

## ***Academic Dishonesty***

Academic dishonesty is particularly difficult aspect of misbehavior, because it crosses the line between behavior and achievement, because it increasingly involves the use of technology that students often understand and use more effectively and appropriately than teachers, and because of the emotions involved in a breach of trust. Schools and districts need procedures to deal fairly and appropriately with academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism. This can be achieved best by having a clear district or school policy on academic honesty.

Archbishop Macdonald High School in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, offers one example of such a policy (2007, pp. 29–30; see also O'Connor, 2007, pp. 36–42). Another useful example is provided by Lakeview High School, Battle Creek, Michigan (1998). In a very student-friendly manner, it provides a definition of *cheating*, examples of cheating, and sections on why students

shouldn't cheat, how educators know students cheat, how students get caught, consequences of cheating, and how to avoid cheating. A third example is provided by Valparaiso High School in Lafayette, Indiana (2007). The policy is headed "Cheating" and begins with this statement:

The students, teachers, and administration of Valparaiso High School are committed to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. To that end, members of the Student-Faculty Senate developed a school-wide policy on cheating and plagiarism, which was approved by the administration. This policy will be discussed in detail with the student body on the opening day of school and a copy of the policy will be posted in each classroom. (p. 49)

It seems clear from the last sentence that this school recognizes that in this area, prevention is better than punishment. This approach is supported by a list of 21 examples of cheating and six different types of plagiarism. This is important, as academic dishonesty often occurs because students do not know what is acceptable and what is not. Such confusion frequently arises when students work cooperatively. A particularly helpful statement in the Valparaiso policy deals with this by noting that "study or homework collaboration is not considered academic dishonesty unless prohibited or limited by procedures/expectations established by the teacher. Teachers shall guide students in understanding when collaborative efforts are not appropriate."

This problem was highlighted in a situation at Ryerson University in Toronto, where in March 2008 a student "was singled out for his role as the administrator of an on-line study group that attracted more than 140 members looking for help with chemistry homework assignments that counted for 10 per cent of the mark" (Church, 2008, p. A14). The professor had indicated (unrealistically) that students should work independently. The student's Facebook page asked members to "discuss/post solutions," and evidence that answers had been exchanged was limited. The university disciplined the student, albeit less severely than the professor had suggested, but lacking a clear policy on this type of collaboration, any discipline seems inappropriate because the students "were just doing what students have done for eons around library tables and in study halls. The only difference is that this time their information swapping was done online where it could be traced" (Church, p. A14).

In this connection, Cizek (2003) notes that most students do not cheat and suggests that we "must work to avoid tendencies to suspect all students of cheating" (p. 61). He further suggests that

to foster student learning, risk taking, creativity, trust and respect for others, the classroom environment must be one in which cheating is defined, identified and condemned. What is needed is a healthy awareness, not an atmosphere of anxiety, suspicion, or mistrust. (pp. 61-62)

### Think About This . . .

"Words such as *lying, dishonesty, misrepresenting, deception, and morality* appear in the literature on cheating and may be applied to situations in which students do not realize that they are 'wrong' in school terms (Athanasou & Olasehinde, 2002). The line between helping (an ethical behavior) and cheating (an unethical behavior) is culturally inscribed and variable. Where the line is drawn is related to cultural differences in conceptions of the purposes of schooling, notions of how knowledge is constructed, the nature and meaning of assessment, and the relationship between the individual and the group (Fleck, 2000; Greenfield, 1994; Nelson-LeGall & Resnick, 1998)."

—Rothstein-Finch & Trumbull, 2008, p. 158

As with other misbehavior, academic dishonesty is primarily a discipline problem, so it must incur clear consequences. Valparaiso High School (2007) lists consequences for first through fourth offenses. Consequences for the first offense "may include but are not limited to . . . 1. no credit for the material in question, 2. referral to the assistant principal, 3. parent notification, 4. Saturday class" (pp. 50–51). It is also reasonable and necessary to have more direct academic consequences for academic dishonesty than for other behavioral problems. The appropriate academic consequence is "do it again without cheating or plagiarizing," because what is needed is accurate evidence of the student's achievement, not tainted evidence or evidence that has been distorted by penalties or zeros. While teachers often have little difficulty with this philosophically, they frequently express concerns about the practical difficulty of creating comparable alternative assessments. One method that can frequently be used to deal with this is an oral test/exam—it does not take long to prepare several probing questions that will find out very quickly what a student knows or understands and on which academic dishonesty is impossible.

Cizek (2003) offers a detailed analysis of the issues involved in academic dishonesty. He provides lists of potential indications of cheating on tests (p. 67), potential indicators of plagiarism (p. 71), points to remember when responding to cheating (p. 80), tips for preventing cheating on tests (p. 87), and tips for preventing plagiarism on written assignments (p. 94), as well as in-depth discussion of these and many other aspects of academic dishonesty. Useful information can also be found at the Web site of Clemson University's Center for Academic Integrity ([www.academicintegrity.org](http://www.academicintegrity.org)).