

Epidemic of student cheating can be cured with changes in classroom goals

9 August 2009, by Jeff Grabmeier

Schools have the ability to drastically reduce cheating among their students - all they need to do is follow the relatively simple and inexpensive solutions suggested by research.

"We know when kids cheat, why kids cheat and how kids cheat," said Eric Anderman, a recognized expert on student cheating and professor of educational policy and [leadership](#) at Ohio State University.

"We know how to motivate kids so that they are much less likely to cheat. The only problem is that what we know about reducing cheating often isn't put into practice in schools," Anderman said.

Anderman discussed the latest research on cheating in schools and how to eliminate it during his presidential address August 8 at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Toronto.

Anderman is ending his term as president of APA's Division of [Educational Psychology](#).

There's no doubt that cheating among [students](#) is widespread and has been growing. In some studies, up to 80 percent of high-achieving [high school students](#) and 75 percent of [college students](#) admit to cheating, a percentage that has been rising the past 50 years.

In one study, Anderman and his colleagues found that 21 percent of students who say that cheating is "unacceptable" still engage in cheating behaviors.

"What we know for sure is that students cheat a lot," Anderman said. "Parents don't think their kids will do it, but many do. I've seen that in my research, and also in the time I spent as a teacher."

Studies have shown that boys cheat more than

girls. Students with high-driving "Type-A" personalities are more likely to cheat. And there is little [relationship](#) between cheating and moral development, research shows.

New research by Anderman and his colleagues finds that students with impulsive tendencies are more likely to cheat.

In two studies from 2004, Anderman and his colleagues found that cheating also tends to increase when students make the transition from elementary school to middle school, and then again from middle school to high school.

That's not surprising, he said.

"During those transitions, [teachers](#) start changing how they talk to students. While earlier in school, teachers emphasize how learning is fun, as students get older teachers begin saying things like 'Now it's serious. Your grades matter.' That's directly related to cheating," Anderman said.

Anderman said how teachers present the goals of learning in class is the key to reducing cheating. But this is the knowledge that is rarely put into practice in classrooms.

Research has consistently shown that cheating is more likely to occur in classrooms that focus on performance - getting the best possible grades, doing the best on tests.

Cheating is less likely to occur when the goal for students is "personal mastery" of the material - in other words, learning and understanding what is being taught.

Federal mandates under "No Child Left Behind," with its emphasis on test scores, send exactly the wrong message to students and teachers and actually encourage cheating, Anderman said.

"These standardized tests aren't going to go away, but we don't have to talk about them in the classroom as the ultimate outcome and goal," he said.

"This produces anxiety and stress in both teachers and students, and that's what leads to cheating."

Ironically, students may actually do better if the focus in classrooms was on personal mastery and not on the tests. Students will learn better, remember the material longer, cheat less, and still do just as well, if not better, when they do standardized testing, according to Anderman.

Schools should work to help teachers change the goals in classrooms from test-taking to mastering the materials, and help them communicate effectively to their students.

"It doesn't help when teachers always talk about 'the test' and reminding students that something 'will be on the test.' The goal should be learning, and not test-taking," Anderman said.

"You can change the goal structure in classrooms. If you change that, you will likely reduce [cheating](#)."

Source: The Ohio State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

APA citation: Epidemic of student cheating can be cured with changes in classroom goals (2009, August 9) retrieved 24 November 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-08-epidemic-student-classroom-goals.html>

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