

Group aims to change the way youth think about work

A group in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has set out to change the way young people think about the consequences of work on others.

The GoodWork Project has launched a practical initiative to start conversations and stir up new thinking about the world of work. The initiative, called the GoodWork Toolkit, includes the discussion of real-life, work-related cases to achieve this goal.

“By presenting students with real stories of the struggles professionals face (at all levels) of carrying out ‘good work,’ work that is excellent, ethical, and engaging, students begin to understand that ‘good work’ is something that can’t be taken for granted,” say Wendy Fischman and Lynn Barendsen, co-developers of the Toolkit.

“Sometimes what may seem like small decisions to an individual, can have major impact for others. Therefore, with students, faculty, and parents, we focus our work around the notion of alignment, with the goal of getting these constituents on the same page about what constitutes ‘good work.’ We hope ultimately to alleviate some of the stress that many students and adults feel and that often leads to unethical work.”

The GoodWork® Toolkit was introduced recently to the faculty and students at the Horace Mann School in Riverdale, New York.

A presentation by GoodWork Project developer Howard Gardner was followed by a workshop for teachers and administrations. Workshop topics included competition, parental influence on school work, and the limits of professional responsibilities.

“Reportedly, participants found the workshop helpful in thinking about issues that trouble them in their work and which they do not have the opportunity to address on

a regular basis,” say Fischman and Barendsen.

Discussions with students of ethics and psychology classes also took place.

“We had the opportunity to talk with students about real examples of students who struggle to carry out good work, specifically when facing challenges of deciding about early admissions, plotting how to win a science competition, and using dishonesty as a means to handle a stressful workload at the end of the year,” say Fischman and Barendsen.

The two-day event was a first step “in a potential ongoing relationship to their school as they think about ways to encourage ‘good work’ as part of their whole school culture,” they add.

Researchers at Claremont Graduate University, Harvard University, and Stanford University have been engaged in the GoodWork Project, since 1995.

The Project evolved out of concern about “what might happen when professionals face immense pressure to meet bottom-line demands,” according to the GoodWork Project Web site (www.goodwork.org/practice/toolkit.htm). “The market pressures of today must be considered in combination with advances in technology that are unprecedented,” the site states. “Young workers are developing in a different cultural climate than their predecessors, and face the complex challenge of learning to negotiate the often competing demands of excellence, ethics, and earnings.”

There is growing interest in the Toolkit, a practical extension of the Project’s findings. Fischman and Barendsen say they have responded to increasing requests for information from educators within the United States and abroad, including teachers and administrators, college and university professors, and other organizations.