Chapter XIV
Expect Originality!
Using Taxonomies to Structure Assignments that Support Original Work

Janet Salmons
Vision2Lead, Inc., USA

ABSTRACT

The online world offers opportunities to appropriate others’ work, while simultaneously offering opportunities for valuable research and creative exchange. The use of secondary research materials in academic writing can be represented as a continuum, with “plagiarism” on one end and “original work” on the other. Educators can take steps to prevent plagiarism by designing assignments that expect learners to respect others’ ideas and strive toward creating their own original work. Educational taxonomies, including the Cognitive and Affective Domains of Bloom’s Taxonomy, and the author’s Taxonomy of Collaborative E-Learning, can serve as conceptual frameworks for designing assignments that (1) expect learners to present original work; (2) provide opportunities for learners to develop new ideas through meaningful online interaction; and (3) value learners’ ideas while respecting published authors’ intellectual property.

INTRODUCTION

While plagiarism involves ethical dilemmas in regard to misrepresentation of work and/or violation of copyright rules, it also involves dilemmas for teaching and learning. When learners represent others’ ideas as their own, they are not developing their own ideas. When learners plagiarize, they are not developing the thinking, research, and writing skills necessary to successfully achieve the learning outcomes of a course and to prepare for professional life.

The online world offers easy access an extensive array of work by other writers. Learners no
longer need to re-type material; they can easily find writings in electronic format on any subject, select, copy, and paste it, and call it their own. The same technologies that make it easy to plagiarize also facilitate a rich culture of free exchange emerging in the online world. Sharing, forwarding, linking, and blending information and media are intrinsic to life in the online world. Participants in this culture do not see use of materials they find online as stealing someone else’s intellectual property. Similarly, learners who make free use of materials they find online for academic work do not see it as plagiarism (Kraus, 2002; Madden & Rainie, 2003, 2005; Renard, 2000; Wood, 2004, p. 299). Since learners tend to study in an academic context using the same processes they use in informal interactions, it is not surprising that practices used to complete their assignments are similar to those they use in everyday interactions with friends (Crook & Light, 2002). Clearly, approaches being used to address plagiarism must take into account profound changes to the world of information and the ways it is accessed and used.

This chapter proposes a model for thinking about use of resources in academic work as a continuum, with “plagiarism” on one end and “original work” on the other. Strategies for addressing the issues at each point on the continuum are discussed. While achieving proper attribution of sources represents success in terms of academic honesty, other steps are needed to ensure that higher order thinking and learning occurs. This chapter focuses on ways educators can plan and facilitate learning assignments that discourage cheating by encouraging learners to aim for original work.

The chapter explores ways that educators can support the positive aspects of learners’ use of the Internet to locate diverse materials and exchange ideas with peers within an academic culture that respects intellectual property. In particular, this chapter shows how educators can used Bloom’s Taxonomies together with the Taxonomy of Collaborative E-Learning as a framework for designing learning activities that make productive use of online materials and peer collaboration.

BACKGROUND

Four broad strategies to combat plagiarism are frequently mentioned in the literature:

- Having, promoting, and administering clear, institution-wide policies for academic honesty.
- Using electronic detection tools such as Turnitin.com or using a search engine to find sources of suspicious phrases.
- Teaching the proper use of sources by defining plagiarism and educating learners in methods for citation.
- Designing meaningful and unique assignments to minimize the opportunity for cheating.

Educational institutions widely recognize the need for policies on academic honesty. An institutional approach should ideally be embedded into academic rules and regulations and promoted throughout the institution (Park, 2004). The Center for Academic Integrity suggests four stages for developing academic honesty policies and diffusing them into campus life. At the first stage, no policy is in place. The next stage involves building faculty and student awareness of academic honesty issues and options. At the third stage, the institution has policies that are widely known but not fully supported. At the fourth stage, policies are widely understood and students are involved in development and implementation of academic honesty policies (Drinan, 2006).

At best, policies alone are an imperfect solution for addressing plagiarism. One study, based on an experiment with two large undergraduate classes, found that “warning students not to plagiarize, even in the strongest possible language, appears