

Chapter 32

The Perceived Work Ethic of K–12 Teachers by Grade Level Taught (K–6, 7–9, 10–12)

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ABSTRACT

Most professional educators agree that K – 20 educators have difficult jobs. However, there has been little research conducted on whether the work ethic of teachers of the different grade levels is common to all levels of teachers. Knowledge of any differences could affect training strategies and educational practices. The science of pedagogy implies that all teaching structures and curriculum are the same for teaching children. However, this chapter shows that there are significant differences between teachers of kindergarten through sixth grade from their counterparts teaching seventh grade through twelfth grade. Specific components that are the result of a factor analysis reveal definitive work ethic constructs that differ between levels of teachers. This information could be used to develop more appropriate curriculum for teachers at all levels of teaching.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports the investigation of the work ethic of K-12 public school educators at different teaching levels. Due to the current need for well prepared and trained teachers, understanding the work attitude or work ethic of teachers is important for reasons of recruitment, training, and retaining

current teachers. This study determines if any differences in work ethic existed among educators in different teaching levels (K - 6, 7 - 9, and 10 - 12) as measured by the Occupational Work Ethic Inventory. Differences in work ethic could indicate changes in the teacher education methods and the curriculum offered with in service training for teachers.

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A strong work ethic is an expected attribute of successful workers in the twenty-first century workplace (Petty & Brewer, 2008). According to various studies, employers have been dissatisfied with the quality of perspective employees produced by the American education system (Hill & Petty, 1995; Lynch, 2000; McNabb, 1997; Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 1983). It is believed that the teachers of today's youth should exhibit the type of work ethic employers require in their employees (Petty, 2010).

Work ethic is also frequently labeled as "work" or "occupational" values (Petty, 2010). Values are a type of preference, based on beliefs about desirability rather than a mere liking (Johnson, 2001). In recent years, the skills necessary for entry-level employment have not been evident in entry-level applicants (Brown, 1999; Cumming & Lesniak, 2000; Imel, 1999; Lankard, 1990; Lynn & Wills, 1994; Stasz & Brewer, 1999). New jobs have required prospective employees to have generic employability skills such as problem-solving, communication, and personal skills (McLarty & Palmer, 1994). Resnick (1997) stated that personal skills include teamwork and resource management skills. Recent studies conducted by business and industry, the U.S. government, and educational experts have indicated a deficiency in job preparation procedures and have concluded that changes are necessary (Gregson, 1995; Maddy-Bernstein, 2000; National Employer Leadership Council, 1999; Petty, 2010; U.S. Department of Labor, 1998; Zirkle, 1998).

BACKGROUND

The problem investigated in the study was to determine if there were different work ethics among educators of the current K-20 teaching workforce. Information about how future or past generations view work ethic is important to a variety of audiences but mostly to employ-

ers (Imel, 1990), in this case the school district administrators. This importance stems from the need to understand how each grade level teacher within the workforce differs in their attitudes and values they place on work.

Many researchers have studied age and generations and how different views of work ethic affect the workplace (Hazim, 2001; Lankard, 1995; Zemke, et al., 2000). Most work ethic studies have been related to employees of the business sector. Few studies have investigated work ethic as it pertains to educators within public schools. Information on attitudes, values, and interpersonal skills, particularly the work ethic of different generations of educators, may be useful for employers, educators, and researchers in determining ways to attract and keep teachers in the workforce.

The Protestant Ethic as developed by Weber (1958) stated that work was a sacrifice and a means to moral righteousness. However, with the rise of the Information Age, work is now perceived as good and rewarding in itself (Hill, 1996). It was believed that the rise in technology at the turn of the 19th century and the changing nature of work was redefining the American work ethic (Applebaum, 1998). According to Rothman (2000), the nature of work drastically changed in the 1960s when work itself became a much more powerful reflection of status than accomplishment. And it became easier to make money without creating anything tangible. The trend from emphasis on work to refocusing on one's personal interests continued through the 1970s and 1980s (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). Slowly the American work ethic changed from working hard to working smart (Leonard, 2000, p. 224).

Cherrington (1980) argued that the values of adults are largely shaped through childhood experiences. Values, which contribute to the development of an individual's work ethic, are developed during youth in three stages: imprinting, modeling, and socializing. Imprinting occurs from birth to approximately age seven. The child observes the world and absorbs values patterns

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