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For Turnitin Blog

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As regular readers of the blog know, student plagiarism is a challenging issue in education today. According to [The School for Ethical Education's \(SEE\) Academic Motivation and Integrity Survey¹ \(AMIS\)](#), almost 60% of US public high school students who responded to the survey self-report some form of plagiarism during a typical school year. As educators, we have three options to choose from as we consider how to respond to the problem we and our students face.

We can ignore the whole issue and hope it goes away. Of course the problem of plagiarism won't go away and our inaction only maintains the status quo. Students have communicated their frustration to us in their AMIS survey responses. A typical high school student's complaint is captured in this quote, "I don't think that academic integrity is really enforced. Students cheat. They don't get caught." While doing nothing is an option, we hope most of our peers would agree it is not a helpful option and certainly doesn't address the concerns of many students.

A second option is choosing to act and resist plagiarism in its many forms. Actions will generally focus on policy formation and enforcement to make plagiarism more difficult and costly if caught. In a recent [Turnitin webinar](#), we outlined a variety of strategies teachers can implement to help resist plagiarism. Some of those strategies include:

1. Breaking large assignments into smaller parts with intermediate deadlines to reduce the likelihood of student procrastination leading to temptation to plagiarize online resources.
2. Integrating forms of personal or current events reflection that would not be available to an online paper mill.
3. Having students conduct and report on their own [Turnitin Similarity Check](#) prior to final submission of their paper.
4. Randomly selecting or having all students present an oral summary of their work to demonstrate personal mastery of the topic.
5. Instructing students in the skills of note taking with source citations, outlining, placing citations in the text and bibliography, paraphrasing and quoting.

All of these strategies should be advanced with the overall goal of seeking mastery learning for each student. Mastery learning, or learning to develop competence in a subject or skill, is contrasted to performance learning where the knowledge demonstrated might be copied without citation from someone else. Engaging students in the process of learning is one of the first keys in resisting the temptation to plagiarize and promote mastery of subject matter.

The third option for educators to resist plagiarism, and the focus of the balance of this blog, is the goal of developing students' personal commitment to academic integrity. Can we develop an appreciation for integrity in our students? Would an appreciation for integrity help students resist the temptation to plagiarize? There is research that can guide best practice here, which begins with our own commitment to academic integrity.

Our commitment to integrity can be expressed both orally and published in course syllabi. Our personal commitment to academic integrity can be explained by a goal for students to experience authentic learning and mastery of subject matter. With these goals in mind, we encourage students to reject the shortcuts of academic dishonesty that include

plagiarism. Thus, students would find a statement in our class syllabus at the secondary level that might state, *In keeping with school policy, I am committed to the practice and protection of academic integrity. Cheating in any form represents a fraud, compromises authentic learning and, if plagiarism, it is also a theft. If cheating is detected, it will result in loss of grade, communication with parents/guardians, and report to the school administration.* While the wording of this statement will certainly be different for secondary and post-secondary schools, the intent should be clear at any academic level. Students will understand their instructor is committed to upholding academic integrity.

Another key in this communication is the identification of plagiarism as a theft. This choice of vocabulary correctly makes plagiarism an ethical issue. In addition to recognizing a respected teacher's concern for plagiarism, there is another research correlate that points to a decrease of plagiarism when it is openly identified as an ethical error. Plagiarism is not just a short cut or mistake. Exposed as an ethical violation, plagiarism creates a disequilibrium for those sensitive to their ethical motivation. Language matters and how plagiarism is defined and discussed will either activate an ethical claim to practice integrity, or ignore the power of ethical motivation.

A useful exercise to build on the theme labeling plagiarism as an ethical problem is to have students brainstorm the costs or harm to the individual student and school community associated with cheating. Ethics, after all, are rules or principles that help guide behavior for the individual and society to flourish. Identifying harm to the individual and society enhances the ethical claim.

Students will recognize some of the following list of ethical problems rather quickly. The suggested activity is meant to be a constructivist approach to have students identify the cost of cheating/plagiarism. Once students have brainstormed a class list, we recommend comparing it to the following ten costs of cheating and have students rank the harms they believe are most serious and explain why.

Cheating harms the individual by:

1. Rationalizing their cheating/plagiarism leads to more cheating (in and out of academics) and a corruption of their own ethical/moral code
2. Failing to engage in the authentic learning and mastery of academic material and thus harming their own education
3. Harming their reputation if they are caught (they are frauds, liars and intellectual thieves) and facing consequences that can be serious
4. Reducing the enjoyment of accomplishments earned through genuine effort

Cheating harms society, the school culture by:

5. Creating an environment of broken trust, which then limits the ability of students and students and faculty to work together meaningfully and collaboratively
6. Cheating not addressed leads to more cheating and normalized in the culture of lower standards
7. Lowering standards can reduce the moral authority of school leaders
8. Forcing cheaters to depend on authentic learners because cheaters have not learned or mastered their own academic work
9. Requiring productive students to spend time and effort protecting themselves (intellectual property, ideas, writing, exam answers) from cheaters which is nonproductive work
10. Awarding cheaters falsely-earned rights, privileges and scholarships

We conclude this short essay with one additional vocabulary strategy to cultivate an ethical commitment on the part of students to resist plagiarism. Teachers can help students identify and define their own set of ethical core values that should ultimately define what type of reputation a student wants to develop. Ethical core values include terms like integrity, responsibility, perseverance and fairness. Each term should be defined in behavioral terms as they relate to academic life and life in general. The terms highlighted here all have specific attributes that would support

a student's commitment to academic integrity. The overarching question in this strategy becomes, how do I want to live? Do I want to be committed to and demonstrate ethical values?

Regrettably, this is almost a counter-cultural activity in the current age. We can choose as educators to give into the cynicism of the modern culture, or recognize our role of modeling a commitment to achieving with integrity and activate the psychology of an ethical claim in our students. Students choosing a commitment to core ethical values will be an asset to any society.

So, we have three options in the face of widespread student plagiarism. We can ignore it, we can attempt to police our way out of the problem, or we can seek to cultivate our students' personal commitment to integrity. We encourage the use of both respectful policing and reflective activities and dialogue to promote students' understanding, commitment to and choice to demonstrate ethical behavior. For more information SEE invites you to visit our [Integrity Works! website](#).

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¹AMIS is the product of a collaboration with Dr. Jason Stephens currently at the University of Auckland