

PLAGIARISM ISN'T JUST *an* ISSUE *for* STUDENTS

By Deborah K. Reed

Teresa Lozano was working in the high school library during her conference period, preparing for an upcoming lesson. As she searched for current information and bookmarked web sites, she overheard a discussion between two students seated at a computer station near her.

“Just copy and paste that,” the boy said. “We need to get this done.”

“Aren’t we supposed to use quotes or something?” the girl asked her peer partner.

“Mr. Henshaw isn’t going to check all these slides. Besides, we have to present this, don’t we? The web site isn’t making our presentation for us, so we still have to do most of the work. What’s the big deal?”

“I guess it’s just a couple slides,” the girl agreed.

What should Lozano do? Does she have a professional obligation to report the students to their teacher? In fact, Lozano quietly approached the librarian to obtain the students’ names through their log-ins. She then went to Henshaw to discuss what she overheard. Henshaw asked to meet with the students the next day to go over their presentation. He confirmed that they had plagiarized information from a web site, so he took the opportunity to review with



all his classes the school’s academic dishonesty policy. Moreover, one of the students involved in the incident was a member of the campus’ National Honor Society. Henshaw informed the faculty advisor for the organization, who subsequently warned the student that any academic dishonesty would be considered grounds for dismissal from National Honor Society.

Most of us would agree that these were appropriate steps to help the students learn to make good choices and earn their grades legitimately. We are appalled at reports of rampant cheating among high school and college students, primarily by cutting and pasting from the Internet without providing citations (Scanlon & Neumann, 2002). We can all point to situations in real life where an individual suffered serious consequences for plagiarizing work: The national reporter who was fired for publishing another journalist’s articles as his own or the comedian who was publicly upbraided by his peers for using their jokes in his act without permission (Barry, Barstow, Glater, Liptak, et al, 2003; Goldyn, 2007).

Many schools incorporate such scenarios in character education programs. The lessons encourage students to examine the actions of those who claimed someone else's work as their own, as well as the actions of those who reported the incidents. The message for children and adolescents is that plagiarism is unacceptable, and knowing about but not reporting forms of cheating is just as wrong.

Why is it, then, that educators often do not uphold these same standards when confronted with "cheating" among their colleagues? Consider the following scenario:

Last spring, Steven Nguyen attended a national conference with two other teachers from the middle school where he teaches. At the conference, the three teachers participated in a particularly interesting breakout session where they learned innovative strategies professors were researching at a local university. The teachers implemented the practices in their classrooms and observed increased success among their students.

The next fall, Nguyen's two colleagues offered to provide professional development to the rest of the middle school faculty on the new strategies they had been using. The district curriculum coordinator and the principal scheduled the teachers' presentation as part of the next professional development day. As Nguyen listened to the presentation and looked at the slides, he noticed that most of the content was remarkably similar to what they had experienced at the national conference a few months earlier. When he returned to his classroom, Nguyen compared the university professors' handouts to the handouts his colleagues had distributed to the faculty. The material was the same, except for a change in backgrounds and the names of the presenters listed on the cover. The teachers had not cited the researchers or noted whether permission had been granted to reproduce the material. Nguyen later learned that the two teachers were going to be paid to offer the same presentation at a school district across town.

What should Nguyen do? Does he have a professional responsibility to report his two colleagues to the district curriculum coordinator or principal who arranged for the presentation? Should he plan to meet with his colleagues to review what constitutes plagiarism? If they refused to amend their presentation, would we all agree that disciplinary action was important to helping these teachers learn to make good choices and earn their reputations legitimately?

If experience is any indication, Nguyen would not be heralded as a champion of character education or professional ethics for reporting his colleagues when they exhibited the same behavior that is considered unacceptable among students. It is more likely that the faculty would believe it was not Nguyen's place to police his fellow teachers. Moreover, administrators and faculty might excuse the presenters' actions as an innocent effort to pass along important information intended to help students in a timely and cost-effective manner. In essence, they might echo the sentiments of the boy in the first anecdote who

wondered, "What's the big deal?"

It is difficult to escape the injustice done to educators when others type their ideas onto new slides with different backgrounds or otherwise share original ideas without proper citations or permission. As with most professions, the field of education is supposed to be guided by agreed-upon standards of conduct. To this end, there are codes of ethics published by education organizations, such as the American Educational Research Association and the International Reading Association, that admonish members to "honestly [represent] oneself and one's work" (IRA, n.d.) and acknowledge the intellectual property of others (AERA, 2000). It is considered a matter of integrity and professionalism for educators to hold themselves to the same or higher expectations we hold for our students. But in order to do so, we need an improved understanding of current copyright rules. Note that U.S. copyright law is subject to change. Find up-to-date information at www.copyright.gov.

Many educational uses of protected materials fall under the fair use guidelines of U.S. copyright law (17 U.S.C. § 107). It is generally acceptable to use material one time in a course if it is distributed in limited fashion with the original copyright notice or appropriate citations, and subsequently terminated (if electronic) or destroyed (if in hard copy). Repeated use by the same instructor or for the same class requires permission, not just citation. Fair use also tends to be negated when larger amounts of a single copyrighted source are used, or when the material is more imaginative or does not have copyright information to cite (as is usually the case with presentation slides).

What is often most contentious in educational copyright issues relates to fees associated with the use of materials. It is not acceptable to charge for services or products made on the basis of material taken from others without permission — even if the services and products are intended for educational purposes. If financial compensation is involved, it would only be fair for the original creator to have the opportunity to profit first. Similarly, it is not acceptable to reproduce material without permission simply because a school or individual does not want or cannot afford to pay any associated fees. Ideas may not be as tangible, but they are property nonetheless.

If it were not important for educators to observe copyright, then academic dishonesty policies everywhere would need to be abolished. The notion that students should be allowed to plagiarize in their work has always stricken teachers as absurd. Not only do we hold students accountable for monitoring their own behavior, but we also teach them to demonstrate courage in reporting the unethical behavior of their peers. As professionals and adult models, we must expect as much of ourselves. We need to be more diligent about honoring the work of colleagues in our field. And if we choose to remain silent in the face of blatant copyright violations among our peers, we have to recognize our tacit complicity in the act. Even good faith mistakes ought to be addressed, albeit sensitively, in an effort to prevent per-

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petuating the problem.

Consider what our behavior communicates to each other, to our students, and to the public. We are stewards of the trust and respect afforded our profession, so copyright cannot be approached as a matter of personal choice or something that applies only to students. Let's all make it a bigger deal and include copyright adherence among the ways we exhibit the ethical practices that govern Learning Forward (n.d.):

PRINCIPLE V: Staff development providers give appropriate credit to individuals or organizations whose work has influenced them.

Staff development providers understand and recognize the theoretical and research traditions that are the basis of their work. They acknowledge these contributions when appropriate in their presentations and writing.

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Collaboration paints a bright future for arts education

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the students — a show of square dances, for example, by those 4th-grade Texas scholars.

The mantra, says Welle, was “no worksheets.”

Ensuring the success of this recrafted summer school meant offering intense professional development to 800 classroom teachers, fine arts instructors, teaching artists, school principals, and others. It took place over two days last June in a large Dallas high school. The attendees participated in what Binford calls “project-based learning 101” — learning the principles of the project technique, how to apply it, and why it could benefit children. Later in the day, classroom teachers, fine art instructors, and others met separately with curriculum writers to get up to speed on the curriculum and their specific roles in teaching it. There was instruction in administrative procedures as well as team-building exercises, as fine arts and academic teachers, accustomed to working alone, learned to work in tandem.

Equipped with their learning experiences, the teachers and artists dispersed to the 22 school buildings that housed the July program. More than 7,000 students took part, and a mark of the program's draw was that a sizeable portion of them did not have to attend. In addition to struggling students, Welle says, the program attracted children whose families were looking for sound, safe, vacation-time opportunities for their youngsters.

Now, Dallas is gearing up for summer 2011 and applying lessons it learned during the kickoff year. This time, for exam-

ple, organizers plan to offer the professional development earlier and to make it more of an exercise in team-building by basing it at the individual schools where the camps will take place.

Whatever kinks still need ironing out, however, Welle believes that a major accomplishment of July 2010 was its proof that a summer school with art at its center could be more than drudgery for children. “I told the community artists that if nothing else, I'd like the kids to leave at 5 p.m. so excited about what they were doing that they couldn't wait until they came back,” he says. “It's amazing how they took that to heart.”

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