

Sya Van Geest: Plagiarism or Academic Honesty - What Can We Do?

by Susan Mickalow

Plagiarism has always been a concern with student research. It is compounded today by the ease of electronic theft and misrepresentation. In this session, the dynamic Sya Van Geest showed how to develop practical strategies to "help students be honest."

Research for our students is a guided process. With proper design, intervention and assessment, it should be very difficult for students to plagiarize. The design of research units should force higher level thinking. If the performance task is such that the students have to process and transfer the information, students cannot simply copy.

The ideal places for the teacher and the teacher-librarian to intervene with the students are at the ends of each of the four stages of research. During preparation, the teacher-librarian helps with exploration of the topic by encouraging talking, brainstorming, mind mapping, and the use of a portfolio, etc.

Resources are accessed successfully with the help

of such questions as "what information sources match your needs; what tools did you use to access the resources; were you able to use computers to find any materials?" To help the student process the information and to encourage them to think critically, the teacher-librarian can question the relevance of the information; the accuracy; the authority; fairness; and the point of view. When transferring learning, the teacher-librarian needs to help the students consider such things as their own strengths, the time and resources available, and the format of the presentation.

Assessment is an ongoing process that occurs throughout the student's research. Assigning a grade from one to four at each stage is a simple way of marking. Conferencing is an assessment tool that must be part of the process, especially at Stage 3 when students talk about the information they have replaced. Sya recommends having "all kinds of talk". Assessment, evaluation, and reflection must occur throughout the process. If it does, there is no opportunity for plagiarism.

Finally, Sya insists that if we put the blame on the student for plagiarism, that blame is misdirected. It is the process and delivery that needs constant re-evaluation. ■■■

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