particular class. In addition to students’ emphasis regarding the importance of caring student teacher relationships, students’ comments described to a greater extent aspects of student teacher relationships that influence the kind of work that is assigned by teachers and the quality with which it is completed by students. In students’ minds when teachers care about the learning of each student, teachers make a greater effort to assign appropriate and meaningful work that will challenge students to meet their potential. Furthermore, when students understand that teachers are assigning work meant to facilitate student understanding, challenge student minds, and prepare students for life long success then students will complete that work with integrity.
Across students and teachers, the principle categories that emerged concerning student-teacher relationships are (a) understanding students, (b) teacher caring, (c) building respect, (d) teacher attitude, and (e) understanding the pressure.

*Figure 9. Student and Teacher Tree Diagram: Student-Teacher Relationships*

**Understanding of students.**

Students, unlike teachers, view themselves as a group at odds with or even in opposition to adults as a group. A student explains how this seventh grade English teacher was his favorite. He summarized this sentiment by saying that a good teacher was not like a teacher at all. “I guess he was one of us.” One student, in describing this same inspiring teacher, said, “If you cheated on a quiz that would be like throwing away his trust. He wasn’t a teacher. He was like a peer.” High praise from students describes teachers as not just relating well to students but actually becoming a part of students. Students divide teachers into those categories, “There are some who understand and some who don’t understand.” And students in turn will behave differently for teachers who understand versus those they feel do not. “A teacher who understands who is a little bit reasonable, who doesn’t go easy on us but who is reasonable would have less cheaters.” Students view the relationship as reciprocal. When teachers understand their needs, students in turn make an effort to be understanding towards teachers and a classroom order where work is completed honestly.
Teacher caring.

Teachers recognized the positive influences in student performance when students “like” a teacher; however, most adults tied those appealing qualities to effectual aspects of teaching practice. Students agreed that they are more likely to approach teachers for help who are friendly and helpful rather than find some other means to complete work that is too hard or confusing. A student shared that some teachers are not approachable and “whatever question you have, you think: I will figure it out and not go to the teacher.” To students, teachers who show that they care about them as individuals and their personal work inspire them to work hard. When describing a teacher who cared a student explained, “If you do work well he will take you after class and tell you, why you did well. He will make you feel good about it while other teachers will give you an ‘A’ but that doesn’t really motivate you.” A teacher who is unfeeling towards student needs will generate resentment that justifies students to behave dishonestly. A student explains, “If they are insensitive there is going to be more cheating. ‘Oh yeah I heard you have a math test but I am going to assign you two hours of homework.’ Students view such uncaring behavior as unreasonable. In turn students will behave in uncaring ways about the work.

Furthermore, just realizing that a favorite teacher would be disappointed was devastating to students. “I would never ever even think of like cheating with him. It would never go into my head. You wouldn’t want him to find out. He is such a good person that you don’t want to disappoint him.” Students expressed utmost loyalty to teachers who behaved in caring ways to students. Many of the students spoke about the same particular English teacher from the previous year. All of these students expressed such admiration for this teacher that they were motivated to work with integrity for him. One student explains, “He didn’t push you to do things by making consequences or things like that. He pushed you hard to do things because he knew you could.
And he expected it of you. He expected you to work your hardest. Because he was a friend, you wanted to do your best for him.” Again, when students have a connection to their teachers they feel more motivated to treat both their teachers and the work they assign with integrity.

*Building of respect.*

When asked what motivates them to do work of quality most students expressed the sentiment that individual teachers pushed them to do their best work. Although only some teachers acknowledged “having a better relationship with the student means they are more likely not to want to let that teacher down and to want to be honest with that teacher” every student interviewed expressed the sentiment that they would not cheat on the work assigned by their favorite teachers. In contrast teachers often distinguished respect from fondness. Paul contends, “some teachers who think they have a nice relationship maybe they think the teacher may be that much easier on them and the teacher may not necessarily call them on the cheating. Respect is the key. Do they respect the teacher as opposed to like or dislike the class? I would hope so.” Al concurs that a relationship built on respect affects students’ inclination to treat the subject honorably. Some students also used the term respect and many agree that a respectful relationship discourages dishonesty. One student summarizes this outlook when she states, “If they [students] respect the teacher a lot they are not going to want to lose the teacher’s respect by cheating.”

*Teacher attitude.*

Teachers also believe that their attitude towards students affects how students complete work. As one teacher discusses, “I think also because of my willingness to listen and kind of go sideways with them if they have a sideways question and try to reassure them that you can ask me any question.” She tries to make herself approachable and available to students: “You don’t
have to ask in front of your peers. You can e-mail me. You can find me one on one. So I think probably my efforts to make the comfort level there are the biggest thing.” Teachers like students view a strict attitude as eliciting more cheating. The history teacher, Paul, says, “So sometimes teachers that are extremely rigid might invite more cheating. You are scared of the teacher, and ‘Okay, if you don’t turn it in on x day you get a zero’ Well, then the incentive is greater.” Similarly, students used the term strict to apply to a teacher attitude that would invite cheating: “It is almost like stricter teachers entail more cheating because if they are more strict about you getting your assignments in then you are going to feel like you have got to do it at any cost, no matter how bad it is you have to get it in or else get punished for not having the assignment.” Both students and teachers express that teachers who behave rigidly are more likely to focus on the completion of work and the expense of process. By failing to show understanding for students’ individual circumstances they invite dishonest behavior about how that work gets done. Students will be more likely to work hard for teachers who are flexible to give students the support they need to do their best work and who know and care for them as individuals.

Some teachers expressed concern that although it may be the case that students feel like they work honestly for a teacher that they should be doing the work for themselves because it is an opportunity to apply their knowledge. Craig says, “I try to break down that feeling that students are doing work for their teacher. The work is being done for themselves.” He recognizes that students may not feel this same way, but expresses hope that students “realize that they should be doing the work and that there is value in doing all this work regardless of the interaction they have with the teacher, regardless of their feelings about the teacher or whether or not they like the subject or like the teacher.”
Understanding of the pressure.

Students expressed worry about the pressure of completing work. One student recalls, “I know a couple kids for exams if they didn’t get an A- or higher, then there could be consequences, off the sports teams.” Another student explains that there is greater freedom and choice given to students when they have their work in on time, “And at school here we have privileges. And the homework it is really unfair like, if you miss a math you get your privileges taken away until you get it in and now you are just falling behind. You have that homework and now new homework.” Furthermore, students feel overwhelming pressure to earn high grades and to gain entry to select high schools. A student shares what students are privately thinking: “I know if I did this assignment without cheating then I am going to get a bad grade and then I am not going to get into a good school.” She explains, “Then you could see it as affecting the college you get into and your job and your success later in life.”

Students described two kinds of teachers, one who have compassion for the kind of pressure that students face and the other kind of teacher who add to the pressure. Tom describes one teacher who helped students when they felt overwhelmed by the anxiety to earn high grades, “He was always telling you to come to him if you had any questions about anything. And so he really wanted you to do well. He always talked about he really didn’t care about the grades because no one ever completely aced his course.” Because this teacher was available to students, conveyed that he cared about student success, and diffused the emphasis of grades in his class students felt that he was different from other less understanding teachers. Kate describes in general teachers who lack sensitivity for understanding students’ pressure. She shares, “If they are insensitive there is going to be more cheating. ‘Oh yeah I heard you have a math test but I am
Students internalize pressure from parents. One student understands that for “Some students their parents might really be on them about grades. If they get good grades their parents will be nice to them and if they don’t you don’t know what is going to happen.” Another explains, “Your parents always want you to succeed and do well. Sometimes you do have to tell them to just back off.” When teachers behave in ways that recognize the pressure students face and work with students to help them manage the pressure students are less likely to cheat. Teachers also recognize that students are “under a tremendous amount of pressure.” For example, the English teacher contends that “Cheating responds in part to the pressure that assessment places.” And so he tries to “not make the pressure evident or hide the pressure.” He informally assesses student work through class discussion and participation on discussion boards” “I don’t know how you would cheat in a discussion.” Al believes teachers can reduce incidences of cheating by concealing, putting into perspective, or reducing the pressure which students face. Students explain that he pressure on students to be perfect melts away when teachers emphasize understanding as opposed to receiving a high grade. One student describes one class in which “The grades were second to the understanding. Even though no one actually aced, got a 100% in his course he still got a lot of students to come out completely understanding all the material.” Although teachers must assess student learning and there are high stake consequences attached to those grades, participants characterized teachers’ attitude toward assessment as unsympathetic and stress inducing or supportive and stress reducing.
**Engaging Work**

Overall when work is more interesting to students they are more likely to complete it honestly. In terms of what precisely constitutes engaging work, teachers believe that transferring greater autonomy to students regarding their work may increase student interest and decrease the likelihood of cheating. When teachers assign work that can be completed with others, teachers note that students become more accountable to one another in completing the work done well. When teachers incorporate aspects of technology, students become more interested in the work. And finally, students discuss how when learning activities are hands-on students are more likely to become active participants immersing themselves in the learning experience both intellectually and physically. Such whole bodied experiences with the content provides students the opportunity to become scientists, lawyers, and engineers for example, and apply their learnings rather than observe from a distance the actual work of others.

*Figure 10. Teacher Diagram: Engaging Work*

In terms of work that is engaging, students complain that so much of the work that they do at school is boring and entails doing the same thing over and over again. When work is to be gotten through as quickly as possible students believe there is a greater likelihood for cheating. Students believe that the more independence they have about the kind of work they do decreases the frequency of cheating. And interestingly, students believe that while working together can often help build understanding such collaboration affords greater opportunity for students to cheat by relying on the effort of others and submitting that work as their own.
In terms of highlighting the characteristics of assignments in which there is little cheating, teachers and students discussed certain qualities that build interest in the material for students. The components of engaging work central to qualities tied to work that is considered engaging to both students and teachers are: (a) hands-on and interactive work, (b) social learning, (c) technology, (d) student choice, and (d) interesting or non-repetitive work.

**Hands-on and interactive activities.**

When learning is interesting students, students will produce quality work. As Craig, the science teacher, noted “the more hands-on and interactive work is in science students seem to engage much more.” Students agreed commenting that they are more likely to spend time on something that is hands-on than other forms of work, “If I have four assignments like that and one that is building something or doing anything like that gluing stuff building stuff it is like a break from homework pretty much.” One commented that science was engaging because “It was
a lot of hands on stuff which is what I like to do.” Because students enjoy more interactive work
teachers find that there is higher completion rates and higher quality on this type of work.

Both students and teachers described boring work as repetitive work in which students
define terms or answer questions from a text. A student notes, “Certain homework assignments I
get so bored we are doing the same things over and over and over on the same topic.” Another
said, “It gets so boring after six problems that you have gotten right and you obviously
understand the information that you would be able to do whatever they throw at you and it is like
why do I have to do all fifty problems if I know that I understand it?” Work that always
disengages learners is work in which students have to provide a single correct answer that the
teacher has in mind. “You know you have to finish it. It is just so boring. I just want to drop this
and go running, completely insane.” Work that does not honor students’ individual ideas,
solutions, or arguments tends to bore students. They cheat on it because it does not matter who
answers the questions; every answer is identical. When students can share varying perspectives,
provide creative solutions, or write about their personal opinions and experiences students
engage in learning as dialogue.

Social learning.

The history teacher connects such uninspiring work to cheating: “There is some of the
stuff that I give that I try to cut down. It bores me so I imagine that these kind of assignments, ah
to heck with it. It is not important. There is more of an incentive to do it together.” Many
commented that students like to work with their friends. Although all work cannot be completed
in groups teachers do try to incorporate social learning, “What I have tried to do is if they like
working together there areas that they can collaborate and do the work and it is not cheating.”
Becca, the Spanish teacher notes that “The group projects in particular they get excited about,
just being able to work together. I have noticed when I actually pair them up it is a little less fun. When they get to choose their friends it is more fun.” When students act as teachers themselves or learn from their peers they are no longer passive vessels into which teachers pour information but become actively engaged in the process.

On some assignments teachers require that students work together often students have difficulty evenly distributing work among group members. One student, Kate, believes that working together often leads to copying of work, making it more difficult for teachers to appropriately assess understanding and diagnose learning problems. Kate says, “I think some people would take advantage of that lack of direction. You could sort of subtlety copy someone’s answers and pretend that you understand it when you actually don’t. You have gotten the assignment done but not have gotten anything from it.” On the other hand students like Tom, suggest that teachers limit their students by saying that they can’t help each other understand it, “If there is a student who just can’t understand the material but tries but still can’t figure it out, is it so wrong for them to go have someone help and explain it to them in a way that they can understand it?” And another student recalls a time when her knowledge complemented a friend’s and both equally benefited from working together: “There was one time when we had math homework and it was really heard I knew how to do half of the formula and my friend knew the other half. So we asked each other, then we put it together and then we understood how to do the math homework.” As a whole, teachers believe that having students work in groups prepares them for the all ways in their future that they will have to work collaboratively. Furthermore, working with others is appealing to students
Technology.

Students also enjoy work that uses technology regardless of the activity. For dry topics like graphing the math teacher will incorporate technology. She says, “They are going to see these points moving around on the screen making the designs. For some kids they are going to be thinking “Oh that is kind of cool.”” Similarly, Becca, a Spanish teacher claims, “I mention today that we are going to the computer lab and they don’t even know why we are going in there and they are like “Alright!” You know, it could be a quiz. They don’t know.” When teachers present information in ways that incorporate student interests like technology they make less interesting topics appeal to students.

Student choice.

Another appealing quality of work is when assignments have personal relevance to students. The Science teacher maintains, “If has student has to give their own, 100% their own viewpoint or put themselves in the assignment, it becomes more difficult for them to use someone else’s work and consequently they are maybe, become more inclined to do their own work.” As the English teacher, Al adds: “I could say that they are really writing about themselves and nothing is more interesting to an eighth grader than him or herself.” Every year Al has students write a personal essay. This year students wrote a love paper on My Antonia in which they wrote about a personal relationship and tied it to an epigraph from the text. “And what I like about this kind of assignment is first of all it arises from a critical study of a work of literature but the paper itself is about one’s individual experience in one’s own life.” Work with such personal connection often involves more choice. Al comments, students “like to write about themselves or talk about themselves and their own lives. They will articulate it as they want freedom. They want freedom to work on what they want to work on, what they want to do.”
When student work has greater autonomy and personal relevance students view the work as exciting and they demonstrate increased motivation to complete it honestly.

Teachers recognize that work cannot always be interesting to students. One Spanish teacher remarks that in order for students to engage in the intellectual work of school it has to be presented in an appealing way. “The topic has to be interesting to them. For example we have to teach a lot of grammar we try to, not to make it the focus of the class.” However teachers note that learning is work and it is not their job to entertain. As Craig explains, “I am also a little bit concerned that that may be doing students a disservice that in the future when they run into work that does not have that high level of engagement or that, that real appealing nature that they won’t engage.” Teachers view students as also having a responsibility to engage themselves as opposed to expecting teachers to only select assignments that will engage them. And students agreed that interest in a topic leads to self-motivation and to complete the work honestly. One student expressed this by saying if “I am really interested in the topic that I kind of want to challenge myself and the opposite of challenging yourself is cheating.”

*Holding Students Accountable*

A final element central to these beliefs in reducing cheating was the active behavior of teachers to hold students responsible to high standards of academic integrity. In terms of holding students accountable, both students and teachers perceived that teachers have a great deal of responsibility and power to protect the sanctity of learning in the classroom. Based on the comments of students in interviews and focus groups, below is a student tree diagram that encapsulates their responses regarding the ways that students are held accountable to follow the expectations of teachers, parents, and school policy.
In terms of the themes from the student teacher tree diagram, many of the themes that students identified as holding students accountable such as the discussion of classroom set-up and providing clear directions and expectations I have already discussed under sound pedagogy. In terms of the main differences between student and teacher tree diagrams, students claim that their peers cheat because they must choose between two equally competing values. For example, students know that honesty is really important but they have also been taught that grades really matter. Therefore they feel like they have to choose one value over the other.
As a whole, participants believe students behave honestly when their teachers (a) provide clear and meaningful feedback, (b) have public audiences for student work, (c) catch students cheating and act appropriately (d) recognize quality work, and (e) focus on the process of work rather than on the final grade.

Clear and meaningful feedback.

Teachers commented that ongoing feedback inspired students to complete their work and to do it well. The English teacher, Al, noted that “The most important and frequent forms of individual feedback are written comments on papers and response within discussion settings, response to their comments and observations, and individual conferencing about ongoing assignments at special meeting times whenever we can get them together.” One student describes how a teacher who gives thoughtful feedback on student work is more likely to detect plagiarism: “He would know too. He knows your style, your work and could be able to tell.” In math, Avery often has students write out feedback on assignments. She asks them “Did you do the assignment? If not, why not? Did you check your answers if not, why not?” She is able to address common misunderstandings, gauge the appropriateness of the assignment, and help particular students who are struggling. The check-in itself is an invitation to dialogue about anything that might be of difficulty and elicit suggestions on what might work better.

Both students and teachers talk about how taking a student aside to talk to them about their work “I can tell someone is doing, really putting in the effort, I pull them aside and have a talk with them and just let them know I think they are doing a really good job.” Students recognize a caring teacher as someone who knows well the students’ work, cares that students are doing their best, and acknowledges when students have done a good job. One student explains why a particular teacher’s feedback inspired him, “If you do work well he will take you
after class and tell you, why you did well. He will make you feel good about it while other
teachers will give you an ‘A’ but that doesn’t really motivate you.” As a whole, teachers view
feedback as an opportunity for students to gauge their understanding and students view feedback
as an indicator of teacher caring about them as individuals.

In terms of public praise, teachers express a few concerns. First Al acknowledges that
“the danger of public acknowledgement is that it is very natural to acknowledge the best work
and teachers know that a lot of the best work comes from the same student over and over again.
So it is important to find the best from all of them in turn.” Al tries to balance positive feedback
and still give genuine praise. Craig discusses how praise from a teacher, positive or negative
feedback, grades and other extrinsic rewards can result in students’ relying on a teacher’s praise
to the extent that when the reward is not present then there may be less incentive for students to
produce good work. He attempts to have “the student look at their own sense of accomplishment
and their own feelings about their work in terms of that being the positive motivation to do well
as opposed to doing work because they want to impress me.” He discusses Alfie Kohen’s book
Punished by Rewards as influencing his approach to providing feedback to students. He explains
that “I tell my classes I never want to hear ‘Is this good?’ because my job is not to tell them
whether or not the work that they do is good or not. My job is to allow them to develop their own
internal sense of what is quality work.” Instead he produces very detailed rubrics in terms of
what is a quality assignment. He explains that “instead of them doing a piece of work and
showing me and asking is this good, I will say ‘let’s go back the two of us go back to your
rubric, did you?’ and we will go through the steps and if they say ‘yes’ to all of them it is quality
work.” Again, students tend to see teacher feedback as indicative of teacher caring but recognize
that ultimately good work should be completed for personal benefit. One student recognizes that
“even if the teacher does not check the assignment you also know if you want to get better you are going to have to practice sometimes even when someone isn’t there to tell you, ‘Oh, you did something wrong there so you could do it on a test.’” Additionally, she mentioned that a caring teacher would want to know if students understand the material and would want to give students feedback.

Public audience.

Teachers view work that has a public audience as significantly more likely to motivate understanding for the work. Ella, the Spanish teacher, describes how students both feel accountable and enjoy presenting their memorized Spanish dialogues in front of the class. In terms of how students will look in front of their peers she explains, “Or sometimes when they have to present in class, they don’t want to have the others see that they didn’t work.” At the same time she claims students like showing off: “So when I assign dialogues that they have to present in front of the class I usually see that they work and also that they enjoy. They enjoy some attention.” When the history teacher talks about a mock trial project which takes place at the end of the year, he explains that really the grade is irrelevant because students have already been accepted to high schools. Students do not work hard just for the grade but rather they are performing in front of parents, teachers, and their peers to effectively build a persuasive argument and win a case. He explains, “They are doing this because there is peer pressure that if they don’t perform, the rest of the group may go down. They may not win. They begin to see it more like a sporting event. And they don’t check out as much.” Similarly in science, Craig explains that “If there is going to be some sort of public requirement for them to demonstrate an understanding often times that leads to a huge motivation for students to do their own work.” Students do not want to look unprepared in front of their peers, “For example, if a student is
going to have to participate in a role play the next day and it will become very obvious publicly if they have done their work, then I think there is a greater chance they will be doing their work.”
A combination of the fear of public failure, the pressure from other presenting group members, and the students’ interest to become a knowledgeable member of the class dialogue motivates students to thoughtfully complete work.

*Getting caught.*

Students and teachers also discussed school and classroom policies about monitoring for and punishing cheating. Students considered the school very strict in terms of dealing with cheaters and expressed that for many anticipated consequence did deter cheating. One student recalls a time when a friend of his was caught for cheating. He contends that “Just getting caught that is basically what most kids are scared of. Northwest is really strict. I know one kid a couple of years ago, one of my good friends, he wrote a paper for Spanish and copied it from a website and he got suspended for a couple of days.” As one student explains, “I know some kids, probably half the classmates they don’t have the guts to cheat because they would be scared.” Another agrees and comments, “If there weren’t any punishments for cheating it would probably happen more.” She did distinguish that some students may not care or think about the reprisal. However, she shared, “Someone like me who actually really cares about their grades and to whom getting a zero is devastating it would probably deter us.”

Although students are afraid of being caught, they continue to cheat if the possible benefit outweighs the risk. And teachers acknowledge that although they may suspect incidents of cheating, there are times when they cannot be absolutely positive. A Spanish teacher shares that “I haven’t told them that but actually sometimes I cannot know if they use the translator or not. Because if you use very simple sentences like, ‘He is a tall man. She wears a blue shirt.’ The
translation would be perfect and I have taught them how to say he is a tall man and she wears a blue shirt. So in these cases I cannot know."

Recognition of quality work.

Participants as a whole noted that schools needed to do more than punish cheaters in order to prevent cheating. Teachers believe that when students turn in quality work rarely students have engaged in cheating. A teacher explains that she can tell if an assignment was a good one based on the product: “When I see what they wrote, what is well written of course they have mistakes and this is authentic, when I see the process and also the presentation of the work I think that it was a good assignment. When you see that here is work behind that. They did not do it quickly.” Similarly the English teacher noticed that personal investment in turn results in increased quality of student work, “When I am reading something that the kids have written and in that instance I feel like there is an incredible degree of personal investment, which almost never results in bad work. It is very personally exciting for me.” The science teacher also mentioned that the quality of work indicates authentic work on the part of students. He shares, “Oftentimes on an assignment where I can see students truly embrace the value of it I would see a lot more depth and quality of their answers.” Students also see the evidence of original work in the assignment itself. One student says “fill in the blank where you don’t actually have to show that you yourself did it or homework assignments where you don’t have to show your work is where they are most likely to be cheating.” Intuitively it is more difficult for students to copy longer responses from their peers, but teachers also attest to the thoughtfulness of the responses themselves and the quality of the work as indicative of genuine effort on the part of students.
Focus on process of work.

Work that demonstrates high quality often entails multiple drafts. When teachers can see the evolution of the work that students have done, it is very difficult for students to cheat. In math, students have access to the answers but they must turn in their work and expectation is an explanation of the process for reaching the final answer. In Spanish, students work on writing autobiographical books of their 6th, 7th, and eighth grade year. When Ella used to write comments and notes on their work she believes that sometimes students did not even read the comments because they just wanted the grade. She shares, “I felt frustrated. After I spent the time writing them they just put the work in the trash.” So she changed the project to access improvement and the integration of her comments in subsequent drafts. Now, “When it is something that they have to continue working with like this first draft they have to read my notes and put it to use to correct [their work] so I think that they do pay attention.” Becca, the other Spanish teacher also assesses student work based on the changes they make to their drafts. She says initially, “A lot of them turn [their paper] in and haven’t made any corrections and I know they haven’t made any [corrections] because I make photocopies of the first draft and I can check. By holding students accountable to a process of revision, teachers demonstrate to students that it is the development of their work not just the final product that matters.

Conditions under which Students Consider Cheating Acceptable

Students described conditions under which they viewed cheating as acceptable although not right as either compensating for unjust treatment or avoiding more serious negative outcomes. When students feel like they are treated unfairly they may excuse cheating behavior. For example one student believed cheating may be reasonable, “If you get a lot of homework in one day. If you were not to cheat it would be four or five hours of homework so you are just not
going to do that much. So, I think it would be acceptable but not right then.” Another student shared that when a student has so much work because the teacher is just laying it on, having someone else help you get something done faster which might be considered cheating and I guess you could consider it okay in this respect. You could minorly cheat by asking someone to help you do it faster. If you are doing the problems really slow a person might help you, show you one of their problems and give you a shortcut or something, which could be seen as cheating but it is that versus not doing the assignment at all.

Another student agrees saying that when teachers assign too much work, “Then I think I don’t know it is almost required [to cheat] because they are just giving you so much homework it is not right to do that much homework and act like you don’t have other assignments to do.”

In order to avoid negative outcomes students contend that it may be acceptable to cheat. For example the same student shared, “If your mom says if you don’t get blah, blah, blah you are not going to be on the ski team anymore. I think that is a pretty good reason. I know that happened at Northwest.” Other students shared this same viewpoint. Kate said, “This is sort of an athletic school so people might think it is okay to cheat a little bit to a lot if it is going to get in the way with their sports.” She goes on to explain how teachers on the one hand say if you are having problems you can definitely skip sports but if you make a varsity team and you don’t come to any of the practices then there are consequences. Kate also shared if the student is at risk for academic probation and the possibility of expulsion then it may be understandable that the student cheated: “I see it both ways. I see it as a really bad thing as cheating or you could see it as a sort of a thing done out of desperation to prevent something worse from happening, maybe if you were told not to cheat and being punished with a work detail is probably better than being expelled.”
Students claim that students may have to cheat just a little and the behavior might be considered reasonable if it helps students understand the material rather than facilitating solely completion of the work. When I asked students, “Do you think your teachers would prefer that the assignment to be done collaboratively but everyone has the correct answers or for kids who are having difficulty to have not done the assignment?” Students responded that they did not see anything morally wrong with helping one another to understand the assignment, even if that meant giving some answers. Students believed that the consequences would be far more punitive if they did not do the work. Moreover, they believed that teachers would be mad at them for not completing the work even if they did not understand it and that they would be penalized for doing it incorrectly. Students viewed getting help from other students, tutors or parents as the only option available to them if they did not understand the homework assigned.

Both students and teachers described students’ inclination to help other students as empathetic to the lack of understanding on the part of some students. Participants describe how not all students may be able to do the work after a teacher’s explanation but they will held responsible for being able to apply the learning whether they understand it or not. The English teacher shares, “There are those who are good in the class and those who not good at the class. And everyone knows who they are. The more empathetic haves feel compulsion to even things out, to be a middle man between the instructor and the have-nots in the class.” Even if a teacher explicitly prohibits group work on an assignment students like Sarah contend, “I honestly don’t understand what is wrong with helping each other out to understand something.”

Participants acknowledge that relationships with peers affect the incidence of cheating. Teachers explain students may feel cheating is acceptable when the behavior protects their friendships. Al says, “I think there is a little bit of a social pressure too when they are sharing
information on a quiz. It is a kind of currency. You gain favor from others by sharing information and by taking information. It is a kind of expression of friendship I think in both directions.” As Tom (student) acknowledged, “Friends will cheat together in one class but when they are by themselves they won’t.” Some of the students interviewed shared that other students probably believe cheating to be acceptable if a friend asked him/her to cheat students. However most students did not condone the dishonest behavior for this reason and acknowledged that just because a friend asked for illicit help, does not exonerate students from blame if they choose to cheat.

Examples of Cheat-Proof Work

In speaking with students about specific engaging assignments, participants time after time mentioned the following examples of work as having value to them: the history mock trial project, the chemical bonding wiki project, and the English love paper. The following is a description of the three projects.

Mock Trial

In history class students become practicing attorneys and put on trial Marcus Brutus for the assassination of Julius Caesar. The project connects to the English curriculum in which students read Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. Testimony comes from lines in the play and so students must apply their prior knowledge about the characters in order to build a compelling story to convince juries that either the murder was justifiable homicide or Marcus Brutus engaged in the unlawful killing of a Roman citizen. The performance is public and parents are invited to serve as jury members. Students work together in legal teams to prepare opening and closing statements, testimony of witnesses, questions for witnesses, and cross examinations. The exercise applies American rules of evidence and criminal procedure. Prior to working on the case
students themselves serve as jurors in a Harvard Law School mock trial in order to better understand legal procedure. The final product is open ended in that there is no singularly correct line of questioning or one particular legal strategy. Although students have two roles in the trial, the team assigns the parts rather than the instructor telling students what they must do. The student attorneys could exercise a great deal of creativity in terms of writing a witness’ testimony as long as there was some tangible evidence in the text.

The history teacher, Paul, believed that the assignment is cheat-proof because “there is nothing that they can do that will constitute cheating.” Given that the public performance constituted students’ grades, “Everything they do up to that point to prepare, if they get help from anyone that is completely fine.” Paul encourages them to behave like actual attorneys and copy the ideas of others, “I don’t pretend that they can’t get information from other sources because ultimately their job is to defend or prosecute that particular person. In the real world that would be the case too. People steal closing arguments all the time.” More important is how students apply those ideas to this particular case, react to the lines of questioning of the opposing attorneys, and use each witness to add credibility to their particular version of the story.

Chemical Bonding Wiki

Craig’s Chemical Bonding Wiki project entails having students create a collaboratively built collection of web pages on electrons and chemical bonding. Each student is responsible for independently researching ionic bonding, covalent bonding, or properties of compounds. To demonstrate understanding, once they have each completed their individual portions of the wiki, students then must teach their other group members about their particular area of expertise. As a group they are expected to present their wiki to the class and then take a quiz on all areas covered in the wiki.
Craig feels that the wiki is beneficial because students “had this great teaching tool all of a sudden where they could have their other two group members look at their, the work that they had done and all three were on the computer they could make reference to, they could use the text and the images that they had assembled to help their teaching.” Furthermore, this project has high rates of completions. Since students presented their wikis to the class others knew whether or not they had completed it, or the type of work that they had done on it. Students are encouraged to complete the assignment because there is a public audience for their work.

The Love Paper

Based on the novel *My Antonia*, the love paper is a personal essay in which students describe a relationship in their lives and discuss that love for a person, place, pet or period in their life in light of what they have learned about love from the text. As Al, the English teacher explains, the paper is engaging to students because it is personally meaningful. In particular Al likes that “this kind of assignment arises from a critical study of a work of literature but the paper itself is about one’s individual experience in one’s own life but the epigraph part of it is a bridge between those two things.” In asking students to select a quote from *My Antonia* to place at the beginning of their piece, students are expected to connect the notion of love in the text to their personal lives. Al believes that it is the epigraph that makes the connection clear to students, “I think it is making something that seems completely on the surface, especially to an adolescent, irrelevant to their own lives showing them how it is in fact it can be relevant is a really, really important goal for me as a teacher of literature.” He adds that, “Because I think seeing the relevance of art, not just literature, but art in one’s life but art is in one’s life and how it is an expression of life is incredibly valuable to an individual.” He also sees the assignment as tying together many of the skills that students have worked on in the class, “We have done a good deal
of practice just focused on comma rule and this is that practice in practice.” He also sees the assignment as collapsing the definition of creative and formal writing. Students have for the most part written the five paragraph analytic essay which students consider different from creative writing. Al tries instead to “really try to push back against those ideas in both directions but especially now that they are doing creative writing they can make very good use of the devices, organization tools that we talked about today and yesterday from academic writing and apply it to what they would call creative or personal writing.” He also tries to do the reverse meaning that when they do academic writing he tries to show them how many opportunities there are for creativity within the guidelines. He says, “I want them to feel that writing is writing. Creative writing is not distinct at all in fact. It is different in the ways that you feel but it is more similar than it is different.”

In speaking with students and teachers, these three assignments were described as exemplars of work which presented a limited opportunity to cheat. Furthermore all three assignments proved meaningful to students as evidenced by high completion rates and overall quality of their work. Although students described these assignments as having value for varied reasons, all three assignments proved engaging and students recognized a future benefit in completing them. (See figures for copies of aspects of each assignment as they were presented to students)

Conclusion

In order to contextualize my findings I have presented a descriptive rendering of the context and participants for the study, followed by the participants’ definitions of cheating behavior, and their descriptions of the types of cheating behavior found at Northwest. Below is the final tree diagram for students, teachers, and across students and teachers. In terms of
discussing elements of classrooms and assignments which affect cheating behavior I have discussed the data according to thematic categories across cases. The charge of the next chapter will be to integrate these findings with the research questions, related literature and theoretical underpinnings.
Figure 16. Student tree diagrams
Figure 17. Teacher tree diagrams
Figure 18.

Teacher and student tree diagram

Sound Pedagogy

- Clear Expectations
- Classroom Set-up
- Appropriately Challenging Material
- Clear Explanations of Content
- Open-Ended Assignments
- Reasonable Amounts of Work

Student-Teacher Relationships

- Understanding of Students
- Teacher Caring
- Building of Respect
- Teacher Attitude
- Understanding the Pressure

Value Laden Work

- Future Application
- Connections
- Focus on Understanding
- Value for the Discipline

Engaging Work

- Hands-on & Interactive Activities
- Social Learning
- Technology
- Student Choice
- Interesting/ No Repetition

Holding Students Accountable

- Clear and Meaningful Feedback
- Public Audience
- Catching of Students Cheating
- Recognition of Quality Work
- Focus on Process of Work
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This chapter contains a discussion of the major findings of the study, which compare and contrast how students and teachers attribute the frequency of cheating behaviors to classroom and school work characteristics. The discussion is framed by the theories of neutralization and classroom goal orientation described in Chapter 2. Subsequently I acknowledge the limitations of this study and relate the implications for school policies and practice that can be inferred from the major findings. In the final section I point out recommendations for further research and offer concluding comments related to my initial hypotheses.

Research Question One: Definitions of cheating

In addressing the first research question of how students and teachers define cheating, the present study confirmed findings in the literature that students and teachers do not define cheating exactly the same way. Among the teachers, four of the six teachers labeled all 12 items unequivocally as cheating. The history teacher disagreed with the majority of teachers that parents giving students answers on work always constituted cheating. And the math teacher clarified that having a parent or tutor give answers on an assignment or even turning in work that was copied from another student might not be cheating in math if a student had permission to collaborate from a teacher, and if what the student wrote represented thoughts they had processed and ultimately agreed with in their own minds. All students and teachers cited that the following behaviors were categorically cheating: turning in a paper purchased on a web-site, helping someone else to cheat on a test, copying from another student during a test, and using prohibited notes during a test. Among the students, there was no consistency regarding behaviors labeled as unequivocally cheating for the remaining eight items.
In contrast to the work of Evans and Craig (1990), data revealed that these eighth grade students were equally likely to judge passive behaviors such as sharing answers with their peers as cheating. However, similar to the findings of Evans and Craig (1990), students were slightly less likely than their teachers to consider providing advance test information cheating behavior. The literature highlights that students will not have the same degree of understanding about cheating that educators may have, yet this study indicates that educators themselves may not agree about what constitutes cheating either. As Neils (1996) argues, before teachers can provide systematic instruction on the various types of cheating behavior they must first have a shared understanding of what the various types of cheating behaviors are, a justification to why they are wrong, and agreement on how to handle each type of infraction.

Since the adults at this school do not agree on what constitutes cheating on assigned work for every item of the protocol, it is reasonable to assume that students and parents as well may not necessarily have a shared understanding on the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate help on homework. The literature suggests that students may cheat because they do not understand what constitutes cheating behavior or do not understand why cheating hurts the individual and the community (Diekhoff et al., 1996; Evans & Craig, 1990; McCabe et al., 1999). However, students in this study described their teachers as repeatedly explaining what cheating looks like. Similarly during interviews teachers discussed the content of conversations that they have with students regarding cheating. And students demonstrated an understanding of how cheating harms both the offender and the learning community.

Furthermore teachers, such as Al, noted that while he could not be sure how students would respond to a question, he was confident that students would know in their hearts when they were engaging in cheating. In fact, both students and teachers implied that students know
when they are cheating. In the same way that Goldwasser and Bach (2005) contended that students know when they have done ‘good work’, participants in this study explained that students know when they are working toward understanding, challenging themselves as learners, and producing genuine work.

Students expressed that they expected teachers to cite all twelve items as cheating and students could articulate why those responses could be true. But these same students did not say objectively that these items always have to be defined as cheating. Similarly to Graham et al. (1994), in which college students identified certain cheating behaviors as more acceptable than the professors, these students in the study were accurate in predicting their teachers’ more rigid judgments. Graham et al. (1994) concluded that while students rationalize cheating behavior, they recognized that their professors would harshly condemn such behavior. For Graham et al. (1994), the professors failed to recognize that students are far more tolerant of cheating. The findings from this study hold true for middle school students at Northwest who also had less stringent definitions of cheating in comparison to their teachers and also predicted that their teachers would be more stringent about the definitions of cheating. In both the higher education and elementary settings, students do not agree with their teachers about what constitutes cheating. It is the situation that students find themselves in rather than an absolute definition of cheating that largely contributes to students’ understanding of their behavior.

Specifically, students applied their own situational ethic when presented with circumstances that they regarded as unfair. They collectively described cheating as a shortcut to completing work without understanding. Students reasoned that at some point all students may feel forced to engage in prohibited behavior and students discussed in those situations that their decision would entail weighing the possible consequence with the desired benefit. One student
distinguished breaking the rules from her own definition of cheating. She explained that, “It is
not really cheating if you are learning to understand it. It is not following instructions.”
Comparable to Eisenberg’s (2004) study on moral reasoning, students in this study may have
attained a high stage of moral development and yet do not recognize cheating in all contexts as a
moral issue. These students view cheating precisely as the students in Eisenberg’s (2004) study.
He posits that students view cheating in the same way that jaywalking violates law and order but
not a moral code. In both focus groups, all students asserted that there is no clear-cut definition
of cheating. As one student explains, “I think it is individual to each student. You can’t really say
as a general rule. It depends what the situation the student is in.” Students contextualized
cheating by proposing a situation when cheating could be perceived as acceptable.

On occasion, students deflected responsibility for the behavior by suggesting that it was
not cheating unless they had been expressly told not to do it. This is consistent with the work of
Burrus, McGoldrick, and Schuhmann (2007) in which college students deflected responsibility
by claiming it was the instructor’s fault for not expressly delineating that items such as sharing
answers on a take home exam was cheating. Even when students have been presented with
explicit definitions of cheating, Burrus et al. (2007) suggests that interpretational ambiguity
exists in students’ minds for every situation not expressly described as cheating. In addition to a
more narrow view of cheating, Northwest students further neutralized behavior they actually
deemed cheating when they considered situations unfair to them such as when teachers’
instruction did not convey total understanding or when students felt pressured by insufficient
time to complete assignments. They reasoned that under these situations certain behaviors such
as soliciting help may be justified. Most teachers, but not all, maintained that all 12 behaviors
were cheating regardless of the context. However, in a school when it is acceptable in some
classes to have parents, tutors, and other students give answers it is easier for dishonest students
to escape without consequence having work completed by parents, tutors, and other students in
other classes. Therefore, the argument becomes even stronger: teachers need to assign work that
students believe is inherently meaningful so that students feel compelled to authentically
complete it in order to experience and understand the content fully.

*Cheating at Northwest*

In speaking with teachers and students about what kind of cheating occurs in eighth grade
classrooms at Northwest school, both groups described cheating as copying homework
assignments from peers and sharing questions on quizzes with sections who have not taken the
quiz yet. This type of cheating frequently appears in the literature for both high school and
college populations (Davis et al., 1992; Genereaux & McLeod, 1995; Hollinger & Lanza-
Kaduce, 1996; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes & Armstead, 1996; Robinson et al., 2004). Teachers
cited getting inappropriate help on written work from tutors, parents, or friends and using online
translators. Although copying work from friends appears frequently in the literature, neither help
from parents or tutors appears widespread for high-school and college students. This may be due
to the fact that the material is more difficult making it harder for others to do the work for older
students. The middle school in this study, comparable to studies on high-school and college
environments responded that other common cheating behaviors included copying answers off
another student’s test and working with peers when they have been expressly told not to.
However at this school, participants believed that the small classes and the separation of students
made this more difficult.

Only one student at Northwest mentioned plagiarism as an issue and others emphasized
that teachers at this school extensively discussed plagiarism as well as explaining the severe
repercussions for this form of cheating. Teachers contend that because of past experiences with plagiarism they rarely assign any assignments that it would be possible for students to plagiarize. In contrast, much of the literature on high-school and college populations addresses plagiarism (Baird, 1980; Bennett, 2005; Brandes, 1986; Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce, 1996). One reason that may explain why students do not cite plagiarism as an issue is because of their definition of plagiarism. For example one student did not view copying sentences from the internet as plagiarism if the teacher did not expressly tell them not to. Another reason may be that teachers have adapted their assignments based on past plagiarism making it difficult for students to cheat in this way.

Participants at Northwest agreed that middle school cheating looks different than cheating committed in high school or college, although there was not consensus among all participants about what those differences specifically entailed. Some participants suggested that high school students plagiarize more or may buy papers from online websites more than middle school students. Unlike recent literature on high school and college students, beyond online translation services, these participants did not present technology as facilitating more cheating opportunities. However, the campus of Northwest does not have cell service and internet use is always adult supervised. Unlike the studies of Newstead et al. (1996), Syer and Shore (2001), and Bennett (2005), these middle school students did not report the fabrication of data or references as occurring at Northwest. Not only did students in this study cite fewer forms of cheating than found in the literature, they did not suggest a culture of cheating in their school similar to that described by the literature as pervasive in high school and college settings.

Another consideration in comparing students across school-based divisions is the degree of high stakes for students. As hypothesized students are more inclined to cheat at Northwest
when greater pressure exists to earn high grades and compete for elite high school selection. Also, at this school there are eligibility requirements based on grades to participate in sports. Students view this school policy as putting students in an untenable situation where students feel compelled to do what it takes to survive, even cheat, to maintain their cherished positions on teams.

Although Baird (1980) found that students are more apt to cheat on less important tasks, such as homework, some students did report that when high stakes are attached to the assessment the students feel greater pressure and perhaps may be more inclined to cheat. At the same time, students suggested that the consequences for cheating on a final exam or a comparable assessment would be greater and the risk of getting caught might deter them more. Participants also said that they agreed with the statement that students are more likely to cheat on work that they do not consider important. Comparable to the literature in which students cheat in diverse ways, students cheat at Northwest in many different ways and contexts. The general consensus that cheating exists but is not widespread in this middle school is consistent with studies of both high school and middle school students that cite higher rates of cheating in high schools than in middle schools (Schab, 1991; Anderman & Midgley, 2004). In contrast to the work of Evans & Craig (1990), in which students cited cheating as more prevalent than teachers recognized, at this school, students and teachers had a similar knowledge about the prevalence of cheating.

A difference between studies on high school or university settings and these middle school classrooms is that both eighth grade teachers and students felt that although cheating is wrong, most interviewed acknowledged that some cheating in middle school is normal. Al explains that, “When a kid lies about anything, one way I get them to admit is by saying, ‘Look eighth graders lie, okay. I am not accusing you of lying… what you are doing is what is normal
for your age and you have to acknowledge it to adjust it.’ Teachers described the middle school years as a transitional time in which students face increased responsibility and choices. These eighth grade teachers articulated that it is important in middle school for students to weigh decisions, take risks, make mistakes, and experience consequences in order to positively influence future decision making as adults.

Certainly in middle school the consequences for lying and cheating are a lot less than for high school or college, students or for adults. Al adds, “We have to find a way for them to come to the realizations on their own and to operate underneath in the subculture in however way they need to but to develop values that are more appropriate to being an adult.” Because of their age, middle school students need consistent explanations from teachers about what constitutes cheating, reminders as students engage with the material, and then appropriate and purposeful actions when students test whether values such as honesty actually do matter.

In conclusion, students and teachers agree upon what egregious cheating looks like and share a general definition of cheating. However, consistent with the literature, students as a group do not recognize all cheating behavior as illicit (Burris et al., 2007). Consistent with the literature, teachers are more firm than students about what constitutes cheating and students expected teachers to respond accordingly (Graham et al., 1994). However in this study, a finding not described in the literature is that teachers as a group also did not agree whether certain examples of behavior from the interview protocol are cheating in all contexts. This can be confusing for students and parents who will question why in some classrooms one behavior is considered cheating while in another classroom such a behavior is acceptable. Generally, students are more likely than teachers to justify certain behavior given the situation. In terms of the types of cheating that participants observe at Northwest, participants viewed middle school
cheating dissimilar from cheating in high school or college, although participants did not concur on the specific differences. Consistent with the literature, data suggests cheating exists in middle grades but is not as pervasive as in older populations. At Northwest, both teachers and students concur that it is normal for middle school students to occasionally make poor decisions when confronted with greater choices and increasing pressure. It is how teachers respond to these cheating behaviors that determine whether students now and later as adults will view cheating a matter of absolute or relative ethics.

*Research Question Two: Classroom-based Characteristics*

Middle school students and teachers believe the following classroom-based characteristics lessen cheating as they define it: sound pedagogy, student-teacher relationships, and student accountability. Within student-teacher relationships participants’ comments relate to mutual respect, liking the teacher, and teacher caring. Teachers and students shared how these themes featured prominently in classrooms with a low frequency of cheating.

*Sound Pedagogy*

The studies of Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999), McCabe (2001), and Evans and Craig (1990) relate that college and high school students associate poor instructional practice with cheating. This study confirmed that younger students feel much the same as researchers have documented in older populations. Students cheat with greater frequency when they believe the instructor either does not care about quality instruction or they judge the teacher as incompetent or unknowledgeable (Evans & Craig, 1990, Murdock et al., 1998; Murdock et al., 2001; Shraw et al., 2007; Szabo & Underwood, 2004). At Northwest, middle school participants associate instructional effectiveness with teachers’ clarity in communicating both content and expectations to students. Northwest students and teachers share that teachers must provide clear directions
about what help from parents and tutors is acceptable, how to cite sources, and whether students can work with their peers. For all work assigned, teachers need to have provided thorough explanations so that students can complete the work independently at home. The focus on pedagogy of high-school teachers, as studied by Szabo and Underwood (2004), include a variety of instructional factors related to cheating that are relevant to this study such as assigning large quantities of work, providing limited time, and failing to demonstrate the relevance the material has on students’ lives. Northwest students connect such effective pedagogical elements to respectful student-teacher relationships

**Student-teacher relationships: Respect.**

At Northwest, students report “liking” teachers who they describe as treating them with respect. The science teacher believes that in students’ minds, respect means that teachers think they are smart. Students explain that respectful teachers care about what their students have to say in class and demonstrate respect by listening to the ideas and opinions of students and convey openness in learning from their students. To all participants, these teachers show their respect by being sensitive to the pressures students face. They assign work that they know students can reasonably complete. Teachers are respectful of other classes and students when they coordinate with other teachers about upcoming larger tests and assignments so that students do not have multiple longer assignments and tests on the same day. By assigning a reasonable amount work, teachers are considerate of students’ busy lives outside of school which such as their other interests, activities, and sports. In return students treat teachers with respect by completing the work they assign with genuine effort. When students say they like teachers they trust these teachers would assign work that students need to complete rather than assign work
merely to generate grades. Furthermore, students want to maintain the respect of these teachers; therefore, they do not want to do anything that might disappoint them.

_Liking the teacher._

Shraw et al. (2007) found that students will not cheat when they really like the teacher and their class. As Shraw et al (2007) indicated, students pointed to teacher caring and mutual respect as pivotal in shaping students’ perception toward the work. In a study conducted by Murdock and Miller (2003), results indicated that 206 eighth-grade students’ achievement motivation was correlated to their perceptions of teacher caring. Students in this study, like that of Collier (2005), lead one to conclude that students are more invested in the instructional goals of the class if the student trusts that the teacher cares about the student and is invested in each student’s individual success.

Most evident is that students at Northwest like good teachers. Although they do not explicitly equate good instructional practice with liking a teacher, when students describe what they like about a teacher these qualities relate to effective classroom set-up, classroom management, instruction, and assessment. Students share that they like a teacher because they present engaging lessons, give fair assessments, assign reasonable amount of work, and care about their students’ understanding rather than the generation of grades. The very reasons students cite as why they like a teacher are what teachers would define as good pedagogy. When teachers effectively attend to these areas they protect the opportunity to learn for all students, which students interpret as caring practice.

_Student-teacher relationships: Teacher caring_

Prior to this study, other researchers have found that teachers whom students consider unfair, uncaring, or uninterested in building a relationship with students are more likely to have
cheating students (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Shraw et al., 2007; Stearns, 2001). One of the major findings in this study is the extent to which students referred to their relationships with their teachers as the single most determining factor in predicting the likelihood of cheating. Most important to Northwest students, was the attitude that they would not cheat in classrooms of beloved teachers because these students would not want to ever disappoint that particular adult. Furthermore, students consistently described favorite teachers as friends who knew their students well, cared about them as individuals, and motivated them to do their best. Teachers, while acknowledging the importance of respectful, caring relationships with students hesitated to seek the affection of students to increase the value students have for their class or for the work they assign.

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Student Accountability

Students and teachers believe that to reduce cheating behavior teachers must attend to holding students accountable. Although authors such as Specter Gomez (2001) have recommended that teachers must provide clear and meaningful feedback, none of the studies have presented the voices of middle school teachers and students. At Northwest, these participants describe that written feedback and student-teacher conferencing develops rapport, demonstrates to students that teacher have read and care what students think, builds a teacher’s knowledge about a student’s work, and helps students view themselves as having something important to say. Also, students and teachers believe that this kind of feedback helps students to recognize for themselves when they have produced quality work.

Johnson (2004) articulated that a characteristic of a low plagiarism project (LPP) is having a public audience. Northwest teachers also noted that beyond teacher input, students are more likely to complete assignments and care about the quality of their product when students know that there will be a public audience with whom students will share their work. Students do not want to appear unprepared or lazy in front of other students. Furthermore, they enjoy performing in front of their peers. When they are presenting with other students, they do not want to disappoint their group members. Thus having a public audience not only reduces the incidence of plagiarism, as noted by Johnson (2004), but also lessens the likelihood of other forms of cheating.

Performance versus Mastery Orientation

Goal orientation theory and neutralization theory together explain much of why students cheat. Students’ judgments about whether cheating is or is not acceptable under certain conditions are indeed, as Diekhoff et al. (1996) described, affected by classroom characteristics
rather than absolute ethics. In terms of my initial hypotheses, I expected to find students’
perception that higher incidences of cheating occur in classrooms emphasizing performance
goals rather than mastery ones. Researchers indicated that students are more likely to engage in
cheating when classroom goal structure is portrayed as performance versus mastery (Niels, 1996;
Anderman & Anderman, 2000; Murdock et al., 2004; Murdock et al. 2007) As students transition
from elementary to middle to high school increasingly teachers assign a greater weight to
performance and grades as opposed to understanding and the process of learning. (Anderman &
Midgley, 2004; Maehr, Hicks, Urdan, Roser, Anderman et al., 1995). These researchers suggest
that higher stakes attached to student performance coincide with an increase in cheating
behavior. Although older students have reached a higher stage of moral development, they will
not necessarily behave more ethically (Miller, Murdock, Anderman, & Poindexter, 2007). Rather
they will rationalize their decision to cheat in a more sophisticated way in order to meet
increasing pressure to appear knowledgeable on tests, term grades, and final exams rather than to
genuinely focus on the development of scholarly skills and understanding of central concepts.

There is negligible qualitative data on middle school student and teachers’ perception of
classroom achievement goal structures as either mastery or performance orientation and the
impact of that classroom structure on cheating. Researchers like McCabe (1999) gathered
qualitative data but have focused on high school and undergraduate students. Other researchers
(2004) studied goal orientation using hypothetical vignettes with ninth and tenth graders and
Murdock et al. (2007) then expanded this work with undergraduate students. A significant study
by Anderman and Midgley (2004) investigated the change in frequency of self-reported cheating
behaviors before and after the transition to high school. Based on the findings of previous studies
that suggest performance orientation increases the likelihood of cheating, this study inquired into the classroom goal orientation middle school students experience in a classroom as well as the meanings students and teachers ascribe to their classroom’s environment.

Northwest students are more apt to cheat and to believe that cheating is more reasonable given the pressure from parents to attain high grades and the omnipresent pressure to obtain entrance to elite high school in classrooms. When adolescents learn in environments that stress rewards for performance, some students see cheating as the only option. Despite teachers saying and even believing that understanding is more important than grades, Northwest students do not believe that the educational system rewards understanding. In students’ minds entrance to elite educational institutions, professional opportunity, and their future prosperity depends on test scores, grades, and class ranking. Northwest students and teachers as a whole perceive that they unwillingly participate in a performance oriented educational system. Students at this school are caught up in a high school admissions process based on grades, which they view as rewarding make-believe learning. Classrooms must work against this system if educators want students to focus on personal effort, take educational risks, and develop a positive orientation toward learning (Starratt, 2005).

Neutralization Theory

My second hypothesis was that I would expect to find greater incidences of neutralizing attitudes towards cheating among dishonest middle school students. An important aspect of this study was examining the moral reasoning processes that students employ when deciding to cheat. Based on results from this study on eighth graders, academic cheating is strongly related to students’ contextualized attitudes about dishonesty. Students’ reasoning about the context for the cheating behavior tempered their negative judgments of students who have been dishonest.
According to neutralization theory, individuals will use five specific strategies to deflect responsibility for deviant behavior from oneself to others: the denial of responsibility, the denial of injury, the denial of the victim, the condemnation of the condemner, and the appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Although students did not exemplify all five neutralizing attitudes, they did employ three strategies, specifically, denial of responsibility, the condemnation of the condemner, and the appeal to higher loyalties. Using these three neutralizing attitudes, students shift the blame for cheating away from the student and onto the teacher or class where the cheating occurred.

Students did exemplify behaviors corresponding to denying responsibility, condemning the condemner and appealing to a higher authority. In terms of denying that their behavior causes injury, students did not deny that the behavior causes an injury. Instead all recognized the detrimental effects of cheating in terms of their relationship with teachers. They also viewed cheating as unfair to other students in the class. Nor did students in general use the neutralizing strategy to deny that there is a victim, students did see both the cheater and all of the other students in the classroom as victims. However, students did at times deny personal responsibility. While recognizing it was their decision to cheat that in some instances they should not be blamed for the cheating. In terms of condemning the condemner, students explained particular instances when they considered teachers to blame for putting them in an unjust situation.

Denying responsibility.

As Sykes & Matza (1957) suggested in their theory on deviancy, students viewed cheating as caused by factors beyond the students’ control. In particular, Northwest students consider cheating as acceptable though not “right” when the cheating compensates for unjust treatment such as the assignment of excessive amounts of work or when hard working students...
do not have the time after school, given their other extra-curricular commitments, to complete the work assigned. Comparable to the McCabe (1999) study, students similarly diverted the blame from themselves to the situation and thus also lessened feelings of guilt and shame. Although unlike the college study on students conducted by Daniel et al. (1991), students in this middle school did not cite job or family responsibilities as forcing students to engage in cheating, Northwest students, as did the students in the Daniel et al. (1991) study, did report overly difficult material and the excessive amount of work as motivating cheating.

Condemning the condemners.

In terms of condemning the condemners, scholars claim that students are more likely to cheat when they suspect the teacher either does not care about quality instruction or they judge the teacher as incompetent or unknowledgeable (Evans & Craig, 1990, Murdock et al., 1998; Murdock et al., 2001; Shraw et al., 2007; Szabo & Underwood, 2004). Together the studies of Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999), McCabe (2001), and Evans and Craig (1990) relate that college and high school students associate poor instructional practice with cheating. According to these researchers, students infer that teachers do not respect either the material or the student, which students use as justification to complete work dishonestly. Murdock et al. (2004) found that teachers’ pedagogical competence has a stronger determining influence of students’ justifications than teacher caring. However, in the study at Northwest the opposite was true. Students emphatically believed that when students perceive that their teachers care about them, respect them, and treasure a teacher-student relationship, then the students are more likely to honor that teacher-student relationship by not cheating. Of all the factors the perception of this caring relationship is the single most determining factor for the students at Northwest regarding the
decision to cheat or not. This difference may reveal some of broad distinctions in practice between high school and middle school classrooms.

Older student populations describe that students cheat with greater frequency because of a lack of respect students have for a teacher’s content knowledge or pedagogical skills (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; McCabe, 2001; Evans & Craig, 2003). None of the Northwest middle school teachers or students discussed lack of content knowledge on the part of teachers or questioned the high quality of instruction they have received from their eighth grade teachers. Students in this study did not corroborate the work of Evans & Craig, (1990) who noted that students are more likely to cheat when large amounts of material are covered, where grading is on a curve, and where grades are based on just one or two exams. Students did not express anger toward teachers who give tests that cover material not discussed in class or covered in homework assignments as students mention in a study conducted by McCabe (2001). Students in this study did not suggest as did participants in Murdock’s (1999) study that they would cheat expressly to undermine the teacher’s authority or retaliate against teachers as described by Shraw et al. (2007). However in terms of using the neutralizing strategy of condemning the condemner, Northwest students recognized that teachers have a curriculum to cover in order to prepare them for high school, which may result in some students not fully understanding every concept. Students critically noted that there is not a lot of opportunity within the school day for students to get clarification and that even going to teachers for extra help may not foster greater understanding since teachers explain the material in the same way as before. Students at Northwest believe sometimes teachers unfairly assign excessive amounts of work as did the participants in Murdock’s (1999) study. Students become frustrated when they cannot do an assignment independently and struggle to apply knowledge which they do not have. To cope
with their anxiety about earning a low grade, their low-confidence about their academic ability, and their resentment that the teacher did not explain the material some students may feel trapped by such pressure and resort to cheating.

*Appeal to higher loyalties.*

Students do view values in competition with one another and justified their cheating behavior by framing their decision to cheat as choosing another esteemed value over honesty. In terms of the appeal to higher loyalties students and teachers suggested that students do feel that in some circumstances completing work honestly jeopardizes peer friendships. In order to maintain friendships, students feel compelled to help their peers avoid the negative consequences of a bad grade. If students viewed sharing answers with a friend as a way to maintain that friendship, students may be likely to choose the stability of the friendship over an understanding that such collaboration is cheating. Also, students feel significant parental pressure to earn high marks, which they may occasionally feel they cannot meet without cheating. For example, they recognized that parents wanted them to get into prestigious schools as possibly more important than completing work honestly. Students also viewed maintaining their eligibility to participate in sports at the school as justifying in some instances cheating behavior.

*Research Question Three: Assignment Characteristics*

In answering the research question what are characteristics of assignments that students and teachers perceive reduce the opportunity for students to cheat, participants identified many ways that teachers can protect the integrity of learning that are consistent with strategies from the literature. According to Johnson (2004), students have far less of an opportunity to cheat when assignments require creativity, incorporate students’ individual voice, and challenge students to solve problems that teachers do not claim to have the right answer. Northwest teachers often
refer to such assignments as cheat-proof assignments. These assignments involve original and open ended responses, include personal experience, and require students to demonstrate proof of understanding. This kind of assessment allows teachers to gauge what students genuinely know and are able to apply. For example, instead of writing a report on a scientific topic, Craig tells his students they are actual chemists who have been hired by a chemistry research lab to do practical scientific research. Students become accountable to supposed individuals, companies or municipalities who have contracted the school lab to do research. Students come up with results, data, and relationships between factors that will help them make various decisions. They design their own scientific experiment and convey their findings to the class. In English, instead of writing a standard five paragraph persuasive essay, students write a piece that ties the text to an aspect of their personal lives. As the English teacher notes, this kind of essay addresses all kinds of writing conventions such as punctuation and organization of writing that students have been working on all year but all of those things are framed in something that is unique. In Spanish, students create memoir books to commemorate their sixth, seventh and eighth grade years using the preterit, present, and future tenses. In this way, they are able to apply all the Spanish grammar forms that they have learned. Using mementos, drawings, and photos students write a narrative reflecting on highlights from each year. Students describe in Spanish what they experienced, the friendships they had, and the things they learned. They enjoy creating the books as a personal keepsake for the future and they take pleasure in sharing their memories with one another.

At this particular school, teachers have responded to past incidents of cheating by modifying assignments and classroom structure. For example, foreign language teachers realize that students are tempted to use online translators so they build in time for students to write in the
target language during class. By providing more class time to work on assignments students can receive appropriate help when needed from teachers and do not have access to online translators. World language teachers emphasize with students to write what they know how to say in the foreign language and encourage students to use short sentences with familiar vocabulary and tenses that they have learned how to conjugate. Secondly, Northwest teachers are very aware that students discuss the content and difficulty of tests between classes. To prevent students from sharing test questions with other sections, teachers describe how they mitigate the benefit of having class after other sections have already taken the test by generating multiple versions for each class.

Teachers and students note that teachers must attend to the process of work. To reduce incidences of cheating and collect a product which is much more difficult to copy, teachers should set small deadlines, provide opportunities for revision, and witness students as they develop their thinking into final polished pieces. For example, in preparing for the mock trial project, Paul helped students by providing instruction and guidance for each component of the case. From work with legal terms and their definitions, to building the theme of each side’s case to designating students’ roles, Paul helps students progressively work on opening and closing statements, witness questioning, cross examination and redirection in order to be prepared for the final simulation. Similarly, other Northwest teachers help students to plan, be accountable to frequent deadlines, and schedule multiple conferences students. So that students are less likely to be able to cheat on the assignments, Northwest world language, science, English, and history teachers give feedback to students on multiple drafts of their writing. When readers know what their students’ voice sounds like it is easier catch work that is written by someone else.
Teachers and students relate that for some students just knowing that teachers are vigilant and will punish dishonest students deters students from cheating. Both students and teachers noted that teachers must honor the sanctity of assessments by protecting the testing environment. The literature reveals that teachers reduce the opportunity for cheating to occur when there is vigilant proctoring (Covey, Saladin, & Killen, 1989), spaced seating arrangements (Houston, 1986), and the removal of book bags from the classroom (Cole & Kiss, 2000). In terms of reducing cheating during the test, teachers and students relate how teachers space students out and make sure that other students’ papers are out of view of students. In terms of vigilant proctoring, teachers need to make sure that students have put all of their notes and study materials away and should remain in the room for the entire test to monitor that the classroom is quiet and that students’ eyes remain on their own papers. According to the literature, when students feel like the testing environment is fair for everyone then they do not feel that they need to cheat to keep up with everyone else (Eisenberg, 2004). At Northwest, both students and teachers believe that teachers have the power and responsibility to protect the integrity of a classroom. Both teachers and students do not believe that strict surveillance or hard line punishments will deter all students, nor will it cause students to behave more honestly outside of school. However, both students and teachers believe that for some students punitive measures are effective and that students should be fearful about the consequences of getting caught cheating.

Although cheating can be limited by attending to these themes, teachers hesitated to fully assume the responsibility to create learning environments that eliminate the opportunity for students to engage in ethical decision making. These middle school teachers viewed their students as works in progress and they wanted students to practice making decisions and then experience the consequences of those choices in order to develop their sound judgment as adults.
Furthermore, participants at this school do not believe it is even possible to eliminate all cheating. During a focus group students discussed how regardless of the assignment, that if a student really wants to cheat, teachers cannot fully ever design an assignment that they can assume students have done entirely on their own. In conjunction with the efforts described in this section to reduce the opportunity for students to cheat and the previously described classroom characteristics in which teachers consistently and clearly explain the detriments of cheating, practice sound pedagogy, foster respectful student-teacher relationships, and hold students accountable for their cheating behavior, the last area that students and teachers contend would influence the incidence of cheating is to design assignments that students perceive as valuable and worth doing honestly.

Research Question Four: Assignment Characteristics and Value for the Work

Johnson (2004) proposes that certain characteristics of assignments reduce plagiarism. For example, he contends that students are inclined to plagiarize less when teachers are clear about the expectations for the work, provide student choice, focus on the works’ relevance to students’ lives, include hands on activities, incorporate technology, use authentic assessment rubrics, emphasize revision, and provide the appropriate amount of time and resources to complete the assignment. Johnson (2004) recommends work that asks students to apply higher level thinking skills, utilizes their creativity, works with a variety of information-gathering activities, incorporates narrative prose, includes collaboration, and requires student to share their results with a larger audience. Although not all of these characteristics were mentioned by participants, many of these qualities appear in the findings along with new ones. Johnson (2004) articulates ways to reduce plagiarism based on teachers’ experiences exclusively while the qualities mentioned at Northwest by both students and teachers address all types of cheating.
behavior. Furthermore, many of the qualities included have been mentioned in the context of discussing particular assignments students found meaningful.

Northwest students and teachers confirmed that students are more likely to complete work honestly that is purposeful, challenging, and interesting. Participants said that the conditions under which students value the work itself and complete the assignment without cheating participants are when students (a) can apply the learning in other situations (b) make connections between the learning and their personal lives, other skills, and other disciplines (c) work towards understanding rather than a grade and (d) value the discipline. When work is perceived as serving the sole purpose of generating a grade students do not recognize any value for the process and are less likely to care about the integrity of the manner they complete it.

In terms of work that is valuable, students and teachers noted that there are less likely to be incidents of cheating when students appreciate the future benefit of knowing the content or skill. Some students mentioned that they would not be as inclined to complete the assignment at all if the teacher could not convey to them how the work could be used in the future. For example, students describe that they are willing to complete math assignments, regardless of how boring they are if the concept is important to their future work in math in high school. Students are also likely to spend time learning grammar in world language courses when they can see how memorizing these forms does allow them to better communicate with Spanish speakers in their communities and when they travel.

To increase the meaning of student work, students want the opportunity to make connections between what they are studying to other disciplines, prior knowledge, the real world and their own lives outside of the classroom. For example, one student describes how reading and discussing *Petropolis* in English connects to history in terms of an appreciation for the
culture and history of other parts of the world. Northwest teachers noted that work possessing personal relevance can lead to greater depth of students’ answers and higher completion rates. For example, students in an English class critically studied a work of literature and wrote a paper about a comparable experience in their own lives thereby appreciating as Al describes, “the relevance of art, not just literature, but art in life and how art is an expression of life.” When the work teachers assign relates to the personal interests and experiences of students there is less incidence of cheating.

Additionally, students and teachers describe how work that emphasizes understanding rather than the grade on a product leads to honest work. As Craig explains, in a class where there is little cheating you would see very few assignments that could be done with the mere appearance of being understood. Cheating becomes irrelevant when students appreciate the importance of actually understanding the concepts that they must apply in order to complete an assignment. They want to receive feedback on the work they can do on their own in order to recognize the extent to which they have developed the skills that they believe they will need in the future.

Students are more likely to complete work honestly for disciplines that the school and parents believe is important. World language teachers noted that the school does not treat world language as a core class. Class time is shorter for world language than other core classes. Since world language teachers teach students across grade levels, they do not have a schedule which allows them to be members of the eighth grade team. This means that world language teachers neither have an advisory nor are available on a regular basis during study hall for extra help. Because these teachers are not as visible to students, these teachers believed that students may value world language less. Other teachers also shared that parents show greater alarm when their
child fails to understand a math concept, for example, than when they lack the ability to conjugate a French verb. Teachers believe parents convey to teachers that some material is not as critical for future success in life as other disciplines. Part of the challenge, Craig explains, is helping students to understand why each class is going to be of value to them down the road.

Engaging work with a lower risk of copying entails creativity and often incorporates student choice, group work, technology, and interactive activities (Johnson, 2004). At Northwest, participants cited these very same qualities as describing engaging work. Additionally they shared that work is also engaging when there are open-ended answers, public performance and technology. Participants discussed that assigning work without ‘correct answers’ and that entails creativity in generating a unique product will rarely be an assignment on which students will cheat. For example, students in a science classroom become scientists when they design and then build bridges of spaghetti to see which models can hold the most mass without breaking. Students consider it much more difficult to cheat on an assignment with longer open-ended responses, especially ones that require a students’ opinion or a personal experience.

Teachers also noted that increased student autonomy for their own learning decreases the likelihood of cheating. Al describes in English that students like to have the freedom to write about themselves and their lives. Furthermore, students believe that giving greater freedom to do work decreases cheating. Not only did students share they might rebel against stricter assignments by possibly cheating they also shared that they feel it is important for students to develop independence to feel that they can do work on their own.

Low cheating assignments (LCA) as described by Northwest participants are collaborative in nature and provide opportunities for students to share their knowledge, perform
in front of an audience, to receive feedback, and to have adults appreciate the students’ work. Such public appraisal students are less likely to cheat because they want to appear knowledgeable in front of others and because they can see that the work has another purpose to share, enlighten, entertain, or convince. The presentation becomes comparable to evaluating a person's performance in the real world. Students in a history classroom engage in ways that actual historians would behave by testing the legal procedure they are studying and putting historical figures on trial.

Low Incidence of Cheating Assignments (LCAs) like the Low Probability of Cheating Projects (LPPs) Johnson (2004) described are most often are hands-on. Students care more about the foreign languages when they are charmed by a full sensory experience including the food, art, music, film and culture of the people using the target language. According to Johnson, when students must use multiple communicative skills such as writing, interviewing, videoing, and speaking they are less likely to find the means to cheat as opposed to when projects focus on writing alone.

Furthermore, to inspire students to produce original work, Johnson (2004) as participants in this study suggest incorporating technology such as wikis, graphic programs, desktop publishers, spreadsheets, and Web page building. Students in world language express glee about going to the language lab even before they know what they will be doing there. Al allows students to read his writing on a smart board and communicates assignments to students through e-mail. And Avery describes how even a dry lesson on linear equation can be more enticing to students when they see graphs on a computer screen. “They are going to see these points moving around on the screen making the designs for some kids they are going to be thinking ‘Oh that is kind of cool.’”
Research Question Five: Teacher and Student Responsibility

In response to the final research question, there is a connection between the responsibility of a teacher to assign authentic learning assignments and the responsibility of students not to cheat. Teachers can send a powerful message that they value the sanctity of the work they assign and that they care about the authentic understanding of every student. As students discussed in a focus group it is always possible for students to find a way to cheat on an assignment. To effectively censure cheating behavior, teachers cannot oppose cheating alone. Students must embrace a learning culture based on genuine mastery of concepts rather than superficial understanding. Students must view classroom learning as critical to future application. When a teacher goes to great lengths to honor the work they assign, demonstrates respect for each individual student, protects the sanctity of learning in the classroom by proactively deterring cheating and then disciplines cheating behavior then Northwest students contend that they will uphold their responsibility to behave honestly. When teachers fail to honor the integrity of the discipline by assigning work that is busy work, that is neither central to the discipline, meaningful to students, nor has a perceived future benefit then students perceive such a lapse as lacking respect for their learning, for their time in completing the work assigned, and for the students themselves. In terms of Starratt’s (2008) Ethical Practice of Teaching, students and teachers have a joint responsibility to uphold the three legs of the triangular model. When teachers and students honor the content and their relationships with one another the teacher practices the good of the teaching profession and the student practices the good of becoming “a reasonably well educated person who is ready to take charge of her or his life, participate
responsibly in public life, take on full membership in the worlds of nature, society, and culture (p. 21).

**Limitations**

In terms of limitations to the proposed cross-case study, this case study included teachers and students from a single middle school, resulting in little generalizability. To the extent that these students and teachers represent the typical eighth grade student and their core teachers depends on the reader to recognize particular elements of relevance to another context. Second, because of the sensitivity of the topic, I did not ask about the personal cheating behaviors of the participating students but rather about their attitudes on the acceptability of cheating and the perceived likelihood of cheating of their peers in particular contexts. This study addresses students’ perception of cheating behavior rather than the actual behavior of the students interviewed. Students may have felt the need to provide socially desirable responses and may not have felt comfortable responding truthfully. Another limitation concerns selection bias in that the school was chosen based on personal access. An ideal school would be one in which the instructional leaders of the school are implementing an intervention on reducing incidences of cheating or a school in which educators already are focusing collegial dialogue on student engagement, motivation, and valuing of school work. This particular school has class size varying between 14-16 students. Given the finding that a major finding of the study is that the relationship a teacher has with students has a strong correlation with the likelihood of cheating, teachers have a greater opportunity to build caring relationships with every student when the class size is smaller. A final limitation is my outsider relationship with the participants. Each school has a unique culture requiring prolonged engagement with participants. Although I did not have prolonged engagement beyond the semester that I collect data, I have had prolonged
Suggestions for Future Research

Given the findings of this study and the existing literature, there are many more directions for additional research. In terms of the limitations of this study, future studies might address actual middle school behaviors rather than students’ perception of their peers’ behaviors in order for researchers to compare what students and teachers say about cheating behavior and how students actually behave. And given the sample size, the results of this cross-case study suggest particular qualities of assignments affect the incidence of cheating; further survey including large populations of middle school teachers and students could verify for larger samples of middle school students whether these particular qualities of work reduce the opportunity and motivation to cheat.

The findings for this particular private school sample draw attention to the possibility for other researchers to investigate this same middle school age but in different settings. Additional qualitative students could study public school populations of students as opposed to private schools. Researchers could also investigate cultural differences to understand whether middle school students from other backgrounds or countries contextualize cheating the way that students in this study did.

This study suggests that middle school students cheat differently than high school and college students, future research might investigate how students and teachers perceive those differences are connected to the differences in the kind of work assigned, the structure of schooling, instructional methods, the stakes attached to the work, and developmental differences among these ages. Studies could interview sixth and seventh grader as opposed to eighth graders.
to see if there are any differences among middle school grades. Long terms studies could track
students and trace their attitudes as they transition from elementary school to middle school or
from middle school to high school. This study confirms what researchers have suggested that
differences exist across age levels regarding cheating behavior, further work across ages might
better explain those differences.

One of the major findings indicated that these students claimed that they would not cheat
in the classes of their beloved teachers. Further research could investigate the nature of students’
relationships with teachers and the students’ propensity to cheat. Is the extent to which students’
view student-teacher relationships important tied to the developmental needs of middle school
learners? Additional qualitative studies could help to better understand how the relationship
between students and teachers in middle school classrooms differs from the influence of
instructor-student relationships in high school and college settings.

Implications

The data gathered in this study highlights an importance for dialogue among teachers to
weigh the benefits of articulating a uniform policy regarding appropriate help from peers,
parents, and tutors with the merits of individual classroom norms. Some Northwest teachers
explain that student work is meant to be a demonstration of what that student is able to do on
their own. The assignment is a snap-shot of students’ understanding and serves as a tool to help
diagnose content and skills that students still need to develop. The grade is supposed to relate
information to the student about the depth of their present understanding and assesses what
students are individually able to produce. Other Northwest teachers view homework itself as a
process to gain understanding. Although students may receive help from others, even answers,
working through the homework is a formative process. For example in math there are summative
tests that the teacher explicitly tells students is to be completed individually. However homework is not meant to be a demonstration of what students know at a particular moment but rather a learning opportunity to expand what they have been working on in class. The question is whether students will understand the teachers’ intent of a particular assignment or if they will apply their own situational ethics regardless of teachers’ instruction. For example, even though a science teacher has expressly prohibited help, the student will seek assistance because they can collaborate for math. In history, the teacher may encourage students to have their parents suggest questions for the mock trial because it is the integration of that information into a persuasive argument in front of a jury and the way students respond to other testimony that reflects the students’ ownership of the work. The English instructor, however, may not want to receive an essay that sounds like a parent had a hand in the writing at all.

In addition to deciding whether the school should have consensus about what constitutes cheating on homework, this study also contributes to an argument for promoting caring student-teacher relationships and classroom practice that effectively impresses on learners a genuine value for the work students are required to complete. Furthermore, the school needs to think about ways to help students put into an appropriate perspective pressure for high-school admittance. The school may need to consider how to involve such conversations with parents who may feel that they are paying private school costs in order to guarantee their child’s acceptance into such a school. Students at Northwest primarily consider eighth grade as preparing them for high school rather than as preparing them with the skills and knowledge they find innately interesting, personally relevant, and applicable to real life. Northwest may also need to consider the subtle influence of high-schools in terms of driving curriculum, affecting discipline rigor, or possibly even pressuring teachers to participate in grade inflation. Despite a
focus on mastering concepts rather than high marks, students say that there is nothing teachers can do to convince them that it is the understanding rather than the final grade that really matters. When schools such as Northwest thoroughly address students’ extrinsic motivation for learning then cheating may become irrelevant.

In the past, a case for the situational factors to reduce cheating has been derived from high school or college studies. The inquiry into the nature of students’ attitudes towards work in middle school holds the potential for understanding the positive and negative attitudes students bring to academic work. Based on this understanding, teachers might be better able to evaluate their instructional practice and the work they assign to avoid involuntary reinforcement of cheating behavior on the part of alienated students. The results of this study can inform conversations at this middle school and other middle schools that are grappling with issues of cheating and how students’ attitudes towards their work influence their motivation to cheat. The study has implications for the role of administrators as instructional leaders. In building a school culture that honors authentic learning, administrators must be sure to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate, reflect, and improve academic integrity in students’ work.

Conclusion

This qualitative study on middle school students adds to existing studies by specifically addressing the differences between middle school students’ and teachers’ understanding of what constitutes cheating, why students cheat, and under what conditions students will complete work honestly. In particular, the study examines specific characteristics of classrooms that reduce the opportunity for students to cheat and motivate students to complete work honestly. In addition, this study describes specific qualities of assignments that influence the incidence of cheating behavior. This study has implications for schools in terms of how middle school teachers convey
content, implement learning activities, interact with students, design assignments, set-up their classroom, and handle incidents of cheating. The findings from this study have implications for administrators in terms of how schools emphasize understanding versus grades, communicate expectations with parents, design policy on cheating, and approach shared expectations among level team members.

There are four major findings in this study. First, Northwest students and teachers do not define cheating in exactly the same way. Students are more likely than teachers to describe cheating behaviors as permissible depending on the situation. However, both students and teachers believe that students know when they are working toward understanding and when they are completing work dishonestly. Participants expect cheating to happen in middle school. As one teacher succinctly describes the teachers’ recognize that students are navigating within a subculture among their peers in which they may feel pressured to behave in certain ways. Students may make some poor choices along the way and experience negative consequences. In time they should come to certain realizations on their own in order and develop values that are more appropriate to being an adult.

Second, according to students, the single most decisive factor in a student’s decision to cheat is tied to how much students like a teacher. All students shared that they would never cheat in the class of a dearly loved teacher because they would never want to disappoint that teacher. They know that the teacher cares about their learning and not just the production of grades. These teachers know students well as individuals and students want to honor this respectful relationship. Furthermore, students added such compassionate teachers would easily catch dishonest students because that adult knows well the distinctive voice of each student’s work.
Third, the present study also confirmed that student and teacher perceptions of the classroom environment and the work assigned, as either performance or mastery focused, are tied to cheating behavior. As past research attests, students are more likely to cheat in performance-oriented learning environments with value on the product and the final grade attached to that work, as opposed to a value for the process and understanding behind the work. Students and teachers as a whole perceive that they unwillingly participate in a performance oriented educational system in which their eighth grade marks have a significant impact on their future educational and professional goals.

Lastly, students employ neutralizing attitudes to divert the responsibility of cheating from themselves to others. Students are likely to view their behaviors as acceptable, but not right using many of the neutralization strategies of denying responsibility, denying that their behavior causes an injury, denying that there is a victim, condemning the condemner, and appealing to higher authorities (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Students use these strategies to temper the guilt stemming from their dishonest behavior. When teachers fail to behave in ways that are consistent with students’ expectations, such as by assigning too much work for students or creating assignments that feel like busy work, many students accept and assume their peers are engaging in dishonest behavior. Furthermore, students are sympathetic to cheating when students cheat to avoid more serious negative outcomes like losing student privileges, jeopardizing entrance to elite high-schools or threatening their sports’ eligibility. Teachers cited students’ value for peer relationships as more important for students than doing work with integrity.

Habits of mind, including cheating, develop during the formative middle school years. Taken together, these four findings indicate that educators must proactively reduce cheating in their classrooms through a combination of measures. Teachers must explicitly talk about what
constitutes cheating and why it is detrimental to students’ learning. Teachers must provide clear
directions so students understand the purpose and the expectations of each assignment. Teachers
must emphasize understanding rather than merely performance outcomes. Students are more
likely to consider the work meaningful if they perceive that they will need the understanding
behind the work in the future.

Teachers have a responsibility to students to design learning experiences that have
value. Students in turn must recognize that they have a responsibility to themselves, teachers,
and the learning community to honor the integrity of learning. Teachers must allow middle
school students the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from wise and poor decisions. When
students fail to live up to teachers’ expectations, teachers must consistently and appropriately
respond with consequences. As long as students believe that schools just care about grades,
teachers will struggle to convince students that cheating is wrong. When we help make
classrooms more engaging and less pressured, then students will work toward understanding.
Students who build honest habits in middle school are more likely to pursue honest choices in
high school, college, and in their professional and personal adult lives. To have a more thorough
understanding of the conditions in which students resort to cheating means that as educators we
can better develop our classrooms, our assignments, and our relationships with students to foster
conditions under which students will complete honest work.
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Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Teachers:

The following are the interview questions that will be used for teachers. The interview protocol in subsequent interviews will be shaped by the responses from teachers, which may raise new themes, patterns, or points of inquiry.

1) Do you think that students at this school cheat? How do you know? What does cheating look like in middle school? How frequently do you think students are cheating?

2) Why do you think some students cheat and others do not?

3) How do you treat student cheating? Give an example.

4) Do you think that students act differently regarding academic honesty depending on if they like the subject matter? Depending on the teacher? Depending on the social context in the class? Why is this case?

5) What are characteristics of a class with little cheating?

6) How might a teacher’s relationship with a student affect whether a student will cheat?

7) How do you respond when a student says, “Why do we have to learn this?”

8) How might the types of assignments that a teacher requires of students impact the incidence of cheating?

9) Does a student’s respect for a teacher influence his decision whether to cheat or not? How?

10) What constitutes a good assignment?

11) When do you know what you have assigned is a good assignment?

12) What are some of the ways you motivate students to really get invested in a learning assignment?
13) Describe an example of work that you assigned to students that you consider to be an authentic and engaging learning assignment. What are the characteristics of this assignment that lead you to believe it is important for students to do it?

14) What kind of assignments do students enjoy most?

15) Do students get more enthusiastic over some units of your curriculum than others? Why? Does your enthusiasm affect the learners’ willingness to engage in the unit?

16) Think about a particular assessment. What kind of feedback do you give students? How is it meaningful for students?

17) Besides grades, how do you reward good student work?

18) Do you believe that the kind of work that you assign can affect student’s interest or motivation to complete work honestly? How?

19) What is the role of the advisory program in terms of addressing issues of academic honesty? Do you see the influence of the advisory program as reducing incidents of cheating?
Appendix B- Focus Group Protocol for Students Scenarios for the Student Focus Group:

You have an English paper due. However, you have not had time to complete it because your other teachers gave you so much work to do, too much work. You get a time extension by telling your teacher that you have been ill. Your best friend stayed up all night working on the paper and tells you before he turns it in that if he had more time that he could have done a better job. What do you say? How do you feel that you have extra time and your friend does not?

Your teacher has forbidden group work on particularly difficult math homework assignment. You think the teacher has done a poor job of explaining the concepts. You work on the assignment with someone else from the class and a friend from the class asks you if you worked with someone else. What do you say?

You use your older brother’s old materials including notes and quizzes while studying for a Science test. When you take the test, most of the questions are identical to the ones you studied. You repeat all of the answers from your brother’s old assignments verbatim. Do you tell your teacher? Do you use your brother’s notes in the future?

A teacher catches a friend of plagiarizing a few sentences from one internet site and a few sentences from another site. Your friend received a zero on the essay and has been working very hard and honestly since then in the class. She is filling out an application for an elite private high school that she has wanted to attend for as long as you have known her. The application asks if the student has ever been disciplined for academic misconduct. If she writes that she was caught cheating, it is unlikely that she will be accepted. What do you advise her to write?
The researcher anticipates that the focus group discussion may be a rich dialogue without the use of these particular questions or that the comment of students may raise other important questions.

Questions for the student focus group:

1) Do you think students cheat at this school? How do you know?
2) What does cheating look like?
3) Is there ever a good reason to cheat? What might that be?
4) Do you think that students act differently regarding cheating depending on the class? What are characteristics of a classroom with little cheating?
5) How would you characterize a class where there was a lot of cheating going on?
6) Why do you think students cheat?
7) What kinds of assignments are students not able to cheat on? Why?
8) What kinds of assignments do you think students do cheat on? How?
Appendix C
Interview Protocol for Students Individually

1) What is your favorite subject? Why?
2) What kind of learning do you think is important for you to experience at school?
3) Can you describe a teacher who motivated you to work hard?
4) Describe an assignment that you thought was interesting and meaningful.
5) When students ask teachers, “Why does this assignment matter? Why do we have to learn this?” how do they answer?
6) Which of the following behaviors do you think are cheating? (Show Appendix IIC)
7) Do you think students have varying attitudes towards cheating? Do you think they have different attitudes from teachers?
8) What assignments do you think are more likely for students to cheat on?
9) Can you give me some reasons why you might refuse to cheat?
10) Can you give me some arguments you would use to convince a friend not to cheat?
11) Can you give me reasons a cheater might use to justify cheating on homework, project, a paper, or an exam?
12) Do you think that the relationship a student has with a teacher affects a student’s decision to cheat? What qualities of a teacher would reduce the incidence of cheating in a classroom?
13) What is the punishment for cheating at your school? Do you think that punishments deter cheating?
Appendix D  
Survey for Students

Do you think this behavior is cheating?  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

1) Letting another student copy your homework.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

2) Turning in work that you copied from another student.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

3) Copying a few sentences from a site on the Internet without footnoting them in a paper or assignment you submitted.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

4) Copying a few sentences from a book, magazine, etc... without footnoting them in a paper or assignment.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

5) Copying almost word for word from a book, magazine, etc... without footnoting them in a paper or assignment.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

6) Turning in a paper that was obtained from a web-site that Sells or offers student papers.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

7) Having a parent give answers on an assignment.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

8) Having a tutor give answers on an assignment.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

9) Helping someone else cheat on a test.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

10) Copying from another student during a test or exam.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

11) Using prohibited notes during a test.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

12) Discussing what questions are on the test with someone who has not taken the test yet.  
YES  NO  NOT SURE

Circle the items that you believed should receive disciplinary action.
Appendix E

Parent Consent Form from Boston College Lynch School of Education

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This spring, a researcher and PhD student from Boston College, Nicole Zito, is making visits to your student’s classroom to complete work for her doctoral dissertation. She would like to talk to students to learn more about what they think about the work they are doing and academic honesty. The study uses hypothetical situations and does not seek personal histories about academic integrity.

Information about Research Project:

- The Boston College researcher is trying to understand the attitudes of teachers and students in terms of the value they attribute to their school work.

- If you consent, your student may be invited to discuss class work in a one hour focus group with 4-5 other students during an advisory period. She would then like to conduct one hour follow-up interview. During the focus group and interviews Nicole Zito would like to record the conversation with your student. Your student will be interviewed during the school day at a time with the least possible intrusion on his/her learning with a total of 2 hours of contact with the researcher.

- During the audiotape sessions, your student will only be identified by first name. As recordings are put into writing, all names, including your child’s first name and the name of his/her school and teacher will be changed.

- All content of the conversation between the interviewer and your student will be kept confidential.

- There is no potential for any risk to your student.

- You may change your mind about your student participating in this study and you may withdraw your consent at any time.

Questions:

Please contact the principal investigator with any questions about the study: Nicole Zito at (860)942-3404. You may also contact Dr. Robert Starratt at the Lynch School of Education at (617) 552 -1961. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, please call the Office for Human Research Participant Protection at 617-552-4778.
Certification

I have read and I believe I understand this document. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily. I have been given a copy of this document for my personal records.

I am consenting to allow my student to participate in this study.
(To participate in one focus group and one individual interview this spring. Audio recording is OK.)

I am not consenting to allow my student to participate in this study.

Name of Student: ____________________________________________

Name of Parent or Guardian: _______________________________________

Signature of Parent or Guardian: ________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________________________________
Boston College Researcher and Ph.D. student Nicole Zito would like to gather data on perspectives on teaching and learning in classrooms at [Name of School]. In order to do this, Nicole would like your consent to collect data for a Qualitative Case Study on seventh grade teachers and students. You are also welcome to ask questions at any time.

The main focus of the data Nicole Zito would like to collect is on seventh grade teachers and students and attitudes towards the work that students do in school and its connection to completing that work honestly. Nicole would like to conduct two student focus groups with 4-6 students with one set of follow-up individual interviews with those same 10-12 students. In order to select students for the focus group and interview participation, the seventh grade team will suggest one advisory grouping for study.

As part of the regular Qualitative Case Study research design, she would also like to conduct one set of individual interviews with the following teachers: [teachers’ names] Each of these interviews is focused on classroom characteristics, specifically student work and its relationship to the commission of cheating acts. Also, as part of the regular QCS research design, [teachers’ names] will be observed twice. She will also collect artifacts from teachers including two assignments and any accompanying rubrics.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Boston College. The investigator will protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant and the school. For instance, in any publication that might result from this research, all teacher participants and students will be given a pseudonym. To set a context for what is written about these first year teachers and their students, she will include only the grade level they teach, general information about the school, and the participant’s position (students and teacher), race, and gender. The schools involved will also be assigned pseudonyms and will only be identified in a cursory way (e.g. a private elementary/middle school in the Boston area that enrolls approximately 500 students.)

This project has the potential to provide some important insights into what students and teachers perceive are the connections between the value that students have for academic work and the incidence of cheating. Your consent through your signature on the bottom of this page will provide Nicole with permission to complete two observations in each seventh grade teachers’ classroom, interview one team of seventh grade middle school teachers, collect samples of student assignments speak with 10-12 middle school students through a focus group and conduct one set of follow-up individual interviews. Please contact me with any questions about the study: Nicole Zito (860) 942-3404. You may also contact Dr. Robert Starratt at the Lynch School of Education at (617) 552 -1961. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, please call the Office for Human Research Participant Protection at 617-552-4778.

_______________________________________________________
Signature                                      Title at [Name of School]
Informed Consent Form for Work on Qualitative Case Studies Research
Student Assent

This spring, a researcher and PhD student from Boston College, Nicole Zito, is making regular visits to your classrooms. In addition to seeing what is going on in your classroom, she would like to talk to you to learn more about what you think about teaching and learning in your class.

Information about Research Project:

- The focus of the study is to understand the types of school assignments that you believe are valuable. An example of a question is: When a student asks a teacher, “Why do we have to learn this?” how do they answer?
- If you consent, you will be invited to discuss class work in one focus group with 4-5 other students for approximately one hour and one individual interview that will last approximately one hour. During the focus groups and interviews Nicole Zito would like to record the conversation with you.
- During the audiotape sessions, you will only be identified by first name. As recordings are put into writing, all names, including your first name and the name of your school and teacher will be changed.
- There is no potential for any risk to you.
- You may change your mind about participating in this study and you may withdraw your consent at any time.

Questions:
Please contact me with any questions about the study: Nicole Zito (860) 942-3404. You may also contact Dr. Robert Starratt at the Lynch School of Education at (617) 552-1961. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, please call the Office for Human Research Participant Protection at 617-552-4778.

Certification

I have read and I believe I understand this document. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered.

[ ] I am consenting to participate in this study.
  (To participate in one focus group and one individual interview during the spring semester. Audio recording is OK.)

[ ] I am not consenting to participate in this study.

Name of Student: _________________________________________________________
Informed Consent Form for Work on Qualitative Case Studies Research
Teacher Consent

This year, a researcher and PhD student from Boston College, Nicole Zito, is making two visits to your classroom. In addition to seeing what is going on in your classroom, she would like to talk to you to learn more about what you think about the connection between cheating and characteristics of school work you are assigned. The study uses hypothetical situations and does not seek personal information from you such as whether you have cheated or not.

Information about Research Project:

- She is interested in understanding the characteristics of assignments that motivate students to value the work itself and complete the assignment honestly. An example of a question is: What are the characteristics of an assignment that lead you to believe it is important for students to do it?
- If you consent, you will be invited to discuss class work for one interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. I would also like to be able to observe two of your classes.
- During the audiotape sessions, you will only be identified by first name. As recordings are put into writing, all names, including your first name and the name of your school.
- There is no potential for any risk to you.
- You may change your mind about participating in this study and you may withdraw your consent at any time.

Questions:

Please contact me with any questions about the study: Nicole Zito (860) 942-3404. You may also contact Dr. Robert Starratt at the Lynch School of Education at (617) 552-1961. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, please call the Office for Human Research Participant Protection at 617-552-4778.

Certification

I have read and I believe I understand this document. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily. I have been given a copy of this document for my personal records.

_______ I am consenting to participate in this study.

(I will participate in one interview and allow the researcher to observe two classes. Audio recording is OK.)

_______ I am not consenting to participate in this study.

Name of Teacher: ____________________________________________
Appendix F

Tree Diagrams, Codes and Exemplar Quotations

Figure 16. Student tree diagrams.
Relationship with Teachers

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Popularity*, Students claim they are less likely to cheat in classes where they like the teacher.

**Supporting Statements**
Mike: If you like a teacher then you don’t really want to cheat because that will make you feel bad, like you let them down.

Sarah: If they liked the teacher, like my English teacher, you want to do your best for them you want to try your hardest again there would be no reason to cheat. Why would you want to cheat?

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Teacher Attitude*, Students will behave honestly depending on the outlook of the teacher in class.

**Supporting Statements**
Kate: I guess if the teacher is really strict, it is almost like stricter teachers entail more cheating because if they are more strict about you getting your assignments in then you are going to feel like you have got to do it at any cost, no matter how bad it is you have to get it in or else get punished for not having the assignment.

Sarah: If the teacher isn’t portraying it as an interesting subject to them that you aren’t going to put your heart into. If the teacher thinks it is not going to be interesting than the students aren’t going to think it is going to be interesting.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Teacher Caring*, Students explain that when a teacher shows that he or she cares about the student as an individual the student is more likely to treat that teacher and the work assigned with integrity.

**Supporting Statements**
Sarah: My 7th grade English teacher probably motivated me to work the hardest, like he was a very, he was also my field hockey coach and he was really inspiring. He was just so upbeat and cheerful. He didn’t push you to do things by making consequences or things like that. He pushed
you hard to do things because he knew you could. And he expected it of you. He expected you to work your hardest. Because he was a friend, you wanted to do your best for him.

Mike: A teacher I had, he knew you in a way that was kind of outside of school like as a friend. He could be a good friend. And in school he wasn’t really strict he was nice, not relaxed but kind of relaxed.

**Significant Code, Meaning**  *Building Respect*, Students are more inclined to be dishonest with teachers who do not respect them and with whom they do not respect in turn.

**Supporting Statements**

John: Just because everyone respects him in every single conversation someone will mention it. He is kind of cool to kids. He gives you a lot of, lets you do stuff that most teachers wouldn’t do, not bad stuff. He has respect for you which a lot of teachers don’t.

Lynn: If you have a really good relationship you are not going to want to cheat and ruin that relationship, lose the trust. If they respect the teacher a lot they are not going to want to lose the teacher’s respect by cheating.

**Significant Code, Meaning**  *Understanding Students*, Students express that they are more motivated to work hard and honestly for teachers who empathize with them.

**Supporting Statements**

Tania: Teachers are different. There are some who understand and some who don’t understand that they are not the only teacher and all the other, even if they don’t give a lot of homework it still piles up. A teacher who understands that who is a little bit reasonable, who doesn’t go easy on us but who is reasonable would have less cheaters.

Courtney: Some nights I am staying up until eleven o’clock and then literally getting up at three or four o’clock in the morning to be able to finish the assignments in time for school. Then I am just so dead all day because I haven’t had time to sleep, to do anything else. I go to bed and then five hours later I am getting up to finish it. If you are losing sleep over it, we all need to sleep. If you are losing sleep over it you could communicate with your teacher “Hey, I really haven’t
been getting enough sleep because you have been laying our assignments so much. It is sort of hard to say that to a teacher. Some of the teachers are almost in their own world just because they are so old we can’t really go up to them and tell them what they are doing is bad.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Understanding the pressure:* Students may cheat more out of great anxiety to meet overwhelming demands.

**Supporting Statements:**
John: I know a couple kids for exams if they didn’t get an A- or higher, then there could be consequences, off the sports teams.

Sarah: It depends what the situation the student is in. Like some students their parents might really be on them about grades if they get good grades their parents will be nice to them and if they don’t you don’t know what is going to happen. So kids like that I am guessing they will probably use the quiz, use their older sibling’s stuff, because they want to make their parents happy.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Approachable:* Students are more likely to be honest with a teacher who they are comfortable asking questions.

**Supporting Statements:**
Kate: It might have happened more in 6th grade and 5th grade because the assignments were just starting to pile on. From 4th grade down it was like “Oh, if you don’t understand this you don’t have to do it, you can ask me about it.” Then it was like, “You have to do this assignment and you have to get it on time and if you don’t do it you are going to have to deal with it somehow and just get it in on time. It was sort of like you could go to help but you have to sort of work harder to get help and then you sort of learn that there is nothing that, like no matter how many times that you ask there is nothing going to stop a teacher from teaching you something. So why even ask why are we learning this?

Tom: There is also the problem if a teacher has shown themselves to not really answer questions, they just repeat what they said before, the kids will be less likely to show that they don’t understand it.
**Value laden work**

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Personally Relevant* Students are more likely to complete work on their own initiative when they have to include a part of themselves in the product.

**Supporting Statements:**
Courtney: I think we just had a paper that we had to do in English and it was kind of meaningful to me. The topic of the paper was we had to write about a love relationship we had in our life. And I think that was meaningful for me because it wasn’t your normal thesis, three bodied paragraph, conclusion, kind of paper. You know, when you get into high school and college and stuff they might give you more stuff like that to do and I think it was meaningful for me to see that not all papers have the same structure.

Mike: We made models of the human body and that is learning about you, not really but your body. You learned about yourself and that could be different. Some people could say hey, that is what is going on inside of me. And others might not want to believe it. We learned some nasty stuff about what happens in your body.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Connections to other areas of knowledge* Students are more likely to consider the work meaningful if the work seems related to other disciplines, skills, and knowledge.

**Supporting Statements:**
Sarah: One thing that was from last year that my English teacher that he did, one thing was really interesting I thought he did was us reading the book *Persepolis*. And I thought it was really interesting and meaningful to learn about what was going on in the world. It also is connecting to history class and it is just something that you need to know about and that is interesting to learn about how other people are so different from your culture.

Kate: We did sort of a lot but they all required us to take life examples and to delve into them and find meaning in them. If you have a favorite place we had to describe it and explain why it was so important.
**Significant Code, Meaning** *Future Application.* Students are more likely to consider the work meaningful if they perceive that they will need the understanding behind the work in the future.

**Supporting Statements:**
Courtney: Well, if it is something maybe that we have already maybe gone over in class and maybe we have done a couple of assignments on it. I probably wouldn’t want to cheat on it just to make sure I understand it because if we have done that much it is probably going to be on some form of evaluation like a quiz or test or something and I would want to make sure that I understand it for that.

John: Stuff that I will use in real life because I know there are couple of classes where I would never use the stuff in real life. Real life situations, that I will get out of school, all of that stuff that will definitely be useful.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Nature of the Discipline* Students have varying attitudes towards the kind of work that can be assigned based on the class and its relationship to cheating behavior.

**Supporting Statements:**
Kate: I think you are more likely to cheat and math and French because if you are in a fix it is so easy to cheat in those because you can look at the answers. You can sort of skip around and be really subtle about that.

Tom: If you are reading a book there is not really any way you can cheat because you are just reading. There is no assignment. It is either you read or you don’t. There is no way around that.

**Engaging work**

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Repetition* Students describe work that is boring as work that entails doing the same thing over and over again. When work is to be gotten through as quickly as possible students believe there is a greater likelihood for cheating.
Supporting Statements:
Kate: I think definitely math has, because you just basically there are generally fifty problems and you do the same process over and over and over again. It gets so boring after six problems that you have gotten right and you obviously understand the information that you would be able to do whatever they throw at you and it is like why do I have to do all fifty problems if I know that I understand it? And I know that I can do the most difficult problems on this assignment.

Tom: They give us 100 problems for tonight. Two plus two is four, two plus three is five, three plus three is six then you are just beating your head against the table by the end of it.

Significant Code, Meaning No Single Answer Students describe how it is more difficult to cheat on work that has shorter, one word answers.

Supporting Statements:
Mike: If it is math you will copying down the same things because there is only one right answer. If it is your opinion you wouldn’t cheat on that. If it is a long question, a couple of inches to answer it will be a lot harder to cheat on it and easier to get caught.

John: The shorter it is, if you have to fill in one word almost everyone will cheat except one person.

Significant Code, Meaning Social Learning Students believe that working together can help build understanding but can also promote cheating.

Supporting Statements:
Kate: I think if you are put into the position where you don’t understand the assignment at all. And I know this comes up a lot in math because it is sort of difficult. The teacher might have told you not to work together but if you really don’t understand it how are you expected to complete the assignment?

Sarah: Because sometimes I feel like teachers don’t understand that sometimes when you don’t understand an assignment you sometimes need help from other people and sometimes that can require getting or giving an answer or two.
**Significant Code, Meaning** Independence Students believe that giving students freedom to do work is going to decrease cheating and that it is important skill for students to feel that they can do the work on their own.

**Supporting Statements:**
Mike: Being like to do something on your own, a teacher showing you and then you do it. You don’t have to do it perfectly so it is not amazing but you did it by yourself and it is pretty good. You learn how the skill how to do it. I think that is pretty important.

Courntey: Freedom because if you are bearing down to hard on the kids they are going to feel reason to rebel because if things are really really, really strict then kids aren’t first they aren’t going to like that and second kind of feel like I have to break free from this and do something. That might give them reason to cheat.

**Student accountability**

**Significant Code, Meaning** Classroom set-up Students claim that teachers can affect the incidence of cheating by changing the arrangement of the classroom.

**Supporting Statements:**
John: To reduce cheating physically would be to put the chairs like really far apart.
You can’t get past that.

Tom: They can’t cheat and if you set up the class so that the teacher see all the kids all the time and doesn’t leave in the middle of the test otherwise you are asking kids to cheat if it is a difficult test or something. If they organize it so all the kids are on side of the room and they can see the kids. They can see the cheating. Then the kids won’t try to cheat because there is a good chance of their getting caught.

**Significant Code, Meaning** Getting Caught Students are less likely to cheat out of fear of getting caught.
Supporting Statements:
Courtney: Probably if there weren’t any punishments for cheating it would probably happen more. It depends on the student if you are one of those people who doesn’t really care then it probably won’t really deter you. Someone like me who actually really care about grades and to whom getting a zero is devastating it would probably deter us.

Sarah: Whereas you if you cheat you don’t learn the lesson and you just keep doing that and it is going to catch up with you. You are going to get in trouble. If you get caught it is not going to be okay.

Significant Code, Meaning Grades Because the grade that students receive on work is so important to their future, students believe that their peers may cheat.

Supporting Statements:
Courtney: Somebody might say because I need a good grade, especially when you are in eighth grade and you are looking to get into high schools. A lot of kids think it is just about the grades or mainly about the grades and so they think I need a good grade so if it comes to cheating some kids might.

Kate: I know if I did this assignment without cheating then I am going to get a bad grade and then I am not going to get into a good school then you could see it as affecting the college you get into and your job and your success later in life.

Significant Code, Meaning Clear Directions and Explanations When teachers do not give clear directions and explain their expectations clearly for work students are likely to cheat.
Supporting Statements:
Courtney: I mean if you have really bad instructions there are going to be a lot of grey ideas where you are not sure if what you are doing is cheating or not. And then if you give good instructions you will probably know it is bad.
**Significant Code, Meaning** Competing Values Students cheat because there are two equally competing values. For example, students know that honesty is really important but they have also been taught that grades really matter. Therefore they feel like they have to choose one value over the other.

**Supporting Statements:**
Kate: This is sort of an athletic school so people might think it is okay to cheat a little bit to a lot if it is going to get in the way with their sports. The teachers try to tell us that is not true if you are having problems you can definitely skip sports. If you make a varsity team and you don’t come to any of the practices because you don’t understand the material and stuff that like, it sort of, you are put on the team because you are good but it doesn’t really help you if you don’t come to practice with the rest of the people. So, I don’t know.

Kate: I see it as a really bad thing as cheating or you could see it as a sort of a thing done out of desperation to prevent something worse from happening, maybe if you were told not to cheat and being punished with a work detail is probably better than being expelled.
Figure 17. Teacher tree diagram

Structuring Sound Pedagogy

- Clear Directions/Expectations
- Appropriately Challenging Work
- Unique Work
- Cheat-Proof Assignments
- Focus on Understanding
- Reasonable Amounts of Work

Value Laden Work

- Personally Relevant
- Knowledge Worth Knowing
- Connections to Other Areas of Knowledge
- Future Application
- Value for the Discipline

Holding Students Accountable

- Public Audience
- Getting Caught
- Feedback and Drafts
- Recognizing Quality
- Grading

Relationships with Students

- Building respect
- Teacher Caring
- Peer Relationships
- Understanding the Pressure

Engaging work

- Student Choice
- Social Learning
- Technology
- Hands-on Interactive Activities
Structuring Sound Pedagogy

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Clear Expectations* When teachers do not give clear directions and explain their expectations clearly for work students are likely to cheat.

**Supporting Statements:**

Ella: If the teacher doesn’t tell anything about cheating and seems not to care, yes the students will not care. They need to know that the teacher is asking them not to cheat, to be honest, etc…

Craig: So we have had some frank discussions about how sometimes learning from the internet or creating assignments from internet resources can really lend themselves to just sort of plagiaristic, if I can use that word, types of behaviors. And so by kind of cracking it open a little bit more, I feel like students embraced the spirit of it a little more than they might have if they understood that the goal of this project at the end was to have understand it not just to produce a good wiki, a good looking wiki but that there was actually some things they had to understand at the end.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Appropriately Challenging Work* Teachers recognize that if work is overly difficult or too easy there is a greater possibility for cheating.

**Supporting Statements:**

Ella: We started in class, but then I saw that the book was too difficult. So I decided to stop for some of them and I gave them another option. If this book is too hard for you, you can choose. You can have this other one and start from the beginning.

Avery: I think it needs to be thoughtful and supportive of what are they, where are they, what are they ready to do. And I guess this is a scaffolding approach with something that is difficult. To say this is challenging. I recognize this is challenging. I want you to know that is challenging. It is going to feel great when you learn this and giving them manageable steps for getting through that and support so they get to a point where they are able to show what are they able to do independently and feel like okay that is a worthwhile accomplishment even if I give you a problem set with five problems and you get one of them that you get all the way through all these, there literally can be thirty forty steps in a single problem and you get one tiny step wrong, the answer is wrong but how much do really understand there. So it is to try to help them to
understand what they are accomplishing and recognize that since we started this you have made a lot of progress.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Unique Work* Teachers believe that when they assign work in with original results that there is less of an opportunity for cheating.

**Supporting Statements:**
Craig: I think students like to do anything that is, in which the work that they produce is unique. Everybody, not just students, people become cynical when they are being asked to do something and there are a number of other people being asked to do the exact same thing.

AI: Well, first of all a class that has assessments that are relatively cheat proof. Any individual…the results of an assessment are as individual as individuals are. One thing I really like about writing, certainly in class writing is if you don’t have the question in advance and the question requires you to answer in a way that you need to pull yourself in then it is very hard for you to substitute anything else for what you know or what you have inside of you.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Cheat-proof Assignments* Teachers believe that they can assign some work with no possibility for cheating.

**Supporting Statements:**
Paul: By the way, in this project, it is impossible to cheat. You cannot cheat because there is nothing that they can do that will constitute cheating. They have an assessment. The assessment is the trial is the grade. So how they perform in the trial is what they are going to basically get graded on. Everything they do up to that point to prepare, if they get help from anyone that is completely fine. If they go on the internet and get really good ideas about how to conduct a cross examination or actually say, “wow this is a really good idea about a closing argument” and just take it verbatim and copy it down it is not cheating. It is not plagiarism. I don’t pretend that they can’t get information from other sources because ultimately their job is to defend or prosecute that particular person. In the real world that would be the case too. People steal closing arguments all the time. It is how you cooperate. It is a collaborative effort. You can use other people’s work. It is impossible to cheat. If you ask someone, “Well what questions should I ask?” that is great, that is fine you are talking back and forth. So you can’t cheat because the only
way you could not do well is not do the work at all. And if you are getting help from other places it is not cheating.

Al: For the assignment they are doing now they are writing about their own lives. There are all kinds of common issues that we are getting at regarding punctuation and organization of writing and these are things we are working on all year but all of those things are framed in something that is so unique. It is really not possible to cheat.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Focus on process* When students have to show all of the steps to their work there is less of a possibility for cheating.

**Supporting Statements:**
Becca: They do a first draft for each grade then they do a second draft of all the grades, then it will go in the book. So that when they have a finished product it is something that they feel like is pretty perfect, without mistakes. There still are. The time that I see I wouldn’t call it cheating, but a time when they think they are going to get away with something is the second draft of the three grades. When they, a lot of them turn it in and haven’t made any corrections and I know they haven’t made any I make photocopies of the first draft and I can check. And they don’t know that I do that.

Ella: Because of the product. When I see what they wrote, what is well written of course they have mistakes and this is authentic, when I see the process and also the presentation of the work I think that was a good assignment. When you see that here is work behind that. It is not that they did not do it quickly.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Focus on understanding* When teachers emphasize understanding rather than the product there is less of a inclination for cheating.

**Supporting Statements:**
Avery: Well, I think part of it is that the goal ideally that the goal of the teacher in the class is on learning and not on grades. This is an environment where there is a lot of pressure on kids about grades. I wish it weren’t like that and my focus is very much on the wording, and I think communicating that has some kind of impact. I don’t know how big of an impact. But if they
were getting the message that a grade of B is an all important thing then that would lend itself to a sense of then I just have to do what it takes to get the grade even if it is a little off color.

Craig: It really became apparent that it was possible for students to do those assignments yet not have any understanding, or not have a deep understanding of it. So I started to think in terms like that, I started to think in terms of that the work I want students to do I want to truly be proof of understanding and that is a word that I will use often in my classes. The things that they do for me are not being done to generate grades or are not being done to just have an assignment to get your teachers and parents off your back. The work that you are doing is to address those three goals that I talked about. But also any written work is only going to be proof of understanding and it will be used as a diagnostic tool for your degree of understanding with the one goal which is to give students feedback on their idea development or their academic skills to help them become better students. And so that kind of hopefully that permeates throughout my class or other classes too in which a class in which there is little cheating you would see very few assignments that could be done with the appearance of being understood but no understanding.

**Significant Code, Meaning** Reasonable Amounts of Work When teachers assign an appropriate amount of work students have time to do it honestly.

**Supporting Statements:**

Ella: Another thing as teachers we have to consider, teachers have to take into consideration we teach only one of the classes that we are doing here. So we have to think about how much time they have after school. This is something that has led me to cut a little bit of work. Some of them do sports. They come the next day telling me that they played in a game from six to eight and they come in telling me that they went to bed at ten o’clock, eleven o’clock. That is not fair.
Value laden work

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Personally Relevant.* When the work teachers assigns relates to the personal lives of students there is less incidence of cheating.

**Supporting Statements:**

Becca: I have tried to make some personal connections with him figure out what he likes and so then try to make connections. He really loves sports so not even just to him but to the class so he will hear it I will mention a friend of mine you went one summer and played for a soccer team in Argentina or the time that someone’s mother here at Brookwood after she graduated from high school, took a year off and was a ski instructor in Chile. It might not be the most academic reason to learn but there is some sort of connection that they think, “Oh I like to do that, that would be neat.”

Al: The love paper is an example of the type of paper that I do every year, some kind of personal essay. And what I like about this kind of assignment is first of all it arises from a critical study of a work of literature but the paper itself is about one’s individual experience in one’s own life but the epigraph part of it is a bridge between those two things. So yes, I think it is making something that seems completely on the surface, especially to an adolescent, irrelevant to their own lives showing them how it is in fact it can be relevant is a really, really important goal for me as a teacher of literature. Because I think seeing the relevance of art, not just literature, but art in one’s life but art is in one’s life and how it is an expression of life is incredibly valuable to an individual.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Knowledge Worth Knowing* When students believe that assignments relate to knowledge that is important for them to know they are less likely to cheat on that work.

**Supporting Statements:**

Paul: Then there are students who ask it snidely, “what do I care about this?” There is a response to that as well. Basically, on one level you have to take this class because in order to take this class to get to 9th grade, because I am telling you have to take this class if you want to have a further discussion about why the skills I am teaching are important, we can have that discussion as well. There are different levels you can answer different ways. It sort of brings me back, I get these ideas particularly because at the Seder the Passover Seder there is actually the question of
why is this night different from all other nights and there are four questions. Basically you give the answers to the different types of people. In other words the one who doesn’t know any better, the who is rebellious, the one who is something else and there are others you tailor your answer to the types of person. Some people have a legitimate question, why do I have to know about this particular aspect of the American Revolution knowing that is not what they are going to do in their future. I can explain to them it doesn’t make any difference that you know this but the ability to be able to discuss something like this and the skills involved with this are important. And I can tell them why I picked the American Revolution as opposed to the Guilded Age or something like that. I usually tailor it to the person who is asking the question.

Avery: They are almost a bit too unquestioning about the value of what teachers assign. But for other kids yeah if they perceive it as more meaningful for their life, they are going to put a different kind, different attitude into it.

**Significant Code, Meaning** Connections to other areas of knowledge Students are more likely to consider the work meaningful if the work seems related to other disciplines, skills, and knowledge.

**Supporting Statements:**
Paul: I think a good assignment in history is one that connects to others, that shows a sense of connection. It could be cause and effect. There is something that leads to something else. If it is just out there in on an island it is just a waste of time. I try to cut those out as much as I can.

Craig: Just I think any time I students are being asked to interact with the information and then have a responsibility to use that information in a different context or apply it to a new situation, or summarize it or those type of things to make it a little more difficult for a student to perform in a class if they had been cheating.

**Significant Code, Meaning** Future Application Students are more likely to consider the work meaningful if they perceive that they will need the understanding behind the work in the future.

**Supporting Statements:**
Paul: I think if you give them busy work to do for their homework that is just, answer these questions because I need you to do some homework tonight then the and they don’t see the connection between answering this question and anything they need to know the chance there will be copying is probably much greater. On the other hand work if they are doing work on which you need to do this work because they are going to build on this for a final assessment the likelihood they will cheat is much less one because they realize that if they cheat, if they don’t do the work here then it is going to catch up with them down the road.

Craig: As soon as I can start to make the connection between what students are doing in my class and how it will serve them in the future. That is exciting to me that is what I really enjoy.

**Significant Code, Meaning**  *Value for the Discipline* Students are more likely to complete work honestly for disciplines that the school, their parents, and they believe are important.

**Supporting Statements:**
Becca: I think that Spanish is one of those classes that is not considered a core class. And so I think that their work ethic in general is a little different. I think even just the way the schedule is. We are a class that doesn’t have an hour class. It is more considered a special. It is not a special but it is considered a special, like art or music. I think because we are not a part of a team it affects how kids picture us or picture the subject. Just by the nature of the schedule we aren’t around all the time.

Craig: In the past I taught math, I taught French and I taught PE and I taught other things and I noticed that there are some subjects that parents and students give a lot of value to I would put math up there. If a student doesn’t understand a math concept parents become very concerned and students become very concerned but if student does not understand a French concept there is a lot less concern because at least when I was teaching it because that is not seen as something that student need to be able to survive, it is a course in which they are flexing their academic muscles, it is not necessarily critical material for future success in life. And so I think as far as students engaging in a class those classes where they see that there is value in doing well in that class and learning that material then I think there is a higher level of engagement and so part of the challenge I think of every teacher then is to help students understand why their class going to
be of value to them, the information that is taught in that class why will it be valuable to students down the road.

**Holding Students Accountable**

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Public Audience* Students are more likely to do their best work when they know that they will have to share that work publicly.

**Supporting Statements:**

Craig: But if there is going to be some sort of public requirement for them to demonstrate an understanding often times that really I think leads to a huge motivation for students to do their own work. For example, if a student is going to have to participate in a role play the next day and it will become very obvious publicly if they have done their work, then I think there is a greater chance they will be doing their work.

Paul: There is also a fear of failure and a sense that they know heir parents are going to be watching, the parents are going to be the jury so that is the case.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Getting Caught* Students are less likely to cheat out of fear of getting caught.

**Supporting Statements:**

Craig: I think certain schools can have I think a culture of cheating where if the school does not punish kids for cheating or make an effort to catch students cheating that may contribute to it. I also think certain types of assignments can discourage cheating and if a school has not addressed that issue kind of school wide then teachers may be unaware what types of assignments those are it just may just not be a priority for a school.

Becca: I really think here there are a lot of kids who just want to do well or there are also the kids who are just so nervous to be caught.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Feedback and Drafts* Students are more likely to focus on understanding the work rather than the grade when the teacher gives meaningful feedback.
**Supporting Statements:**

Ella: They just want the grade. I feel frustrated. After I spend the time writing they just put the work in the trash but when it is something that they have to continue working with like this first draft they have to read my notes and put it to use to correct so I think they do pay attention.

Al: All of those things are correct taking drafts and providing written feedback, e-mails, the discussion boards. The most important and frequent forms of individual feedback are written comments on papers and response within discussion settings response to their comments and observations and individual conferencing about ongoing assignments at special meeting times whenever we can get them together.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Recognizing Quality Work* Teachers describe a good assignment as one that results in a high quality of work.

**Supporting Statements:**

Craig: High rates of completion, I think I tend to see more incomplete assignments on assignments that students may not enjoy or see the value of. Depth of the work, if, if the assignment comes in and there is a very superficial treatment of the material I think I can see then that students are not seeing the value in doing this and are simply doing it to get me off their back or to not lose the grade, take off earning from the assignment. Oftentimes on an assignment where I can see students truly embrace the value of it, I would see a lot more depth and quality of their answers

Ella: Because of the product. When I see what they wrote, what is well written of course they have mistakes and this is authentic, when I see the process and also the presentation of the work I think that was a good assignment. When you see that here is work behind that. It is not that they did not do it quickly.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Grades* Students may be motivated to cheat on school work when the emphasis of that work is on the final grade.
Supporting Statements:
Ella: Grades are important for them. The grade will determine what school that are going to be and this school particularly they want to keep going to independent schools. That is why they cheat. They want to have the grade. They don’t want to have a low grade for many reasons.

Paul: A more typical motivation for kids is grades earlier in the year. I try to make the class as interesting as possible but ultimately why they study at the middle school level it is grades. You can explain how much these skills are meaningful for them in the course of their lifetime but it really is grades and parents. If they aren’t motivated well then you can get the parents involved and have them become motivated.

Becca: I think a lot of it is grade driven, how much something will count. I mean even just in the effort that people put forth, they have to know, the kids need to know how much it is going to be worth.

Building Relationships

**Significant Code, Meaning** Building respect, Students are more inclined to be dishonest with teachers who do not respect them and with whom they do not respect in turn.

Supporting Statements:
Al: Yeah, I guess so probably. If they like the teacher they may be listening more carefully or giving more credence to what the teacher saying in terms of the value of something. If they don’t like the teacher or respect the teacher then when the teacher says this has value for this reason they may not be able to appreciate that as much.

Paul: I am not sure if there is necessarily a direct connection because they may dislike the teacher but still respect the teacher or be in fear of the teacher. And some teachers who think they have a nice relationship with maybe they think the teacher may be that much easier on them and the teacher may not necessarily call them on the cheating. Respect is the key. Do they respect the teacher as opposed to like or dislike the class? I would hope. I think that is the case.
**Significant Code, Meaning** *Teacher Caring* Students explain that when a teacher shows that he or she cares about the student as an individual the student is more likely to treat that teacher and the work assigned with integrity.

**Supporting Statements:**
Avery: I get a sense that they feel very comfortable in my class. I mean they know I am enthusiastic about math but I think also because of my willingness to listen and kind of go sideways with them if they have a sideways question and try to reassure them that you can ask me any question. You don’t have to ask in front of your peers. You can e-mail me. You can find me one on one. So I think probably my efforts to make the comfort level there are the biggest thing.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Peer Relationships* The cheating behavior of students is influenced by the relationship they have with their peers.

**Supporting Statements:**
Becca: I think so yeah. If you get a certain amount of students with social power they might not take the class as seriously. I have seen that affect how they treat the material of the class.

Al: If the class is set up in such a way or feels that it is set up in such a way that it is apparent that there are haves and have-nots. They are those who are good at the class and those who are not good at the class. And everyone knows who they are. The haves and maybe the more empathic haves feel compulsion to even things out, to be a middle man between the instructor and the have-nots in the class.

**Significant Code, Meaning** *Understanding the Pressure* Students may cheat more out of great anxiety to meet overwhelming demands.

**Supporting Statements:**
Peter: Some of these kids are under a tremendous amount of pressure. You generally, you don’t necessarily see it in the lowest student the kids consistently get C’s and B’s, on that level, they are working fairly hard and that is what they get or they haven’t worked very hard and that is what they get. But some are on the border line, especially in our situation they are leaving this school and their grades really matter, because they are basically applying to elite secondary
schools. For a B+, A- student I can see with the pressure for them. I don’t really, that is where it comes in. I don’t really see any bad, bad kids here. You just don’t see it very often.

A1: Well, I guess there are different reasons but I think probably the biggest reason is an insecurity that they just don’t have whatever they need to have to do it themselves and they respond to the momentary pressure of feeling trapped by a situation.

**Engaging Work**

**Significant Code, Meaning** Student Choice Teachers believe that giving students autonomy regarding their work may increase student engagement and decrease the likelihood of cheating.

**Supporting Statements:**
A1: They like to write about themselves or talk about themselves and their own lives. They will articulate it as they want freedom, they want freedom to work on what they want to work on what they want to do what they want to do.

Craig: I think also in the eighth grade in particular students have at least an hour of study hall each day, supervised study hall where they complete their work in an area supervised by teachers. I think because a lot of our students are very, very busy they actually use that time to do their homework and I think that there is encouragement during those times for them to do their own work. Often times that is independent work with very little communication between students allowed during that time and so I think it encourages them do their own, their own work.

**Significant Code, Meaning** Group Work When teachers assign work that can be completed with others students become more invested in getting the work done.

**Supporting Statements:**
Craig: So in addition to the fact that they knew that they would have to demonstrate an understanding after the project was finished they knew that others were depending on their understanding so I think that, out of 46 students I only have two who in the end did not complete the wikis as expected and I think that is a high rate, a high rate of completion compared to other assignment and so I think just that feeling that others were depending on them for the
information really encouraged them to both do the assignment but also to try to understand, nail the information from the wiki.

Avery: And I found over the years that giving a small number of problems and giving a lot of opportunity for group work in the beginning that gradually becomes okay now today you are just going to work with one partner and the next day try to do these three all by yourself and let me see what you are doing.

**Significant Code, Meaning Technology** When teachers incorporate aspects of technology students become more engaged in their work.

**Supporting Statements:**
Ella: And they enjoy the technology. Of course they love digital cameras, they love to record, use the microphones to listen, to do effects in the PowerPoint like say the picture is like that or a sentence appears.

Carrie: I mention today that we are going to the computer lab and they don’t even know why we are going in there and they are like “Alright!” You know, it could be a quiz. They don’t know.

**Significant Code, Meaning Hands-On Interactive Activities** When teachers incorporate activities in which students are doing rather than passively observing the material they are more likely to be engaged and less likely to cheat.

**Supporting Statements:**
Craig: Yep. The more, in terms of students, the more hands-on and interactive work is in science at least students seem to engage much more.

*Like the demonstrations you were talking about?*

The demonstrations, yeah. I start off with an experimental design unit. And when students design their own experiments and carry them out there is a high level of engagement there because it is their work. Nobody else in the grade is doing that experiment.