

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: WORK AVOIDANCE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: TEACHERS'
PERSPECTIVES

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This study investigated the beliefs about work avoidance of six middle school teachers from a diverse set of schools. Teachers were individually interviewed. Using a Grounded Theory approach, the interview transcripts were coded and analyzed. The teachers commonly characterized students who avoid work as lacking effort or actively avoiding work, expressing a broad range of emotions (e.g., anger, embarrassment, and negative affect) and having little or incompetent social interactions with peers and adults. The teachers reported several reasons why students avoid work including task/workload characteristics, motivational traits, peers, home and school/teacher. These findings suggest that work avoidance may have been previously oversimplified and the construct may include a wider variety of student characteristics and reasons for the behaviors.

WORK AVOIDANC IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

by

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Work Avoidance in Middle School: Teachers' Perspectives

Any teacher can attest to the fact that students complete assignments and participate in class work for a wide variety of reasons. Some students seem to have an internal drive that pushes them to master new information, seek new challenges, and complete assignments. Other students are more influenced by their surroundings and perform so others see them as competent. For some time, educational researchers have focused on these two motives as reasons for students' achievement-oriented behavior (Elliot, 1999; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Researchers have suggested that these goals may not act in isolation; meaning some students may exhibit several goals at one time, and they may even be context specific (Meece & Holt, 1993). Yet, most teachers can identify that not all students exhibit either goal. In fact, some students seem focused on completely avoiding work all together. This goal to avoid academic pursuits directly impacts student performance and classroom dynamics and therefore, may impact achievement.

Like all professionals, a teacher brings past experience and his/her own knowledge to work each day. Researchers have documented that teachers have opinions, ideas, and beliefs about a whole host of issues, including the school administration, other teachers, the curriculum, classroom management, and even their own students (e.g., Brophy & McCaslin, 1992; Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, & Cuthbert, 1988; Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Nespor, 1987; Simmons et al., 1999). Teachers' beliefs influence their choices, actions, and behavior (Pajares, 2002). If a teacher holds a belief about the goals of a particular student it is likely that his/her belief will impact the relationship between the teacher and student.

While much research has focused on mastery and performance goals, less research has been conducted to understand the manifestation of work avoidant goals in the classroom. It is unknown if teachers can identify students with work avoidant goals. And if teachers can identify these goals, it is unknown why teachers believe students avoid work. It is important to understand the beliefs of teachers in relation to work avoidance because teacher beliefs influence teacher behavior. Within a school, teachers work most directly with students and therefore, teacher behavior can have an immediate and long lasting impact on student performance and achievement. To address this gap in the literature, this study will examine teachers' beliefs about middle school students' work avoidance related to schoolwork and homework.

The following sections delineate the rationale for the present study. First, there is an overview of achievement goal theory, followed by an in-depth look at work avoidance and reasons hypothesized by researchers to explain why students are work avoidant. The next sections explain how goals relate to cognitive engagement, affect, and self-perceptions. The next section addresses the influence of context and teachers' practices on student goals, cognitive engagement and affect. Then beliefs are defined and the influence of teacher beliefs on teacher behavior is addressed. Last, measurement issues are raised.

Student Goals

Achievement Goal Theory

One social-cognitive theory of motivation used by psychologists and, specifically, educational psychologists to explain student goals is achievement goal theory or goal theory. Goals are typically defined as cognitive representations of the different purposes

students may have for their behavior during a specific task (Dowson & McInerney, 2001; Wentzel, 2002). Goal theory addresses achievement-related goals and looks at students' answers to the basic question, "Why am I doing this academic task?" (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). It is through answering this question that students determine their achievement goals, direct their cognition, and make decisions about their behavior.

According to goal theory there are two dominant achievement-related goals for learning: mastery and performance goals (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Students who hold mastery goals demonstrate a focus on learning and understanding (Linnenbrink & Pintrich). On the other hand, students who hold performance goals demonstrate a focus on ability or competence (Linnenbrink & Pintrich). Within these two goal orientations, students may seek different methods for goal attainment. Elliot (1999) and Pintrich (2000a, 2000b) suggest that goal theory include both approach and avoidance dimensions (Linnenbrink & Pintrich).

In this multiple goals perspective, it is important to not only consider how a student seeks understanding or works toward demonstrating ability, but also the complexity of how a student avoids not mastering or not exhibiting competence (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). If a student has a mastery goal, he may approach that mastery goal through active means of learning or understanding whereas a student with avoid mastery goals is concerned with not understanding the material or falling short of his own personal standard (Linnenbrink & Pintrich). If a student has a performance goal, she may approach the goal by focusing on outperforming others or she may seek to achieve the goal by avoiding looking stupid (Linnenbrink & Pintrich).

Work avoidance goal. Some researchers have suggested the possibility of a third goal, a work avoidance goal, distinct from learning and performance goals (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Seifert & O'Keefe, 2001). The work avoidance goal is not a manifestation of mastery-avoidance or performance-avoidance. Students with mastery-avoidance and performance-avoidance goals engage with class work in order to avoid incompetence judged either by themselves or by others. On the other hand, the goal of work avoidant students is simply to avoid work. Students pursuing a work avoidance goal avoid putting in effort to do well, do only the minimum necessary to get by and avoid challenging tasks (Seifert & O'Keefe). If students who are work avoidant are not engaging in classroom work, their achievement may be impacted. It is important to understand goals because of their relation to behavior.

Working within the context of goal theory, researchers have suggested several reasons why students may be work avoidant. The four proposed reasons are: failure-avoidant, learned helpless, passive-aggressive, and see no reason (Covington, 1984; Seifert, 2004). These four reasons are driven primarily by supposition with little empirical evidence. Failure-avoidant and learned helpless students are believed to be work-avoidant due to a myriad of interactions including past success and failure, prior relationships with teachers and parents, and other complex experiences that make-up students' feelings related to school. On the other hand, students who are passive-aggressive or see no reason for the work are thought to be work avoidant due to a more specific factor, either negative feelings about a teacher or the actual assignment itself.

Failure-avoidant students actively choose not to do work because the work is a threat to their ability-perceptions or self-worth (Covington, 1984). This orientation may

originate in students with performance-avoid goals. If a student performs a task so as not to appear less competent than other students, but is unsuccessful in his effort he may become failure-avoidant. Failure-avoidant students are so fearful of not measuring up to their own standards or others standards, that they would rather not complete a task at all. To them it would be better to deal with the ramifications of incomplete work than to face imperfection or failure.

Another work avoidant orientation reflects students who are learned helpless (Covington, 2004). Once students reach middle school, they have received years of messages from home and school regarding their ability to succeed. Due to prior experiences learned helpless students firmly believe that they are incapable of doing the work. This could include all schoolwork or domain specific tasks. Since students with this goal orientation perceive they are not capable, they do not even try to complete the work.

Work avoidance is also believed to emerge as a passive-aggressive mechanism (Seifert, 2004). These students refuse to complete work for the teacher, not specifically because of the actual assignment, but rather as a method to seek revenge against the teacher. Students with this orientation feel wronged or harmed by their teacher due to a past experience, or for some other reason they do not like their teacher. In an attempt to thwart the teacher's plans and disrupt the classroom environment, such students choose to not cooperate through not completing work.

The fourth proposed reason why some students are work avoidant is that some students may feel capable of doing the work but see no reason for doing it. In essence, "they find little challenge, stimulation, satisfaction or meaning in the work they do and,

consequently, only do enough work to get by” (Seifert, 2004, p. 143). It is possible that some students with this orientation, who see no reason to “get by,” may choose to not even engage in a minimal amount of work. Researchers have proposed these four reasons for work avoidance; yet, there are little data to support these hypotheses.

While some researchers suggest that goal orientations work in isolation such that students can only have one orientation at a time, Meece and Holt (1993) found that goal orientation clusters surface. Within the context of science, Grade 5 and 6 students completed questionnaires for motivation and academic performance. Cluster analysis identified three distinct clusters of students. The high mastery cluster exhibited high task mastery, low ego-social (performance), and low work avoidant behavior. The combined mastery-ego cluster exhibited high task mastery, high ego social (performance), and low work avoidant behavior. And the low mastery-ego group of students reported a flat level of mastery and ego-social (performance) goal orientation and greater work avoidance (Meece & Holt). The results found several clusters of goals; there was an inverse relation between mastery and work avoidance goal orientations.

Bradar, Rijavec, and Loncaric’s (2006) research concurs with Meece and Holt’s (1993) finding. Their research was not domain specific and the population was high school students in Croatia. Goal orientations were assessed through subscales (Niemivirta, 1996, 1998) pertaining to learning (mastery), performance and work-avoidance. K-means cluster analysis was used to classify students into four groups: learning (mastery) oriented, work avoidance oriented, performance/work-avoidance oriented and performance/learning (mastery) oriented group. Work-avoidance goal orientation did not cluster with learning (mastery) oriented goals.

Amotivation. Student motivation has been studied from other perspectives; one example is Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan identified three main motivation styles, intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivational. Vallerand and Bissonnette (1992) write

Individuals are amotivated when they perceive a lack of contingency between their behavior and outcomes. There is an experience of incompetence and lack of control. Amotivated behaviors are neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated. They are nonmotivated....Amotivated behaviors are the least self-determined because there is no sense of purpose and no expectation of reward...or of the possibility of changing the course of events. (p. 602)

It is suggested that amotivated students, like students with the work avoidance goal, may not attempt to do their work, but there is an important distinction between the two constructs. Students with a work avoidant goal are believed to have motivation; that is, to avoid work. Work avoidant students put in little effort regarding work, but often put in much effort to avoid work. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors may influence work avoidant students. For example, a student who does not like a specific assignment may not complete that assignment. Such students do think they can change the course of events, it just may not be the most productive change for their academic achievement. While the construct of amotivation is important for research on student goals, the current investigation will focus on work avoidance.

Empirical Research

Cognitive Engagement

A focus on students' goals is important because research has correlated student goal orientation with cognitive engagement (e.g., Diener & Dweck, 1978; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Nolen, 1988; Seifert, 1995). Mastery goal students see tasks as challenges to overcome and learning as a process to acquire new skills and knowledge for the self. Previous research has found that students with mastery goals indicate a greater preference for challenge (Seifert), engage in more strategy use, especially deep strategy processing (Nolen; Seifert), make more positive self-statements (Diener & Dweck) and are more likely to take responsibility for success and less likely to deny responsibility for failure (Seifert).

On the other hand, performance goal students are concerned with ability and see tasks as opportunities to compare themselves with others. Previous research has found that students with performance goals see difficult problems as failure (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), engage in less sophisticated strategy use (Nolen, 1988; Seifert, 1995), make more negative self-statements, attribute success to uncontrollable factors (Seifert) and tend not to process information relative to previous success (Diener & Dweck, 1978).

Although much of the previous research focused on the behaviors related to mastery and performance goals, Meece, Blumenfeld and Hoyle (1988) also looked at students with work avoidance goals. The researchers tested the relations among individual differences, goal-orientation and cognitive engagement for Grade 5 and 6 science students. They found that "cognitive engagement patterns related most directly to students' goal orientations" (Meece et al., p. 521). They reported a correlation between

students' expression of concern about their ability level and the use of effort-minimizing strategies. The authors suggest that this finding supports the previously purported idea that students reduce effort as a defensive strategy when they are concerned about their abilities (Covington & Omelich, 1979; Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Nicholls & Miller, 1984).

Some previous research findings indicate that goal orientation reflects stable personality differences, such that goals do not change in different situations. On the other hand, Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) suggest that students' goals may change dependent on a variety of both personal and contextual factors. While one situation or task may elicit a mastery goal, another may elicit a performance goal; likewise, a student may approach or avoid the goal dependent upon the circumstances. Therefore, an important question to ask concerning work avoidance is: Why might students be work avoidant? Two possible answers are (a) the student's affect and self-perceptions and (b) the school environment and classroom context.

Affect and Self-Perceptions

Student affect, moods, and emotions, have been shown to correlate with goals. In defining moods and emotions, Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) draw on the work of Rosenberg (1998) and Schwarz (1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1996). The researchers suggest that moods and emotions differ in terms of intensity and duration (Linnenbrink & Pintrich). Moods are considered to be longer lasting, whereas emotions consist of short episodes. Moods refer to a general affective state, whereas emotions are affective states due to a specific situation or circumstance (Linnenbrink & Pintrich). As emotions reoccur over time, it is possible that they take shape as a prevailing mood. Affect is generally

considered a broader category of affective states that encompass both moods and emotions (Linnenbrink & Pintrich).

In interviews with middle school students Dowson and McInerney (2001) established a range of achievement goals that these students held. The interviews also provided excellent examples of the emotions felt by students. Students' work avoidance orientations were associated with feelings of laziness, boredom, inertia, and even anger (Dowson & McInerney). Regarding a difficult task, one student explains, "If it's [the work] really hard, then I definitely don't feel like doing it" (Dowson & McInerney, p. 38). Another student exemplifies a sense of apathy regarding the work in the sense of not caring if "I can do something or not" (Dowson & McInerney, p. 38). And another student who identifies his own sense of competence in using effective approaches to studying, as they have worked in the past, explains "I know reading over my notes helps me, but I couldn't be bothered" (Dowson & McInerney, p. 38). Middle school students can verbalize their emotions in relation to classroom experiences. Similarly, they can relate the emotions to their own behavioral outcomes.

The most often researched self-perceptions of students are a sense of competence and a sense of control (agency; Seifert & O'Keefe, 2001). Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory suggests that the degree to which a student feels confident will determine the quality of engagement in a task. A higher level of self-efficacy correlates with a higher level of task engagement. A sense of personal control is also correlated with self-regulated behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

Through questionnaires administered to high-school students Nichols, Patashnick, and Nolen (1985) found an inverse relation between students' self-perception of low

ability level and a higher likelihood of work avoidance. Comparison with others in the classroom can foster low self-perceptions of ability, which in turn can lead to work avoidance strategies. Interestingly, their research also found an inverse relation between work avoidance and satisfaction with school (Nichols et al., 1985). Students who avoid work reported not liking school.

Seifert and O'Keefe's (2001) research also discussed the link between emotions and self-perceptions. The authors suggest that students pursuing work avoidance goals may feel less competent than other students, are more likely to make external attributions and often perceive their work as lacking meaning. Seifert and O'Keefe identify specific student emotions that correlate with work avoidance.

Students who perceive little control or competence may avoid exerting effort because they believe they can't do the work or because they wish to avoid a sense of humiliation and shame associated with failure (Covington, 1984; Frankel & Snyder, 1978). On the other hand, some students see themselves as capable of doing the work but perceive no reason for doing it. That is, the students see themselves as capable, but find little meaning in the work. Consequently, they put forth little effort because they see no reason for doing it. (pp. 83-84)

Seifert (2004) suggests that context, including tasks and task conditions elicit emotional responses, which in turn guide students' behavior.

Context: Teachers' Practices and Classroom Environment

Teachers communicate many messages to students about the purposes of achievement (e.g., Ames, 1992; Nolen, 1988; Turner et al., 2002). One message that teachers may send is that success is found in demonstrating ability and outperforming

other students (Turner et al.). This climate fosters performance goals. Although some students will respond positively to the competitive culture, it is likely other students may perceive the situation as a threat to their self-worth and purposely avoid engaging in tasks. On the other hand, when the emphasis is placed on learning and understanding, as opposed to performance, students are less likely to feel threatened and may not perceive the need to engage in work avoidance strategies (Turner et al.).

Turner, Meyer, Midgley, and Patrick (2003) examined the relations between teacher discourse and Grade 6 student reports of affect and cognitive engagement in two mathematics classrooms. Supportive instructional discourse and less supportive instructional discourse were associated with different student reports. Supportive instructional discourse that focused on student understanding was associated with student reports of self-regulation and positive coping behaviors. On the other hand, students in a classroom with less supportive motivational discourse reported more negative affect and self-handicapping behaviors. The authors suggest that the “features of the classroom context, such as motivational support might be related to student outcomes” (p. 357).

Through student questionnaires, Assor, Kaplan, and Roth (2002) gathered information on students’ perceptions of autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviors. Autonomy-enhancing behavior (e.g., fostering relevance, providing choice, and allowing criticism and encouraging independent thinking) is action that helps students develop and realize their personal goals and interests. Autonomy-suppressing behavior (e.g., suppressing criticism and independent opinions, intruding-intervening in ongoing behavioral sequences, and forcing meaningless and uninteresting activities) is action that interferes with the realization of the students’ personal goals and interests. The

only autonomy-supportive behavior that was significantly related to both feelings and engagement was teacher behaviors aimed at “fostering relevance.” An example of fostering relevance is teachers’ efforts to explain how classroom tasks relate to students’ personal goals. The only autonomy-suppressing behavior that was related to both negative feelings and engagement was “suppressing criticism.” Students felt more negative and were less engaged when teachers did not permit dissenting opinions or ideas. This provides support for the notion that teachers’ behaviors are related to student engagement.

Assor, Kaplan, Kanat-Maymon, and Roth (2005) take the previous research a step further and look at one specific type of teacher behavior, directly controlling teacher behaviors (DCTB), “such as giving frequent directives, interfering with children’s preferred pace of learning and not allowing critical and independent opinions” (p. 97) and how this behavior relates with specific student motivation and engagement. The creation of path-models indicates that a-motivation is closely intertwined with the affective emotions of anger and anxiety (Assor et al., 2005). The authors suggest that further research into the effects of DCTB should focus on older grades as past research (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Kaplan, Assor, & Roth, 2003) indicated that DCTB increases in middle schools and high schools.

Seifert and O’Keefe (2001) administered a motivational survey to high school students. Like Assor, Kaplan and Roth’s finding on the importance of teachers’ behaviors that foster relevance, Seifert and O’Keefe found that perceived meaning, the students’ perception of the reason for completing a task, was related to the motivation of students. The researchers found even if a student perceived himself to be competent, if his work

was not relevant or meaningful then the student was inclined to pursue work avoidant goals. On the other hand, if a student felt confident and had a sense of control over her learning, then perceived meaning was related to pursuit of a learning goal. Ultimately, Seifert and O'Keefe suggest that:

The psychological environment created by the teacher is a critical factor in students' motivation because the environment influences how students think and feel which, in turn, influences how they behave. Teachers who employ interesting, novel and meaningful tasks and emphasize the process of learning are more likely to have students who are willing to engage cognitively with the work.
(p. 90)

Meece and Miller (1999) designed a classroom intervention project to show how various instructional practices can affect students' goals, perceived competence and strategy use in reading and writing. An original assessment of reading and writing teaching practices of eight elementary school teachers found that most assignments focused on individual skills, factual recall and high teacher control. The teachers in the intervention used tasks that provided their students with more opportunities to read and write lengthy prose, work closely with other students and focus on tasks for extended periods of time. The authors looked at the effect of the instructional change on students' achievement goal orientations. One interesting finding directly related to the impact of teachers' practices is that complex reading and writing assignments yielded a significant decrease in performance goals in all students. And most interesting is a significant decrease in work-avoidant goals was found among low achieving students. This research indicates that teachers' practices can influence students' goals.

Summary

Within goal theory researchers have identified three different types of achievement related goals: mastery, performance, and work avoidance. These goals have been related to student behavior. It has been suggested that achievement goals might be influenced by students' affect and self-perceptions, as well as by the classroom context. As stated earlier researchers have proposed four reasons for the work avoidance goal orientation: failure-avoidant, learned helpless, passive-aggressive, and see no reason (Covington, 1984; Seifert, 2004). Yet, the research that has been conducted by educational psychologists regarding work avoidance goals is primarily based on correlational data, theoretical models, and students' self-reports. No one has looked to teachers for information. It is possible that teachers who identify work avoidance in their students may concur with one of the previously cited reasons for such behavior. Or perhaps, teachers have different beliefs and explanations for work avoidance. This is important to know because teachers are the direct observers of students, and their beliefs influence their practice.

Beliefs

Defining Beliefs

Are knowledge and beliefs congruent, intertwined or unrelated? To define knowledge and beliefs could be a philosophical quandary. Researchers have applied many different definitions to both words. Currently the most widely accepted understanding of knowledge is a definition by Alexander, Schallert, and Hare (1991) that states knowledge "encompasses all that a person knows or believes to be true, whether or not it is verified as true in some sort of objective or external way" (p. 317). In this

commonly held definition beliefs are one part of knowledge. Beliefs are personal; what one person believes may be different from what another person believes. People can have beliefs about a wide range of issues, from global issues like the role of government regulation in private affairs to personal issues like the value of creating a home cooked meal. Beliefs are developed from past experiences, ideas and influences. Because beliefs are held to be true, it is unlikely a person would modify his beliefs. Pajares (2002) suggests that “beliefs are unlikely to be replaced unless they prove unsatisfactory, and they are unlikely to prove unsatisfactory unless they are challenged and one is unable to assimilate them into existing conceptions” (p. 321).

Since beliefs come from personal exposure and experience, people would likely have many beliefs about what is familiar to them. For example, because a teacher works in the field of education he would be more likely to have beliefs about the purpose of education, the value of parental involvement or different approaches to classroom management. Pajares (1992) suggests that beliefs are context specific and that educational beliefs can be broken down into many different, more operational categories. Some of his examples include the following educational belief categories, “beliefs about confidence to affect students performance (teacher efficacy), about the nature of knowledge (epistemological beliefs), about causes of teachers’ or students performance (attributions, locus of control, motivation)...There are also educational beliefs about specific subjects or disciplines (reading instruction)” (p. 316). The teachers’ educational belief to be discussed in the paper is beliefs about work avoidance.

Teacher Beliefs and Teacher Behavior

Pajares's (1992) review of teachers' educational beliefs includes some fundamental assumptions that may reasonably be made when conducting a study of teachers' educational beliefs. The assumptions that are applicable to this paper include:

- (1) The belief system has an adaptive function in helping individuals define and understand the world and themselves. (p. 325)
- (2) Knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined, but the potent affective, evaluative and episodic nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted. (p. 325)
- (3) Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence, they play a critical role in defining behavior and organizing knowledge and information. (p. 325).
- (4) Individuals' beliefs strongly affect their behavior. (p. 326)

If these assumptions are applied to teachers it can be posited that beliefs help teachers understand all aspects of the school and their own role within this greater context.

Secondly, when teachers encounter new experiences, their beliefs help them to understand these situations. Also beliefs help teachers make decisions on how to think about information. And ultimately beliefs impact teachers' behavior.

One study that highlights the influence of teachers' beliefs on their behavior is Flowerday and Schraw's (2000) research on teachers' beliefs about instructional choice. The researchers interviewed 36 Grade K-12 practicing teachers regarding their beliefs' about instructional choice. Questions probed teachers on what choices they offer, when,

where and to whom they offer choice, and how they perceived the effectiveness of choice. The authors found that the teachers had strong beliefs about choice and that these beliefs were related to their use of choice in the classroom. For example, most teachers believed that self-regulated students make wiser and more efficient choices. The teacher behavior that corresponds with this belief is that teachers' indicated that they provide students with higher ability or performance more opportunity for choice.

Another empirical example of the interaction of teacher beliefs and teacher behavior is illustrated in a study based on Nespor's (1987) theoretical model of "belief systems." Nespor argues that "beliefs are not so much sets of propositions or statements as they are conceptual systems which are functional or useful for explaining some domain of activity" (p. 326). The model is grounded in the Teacher Beliefs Study (TBS; 1984). The TBS included interviews and classroom observations of eight middle school teachers. Nespor found that the beliefs teachers held about the course content, in this case history, often influenced how they taught the content. For example, several teachers felt that imparting historical facts should not be the primary objective of the course because such information could not be retained for long and that students would not use the content in future classes. Rather than focusing on historical facts and details, teachers with the aforementioned beliefs chose to focus instruction on other types of goals, which they believed would have a longer lasting impact on the students. Examples of these goals include teaching appropriate classroom behavior and manners and general study skills, such as outlining a chapter or organizing a notebook (Nespor).

An interesting caveat to the research findings on the association between teacher beliefs and classroom actions appears in Simmons et al. (1999) research with beginning

teachers. They conducted a longitudinal study of secondary-school teachers during their first three years of teaching. Through in-depth interviews and classroom observations the researchers found that teachers' beliefs and practices became more congruent with increased teacher experience. For example, teachers who held student-centered beliefs generally took several years to effectively implement student-centered behaviors in their classrooms. This finding has important implications for the current research study; therefore, only teachers with a minimum of two years of full-time classroom teaching experience will be included in the research sample.

Measurement Issues

Goal theory has been tested through many empirical research studies. The vast majority of past psychological research relied on data collected through student questionnaires (e.g., Assor et al., 2002; Assor et al., 2005; Brdar et al., 2006; Meece & Holt, 1993; Meece & Miller, 1999; Meece et al., 1988; Nicholls et al., 1985; Seifert & O'Keefe, 2001; Turner et al., 2002). This research sought to define and categorize students' affect, cognitive processes and goals through the use of researcher-created statements. Another approach researchers often used in conjunction with student questionnaires to collect data on student goals is teacher assessments of students through teacher questionnaires (e.g., Assor et al., 2005; Meece & Holt). Like student questionnaires, data collected through teacher questionnaires are grounded in researcher-created statements and conceptualization of goals. A third common research method is classroom observation, videotape or audio transcription (e.g., Dowson & McInerney, 2001; Turner et al., 2003; Turner et al., 2002; Urdan & Mestas, 2006). While data are not

collected via researcher-structured questions, data in these methods are coded via researcher-created organization and constructs.

Fang (1996) suggests that inconsistencies reported in studies may be attributed to the measures used in research. Fang goes on to argue that, “central to this is the issue of construct validity. Most studies used researcher-determined statements or categories, which may be different from those of the participants involved in the studies” (p. 55). Several authors (e.g., Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, & Cuthbert, 1988; Pajares, 1992) concur with Fang’s sentiment. If researchers have driven most previous research on student goals within the classroom context, it is possible that certain aspects and dimensions of this construct have been overlooked. No one has ever asked teachers what they think about work avoidance. To help address this gap, the current study solicited teachers’ beliefs and conceptualizations of students’ achievement goals, specifically related to work avoidance through in-depth, conversational interviews. The interviews are analyzed using grounded theory approach. The teachers’ insight may lead to new considerations in achievement goal research.

Method

Participants

Middle-school (Grade 6 – 8) teachers were interviewed for the study. The researcher solicited participants through word of mouth. The researcher asked professional and personal contacts to speak with their coworkers about the research project. Teachers interested in participating in the project contacted the researcher via email. More teachers inquired about participating than were ultimately interviewed; this was a result of scheduling logistics and conflicts, as the researcher was often only on-site

for a short period of time. The six participants who participated in the interview were active full-time teachers so they could draw directly from their current and prior experience to answer the questions. Because teaching experience is known to effect teachers' beliefs (Simmons et al., 1999), the teachers in the study had a minimum of two years of full time teaching experience. During the first part of the interview, each teacher completed a brief demographic questionnaire with questions such as: content area taught; years of teaching experience; school location; public/private school; range of student ability; number of students per class. It is from these questionnaires that the following teacher descriptions were developed.

Teacher A currently teaches seventh grade General Science in a public middle-school in Boston with approximately 360 students total Grades 6-8. She teaches approximately 65 students in one day, with about 22 students per class. This group of students is comprised of African American (60%), Latino (20%), Asian (10%) and Caucasian (10%) children. There is a wide range of student ability levels, with a majority of students reading two grade levels behind. This is the first year she has taught at this school. Prior, she taught eighth grade General Science for three years in a middle-class suburb of Boston.

Teacher B has taught seventh grade Math (Pre-Algebra and Algebra I) for 26 years in a public middle school in a working-class suburban town outside of New York City. The middle school has approximately 600 total students Grades 7-8. She teaches approximately 75 students in one day, with about 15 students per class. The students are homogeneously grouped into Honors and Average classes. This group of students is

comprised predominately of Caucasian (>50%) and also Asian, Indian and Latino children.

Teacher C teaches 6th Grade Science in a large public middle school with approximately 1,350 students Grades 6-8 on the Upper-West Side of Manhattan. She teaches approximately 90 students per day, two classes of homogeneously grouped Honors level students and two classes of Special Education students that are two plus years below grade level. The students are Hispanic, African American and Caucasian. This is her second year teaching at this school, previously she taught public elementary school for three years in the South Bronx.

Teacher D teaches 6th Grade Honors Math at the same school as Teacher C. She teaches approximately 100 students per day with about 32 students per class. This is her fourth year of teaching and she previously taught 7th Grade Architecture Technology and Art at a public middle school in the Bronx.

Teacher E teaches Spanish, Grades 5-8, at a private Episcopalian girls school in an upper-class suburb of Baltimore. She teaches approximately 64 students per day with about 16 students per class. The classes are heterogeneously grouped with a variety of ability levels. There are approximately 50 students per grade. The majority of students are Caucasian; there also are Asian, Hispanic and African American students. Teacher E has taught at this school for 17 years and prior to that she taught French, Spanish and ESL for 14 years in Baltimore County and at an all male Catholic school in the Baltimore area.

Teacher F teaches middle school (Grades 6-8) English, Social Studies and Religion at a small-Catholic school in a semi-urban area outside of Washington, DC. She

teaches 104 students each day with about 30 students per class. In all of the classes, the students are of a broad range of ability. There are approximately 30 students per grade. The students are African, African-American, Latino, Caribbean and Caucasian. Teacher F has taught at this school for two years and previously taught middle school English for four years at a small girls' school in Washington, DC. Prior to that she taught Latin, French and Journalism, for 14 years at Washington, DC area Catholic High Schools and for 10 years, as a teacher educator, at Trinity University.

Interview

Data were collected through interviews conducted by the researcher with each participant. Each teacher met independently in a private location (e.g. classroom) for approximately one hour with the researcher. First, the researcher explained her background to the teacher and then asked the teacher to read and sign the Consent Form (See Appendix A). The researcher asked each teacher if she had any questions before each proceeded with the interview. Each teacher completed a Teacher Demographic Information Questionnaire (See Appendix B). Then the researcher gave a brief overview of the research questions. The interviews were audio recorded. Prior to conducting the six interviews included in this study, the interview was piloted with one teacher in order for the researcher to get experience with different responses and to develop a list of probing questions. The main research questions included:

1. I would like you to think of students who avoid work. How many students come to mind? Please pick the three students that most stand out to you.
2. Let's start with the first student. Please do not tell me his or her name, but can you tell me about what student X does to avoid work?

[Repeat Questions 2a – 2f for each identified student].

3. Why do you think these students avoid work?

See Appendix C for a complete list of interview probes. The main research questions were a relatively easy set of questions for the teachers to understand and answer. The researcher asked and solicited responses to each of the main research questions. Some teachers spoke at greater length and for more time. The teachers differed in the degree to which the follow-up probe questions were needed. If the teacher indirectly answered the probe question, then, the researcher did not ask the corresponding probe question. To solicit information, other teachers who did not address the issues raised by the probe questions in their initial answer were directly asked the probe questions. After the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings.

Treatment of Data

The researcher used the grounded theory approach to analyze the interview transcriptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher systematically read through the data to break down and conceptualize the teachers' beliefs about work avoidance. Using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) suggestion, the researcher asked the following questions, "What is this? What does it represent?" (p. 63). Then, each concept was coded, by giving the concept a name. For consistency and organizational purposes, as similar concepts were identified they were given the same name. After all of the transcriptions were read through and coded, the concepts were compared and organized. Through the process of categorizing, concepts that seemed to pertain to the same phenomena were grouped. Then each category was given an abstract name that related to the data it represented.

For the purpose of establishing validity two independent readers repeated the categorization process. The results of the readers were then compared to the original schema. After discussion of the similarities and differences among the categorizations with a third outside reader, a final set of categories and labels were assigned to the data.

Results

The teacher responses were analyzed with respect to two broad categories: (a) characteristics of students who avoid work and (b) teachers' reasons why students avoid work. Although the teachers' reasons why students avoid work could be subsumed under the characteristics of students, for the process of data analysis it was more logical to present these phenomena separately. Table 1 and Table 2 illustrate an organized overview of the research findings. A detailed explanation of each category and concept, along with specific interview quotes, follows.

Characteristics of Students Who Avoid Work

The characteristics teachers used to describe students who avoid work fall in five main categories: (a) effort, (b) emotions, (c) competence, (d) interactions and (e) reputation.

Effort. Teachers reported two different types of effort that is characteristic of work avoidant students. Some students were seen as not putting forth positive effort regarding work; in essence, these students were described as lacking effort. On the other hand, some students were described as putting forth a lot of effort in the process of minimizing and avoiding work. Some teachers reported students who were characterized as minimizing their amount of effort as exhibiting sloth (e.g., "It's literally like, 'I can't bring myself to put in the effort that is necessary to accomplish this task of copying these

ten vocabulary words into our glossary.’”). Students described as having a lack of effort often were without school materials and their teachers felt their grades were not reflective of their ability.

The teachers also described students who make great effort in actively avoiding work. Teachers often cited students who do not study for tests and quizzes or do not complete homework or do not complete class work. While these students may participate in some school related tasks, the following were noted to be commonly avoided: higher order thinking, creating illustrations, tasks that are not personally connected to the student, any form of evaluation, and long-term projects. In some of the more severe cases of active avoidance, students do not participate in school at all by frequently being tardy and absent. Two private school teachers also noted that students can very vocally and actively express their desire to leave the school entirely (e.g., “Her way is to do poorly so that her parents will pull her out, so that they don’t have to pay the tuition to have her here.”).

Emotions. Teachers identified emotions, or affective states due to a specific situation or circumstance, that are characteristic of students who avoid work. The most commonly identified type of emotion was anger. Teachers frequently reported that the anger expressed by students is directed towards them, the teacher. Some examples of anger included students who are frustrated (e.g., “Very frustrated, because he seemed like he knew what he had to do to improve, but he couldn’t make himself do it.” “He does express his frustration, both in anger and in tears, but he’s rarely humorous about it. He’s pretty serious about it.”), hostile and defiant (e.g., “They become more angry and it becomes a situation I try to avoid for the most part.”). On the other hand, some students

were described as anxious if confronted by a teacher or a peer (e.g., “He gets very nervous if you talk to him individually about what’s happening.”). Students also express a sense of embarrassment for not completing their work, some are even fearful of being made fun of by their peers (e.g., “He’s trying to avoid having attention drawn upon himself.”). Other students were reported to have a negative affect, being in a “bad mood,” or often upset and seeming “depressed” or “very sad about their existence” according to the teachers.

While teachers identified a range of emotions that students express, it was very common for teachers to report that some students had a lack of emotion when avoiding work. These students were said to have no emotion (e.g., “Very flat. He has no affect whatsoever. Maybe a shrug.” “I would say there aren’t any emotions.”) or be apathetic towards the teacher or bored by the incomplete work.

Competence. Teachers reported low levels of academic competence, or the inability to complete a task, as a characteristic of some students who avoid work. Some examples of competence issues include being an English Language Learner, being a very low functioning reader (e.g., “He has basically no writing skills whatsoever and he has some reading skills, but a hard time even with letter recognition in a lot of cases and gets overwhelmed with trying to read.”) and having the ability to understand concepts, but being unable to acquire new skills.

Interactions. Students who are work avoidant were frequently identified as either lacking social interaction or being part of incompetent social interactions with peers and adults. Teachers often reported that other students ignore work avoidant students and therefore are not affected by their behavior. Work avoidant students may be seen as not

fitting in or not part of the social network of students. Teachers reported them as introverted, “withdrawn or a little sullen.” They may be detached from peers (e.g., “He doesn’t play with others; he doesn’t fool around with others. He’s kind of a loner.”) and from adults.

On the other hand, other work avoidant students are more actively in conflict with their peers or teacher (e.g., “If he doesn’t get the grade he expects then his way of dealing with it is to punish me by not doing the next assignment that I give.”). These students may express their dislike for the teacher and the teacher’s practices (e.g., “He does not like the way I run my class and has made that very clear.”). Work avoidant students may be the target of negative reaction from other students (e.g., “I think he becomes the butt of jokes because he does this.”).

Reputation. Teachers frequently noted that other students often perceive work avoidant students as having a long-standing reputation for behaving this way (e.g., “I think that this is this kid’s reputation. ‘Oh yeah, so and so, does not do work. Everybody knows that.’”). Several teachers reported that other students see work avoidant students as annoying because they are disruptive to the class (e.g., “When this person is having a bad day and causes trouble in this class and the next class and the next class, the kids react negatively as well, because they just have enough.”). On the other hand, sometimes students feel bad for work avoidant students and may even make-up the student’s work for them, specifically in a group-work situation.

Why Students Avoid Work

The reasons teachers used to explain why students avoid work fall into five main categories: (a) task/workload characteristics, (b) motivational traits, (c) peers, (d) home and (e) school/teacher.

Task/workload characteristics. In general, the teachers suggested either that the behaviors of work avoidant students are consistent across all subjects (e.g., “It’s across the board...There’s a pattern of behavior.” “More times than not, what’s happening in one class is almost always occurring in every other class.”) or that the behaviors were dependent upon a variety of task and workload characteristics. Some of these characteristics that students specifically avoid include specific subject matter (e.g., “Areas which require a lot of reading.”), types of tasks (e.g., “There are some that don’t like independent work.”) and the difficulty of the task, whether it be the length of the task or the higher-order, critical thinking nature of the task (e.g., “Any of the Questions that go beyond factual answer, any higher level questions, especially when written.” “Anything that involves creativity or coming up with something out of his or her own feeling.”).

Motivational traits. Teachers also identified motivational traits of students who avoid work. Teachers said that some students are “lazy” and they “believe that they don’t have to work hard to achieve” (e.g., “They’re looking for ways of not doing stuff but not being held accountable.”). One teacher suggested that during certain times of the year students are very busy with other activities and therefore don’t complete work. Other students are motivated not to complete work in an effort to challenge their teacher, who is seen as an authority figure (e.g., “It relates not only to school work...but also how much

can I talk back?”). Several teachers suggested that some students are “frustrated with the work” and may not feel competent completing the work so they avoid it all together (e.g., “It had a lot to do with the feeling that they couldn’t do the work and being used to not being able to do the work.”).

Peers. Teachers identified that peers can be very influential on students in middle school. Some students avoid work as a way to fit into and impress a peer group. These students may have negative peer influences that distract them from completing work (e.g., “He chooses to get involved in some outside influences that unfortunately steer him in the wrong direction as opposed to the right direction”) or they may be a part of a “little crew” of students that all avoid work (e.g., “There were a whole bunch of boys that kind of played off each other.... He and one other were capable and could do the work and sometimes really wanted to, but then two of the boys really couldn’t care less and were trying to make things difficult and they kind of got lumped all together.”). Some students also avoid work in order to “put on a show for other students” and attract their attention (e.g., “It was very loud and very center stage. It was not something you could downplay.” “And the one who’s the ‘hot dog,’ you now, kind of navigating with a little bit more ‘I’m going to call the shots’ tends to start wearing the crown in middle school.”).

On the other hand, some students choose not to complete work in order to avoid negative peer perceptions (e.g., “They don’t pick on him particularly, but I think he’s afraid they’re going to if it comes out that he’s so low functioning.”). Some students do not want to be associated with students who are unliked by their classmates and avoid working with unpopular peers (e.g., “He’s more resistant if I ask them to work together on something.”). Teachers reported that some students don’t like to stand in front of peers

to present material and other students don't like to share their personal ideas in class. These two activities put students in the spotlight for other students to be critical and judge them.

Home. Several teachers suggested that students avoid work because of their home environment. Teachers said that conflict at home could be overwhelming and distracting to students in middle school, leading them to be unfocused at school. Other teachers suggested that students do not complete work because there is not enough parental accountability for their actions (e.g., "The parents don't demand enough of them."). Students also may not complete work because their parents are not involved (e.g., "Home doesn't really have enough guidance to try to keep him on the straight and narrow.") or do not establish consequences for incomplete work.

School/teacher. The final reason teachers gave for why students do not complete work is because of the school environment or student teacher fit. Teachers reported that student work completion could depend on whether the student responds positively to a specific teacher's personality (e.g., "This student was very verbal that she hated me." "Sometimes you'll find a student who...personality wise will click more with one teacher. And occasionally there is one class the student will excel in just because of the personality aspect.") and whether the teacher gives the student enough support. Two urban school teachers suggested that the culture may perpetuate work avoidance and/or the acceptance of school failure. One of these teachers also suggested that students may avoid work if they do not identify with the teacher because of racial differences (e.g., "Is my black boy going to do work for the black English teacher?").

Discussion

All six teachers interviewed for the current study were able to identify and describe in detail students they currently teach that avoid work. This is an important finding because it indicates that work avoidance is a problem that middle school teachers face. The interviewed teachers candidly described characteristics of work avoidant students and provided explanations for why students avoid work. Common themes and incongruencies appeared in the data.

Characteristics of Work Avoidant Students

The teachers described the behavior, emotions, and relationships work avoidant students have in the classroom. All of the teachers identified effort as a major indicator of work avoidance. One subcategory of student effort is not putting forth any effort or lacking effort. The other subcategory includes a description of students who make great effort to avoid work. Some work avoidant students may only exhibit one type of effort-related behaviors, but the teachers indicated other students may at times display a lack of effort and at other times actively avoid work. Therefore, there is not evidence to support a theory that posits clearly differentiated types of work avoidant students. This is contrary to the work of Covington (1984) and Seifert (2004), who suggested that there are four distinct types of work avoidant students: failure-avoidant, learned helpless, passive-aggressive, and see no reason. Students may belong in several different categories.

This overlap in characteristics is also apparent in the teachers' descriptions of student emotions. The teachers did not clearly identify some students as lacking emotions and some expressing very intense emotions. The same student may at times be apathetic while at other times express frustration. This is an interesting finding because it supports

the notion that a variety of factors (e.g., task, task difficulty, and social situation) affect students' work avoidance.

While some teachers identified competence issues as a characteristic of students who avoid work, it was not as frequently identified as other characteristics. This may be because the nature of the interview questions. Teachers were asked to identify and discuss in detail their top three work avoiders. Teachers may not perceive competence issues to be the most striking characteristic of students who avoid work.

In the classroom, each student is part of a broader social setting. The teachers described work avoidant students as often having social interactions with peers and teachers that are different from those of students not characterized as work avoidant. Work avoidant students were described as either avoiding social interaction or as displaying incompetent social interactions. This raises an important issue regarding the social aspects of work avoidance. Work avoidance may contribute to social problems or perhaps social problems may contribute to work avoidance. Either way, it is clear from the teachers' reports that other people judge work avoidant students and as a result these students often carry a reputation of being a work avoider.

Reasons Why Students Avoid Work

Researchers have proposed four reasons for the work avoidance goal orientation: failure-avoidant, learned helpless, passive-aggressive, and see no reason (Covington, 1984; Seifert, 2004). The teachers' explanations as to why students are work avoidant do not fit neatly into these categories. The teachers identified a wide variety of factors that affect work performance in the classroom (e.g., task/workload characteristics, motivational traits, peers, home and school/teachers). Although some teachers reported

that students who are work avoidant are consistently work avoidant across all classes and all tasks, these same teachers were still able to highlight different circumstances that may result in students doing or not doing work. This finding indicates that complete work avoidance is not the sole goal of students. The previously suggested reasons for work avoidance (Covington, 1984; Seifert, 2004) neatly portray four different types of work avoidant students. These descriptions may oversimplify the reality of each individual student.

Although there is a common perception that teachers blame student's families and homes for work avoidance in the classroom, the findings do not indicate this to be the teachers' most prominent explanation. In fact, more often, teachers reported a variety of factors in the school environment to be the reason why students avoid work. Teachers suggested a wide variety of workload related reasons for why students avoid work. Students have task related preferences and chose to complete or not complete work dependent on the type of work.

Teachers also highlighted the serious implications of peer influence on work avoidance in middle school. The data indicates that students avoid work as a way to fit in with their peers. Work avoidance can be an active means to impress peers, or students avoid work as a way to avoid criticism from peers. A central theme that teachers reported is seen in the recurrence of social motivational factors surrounding work avoidance. It is of interest to note, that three out of the five main perceptions teachers' have as to why students avoid work are related to social relationships in school.

Strengths and Limitations

Most current educational psychology research about work avoidance goals is primarily based on correlational data, theoretical models, and students' self-reports. Few researchers have looked to teachers for information. Through in-depth conversational interviews the current research gathered information from a wide variety of teachers. The teachers taught in different geographic locations (e.g. urban center of Manhattan and Boston, outside of Washington, DC, suburbs of New York and Baltimore), with different student demographics (e.g., variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status) and in different types of schools (e.g., large public, small public, and private). In general the teachers have either taught middle school for a relatively short period of time or a long period of time (range 4 – 31 years of teaching experience). All of the teachers work in a school where they teach at least two different classes of students a day, and the teachers had a wide variety of subject area specializations (e.g., English, Math, Science, and Spanish).

Although there is a large diversity among the teachers interviewed for the study, the sample cannot accurately represent all teachers. All of the teachers interviewed are Caucasian and female. Future research could include male teachers and teachers of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The current research focused specifically on middle school teachers' perceptions of work avoidance. Middle school is a distinct time in the social, emotional and physical development of children. The format and structure of middle school is different from elementary school. Students are often in larger classes, see many more teachers in one day, and experience an increase in workload. Because the teachers interviewed for this

study all work in middle schools, their responses are contextualized to this environment and developmental age. This focus provides a deeper understanding of work avoidance in middle school, but limits the total understanding of work avoidance in school, in general, as the phenomena may be similar or different during other developmental time periods.

The transcribed interviews were systematically analyzed using a Grounded Theory approach. A large amount of information was gathered directly from teachers; therefore, the information source may more accurately reflect the true nature of the situation. On the other hand, the nature of the data collection process directly involved the researcher, as interviewer; therefore, the social interaction may affect the openness and honesty of the participants. The abundant amount of qualitative data, which can be time consuming to transcribe and work with, provided a rich and descriptive context for answering the research questions. Ultimately, the analysis and results were teacher driven, not researcher driven. Unlike some other research methods, with Grounded Theory the data could be organized and presented in a variety of ways. In this case, three independent readers validated the current representation of the data, but teachers could also be asked to read the data to further validate the organization.

Implications and Future Research

The teachers interviewed for this research were very open and forthcoming about their personal experiences working with students who avoid work. While some of the data concurs with researchers' proposed reasons for work avoidance, teachers also held different beliefs and explanations for work avoidance. The teachers identified multiple kinds of avoiders and provided many reasons why students avoid work. The data was presented in such a way that does not identify which teacher reported each individual

finding. While differences existed between teachers, in general, the teachers reported similar characteristics of students who avoid work and similar reasons why students avoid work. There was much more overlap than discrepancy in reports. This is an interesting finding because although there were demographic differences between the teachers, it suggests that on a whole, the teachers spoke with a united voice surrounding this issue. Of course, an important extension of the research could be to show the findings to other teachers to see if they concur or have additional information to add. Future research could also interview students to see if they report similar or different reasons as to why they or their peers avoid work.

The interview provided teachers a forum to explore the issue and the findings provide a foundation for future research in this area. In the interview, the teachers discussed many aspects of work avoidance. There are several factors that were raised but could be further explored through future research with teachers. Several teachers reported that work avoidance may be related to the task. For example, students were identified as avoiding lengthy reading and writing assignments. Further research could investigate in greater detail the specific nature of tasks that students avoid. Is the variability of when students avoid work related to task aversion? Some tasks may be more relevant to students. Although the teachers interviewed for the present study did not identify this as an issue, further research could probe teachers more specifically to see whether they perceive a lack of task relevance as a reason why students avoid work.

The teachers identified a wide variety of characteristics of work avoidant students and reasons why students avoid work. While it was not addressed in this research interview, an interesting question to explore with teachers would be their perception of

whether work avoidance can be changed. Do teachers see work avoidance as a permanent or malleable characteristic of students? Teachers' perceptions of whether students can or cannot change may also relate to what teachers do about work avoidance in the classroom, which is another possible area for future research.

All of the teachers expressed concern over their students who avoid work (e.g., "I haven't ever come up with the one thing to work with kids that just don't want to work."). And most of the teachers expressed some level of frustration or dissatisfaction with the situation (e.g., "For me it's a frustration that I have not found the key to getting to this particular student.... I take it personally and seriously because I want them to succeed."). Work avoidance is not particularly productive for students or for teachers. Most of the teachers said that work avoidance is an issue that does not get frequently discussed by principals and other teachers. Principals and teacher leaders could provide a forum for teachers to validate their feelings and discuss their experiences. Both more experienced and less experienced teachers mentioned they would like guidance and strategies for working with students who are work avoidant. Teachers may benefit from professional development on research based methods for engaging students in the classroom.

Table 1

 Characteristics of Students who Avoid Work

Category	Subcategories, Examples and (Frequency)
Effort	<i>Lack of Effort</i>
	Sloth (2)
	No school materials (2)
	Grade not reflective of ability (1)
	<i>Active Avoidance</i>
	Does not study for tests/quizzes (2)
	Does not complete homework (7)
	Does not complete class work (2)
	Avoid higher order thinking (4)
	Avoid creating illustrations (1)
	Avoid tasks that are not personally connected (1)
	Avoid evaluation (1)
	Avoid long-term projects (e.g. Science Fair) (1)
	Absent/tardy often (2)
	Wants to leave school (2)
Emotions	<i>Lack of Emotion</i>
	No emotion (2)
	Apathy (4)
	Boredom (1)
	<i>Anger</i>
	Anger (3)
	Frustration (4)
	Hostility/Defiance (4)
	<i>Embarrassment</i>
	Afraid of being made fun of (2)
	Embarrassment (2)
	<i>Negative Affect</i>
	Depressed (2)
	“Bad mood” (2)
	Upset (i.e. cry) (2)
<i>Anxious</i>	
Nervous if confronted (2)	

Category	Subcategories, Examples and (Frequency)
Competence	English Language Learner (1) Very low functioning (1) Understands, but does not acquire skills (1)
Interactions	<i>No Interaction</i> Other students do not interact with (2) Doesn't effect other students (3) Avoid group work (2) <i>Incompetent Interaction</i> Detached (from peers – 1), (from adults – 3) Introverted/withdrawn (2) Conflict with teacher (3) Other students react negatively (4)
Reputation	Student has a reputation for not doing work (1) Other students see student as disruptive (4) Other students feel bad for the student (1) Other students make-up missed work (1)

Table 2

Reasons Why Students Avoid Work

Category	Subcategories, Examples and (Frequency)
Task/Workload Characteristics	<i>Consistent</i> Student behavior is same in all subjects (4)
	<i>Inconsistent</i> Work avoidance is unique to subject (e.g. Math) (2) Students switch off/on, sometimes avoiding work and sometimes completing work (2) Avoid heavy reading (2) Avoid writing (3) Avoid higher order/original thinking (3) Avoid drawing conclusions (2) Avoid independent work (1) Avoid homework (2)
Motivational Traits	Lazy (1) Students believe they do not have to work hard (1) Busy with other activities (1) Students frustrated with work (2) Students do not feel competent (2) To challenge authority (2)
Peers	<i>To Impress</i> Member of “little crew” that avoids work (4) Put on show for other students/for attention (3) Negative peer influences (2)
	<i>To Avoid Negative Peer Perceptions</i> Avoid working with unliked/unpopular peers (1) Don’t like standing in front of peers (2) Don’t like sharing ideas (1)
Home	Not enough parental accountability (3) Conflict at home (2)
School/Teacher	Depends on teachers’ personality (2) Not enough teacher support (1) Cultural (1) Racial (1)

Appendix A

Teacher Demographic Information Questionnaire

1. What grade(s) do you currently teach? _____
2. What subjects are you responsible for teaching? _____
3. How many minutes are in one class period? _____
4. How many years have you taught this grade and this subject? _____
5. What other grades have you previously taught? _____
6. What other subjects have you previously taught? _____

7. Have you taught at other schools before this school? _____
Please tell me more about this...

8. How many years of teaching experience do you have? _____
9. On average, how many students are in one class? _____
10. How many students do you see in one day? _____
11. Can you tell me about the ability level of your students? _____

12. How many students are in the entire ___ Grade? _____
13. What grades are in this school? _____
14. What ethnicity are the students in this school? _____
15. How many different teachers teach the ___ Grade? _____
16. Do you have teacher meetings? _____
Please tell me more about this...

Appendix B

Interview: Work Avoidance in Middle School: Teachers' Perspectives

Name: _____ Date: _____
 Interviewer: Meridith Sloan School: _____

Introduction:

All teachers can attest to the fact that students complete assignments and participate in class work for a wide variety of reasons. On the other hand, teachers can also testify that some students seem completely focused on not doing work. Researchers have proposed several reasons to explain student behavior in the classroom, but there is some debate in the literature as to why some students choose not to complete work.

In the interview, we will speak about your experience with students who avoid work in the classroom.

Work–Avoidance Questions

I would like you to think of students who avoid work.

1. How many students come to mind?

Please pick the three students that most stand out to you.

2. Let's start with the first student. Please do not tell me his or her name, but can you tell me about what student X does to avoid work?

- a. In what situations does the student do ___?
- b. How often does this student avoid work?
- c. How long does the student generally do ___?
- d. Is the student's classroom achievement affected by this behavior?
- e. Does this behavior affect other students in the classroom?
- f. What emotions does the student express when avoiding work?

Let's think about the next student. Is this student similar or different to the first student you described.

[Repeat Questions 2a – 2f for each identified student].

3. Why do you think these students avoid work?

- a. Are there certain assignments students avoid?
- b. Are there certain classroom activities students avoid?
- c. Are there certain social situations in the classroom that the students avoid?
- d. Do other teachers report that the students you discussed avoid work in their classrooms as well?

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