

Service-Learning Issue Group Paper

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Part 1:

Adolescence and emerging adulthood can be a very trying time in a person's life. The body experiences many changes physically and cognitively all while they move through different phases of life, schooling and friendship. School is an important institution in today's society and serves as a place where children learn academically and socially. A supportive school environment is one of the key factors for later success in the world. Since school does play such an important role and is the place that adolescents first form relationships with peers, it is vital that this environment be one that encourages positive outcomes. As tutors at Classic City High school, it was relatively easy to identify situations and interactions that lead to poor performance or behavior. Having close friends and the use of technology present during the school day can be a distraction for learning and may sway behavior when compared to being in a class without these distractors. This was an issue that was prevalent to all the tutors signifying that it must be an issue with a multitude of students making it worth further investigation.

The prevalence of negative peer influence reaches almost every school and every adolescent especially throughout middle to late adolescents. In this age range (13-18 years old), popularity along with distractions like having friends in class and the increased use of technology such as cell phones make it very easy to be disengaged during the school day. As tutors it has been observed that one student acting out causes a ripple effect and encourages other students to behave negatively creating total classroom disruption (Rambaran, Hopmeyer, Schwartz, Steglich, Badaly, & Veenstra, 2017). Last week one of the English Language Arts teachers asked the tutors about ideas they may have had to keep students engaged. She has recently noticed her student's behavior has worsened, students are being chattier with one another, they are constantly using

their phones in class, and they are being very apathetic about their school work. Her main concern was that when students begin to not care about their grades and are not doing well in class, they stop attending all together. She has seen this pattern occur over many years and is worried about how the students are filling their time when they should be in school. Not being in attendance at school has a major impact on the increased opportunity to engage in risky behavior correlating with poor academic performance. This one example along with many other trends we as tutors have noticed are causeways to failure due to peer influence.

Classic City High School is a second chance and credit recovery school therefore it sees many changes in the student-body throughout the school year with new students arriving and old students leaving. When students change schools, their peer groups also change making it hard to maintain friendships and make new ones. Although once friendships form, they can last for a few years. It takes an equal amount of time to form the same relationships with newer students that are equal to the relationships of students who have been at the same school for many years (Haynie, South, & Bose, 2006). Students who have been at the same school for many years set higher expectations of GPA and graduation plans than do those who have changed schools. The students who have remained at the same school and have these high expectations do not allow new people into their friend group thus it is very easy for new students to fall into the wrong types of friendships that encourage or increase the likelihood of risky behaviors which negatively affects academics (Haynie et al., 2006). Research also shows that there is a direct negative correlation between binge- drinking and academic performance. In addition, binge drinking is a gateway to other risky behaviors such as drug use and being sexually active at a young age (Miller, Naimi, Brewer, & Jones, 2007).

Adolescents may not choose their friends based on behaviors but will adapt their behaviors to align with their peers over time (Wang, Kiuru, Degol, & Salmela-Aro, 2018). That being said when close friends spend most of the day together, they observe the types of behaviors they exhibit which can be beneficial or harmful to the student's education. If the students exhibit positive behaviors such as active listening and good note taking the close friends will likely exhibit this same behavior. However, this is true in the opposite direction. As a mentor this has been exhibited through improper use of technology; one student will use the computer to play a game or watch YouTube videos causing a distraction in the learning environment and decreasing productivity. This type of negative behavior is likely to decrease academic performance as students are preoccupied for the majority of the class with what they have to talk about with their friends rather than directing their focus to the task at hand.

As well as working in classroom settings with multiple students, some of us tutors have been working one on one with one student in a separate room than the rest. It has been obvious to both the teacher and the individual student, that working in an isolated area, away from all friends and peers, has been an extremely beneficial tactic. Without having any close friends around as distractions, the student can focus clearly on the work at hand and feel comfortable to ask for help with any of the concepts being presented. The teacher has stated that ever since the student began working one on one with the tutor, his grades have improved immensely. Although it is nearly impossible for each student to have one-on-one interactions every day, they proved to be beneficial due to the absence of peer and technological distraction that ultimately increased this student's focus and understanding.

One reason for the increase in grades of the student previously described is the absence of technology in the learning environment. Technology does play a vital role in the education of students today with majority of classwork being online. The internet and computers or phones in general have so many distractions whether it is gaming, messaging, or watching videos.

Adolescents today have grown up being exposed to technology and since has become more and more incorporated into their daily routine and academic lives (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Over 80% of students use technology and report paying less attention to class material (McCoy, 2013). Therefore, it is common that students are distracted even if their close friend is not in class with them. They have the ability to be present and be a distraction through texting or even face-time. On many occasions there have been girls in class and on facetime at the same time thus, hindering communication between the student and the teacher.

The school does not have any specific policies to prevent close friends from being in the same class however they do have a policy in place for the use of technology. Students are often encouraged to work together and make friends but when it becomes a distraction it is up to the discretion of the teacher and their specific classroom policy. An example to keep friends from being a distraction during work time is to enforce assigned seating. As far as technology is concerned, the school has set rules that cell phone are not allowed out during class. Although it is not difficult to monitor students are very attached to their phones and disregard the rule. This causes teachers to have to choose which issues they want to argue over. When it comes down to students being on their phone or choosing to work with a student, the teacher is going to help better the education of the student in need of help rather than patrol cell phone use. The classrooms of today's schools are filled with many distractions that are difficult to manage.

Part 2:

The articles talk about how adolescents change as they are in adolescence, and they highlight how these individuals shift their relationships and time spending from family to peers or friends. As a result, the people that they are surrounded with have a huge influence on the type of person they become. Like the focus of our paper, the articles mention how peer influence shapes the individuals in different ways, such as in academic performances, school engagement, popularity, emotional wellbeing, and risky behavior participation. In addition, they discuss how technology and peer influence collaborate to influence the adolescent. Overall, the main point of these articles is that since peers have a great influence on the development of the individuals, the type of friends or peers that they make and are surrounded with impact how well they perform academically and the adolescents' view on education.

The methods that many of these articles used were surveys that were administered at school while others were done online or through the phone. Some articles used national and multi-surveys like the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Haynie et al., 2006) and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Miller et al., 2007) which provided access to different groups of adolescents across the country while others had questionnaires created to answer specific topics like academic performance, substance use, parental investment/involvement, etc., allowing them to operationalize what those topics meant. These commonly applied to a certain period of time frame. These questions further investigated their perceptions on topics, such as listing their friends, their friend's academic performance like GPA, rating peers or friends (in terms of popularity or likeability), the adolescents' expectations on going to college and graduation, participation in extracurriculars, school attendance and effort, and engagement in

risky behaviors like drinking, smoking, skipping class, using drugs, reckless driving, etc. The majority of adolescents involved a longitudinal study in which participants were studied in multiple (usually two) instances had results that varied from within the same academic year to over few years. However, the study generally did not extent to beyond adolescence years.

The samples often used in these surveys included participants from different age groups in adolescence and one from emerging adulthood (McCoy, 2013), but many of them were in their middle to late adolescence. Some were from selected schools (generally in the United States) or countries, such as Finland (Wang et al., 2018) and Uruguay (Balsa, Gandelman, & Roldan, 2018). Additionally, the sample also included feedback from adult figures like the adolescents' parents and teachers, as well as the school districts. The ethnicity and race differed in that some had inclusion of different types while in one particular study, only African American and White students were studied (Jamison, Wilson, & Ryan, 2015). The socioeconomic status varied because few members of the population were of middle socioeconomic status while others were of lower socioeconomic status.

The research questions examined the relationships between factors, but the ones that focused on peer influences on the adolescents' academic achievement observed the type of relationship and interaction the adolescents had with their peers and friends. The articles investigated how the academic or deviant behaviors of friends contributed to the same behaviors for the individuals, so they explored complementarity of friendships. In other articles, they searched for how the involvement or the frequency of certain risky behaviors predisposed or increased the likelihood of the adolescents engaging in greater dangerous risk behaviors and

falling behind academically. Many articles directly explored academic achievement like GPA and engagement in school like truancy, involvement, and motivation.

The findings presented that peers have enormous effect on the development of adolescents in both positive and negative ways. In many cases, it was suggested that adolescents take on the characteristics and attitudes of the peers and friends around them, so if they spent time with those who did better in school, they will do better and vice versa for those who did not do well. For example, in Rambaran et al., they found data that if adolescents were with higher achieving peers, they tried to increase their GPA while when they were with lower achieving peers, their GPA decreased (2017). However, this also took into account the fact that students would befriend those who have the same attitude and belief as them (Rambaran et al., 2017) (Wang et al., 2018). As a result, it was troubling to find from Wang et al. was that adolescents are likely to befriend those with similar truant behaviors like skipping classes, and over time, they will align their behaviors to those of their friends (2018). Nonetheless, the same article talks about adolescents who have friends who highly value school, committed to their academics, and are highly engaged are likely to transmit them to each other through sharing and reinforcement of the positive patterns.

Other findings from articles highlighted how school climate like school cohesion and positive peer associations played a crucial role in student's successes. Another interesting factor was residential mobility, and the research observed that mobile adolescents were in friendship networks of weaker academic performances and higher rates of deviance (Haynie et al., 2006). The root reasons were that the mobile adolescents had difficulty in "breaking into friendship cliques" of the higher achieving peers, and the underperforming peers were more welcoming

(Haynie et al., 2006). In essence, when compared with the results from the previous paragraph, it can be described that adolescents are stuck to whatever academic achievement level they are in because even if they want to befriend those in a different achievement level, if that group is not welcoming, they cannot be influenced by them. In one study, they analyzed the cool reputation and disruption with ethnicity, and a similar result they found was that students nominated peers who were similar in gender and ethnic group as being cool (Jamison et al., 2015).

Two articles talked about the presents of technology and its effect on peer relationship and academic achievement. Both describe how technology is useful and valued for learning purposes, but they are harmful and distracting (McCoy, 2013) (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). In fact, respondents in McCoy favored the implementation of technology policies because more than eighty percent indicated that technology hindered them from paying attention or missing instruction (McCoy, 2013). The results in Subrahmanyam & Greenfield further supported the point in that because of the constant availability of friends and connectedness, students are having trouble concentrating and doing worse in academic performance (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).

Part 3:

Adolescence is a primitive time in one's life where an adolescent will undergo many changes developmentally. During these years, a person will learn socio-emotional skills, coping skills, and define their own identities. On top of all of this, adolescents are expected to perform well in school which will continue to shape their future. Having a learning environment that emphasizes their strengths is important, but no matter where adolescents tend to go to school there are always distractions impeding their ability to learn at their highest potential. As tutors at

Classic City High School, we have seen some troubled youth who struggle even more to get an education for their future. They are surrounded by distractions every day whether they be at home, work, or school. Influence from their peers at school contributes to many major classroom distractions. While the distractions from various aspects of their life cause stress and strife, distractions at school tend to harm their education where they should be learning the most.

Upon viewing some instances at Classic City High school, the most prevalent distraction came from peer influence resulting in the exploitation of technology in the classroom. Upon further research on the subject, technology was seen as beneficial in enhancing learning in the classroom; however, some research mentioned how harmful and distraction technology in general has become (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Most of the technology abuse seen first-hand related toward the use of cell phones in class and their distraction but having other sources of technology like computers, televisions, and tablets can be issues as well. As a firsthand example, one tutor was placed in an online math classroom. The students are given laptops from which to do their work but having this freedom of a laptop causes more distractions to the students than benefits. There were students that were observed constantly looking up answers during tests or “taking breaks” to spend hours at a time watching YouTube videos. This type of behavior with technology is not what they are meant to be used for and definitely do not facilitate enhanced learning with the students. A continuation of this behavior is not just harming one student who continues to misuse technology in the classroom, but it can also disrupt learning from those around them. Overall, this behavior is causing a toxic learning environment.

In a time where technology can be so helpful and harmful at the same time, there are apparent gaps in research, policy, and observations as tutor in today’s high school environments

that propose conclusions for this issue. The research discusses the importance of technology in the classroom as well as it being distracting, but there is not a lot of research on ways to decrease or inhibit this abuse of technology in our education system. Many schools or teachers, like the educators at Classic City High School, have a “no phones” policy, but most of the time that ideal outcome is rarely strictly enforced. Since technology is now becoming a major education tool, how do we continue to use it respectfully to facilitate learning whether than facilitate a major classroom wide distraction? A proposed policy or guideline for technology use in the classroom is having all schools block certain websites on their Wi-Fi or around their campus location. These websites could be anything ranging in what they think is appropriate and not appropriate at school. Some examples include blocking social media sites, YouTube, websites with inappropriate content, or online shopping websites. These are some typical websites that we have seen be used as distractions in our learning environments and in our tutee’s environments and restricting these certain websites may hinder the temptation to use their devices when their access is restricted. A lot of schools are also granting their students laptops or tablets from which to do work on at home or at school. While these devices are being used at school in a classroom, there should be a way for the students to share their screen with their professor. If we could implement some type of app for students and teachers to use to set up screen sharing to the teacher’s desktop while they are teaching, he or she could attempt to monitor if their students are simply doing their work or taking notes in class or on some other distracting website. If there are classrooms with tens to hundreds of people in it, the app could simply put up a student’s name on the desktop and their website on their current screen. When over two-thirds of students who use technology report paying less attention to class material when they have access to their devices,

there is an evident issue and gap in policy on what is appropriate in usage (McCoy, 2013). These ideas could help limit the distracting use of technology especially during class time when distractions would be least beneficial. However, there could be some unintended consequences that arise from implementing these policies in schools across the United States.

When new policies arise, there will almost always be push back from others with opposing ideas. Sometimes people who want to set up a new policy for the better run into unintended consequences making the issue even worse. There could be some push back and negativities toward the policy of screen sharing and blocking websites on campus. When it comes to blocking websites on campus, students are savvier than expected and always seem to get around restrictions. From personal experience, other apps can be created to bypass school Wi-Fi restrictions, or students could turn on their cell phone data/ mobile hotspot to use websites blocked from the school's Wi-Fi. This is where blocking certain websites around a location may be more adversary than merely restricting access on the school's Wi-Fi. There are also times where it may be appropriate for students to use their phones on school campus like during class change, lunch, recess, or at sporting events after school, and blocking access all day or all-around campus may do more harm than good. There also comes an issue on what websites should be blocked. Some websites like Quizlet and academic sites should be allowed, but they can also be abused during class to study and distract other students. A potential way to inhibit this behavior could be the screen sharing policy. However, there are other potential challenges in implementing this policy. A major unintended consequence could be parents or lawsuits coming after schools for invasion of privacy. If students are required to share their screens with their teachers during all classes, it can be seen as an invasion of privacy on behalf of the student. He

or she may be using a person device or looking at personal information on their screen that their teacher could see. While students should not be looking at other information other than items used for class, this could be seen as an issue as well.

No matter the issues that may arise, schools should look into putting in place a policy or device guidelines especially during class times. If misuse of this key tool in education continues, it may need to be taken out altogether. As an alternative to that, simple school policies like website restrictions and screen sharing can be used to combat this issue. The research and day to day observations suggest how prevalent this issue is. Distractions from peers and technology on academic performance suggest lower academic achievement and performance. Where the classroom should be a place for students to feel inspired to learn, they may feel disengaged and distracted. In taking the data from various different studies and real-life observations throughout the semester, this issue seems worth taking time into implementing the policies proposed as a start to combating this issue. In working with the education system at large, school systems, and students in educating them on the benefits and consequences of technology use in the classroom, it will show how prevalent this issue is and what measures need to be taken before the consequences outweigh the benefits. Peer distractions in the classroom are only heightened with the use of technology, and it can change starting with some simple guidelines and policies.

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