

## Corruption Within The School Systems

--Sarah Sprague

As Joe Paterno once said, "Success without honor is an unseasoned dish; it will satisfy your hunger, but it won't taste good" (quotegarden.com). Corruption has always been present in society. Today there is even corruption in our school systems. Many people favor product over process, disregarding the importance of the process necessary to attain the product. In schools, product is also favored over process. Students today seem to care more about getting a good grade rather than actually learning the material. Some are even willing to cheat to do so. It is clear students do not always value the process. Albert Einstein said, "Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value" (quotegarden.com). If success is obtained through unscrupulous measures, is that success? I am currently in an Advanced Placement American Studies class. There are two sections of this class at my high school; one offered first block, the other fourth block. Students of the class take a weekly reading exam on the assigned readings for that week. After the exam is taken the teacher goes over the test and gives the correct answers. Both classes take the same test. Students in first block have been providing information for some members of fourth block, assuring their success. Why would a student do this? How is this considered success? Only if the product is more important. The three leaders of the Abrahamic faiths; Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, also faced people who were more concerned with the product rather than the process; appearances took precedence. How does one confront this type of attitude? Modeling my efforts in the spirit of the great leaders of the three Abrahamic faiths I will examine the conflict of process versus product in American Studies.

Moses lived in a time of corruption in an Egyptian society controlled by the Pharaoh. The Egyptians, like my class, favored product over process. The pharaohs enslaved the Israelites. The Israelites were required to serve the Egyptians, building huge monuments, to commemorate their ruler, the pyramids. Moses was an Israelite but was raised by the Pharaoh. Moses stood up to the Pharaoh in the name of his people. He stood up to the system that benefited him, in the interest of his people. God supported Moses by casting the Ten Plagues on Egypt. Moses confronted the pharaohs and insisted on the freedom of the Israelites, but the Egyptians would not listen to Moses. Repeatedly, Moses confronted the Pharaoh, and each time his words fell on deaf ears. The first plague brought water that turned into blood, and still the Pharaoh did not free the Israelites.

Moses did not believe that it was right for the Pharaoh to bask in the glory of the astounding pyramids when he built these great structures at the cost of others. How great is an accomplishment that one does not work for? The Pharaohs of Egypt just liked to see the pyramids built in their name. The hard work was completed by someone else, just like the students in block four who cheated to get an A.

Corruption was also part of the society that Jesus lived. Converting religions was a trend. Jesus believed in accepting everyone, not just your neighbor. Matthew 13:24-30 states that even though something may look like wheat, it might not be wheat ([www.biblestudygames.com/biblestudies/parabaletares.htm](http://www.biblestudygames.com/biblestudies/parabaletares.htm)). This means that not everything is what it looks like, just like some people during Jesus' time converted to Christianity because they wanted to say that they were Christian. These people said that they would accept their neighbor but would not accept all people, like those with Leprosy or prostitutes. Jesus stood up to these people and told them that saying that they were Christian is not enough. He told them

that they needed to accept everyone as they are and that they needed to practice Christianity, not just flaunt that they are Christian.

Jesus believed that to say people needed to practice their faith. He preached that you needed to be a good Christian and not just say you were a Christian. Jesus valued process over product because that is what people needed to do to be good Christians. There were people who were faithful and put their faith to practice, and were good Christians. The students of block four were like those Christians who looked like they had accepted the word of God but in actuality had not. These trendy Christians did not care about accepting people as they were, or generally following the tenets of their faith. These people just converted to Christianity so that they were able to tell others that they were Christian.

The society that Muhammad lived in was wrought with corruption. Muhammad addressed this corruption by trying to get people to convert to Islam. In Muhammad's time, people converted to Islam as a trend. These people were known as the Hypocrites. Muhammad was angered by the Hypocrites because they claimed the Islamic faith but did not follow the codes that Muhammad created in Medina. Muhammad thought that people should be Muslim to stop corruption, not to further the corruption of his day. He did not see the Hypocrites as living the way good Muslims should ([www.islamreligion.com/articles/175/](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/175/)).

Muhammad believed that people who claimed the Islamic faith needed to be faithful to that faith. To be a Muslim one needed to practice all the tenets of the faith. The Hypocrites were more concerned with product than process. The Hypocrites flaunted the fact that they were Muslim, but in reality were people who were not true to God's word ([www.islamreligion.com/articles/175/](http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/175/)).

How can we stop cheating in a society where cheating has become the norm? According to the Educational Forum article, “Cheating in Middle School and High School” students responded to their survey by saying students cheat because “adults teach them this kind of behavior.” The article also said that one way to accurately discover why students cheat is to survey them, so I decided to do a survey of my own. I gave a four-question survey to the two sections of the Advanced Placement American Studies classes in my school.

1. Why do you think students cheat?
2. Have you ever cheated?      Yes    No
3. If you found out someone else has cheated would you do something about it?
4. What if your grade was impacted by that person’s cheating?

Question	Answer			Total Participants
	Yes	No	Maybe	
Have you ever cheated?	37	8	0	45
If you found out someone has cheated would you do something about it?	1	37	7	45
What if your grade was impacted by that person’s cheating?	18	19	8	45

Question	Answer	Total Participants
	Why do you think students cheat?	

In the two sections of Advanced Placement American Studies class, 82% of the class admitted to cheating. In that same survey 82% said they would not tell if they knew that a fellow

classmate was cheating, and 42% percent said they would not tell on a fellow student even if would affect their own grade directly form the fellow student's cheating. Many students, 66%, responded that people cheat because they want to get a good grade. I also intern for an academic elective class, World Cultures Latin America/Africa, which consists of students from grades 10-12. In the class that I currently intern for 34% of the class is SPED students, meaning they have a learning disability that is recognized by the school. Another 16% of the class is ELL students, which means those students are learning English as a second language. My teacher was going to be leaving early one day and told the students the day before to give them a heads up. The teacher also said that they were not to leave class early to go to lunch or else the relationship between my teacher and any student who left would be damaged, based solely on an honor code. Of a class consisting of 33 students, only 6% of the class violated the honor code. How is it that the about half of the students in the two sections of advanced placement class, that are supposed to have the most integrity, violated a school policy when only 6% of a regular academic class violated an honor code? According to "Cheating in Middle School and High School," 60% of students surveyed, in a nationwide survey, said they had cheated on and tests and other assignments. Also from that same article 80% of students that were selected for scholastic recognition admitted to cheating on not only teacher crafted tests, but state tests as well, this is a 10% increase from the original introduction 20 years ago to honors students. "Cheating in Middle School and High School" reports that of those students who admitted to cheating on tests, 95% said they have never been caught and also consider themselves morally responsible.

Cheating is not just an issue that is present in middle school and high school; it is also now becoming a problem in collegiate schools as well. A well-known college, University of Michigan, conducted a national meeting to talk about originality, imitation, and plagiarism

(Strom and Strom). Duke University sponsors The Center for Academic Integrity, which 250 colleges are involved in that work on ways to reinstate moral behavior in higher education (Strom and Strom). In an editorial in The Tech newspaper, MIT has also been trying to find a resolution to cheating, and that a simple honor code would not be sufficient enough.

Students are not the only ones who have gotten in trouble for cheating. Many school administration members have gotten caught for part taking in cheating. Some teachers have allowed students to change their answers before passing in their tests to the district and have also allowed students more time to take the test than is instructed to be given. For example, in Long Island, New York, a student's father, who also happened to be the assistant principal that had the responsibility of giving state examinations in a school district near by, provided his child with the answers to the 2005 Regents' test (Strom and Strom). Some states, such as Massachusetts, now give multiple forms of the same test to avoid cheating.

Cheating is an issue because punishment is not always followed through with. Cheating has become an issue for not only students, but teachers as well. According to the survey in The Educational Forum article, 70% of the teachers that participated in the survey admitted to being apprehensive about parents' reactions when accusing a student of cheating, fearing a lawsuit may even come of it. This fear discourages teachers from accusing and punishing students that they may have suspicions about. How can we solve cheating when the administration that is supposed to catch and punish students who are cheating are fearful of repercussions and therefore do not follow up on their suspicions?

After looking through the student-parent handbook that is from my high school handed out to every student, I realized that our school does not have a cheating policy. The only thing that my school does have is a plagiarism policy, which states that the teacher and the student will

discuss the writing in question and the student will get a zero on the paper that is suspected of being plagiarized if the paper is not in the words of the student producing the work (Student-Parent Handbook). The policy also says that the administration can be used for advice on the situation and that the principal is to be notified about plagiarism (Student-Parent Handbook). I was shocked to see that my school did not have a cheating policy, but it does explain a lot. It would explain why the students in my class got away with cheating even though my teacher said that the school administration would be notified. The lack of a cheating policy is not working for our school since we have students that are assumed to have great integrity with a higher cheating rate than that of a regular academic class.

As a way to combat cheating in my own school I have come up with a project to address cheating in my high school. We have a committee called Community Council, at our school. Community Council is made up of students from all of the grades in our high school, grades 8-12. These students come together to address issues that students have about the school. I am going to address the issue of cheating, and the lack of a cheating policy in our school, to our Community Council. I will work with the Community Council to create a cheating policy for our school. I will also address the current plagiarism policy and assess whether or not it is working effectively. Creating a cheating policy and improving the plagiarism policy will enforce what teachers try to teach their students, keep eyes on your own paper and cite words and ideas that are not your own.

Like Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, I am also battling corruption today. I feel that when students cheat, it is the same as stealing because the grades they are “earning” can help in the future. Those grades could help them get into college, even get scholarships that others deserve more. I have come up with a way to combat this issue in my school, as well as model a way to

combat cheating for students across the nation. Students' cheating is a reflection of the value of product over process that has apparently become a social norm within our nation.

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