Grounded Design Project: *To Do And What Not To Do,* A Learning Module On Avoiding Plagiarism

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The advent of information and communication technology has impacted education in a big way. It has improved the effectiveness of teaching and learning, especially in the current times, through its applicability to personalized learning, distance and online learning, and easy access to information. However, it has also amplified some existing problems in education, cheating being one of them. Academic dishonesty is nothing new, but technology has made it much easier to do so.

A recent conversation with a friend highlighted this issue. Sarah teaches English at a local high school. As she was grading her students' writing assignments, she found that students had 'borrowed heavily' from the Internet, often copying and pasting information from various websites and digital sources, ('patchwriting'), with no sources credited. During a candid discussion with her students, she realized that most students were unaware that they had plagiarized. They thought that they were allowed, and more importantly, it was okay to source information from the Internet because it was freely available. Others claimed that they had paraphrased or summarized authors' words (so citations were unnecessary). Some wanted to get a good grade, while others admitted that it was much easier to browse the Internet for information, it took little effort and less time. What concerned her was that the students intrinsically viewed this behavior as less serious and 'normal' because everyone was doing it.

Need and Overarching Goal

The scenario described above has become an increasingly familiar one in schools and universities. In a survey conducted by Dr. Donald McCabe and the International Center for Academic Integrity of over 70,000 high school students at over 24 high schools in the United States, "95% said they participated in some form of cheating, whether it was on a test, plagiarism or copying homework" (Stats, n.d., ICAI).

The advancements in ICT, especially the Internet, and the confusion that seems to surround the understanding of plagiarism and what it entails are the two main underlying causes of academic dishonesty in schools and colleges. Several studies have credited the Internet with enabling students to plagiarize (Marshall & Garry2005; Šprajc et al.; 2017; Peters & Cadieux, 2019). With unlimited information just a mouse click away and access to technologies that make it so easy to copy, it is no wonder that students are tempted to do so. Copy-paste plagiarism is the most common forms of Internet plagiarism prevalent in high school students, and most of them do not consider it serious (Sisti, 2007). The reason for this can be attributed to students' lack of understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. Though most students understand plagiarism and academic dishonesty is bad and a serious offence, they do not believe that their behavior and actions actually constitute plagiarism (Echanique, 2020; Marshall & Garry, 2005). A third reason has also emerged as a factor contributing to plagiarism – students' limited competencies in comprehension and writing skills, resulting in decreased self-efficacy (Echanique, 2020; Peters & Cadieux, 2019; Šprajc et al.,2017).

There is an urgent need to foster academic integrity in students, if we are to equip them with life skills that are needed to help them successfully navigate the present and future digital world. Researchers and educators emphasize the importance of instilling these ethics in students as early as possible. This requires fostering critical thinking skills. If, as the evidence suggests students do not perceive their actions as unethical which makes them indulge in that behavior, then "early intervention and reinforcement is critical", the absence of which will make such unethical behavior "legitimized and normalized, making it much harder to discourage" (Marshall & Garry, 2005, p. 464).

In order to address this need, I plan to design a three week learning module for Sarah's class on how to avoid plagiarism, *To Do And What Not To Do*, at the end of which students would have a better understanding of plagiarism, and be able to apply what they have learned to authentic real-world tasks.

Psychological Foundations

Situated cognition is a learning theory that emphasizes "knowledge as lived practices" (Driscoll, 2000, p.156). Brown et al., (1989) postulate that knowledge is constructed within an activity, and cannot be separated from the activity, context, and culture within which it was developed. Students achieve meaningful learning when they participate in authentic, real-world tasks, applying and expanding their knowledge individually, through apprenticeship, and in collaboration with a community of learners (Driscoll, 2000).

Any instruction on avoiding plagiarism needs to be a combination of specific skills (tools) and an awareness of plagiarism as an ethical construct. Teaching specific skills like referencing, attributing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, etc. in isolation will not work if students do not have the opportunity to apply them continually in authentic tasks. According to Brown et al., (1989), teaching abstract content [like ethics] as "fixed, well-defined, independent entities that can be explored in prototypical examples and textbook exercises" does not work, which is why situated cognition stresses the need for "enculturating learning" (p.33). On entering a new group/culture, learners observe, emulate, and adopt the group's norms and behavior (Brown et al., 1989). If students are placed in a context or group where the desired ethical behavior is the norm, given the opportunity to "observe and practice" (Brown et al., 1989, p.34), they will quickly pick up on that behavior, and internalize it, far more effectively than if they were explicitly taught.

Context

Target Audience

The target audience for the *To Do and What Not To Do* module is high school students. The students can use technology satisfactorily and all have access to the Internet at home, since some assignments may need to be completed at home. These students have some understanding of plagiarism and are aware that it is wrong. However, they are unclear as to why certain actions are considered plagiarism.

Technology

For this learning module, the teaching and learning content will all be computer-based. The learning materials will include videos and podcasts, students will be able to access electronic resources at the school library as needed. Students will be expected to post on discussion boards. In addition, students will also design and create an Honor Code that will be added to their school website.

Pragmatic considerations

This module will be administered as an enrichment class and will be in addition to regular schoolwork. The students will meet thrice a week after class, either in their English class or the library, depending on the tasks they will be performing. Also, the assignments will be individual and group-based which might result in an extraneous load for some students. For this module collaborative work is key, so care must be taken while assigning groups. There is no way to judge the abilities of the students beforehand, therefore, finding a balance between the complexity of the tasks and student competency might be tricky. Since this is module will be computer-based, issues like Internet connectivity and other technological glitches must be factored in. Since all resources are electronic, there are no extra costs incurred.

Pedagogical Decisions

The *To Do and What Not To Do* module will use Cognitive Apprenticeship (CA) as the instructional theory. Situated cognition recommends the CA model as a means to "enculturate students into authentic practices through activity and social interaction" (Brown et al., 1989, p.37). According to Collins et al. (1991), through CA, students learn by engaging with an authentic task, supported by 'experts/masters' (teachers) who "make their thinking visible" (p.3) during the task. They also learn through collaborating with other learners, problem-solving, clearing misconceptions and developing effective strategies.

Collins et al (1989) advocated six teaching methods for implementing a CA based learning environment. The first three, modeling, coaching, scaffolding, help students acquire the "domain knowledge" (p.12) skills through "observation and guided practice" (p.13). In CA, teachers model activities, coach students through similar tasks, and then slowly fade support as students grow more confident and competent. These three methods apply to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as they enable the learner to acquire higher levels of competencies with support. The next two, articulation and reflection, help students to "focus their observation" and "gain control of their problem-solving strategies" (p.13). These methods are associated with the processes that students follow while actually doing the task. The last one, exploration, encourages the learner to generate problems and solutions and may involve setting goals and subgoals to achieve desired learning outcomes.

Week 1: Modeling, Coaching and Scaffolding

Task examples

Students will watch presentations on digital scrapbooking skills, and videos on what plagiarism is and is not, observe teachers demonstrate key elements of paraphrasing and

summarizing, identify plagiarized texts from samples provided, and start their digital scrapbooks (group activity). The topics for the digital scrapbooks will be provided by the teacher.

The teacher will model authentic tasks to the students. These could be demonstrating how to paraphrase or summarize, showing students excerpts of 'original' writing and plagiarized writing, pointing out problem areas and how to rectify them. Modeling will also take the form of videos or presentations about what constitutes plagiarism, clarifying misconceptions. Through this process, the students will start building on or modifying their existing knowledge schema making space for what they will learn ahead.

Students will then be coached through similar tasks. These tasks could be asking them to identify plagiarized texts from samples provided, asking them to explain the processes they followed while engaged in that task, and giving feedback. The teacher can also guide the students as they start their digital scrapbooks by helping them source information from the Internet. With the guidance of the teacher, students will start to realize that searching for information involves more than just computer skills, but also critical thinking and analysis – how to interpret and use the information, evaluate the information, etc. This is an excellent example of "situated learning" (Collins et al., p.16), where the learning is embedded in an authentic task (Brown et al., p.32). Through guided instruction and enough practice, students will slowly start building up expertise and confidence.

In the process of scaffolding, the teacher can observe the students as they perform the tasks, intervening and providing feedback as required. For instance, the teacher can do a summarizing activity as a group, where she observes how students go about it, intervening and redirecting, as necessary. Using reciprocal teaching would also be an effective way of

scaffolding in this instance. Here scaffolding can also happen through peer discussion where they would all come up with their suggestions and opinions.

Week 2: Articulation and Reflection

Task Examples

Students will post on a discussion board, continue with the digital scrapbooking, and read articles on plagiarism cases (e.g., Vanilla Ice vs. Queen, Melania Trump). They will also write a reflection piece due at the end of Week 3.

Students are encouraged to articulate their reasoning and thinking processes as they engage in a task. Just as modeling activities made the teacher's thinking "visible" (Collins et al., 1991, p.3) to the students, the articulation exercise will make the students' thinking visible to the teacher. This is imperative for any CA learning model to be effective. The discussion forum is a good way to implement this, where the student is asked to respond to a prompt given by the teacher on the plagiarism cases. Not only do the students post on the discussion board, but they also have to respond to at least two other student posts. This is where the teacher scaffolds slowly start to fade out, the teacher now plays the role of the facilitator. The students will be asked to write a reflection piece on what they have learned which can be used as a form of summative assessment.

Making students reflect on their reasoning and thinking process is crucial to CA because it will show the student how it differs from that of the experts. This helps the student in developing self-monitoring and correction skills (Collins et al., 1991, p. 2). The teacher can use the articles on plagiarism cases as topic for a group discussion. The students assume the role of 'experts' and analyze the problem. This activity will enable the students to compare their processes with those of their peers, which can provide useful insights. The teacher then compares

the students' processes with those of the experts, focusing on key similarities and differences. This will help students have a conceptual model for comparison, against which they can evaluate their critical thinking processes. This is especially helpful for fostering a positive behavior as students will adopt and internalize these positive reinforcements more easily than any form of explicit instruction.

Week 3: Exploration

Task Examples

Students will work in groups and generate scenarios that are based on plagiarism instances which they will share with the class. The other students will analyze those instances and present their analysis to the class, which the class will the discuss. They will complete the digital scrapbooks and post it to the discussion board, create an Honor Code that they will post to the school's webpage, and compile a handbook for plagiarism that will include a list of actions that constitute plagiarism. The final two tasks will be group activities, the teacher can divide the class into two groups, and they will have started to work on them since week 2.

This is a crucial stage in the CA model, where the scaffolds naturally fade out and the students are encouraged to problem generate rather than just problem solve. This is important for developing critical thinking skills and will also increase their self-efficacy. Also, by making them create an Honor Code and a handbook for plagiarism, students are given a goal. To achieve that goal, they have to 'explore'; they will have to source a wide variety of resources, evaluate and choose what suits their purposes best and create an artifact that they can share with their peers, something that can be referenced in future, too. The digital scrapbook is also a culmination of an effective exercise where they could apply all the skills that they learned.

It is important to acknowledge that teaching students the perils of plagiarism and how to avoid it will not make it go away completely, intentional plagiarism will still exist, however, unintentional plagiarism can be remedied by this learning module based on Cognitive Apprenticeship through instruction and creating an awareness about the need for academic integrity which will inevitably translate into professional work ethics once students enter their chosen careers.

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