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LEARNING ABOUT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Abstract

Purpose: This report highlights ways in which academic integrity can be taught through experiential learning activities.

Methods: Information synthesis of academic integrity and experiential learning are provided, supplemented by a qualitative reflexive processes of a teaching activity.

Results: A hands-on teaching activity showing how academic integrity education was provided through an inquiry-based experiential learning activity.

Implications: Through this report, an argument is made to move away from deficit-based transmissionist models of academic integrity education in favour of more student-centred and experiential approaches.

Additional materials: 10 references; 1 figure.

Document type: Report

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Introduction

There are two ways to think about academic integrity as it is connected to experiential learning.

The first is to think about students uphold and enact academic integrity during their experiential learning. Under these circumstances, academic integrity is expressed as the undertaking of experiential learning from the standpoint of ethical learning. In other words, the integrity is an embedded aspect of the learning, but not the focus or topic under study.

The second way to think about academic integrity and experiential learning is when integrity itself is the topic studied. It involves teaching the skills and values of academic integrity, including sub-topics such as citing, referencing, academic writing and research through experiential learning activities. It is this second perspective that is the focus of this document.

Overview of Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is often viewed as a set of values that students enact through ethical behaviour: courage, fairness, honesty, responsibility, respect, and trust (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2014):

Figure 1: Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity (ICAI, 2014)

Skills Associated with Academic Integrity

There is no universally accepted or definitive set of skills associated with ethical decision-making for learning and research, but include:

- Library and information literacy
- Research skills
- Referencing and citing
- Academic writing

These terms themselves have varying definitions and there is overlap among them, but they serve to offer a broad understanding of concrete skills students need in order to conduct themselves with integrity in learning and research contexts.

Overview of Experiential Learning

The University of Calgary's Experiential Learning (EL) Plan (2020-25) (Kaipainen et al., 2019) outlines the strategic vision and plan for the university. Examples of experiential learning include:

- Co-curricular experiential learning
- Community-engaged experiential learning
- Curriculum-integrated experiential learning
- Research-based experiential learning
- Work-integrated learning

There is an increasing emphasis on experiential learning at both undergraduate and graduate levels across Canada and beyond.

> *Definition: "Experiential learing (EL) is learning-by-doing that bridges knowledge and experience thorugh critical reflection. EL activities are intentionally designed and assessed. As such, they empower learners to enhance indvidual and collaborative skills such as complex problem solving, professional practice skills, and teamwork. Reflecting critically on these activities helps individuals develop higher order thinking to challenge and advance their perspectives. The EL process prepares students to take on roles as active citizens and thrive in an increasingly complex world." – University of Calgary, Experiential Learning Plan 2020-25 (p. 11).*

Learning Academic Integrity through Experiential Learning

Learning about academic integrity through curriculum-integrated and research based activities are likely the most common ways experiential learning can be used. Others have developed experiential activities to teach students the importance of academic integrity through inquiry-based activities (Cowan, 2019; Gardiner, 2019; Stoner, n.d.).

Sample Activity: Library Inquiry into "Maslow's Pyramid of Needs"

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In this section, I highlight an activity to teach academic integrity, both as a set of values and set of skills.

This learning inquiry centres around Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This is an activity I developed for Master of Education (MEd.) students at the University of Calgary. In preparation for the activity, I checked our library resources to ensure they had the relevant sources needed for the inquiry.

This inquiry was first conducted in a face-to-face course in Summer 2012.

Library Inquiry: "Maslow's" Pyramid

Audience: Originally designed for first year Master of Education students, but could be used with undergraduates.

Objectives:

- Discover how to use the university library search tools, find a digital article and physically search for a book in the stacks.
- Understand how to critically evaluate primary, original source material.
- Critically analyze how original source material is interpreted and re-used by others.

Inquiry question: "Where did Maslow's pyramid of needs come from?"

Step 1: Brainstorm ideas.

Students came up with everything from aliens to Egyptian pyramids came up during our pre-activity brainstorming. We had a few good laughs and then I sent the students on their quest to answer the question I had posed for them, telling them everything they needed to find the answer to the question could be found in our university library. I told them they could work individually, in pairs or in groups, but they only had one day to complete the inquiry and we would be talking through their results in class the following day.

Step 2: Find the original sources in the library.

I gave the students this hint: The article is only available digitally and the book is only available in physical hard copy.)

Students found Maslow's 1943 article, "A theory of human motivation", which our library had available in digital form. Then they had to go into the stacks to find his 1954 book, *Motivation and personality*, which was only available in hard copy. They also found a number of other works, which we discussed as a group in class the next day.

Step 3: Look for evidence of the pyramid in the original sources.

The students found that the “pyramid” does not exist anywhere in Maslow’s original work. Although the original ideas are Maslow's, the pyramid is not. Someone, somewhere along the way, adapted his original work into the pyramid graphic. The pyramid is someone else's interpretation of Maslow's original work and it has become an iconic representation of his ideas.

The iconic pyramid known as “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs” does not exist anywhere in Maslow’s original work. At best, it is an interpretation or a riff on the original.

Step 4: Analyze the evidence.

Through their library inquiry the students found what Maslow actually says about the hierarchy of needs is, "if I may assign arbitrary figures for the sake of illustration, it is as if the average citizen is satisfied perhaps 85% in his physiological needs, 70% in his safety needs, 50% in his love needs, 40% in his self-esteem needs and 10% in his self-actualization needs" (Maslow, 1943, pp. 388-389). So even if we *were* to draw a diagram to represent Maslow's hierarchy, the physiological needs would need to represent a much bigger piece of the pyramid.

Step 5: Reflect.

The students reactions to this inquiry varied from puzzled to surprised to horrified. All of them had seen the pyramid at some point in their studies. It is published in textbooks and online. None of them had ever thought to question its origin.

Step 6: Document what you have learned.

As a class we documented these learnings from the inquiry (which I have previously written about on my blog, see Eaton, 2012):

a) **Original works are adapted by others**. Some purists argue that mash-ups are an aberration; that they defile the original work. People have been modifying and adapting original works for centuries.
b) **Find the original sources whenever possible.** In today's world, it is easier than ever to find original source documents. Libraries have digitized versions of primary sources going back for decades. It is important for students and researchers to learn to "drill down" and find the original sources of information. If Maslow's original article from 1943 has been digitized and is accessible through the local library, it is worth the effort to go and at least try to find the original source for your own research. It may be easier than you think to access it.
c) **Don't believe everything you see on the Internet.** The pyramid figure that has come to represent Maslow's work appears all over the Internet. Yet, it never appears anywhere in his original work. There is value in learning to discriminate between original research and was is presented on the Internet as "truth".
d) **Check others' citations**. Maslow's pyramid has been cited in both academic and popular articles as originating from both his 1943 article and his 1954 book. Yet, the pyramid appears in neither original source. It is important for researchers, scholars and students to (respectfully) check other authors' citations. Do not take it for granted that simply because a reference appears in a bibliography that it means the citation is correct.
e) **Learn to "drill deep" in your research.** Often we take it for granted that others' research is "the real deal". Part of our professional practice means that we allow our curiosity to drive our search for knowledge. Learning to "drill deep" means that you take on the challenge of finding out for yourself, learning to analyze and think critically and not simply rely on what others say.

As I reflect on this inquiry several years later I also see the value in a “rapid response” kind of activity. It is important for students to know that they can find original sources quickly and with relative ease. At first some students felt that having to go to the library in person and search through the stacks was inconvenient, though they later admitted that the value in finding the original source was worth the trip to the library.

Discussion

So much academic integrity instruction starts from a deficit-stance that emphasizes punitive consequences if students fail to cite and reference properly. Through this activity, students learned the importance of consulting original sources and accurate citing and referencing without me ever preaching to or wagging a finger at them. I did not have to convince them of the importance of citing and referencing, they convinced themselves through their own learning.

Start with Why[1]

Various academic integrity scholars advocate for an approach that not only focuses on "how to" skills, but also develops metacognitive awareness about *why* these skills are important (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000; Robillard, 2006). In the early stages of research skill development, learners might cite sources, but be relatively oblivious to *who* they are citing. They might choose a source because it is easy to access, for example, without critically evaluating it. As inquiry and research skills become more developed, students develop deeper awareness about not only who and what they are citing, but why.

"Most writers know on some level that citations aren't simply matters of rationality and logic. Citations reveal a great deal about personal allegiances. We cite the people we cite because we feel certain things toward them" (Robillard, 2006, p. 261).

Starting with why helps to make learning the technical aspects of citing and referencing more tolerable. Otherwise, the details of following a particular disciplinary standard for citing and referencing (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.) can seem like meaningless drudgery. Although the technical minutiae might still cause some frustration, when students know why they are citing and referencing, they feel "epistemologically empowered" (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000, p. 447).

Conclusions

A common approach to teaching academic integrity skills to students is to emphasize possible punitive consequences that can occur if they fail to follow the rules or conventions of the discipline. These warnings are often offered in conjunction with exercises that focus on what to do, by teaching concrete steps. Traditional ways of teaching academic integrity rarely focus on why, except to emphasize that it prevents punishment.

These traditional, deficit-based approaches to teaching academic integrity can be replaced with more learner-centered approaches that take a strengths-based and experiential approach in which students not only learn by doing, but also learn *why* they are doing it. Through this they will learn an appreciation for ethical approaches to learning and research that will serve them well in and beyond their formal education.

[1] With a nod to Simon Sinek (2009).

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